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Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

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•(1145)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)): Good morning, everyone. Pursuant to standing order 108(2), we're going to continue our study of the protection of children and youth in developing countries.

Before we do that I know that Mme Laverdière would like to read a motion, to put a notice of motion on the table.

I'll turn it over to you to read your motion into the record.

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to put forward the following motion:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Committee undertake a study of the humanitarian crisis in Lebanon, with a particular focus on the influx of Syrian refugees, including the impact of that population on the host community, and that it report its findings back to the House once the study has been completed.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I believe you just wanted to put in a motion right now. We're not going to debate it or anything. She's just putting in a motion.

To our guests, to our witnesses, thank you for your patience. These things happen from time to time, these things called votes, so we appreciate your patience with that.

I want to introduce Mary Anne Roche, who is the vice-president of global initiatives and governance of the YMCA. I would also like to introduce Patricia Pelton, who is a member of the YMCA Canada world relationships committee.

Welcome, ladies, to both of you.

What we're going to do today is this. I believe you have an opening statement of around 10 minutes or so. We're going to get your opening statement and then what we're going to do is that we may start with one round of questioning. At 12:00 we're going to get someone on video conference. We'll continue, we'll get them to do their testimony, and then we'll just continue to go around the room there.

Why don't we get started with you young ladies with your opening testimony, then we'll start with questions?

Okay, thanks.

Ms. Patricia Pelton (Member, YMCA Canada World Relationships Committee, YMCA Canada): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the committee.

Good morning, I am Patricia Pelton, a volunteer member of YMCA Canada's national board world relationships committee and immediate past member of the executive committee of the World Alliance of YMCAs. Accompanying me is Mary Anne Roche, vice-president, global initiatives and governance, of YMCA Canada.

The challenges facing young people around the world seem daunting. With nearly half the world's seven billion population comprised of children and youth and a record number now living in developing countries, we share your concerns of the many risks facing children and youth on a daily basis, risks that have been the focus of this committee's deliberations in recent months.

The YMCA was established in Canada over 160 years ago as a charity dedicated to advancing the health and well-being of individuals and communities. Within Canada our strategic plan "Plan Y" commits us to improving the well-being of children and youth at home and abroad. At home, 1.5 million of the over two million Canadians in YMCA programs and services are young people.

As part of a global YMCA network we have also gained a significant amount of experience with children and youth in our work with international partners. We have been particularly active with our partner YMCAs in Africa and the Americas, in Bogotá with street children and in Sierra Leone with former child soldiers, to name just two.

Globally speaking, the YMCA is present in 119 countries with over 11,000 locations, 96,000 employees, and 725,000 volunteers worldwide reaching 58 million people through YMCA programs.

The YMCA's hallmark is creating the safe spaces for children and youth required for young people to achieve their full potential, ensuring that young people have a voice on issues of concern to their growth and development in their families and communities, and equipping youth with transformational tools that empower them to lead productive adult lives. Our approach to youth empowerment is a collaborative community-building model with local leadership that is inclusive of young people, focusing internationally with youth on issues of health, employment and vocational training, environmental sustainability, and civic engagement.

I'm going to turn this over to Mary Anne to speak more specifically about some of the key approaches that drive our work with young people and their application internationally.

Ms. Mary Anne Roche (Vice-President, Global Initiatives and Governance, YMCA Canada): Good morning, Mr. Chair, and members of the standing committee.

I would like to speak to you very briefly about three strategies for youth empowerment that we have tested in a wide variety of settings and which have proved transformational in our work both at home and abroad.

First, we enable young people's empowerment using the assets-based approach through education, training, volunteer opportunities, social networks, and other social determinants of health. We do this in a manner that gives explicit value to the role of women and minorities in society, and in this way contributes to efforts to eradicate those issues of particular concern to this committee by working on the underlying social determinants of these abuses. Our work has a strong emphasis on youth leading youth. By building community among young people, we build their resilience and encourage their positive involvement in civil society.

The youth empowerment model used by the Africa Alliance of YMCAs, called "subject to citizen", is an excellent example of the use of peer education and dialogue to trigger a positive shift in youth self-identity.

Second, community building through local leadership puts the emphasis on "nothing about us without us". It sets local YMCAs on a path toward sustainability as opposed to reliance on foreign advice or resources. All YMCAs are formed, owned, and operated by local leadership. This means that local grassroots YMCAs, with their capacity, know-how, deep roots, and networks are frequently able to serve communities experiencing conflict or instability. When Canadian YMCAs get involved overseas, they do so through a partnership model, providing financial and technical support to match local social capital for projects that respond to local needs.

My last point is about the importance of strengthening civil society in the local communities in which we work. Partnerships and collaborations built on the ground are key, both to the cost-efficient and effective use of resources and to creating a strong and resilient social platform that can be leveraged in many ways for different purposes. This work may take many forms: training and democratic decision-making, media outreach, public engagement activities, and citizen participation. This work is well aligned with the federal government's new emphasis in its recently announced civil society partnership policy.

In closing, we are a voice for the world's young people, who account today for some 40% of the global unemployed, with long-term consequences for their individual, family, and community health and well-being. It's important that our work internationally, as the YMCA and as a country, creates options for the world's youth and builds their sense of hope, choice, and alternatives to crime, street life and gangs, and violence and war, especially in contexts where there are few employment opportunities. Their more active participation in civic and political life needs to be seen as an untapped asset.

YMCA Canada encourages the federal government to invest in youth empowerment strategies by committing greater resources to initiatives that employ peer-to-peer dialogue, community building

with local leadership, and civil society strengthening, and by advocating for more emphasis on young people and their concerns in the post-MDG agenda.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the work of the committee. We are both happy to answer any questions you might have.

• (1150)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to start our first round with Madame Laverdière for seven minutes.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you both for your very interesting presentations on youth empowerment and giving hope to youth, which I think are very key issues, especially nowadays when we're seeing so many challenges and so many youth taking different paths, often because they don't have hope.

That being said, you mentioned briefly the post-2015 agenda. I wonder if you think that the SDGs' target sufficiently reflects the needs of youth. Would you comment on that?

Ms. Mary Anne Roche: Yes, thank you for the question.

The short answer is going to be no. I think there's opportunity with the goals that have been, in my understanding, fairly well agreed to—the 17 or so goals—to create a greater emphasis on youth within the targets. Youth are specifically mentioned in several of the targets that are currently under discussion, but there may well be opportunities to further highlight areas where we want to ensure that people looking at the goals understand that the work needs to include young people, and particularly, perhaps, in the goal related to youth participation.

There's always a risk that, if we don't mention youth by name, they may inadvertently be left out. I think there might be an opportunity to include them.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: You're suggesting more or less that it become mainstream, as it did with women's issues, at some point. I'd like to know some of the challenges you are facing on the ground and how the government could help address those challenges.

• (1155)

Ms. Mary Anne Roche: I'll start and Patricia can join in.

I think when you talk about the "we" you're referencing the YMCAs in other countries. I think the enabling environment for civil society, which has been one of the objectives of the new civil society partnership policy, is certainly critical for that. Continued funding for initiatives that target children and youth continue to be important.

The challenges on the ground relate to the challenges that children and youth face within particular contexts. It's hard to talk about them in a general sense. You have to look at the country context in order to look at the situation for children and youth. Broadly speaking there are great opportunities to increase opportunities for young people to contribute to the development of national policy and to have the ability to go to school. We know there's a huge youth unemployment challenge around the world that we need to address, and I know that's one of the targets currently in the SDGs. One of the challenges is for children's and youth rights to be respected by governments.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: You mentioned education also, which of course is key. Are you in any kind of relationship with the Global Partnership for Education?

Ms. Mary Anne Roche: At YMCA Canada we are not. There would be YMCAs involved around the world in various aspects of that particular work. When we're in public forums at the United Nations, or other multilateral forums, we are advocating for education. We're looking more at informal education. Our experience with after-school programs, for instance, tells us that it's important for children to have those kinds of experiences in addition to formal education programs. Community-based programming for children and youth is critical.

Ms. Patricia Pelton: I was going to say that there are many universities across the globe that are involved in post-secondary education at the university level or with more formal education. We'll talk more about the leadership training that we're involved in and some leadership certification courses. Predominantly YMCAs are interested in vocational training, or in other words, getting youth prepared to work and with the desire that jobs would be available. Trying to affect policy in job creation is important, and arming youth with the tools to be able to do that and have a voice is part of our work.

Thanks.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Could you give us examples of the types of activities you do parallel to school and after school—community activities? Could you give us one or two example of the types of activities you do?

Ms. Mary Anne Roche: Most of our YMCAs, for example the Haiti YMCA, would be running programming for children after school. In those programs they would be learning about children's rights. They would have opportunities for recreation, food, some nutrition, fellowship, and leadership development, as Patricia noted. A big focus of the YMCA work right around the world is leadership development. We're in 119 countries, so that kind of work is very common across all of those countries.

The Chair: Thank you. What we're going to do is suspend for a couple of minutes so we can get our next witness online. We'll have them give their presentation and we'll continue with the questions. Okay? It's probably going to be quick.

• (1155) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1200)

The Chair: I'd like to welcome our guests that are joining us via video conference.

From Markham, Ontario, we have Mark Lukowski, the chief executive officer of the Christian Children's Fund of Canada.

Welcome, Mark. It's great to have you here.

Also joining us via video conference from New York City is Sarah Stevenson from the ChildFund Alliance, who is the United Nations representative.

What I'm going to do is get you both to give your opening comments. We've just had our opening statement and one round of questions. Once we have your opening statement then we'll continue with our rounds of questioning.

Mark, I'm going to turn it over to you, sir, for your opening statement first, and then we'll go over to Sarah after that.

Welcome.

Mr. Mark Lukowski (Chief Executive Officer, Christian Children's Fund of Canada): Thank you very much for having us. Thank you for the opportunity to address the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

As was mentioned earlier, I would like to acknowledge the presence of my colleague, Sarah Stevenson, who is online with me today from New York. Sarah is the United Nations representative of ChildFund Alliance, a global network of child development organizations of which Christian Children's Fund of Canada is a member.

We warmly welcome and support the government in its leadership role of protection of children and youth. The national action plan to combat human trafficking is recognized as a successful government approach to preventing this form of violence against children.

We thank the Canadian government for its ongoing support to the United Nations cluster child protection working group to improve response, increase accountability, and progressively professionalize the sector of child protection in emergencies. We also thank the Government of Canada for its support of the declaration on violence against children within the post-2015 agenda at the OAS General Assembly that was held last year in Asunción, Paraguay.

As a Canadian-based registered charity and child-centred international development organization, Christian Children's Fund of Canada has been working in developing countries for more than 50 years helping to improve the lives of millions of children around the world. Violence against children is a universal problem affecting children at every stage of development. It takes place in every setting, starting in a child's own home. Failing to address violence against children compromises progress in many other areas, such as getting children into schools and enabling children to learn and develop to their full potential.

In our view, stopping violence is not just the right thing to do, it is also the smart thing to do. Without ending violence against children, it is almost impossible to finish the ambitious job that was started by the UN millennium development goals back in the year 2000: to bring an end to preventable newborn, child, and maternal deaths; to ensure that every child learns in schools; and to ensure that all people have access to sustainable food, nutrition, water, sanitation, and energy.

A permanent end to violence against children is possible. We have cost-effective interventions that work, including positive parenting programs and life skills education, and changing long-established social norms that institutionalize violence against children.

Schools by definition should be places where children feel protected and safe, and where their dignity and development are upheld. Violence is amply recognized as an obstacle to achieving education outcomes, both in terms of coverage and quality, as it hinders effective learning and has a negative effect in school attendance and enrolment.

The issue of legal identity is an important step to ensure children are free from violence. Birth registration can be greatly assistive in preventing child labour, preventing children being engaged with armed forces, preventing child trafficking, and managing situations where children are in conflict with the law.

Our work in communities around the world has taught us that child and community development must go hand in hand with education and intervention to help children be safe from violence and exploitation. To ensure we are able to achieve the results for children in health and education, this will not be possible unless we address the issues of violence in schools, homes, institutions, families, and communities. In every country we work, our work includes education and advocacy on keeping children safe from violence and exploitation.

Currently, more than half a million children and families benefit from Christian Children's Fund of Canada's work, and more than 50,000 children are sponsored in our programs. Christian Children's Fund of Canada uses community-based child protection mechanisms to increase awareness, and to reduce and eliminate violence against boys and girls. These protection mechanisms include children, parents, and local authorities, as well as traditional and religious leaders. Our goal is to have a child protection mechanism in place in every community where we work.

● (1205)

Our child protection committees have used structures such as a coffee ceremony in Ethiopia to discuss taboo topics of child labour, girls' education, abduction, child marriage, female genital mutilation or cutting, and other harmful traditional practices. Many children now have a birth certificate, thanks to the efforts of the various child protection committees in Ethiopia that have established linkages with local birth and civil registration services.

In Ghana, child-to-child groups are a pivotal part of the child protection system in the community. These groups have raised awareness on the importance of keeping children in school and have also been a crucial early warning system of violence in the family, the school, and the community. In Nicaragua and Paraguay, community child protection committees have successfully advocated for the inclusion of child rights on the ruling and opposition parties' political agendas.

As governments throughout the world come together at the United Nations this September to finalize the sustainable development goals, it is vital that the issue of violence and exploitation perpetrated against children is explicitly addressed in the new development agenda, by being included not only across the goals but as a stand-

alone target. We are asking that the Canadian government continue to be a champion for the prevention of violence against children in the intergovernmental negotiations at the United Nations and continue to call for targets on the prevention and elimination of violence, exploitation, and abuse against children.

We ask that the Canadian government continue its support for a target to end all harmful traditional practices, including child, early, and forced marriage and female genital mutilation or cutting, as well as for a target to achieve universal birth registration. We are asking the Canadian government to ensure that any target on the trafficking of children includes trafficking of girls and boys. Further, we ask the Canadian government to support the implementation of targets for the immediate elimination of all child labour by the year 2025.

To succeed in achieving the targets on the elimination of violence, abuse, and exploitation against boys and girls, more investment is needed. Specific areas of investment that will assist in the reduction of violence and exploitation should be a child protection system based on children's rights, with measures to protect all children. It will be holistic, inclusive, sustainable, and well-coordinated.

We also require special teaching and learning methodologies, such as that which has been developed by the learning through play program developed by Hincks-Dellcrest Centre in Toronto, to make teachers, parents, and caregivers more responsive to the safety and security of all children and the special needs of vulnerable children.

We're asking that Canada's contribution to a new global partnership continue to protect children from all violence, exploitation, and abuse.

We would like to express our gratitude for giving us the opportunity to appear this afternoon at the standing committee session. We warmly welcome this opportunity and would also like to thank the Government of Canada for its unyielding commitment to the prevention of violence against children everywhere.

Thank you very much.

● (1210)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lukowski.

Ms. Stevenson, it's my understanding that you're there to answer questions and that you don't have an opening statement.

Is that correct?

Ms. Sarah Stevenson (United Nations Representative, Child-Fund Alliance): Yes, that's correct, sir.

The Chair: Okay, great. Thank you very much.

We'll look forward to some of those questions then.

We're going to move over to Ms. Brown for seven minutes.

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you very much to our witnesses for being here. Mark, very nice to see you again. Thanks for the tour that I had of your facility in Markham. Thanks to all of you for the good work that you do.

All of you know that Canada has three priorities with our development dollars. One is food security, the second is children and youth, and the third is sustainable economic development. All of those have to work in tandem, I believe, in order for anything to be accomplished on any particular issue. Obviously this issue of child protection is one that we take very seriously.

Mark, you talked a little bit about some of the initiatives that we have championed. It was our former minister of foreign affairs who raised the issue of early and forced marriage a year ago. In fact, in 2013 we raised that issue at the United Nations General Assembly and continue to advocate to make sure that these things are addressed from the position of the United Nations.

We've said over and over again, in this next tranche of money that Canada has put forward for maternal, newborn, and child health, out of the \$3.5 billion, how important it is that we see civil registrations as part of what happens in MNCH, because without legitimizing the existence of a child we have no way of protecting that child for the future.

With that as my lead-up, I do have a couple of questions that I'd like to pose. First of all, to our ladies from the YMCA, you talked about youth empowerment and about giving young people the tools for sustainable employment and being able to create a life for themselves. I wonder if you could just tell the committee a little bit about that education process that you have. What are the tools? Do you have any private sector engagement? We have a very robust program with WUSC, for instance. I met some of the interns in Malawi just a month ago. They are young Canadians who are working over there. But we also have programs with Barrick Gold in Burkina Faso, where young people are getting real employment tools that they can take into the workplace. Do you have any private sector engagement? Could you talk a little bit about those programs and how the kids are doing who are coming out of them?

Ms. Mary Anne Roche: Thank you.

Let me approach this question by describing the subject to citizen program of the Africa Alliance of the YMCA. I would describe it as both a philosophy regarding youth empowerment and a specific program with designated initiatives. The term "subject to citizen" reflects the goal of the Africa Alliance of the YMCA, which believes its mission is to empower young people to move forward toward an African renaissance, which is a way of talking about the renewal of Africa as designed by Africans themselves.

The challenge has been that the colonization process within Africa has often left young people feeling like they don't have a sense of agency. They have a mindset that sees themselves more as subjects to the conditions in which they exist. Poverty might contribute to that, as might a lack of jobs, and so on. The philosophy is that the work needs to begin with changing the mindset from that of being a subject to that of being a citizen, and a citizen being a young person who has a sense of agency, who believes that they can make a

contribution to the community, that they can have a life of hope and contribution, education, jobs, and so on.

The specific initiatives within that fall into leadership development programming for young people, men and women, where they explore with each other through a peer-to-peer methodology and in those conversations with each other come to see and understand their context in some different ways. They also benefit from some adult partners who are working with them, positive role models. Some of the young people are working in communities where there have not been positive role models for leadership by adults, so there are leadership development initiatives.

There are economic initiatives. There is a whole range of initiatives trying to encourage entrepreneurship, financial savings, and so on, but within that economic portfolio is an interesting initiative, to speak to your point regarding the private sector. Generally speaking, I can say that the YMCA works with all development actors, so that includes the private sector. In this particular case, Rio Tinto approached the Madagascar YMCA regarding its youth work, and they have developed a partnership over a period of time where Rio Tinto is funding and providing support to the youth programming at the Madagascar YMCA, including job training and offering opportunities for young people. It's part of their business strategy or corporate responsibility strategy, so that's a concrete example.

Do young people get jobs out of those opportunities? In some cases, yes. In some cases, what they leave with is that sense of agency, hope and possibility, and feeling that they have the skills to move forward. Certainly in that particular example, there are various kinds of internships, I believe, with Rio Tinto.

● (1215)

Ms. Lois Brown: I have a very short time.

Mark, you talked about a child protection system and making it holistic. I think you're looking for global buy-in on this. You know because of our conversation when I was in Markham that my daughter taught in Ghana last year. She was there with her husband, who is from Ghana. When she went in to sign her contract, the very first thing the headmaster handed to her was a cane. My daughter said, "I won't use it. I don't believe that's the best way to manage a classroom", and he said, "Well, this is what we do." We would consider that inappropriate in our school systems, but there is an acceptance in many cultures that this is a form of discipline.

How do we change that mindset? What do we do to change the mindset and to move cultures forward so that people who are in authority don't see this as an appropriate mechanism?

The Chair: I'm sorry, we're going to have to answer that next time.

Ms. Lois Brown: I'm sorry.

The Chair: Everyone has a different definition of short question, but we'll come back again or maybe someone else will pick it up.

Mr. Gameau, you have seven minutes, sir.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My first question is to the YMCA. I'm a big fan of the YMCA. I have three YMCAs in my riding in Montreal. I also have a YWCA and I'm not sure whether you're independent or both related.

You mentioned the youth empowerment mandate that you have in developing countries. You talked about programs that were related to education. One of the things that this committee has been seized with quite a bit in the last few meetings is this whole subject of forced marriages with young girls, child marriages effectively, and then being pulled out of the educational system and being really doomed to a life of having babies.

Does the YMCA—this is a delicate subject to advocate—try to engage in some of the developing countries with the local population to.... Obviously, if these young girls are going to be empowered at some point, they have to be able to develop themselves as well as boys, and they don't have that opportunity in some cases.

Do you intercede with the local population and try to get that message across as part of your youth empowerment mandate?

• (1220)

Ms. Patricia Pelton: Certainly, again, getting back to the subject to citizen program in Africa, the focus is on all girls and boys. All females and males are welcome into the program. There has been in the past, and currently still remains, a culture of male dominance and often abuse toward young females that could culminate in rape and/ or forced marriage, and we see that around the world.

Part of the S2C program is transforming masculinity and trying to work with young males so that they can understand what we would consider appropriate behaviour with young females. It's trying to get at the root cause and culture change.

Ms. Mary Anne Roche: Just to comment on the YMCA/YWCA, we are two separate organizations within Canada, but obviously collaborate closely on many initiatives, and certainly in Montreal that would be true.

To supplement what Patricia said, a quick example from Nicaragua where the YMCA.... For the YMCA, by the way, the focus on youth empowerment is a global strategic priority, so that's the number one for all YMCAs around the world.

In Nicaragua, the young people go house to house and talk with families about the family laws within the country. They've developed a strength through their own leadership development work at the Nicaragua YMCA and learned about their rights and responsibilities. This is also a very key thing for children and youth to understand, that there are safeguards in place that need to be respected and implemented. In this particular case, they go around and talk about the family laws and what the rights and responsibilities of a good parent are within a community, what the community standards are.

The answer to your question is yes, absolutely. That's the work that we're engaged in. It's coming at it perhaps from the perspective of rights and responsibilities, and dialogue being the key element.

Mr. Marc Garneau: Ms. Stevenson, we all know that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was signed about 25 years ago. It was one of the most ratified, if not the most ratified, convention ever, by at least 190 countries. Yet we're talking about a

lot of developing countries where the concept of female genital mutilation, the concept of child forced marriages are very prevalent.

What does the United Nations do to make people aware, make countries aware, of the importance of the rights of the child, specifically with respect to some of those issues?

Ms. Sarah Stevenson: Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here.

One of the things that we've been doing quite a bit at ChildFund Alliance in New York is helping to create awareness about these issues. Part of that has been the work around the post-2015 development agenda. Right now the version of the outcome document that we have has targets and goals partly for children but also for sustainable development. Within that we currently do have a target that is looking at forced female genital mutilation and cutting as well as child marriage.

One of the arguments that we've been using here is that the overall issue of violence against children and the costs of the physical, psychological, and sexual violence against children, according to the Overseas Development Institute and ChildFund Alliance, is \$7 trillion U.S. a year. Not only do countries have the moral obligation as set out in these different conventions but also it makes economic sense for all of us to be working together to address these issues of violence against children. That number is 8% of the world's GDP. That includes the combined GDPs of Australia, Canada, India, and Mexico.

Starting in January 2016 the world will have the opportunity with the newest version of a global agenda to be able to set out and address these issues and to ensure that violence against children including child marriage and FGM/C are both prevented across the social norms of countries.

Mr. Marc Garneau: Thank you.

Just to follow up, do you have a sense of whether you've making progress in the past 25 years in getting that message across?

Ms. Sarah Stevenson: In some areas there's been more progress than others. For example, within the issue of child labour we've seen the numbers of children in hazardous labour down from 171 million in 2000 to 85 million. We are able to show progress.

One of the things that the UN Statistical Commission is asking us for is to be able to show proven targets with indicators that we can measure, because if you can't measure it we're not going to be able to count it. There has been a significant push to show targets that have been improved upon within the last few years.

• (1225)

The Chair: Thank you, Marc.

We're going to start our second round, which will be five minutes.

We're going to start with Mr. Trottier, please.

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC): Thank you Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

My colleague Ms. Brown mentioned Canada's development themes around food security, children and youth, and economic growth. Obviously underpinning all three of those themes is safety and security in a functioning criminal justice system.

I know our guest from the YMCA mentioned some programs around criminal gangs in particular. You go to some cities in Latin America where entire barrios are taken over by criminal gangs, and we're not talking about large international narco gangs, we're talking about local gangs that get involved in extortion rackets, drugs, prostitution, contraband trafficking, guns, and those kinds of things. I was wondering if the YMCA has specific programs—there's this positive model that you talked about, civic engagement and giving children some tools to stay away from that—that work with kids in helping them to resist the lure of getting involved in some of these gangs, because once they're in it's very hard to get out.

The reason it's very important for youth is that they get recruited at a very young age. I was in San Salvador last year and they talked about an eight-year-old being recruited. To prove their worth they have to go out and kill somebody, an innocent person selling tortillas in the street, because maybe this person refused to pay extortion moneys to the local gang and it was just to send a signal to all the other people selling tortillas in the street that they had to do this.

Does the YMCA have programs to help kids stay out of gangs, other than the positive things you do, targeting and maybe even working with local police forces, if that's at all possible?

Ms. Patricia Pelton: I'll begin.

In our board meetings we often hear what we call the “thought of the day” and it's a practice that I would suggest all of you on any board start. When someone comes in and gives testimony about the value of the organization, it keeps you grounded. I've been in board meetings where we've heard from people who had been in gangs who commit and dedicate themselves to the YMCA or to working with like partnerships and community efforts because they feel they have been rescued.

Indeed there are targeted programs. We said in the initial comments that we'd worked with child soldiers in Sierra Leone, and certainly a lot of work has been done in Colombia. About three years ago a young YMCA leader of some temerity—and I'll get emotional here—was shot down in the street. So it's not always safe work, but yes, work is being done, particularly in the Americas and in scattered countries across the world that we've targeted.

Ms. Mary Anne Roche: Let me just add that absolutely this work can't take place in the community by the YMCA without it being done with school boards, police forces, and other agencies in civil society trying to move this forward.

Our Governor General and his wife did a visit to Colombia recently. The Governor General's wife had an opportunity to visit the programming at Medellín, Colombia. Comuna 13 is one of the highest communities of violence within that area. The YMCA has had tremendous success in reaching out, connecting with those young leaders, and then it's the young leaders themselves who talk with other young children to try to pull them away. But it's a huge issue, a huge problem. There's absolutely more work that can be

done with more resources, but the secret is to do that in collaboration and with youth leading the process.

Mr. Bernard Trottier: I'd like to hear from the CCFC also about any program you might have to combat the scourge, the menace of organized crime in some of the countries that you operate in.

Mr. Mark Lukowski: I'll give you an example of a program that we implemented in Nicaragua. As you know, our focus is working through communities, and there was an issue of gang violence and lots of fights in the community. We set up a youth group and we educated them on the benefits of having a life without violence to the point that after that happened they went door to door recruiting their peers to show them that violence is not the way to go.

We saw some measurable results after we did it. Children felt more safe in the community after we did that training. So we engaged the youth. Our focus is always to engage youth, whatever the form of violence.

I'll give you another example. In Burkina Faso we worked in a community where there was a high proportion of women who were going into early forced marriages. We set up a community education program. We got mothers and fathers in an education program to make them aware that early, child, forced marriage is not in the best interests of a girl. It limits her opportunity to be able to achieve her full potential.

As the end of that training was completed, women then went door to door and identified young girls who they felt were at risk. At first there was a lot of resistance to it. But over time, within a couple of years, we learned that when mothers and fathers in the communities, or young people in the communities saw a girl who was vulnerable to this, they would go and see this leader and say, “Please be careful, that young girl is vulnerable to early forced marriage.”

So our focus is always on education because we're changing behaviour in any type of violence, whether it be crime or early forced marriage.

● (1230)

The Chair: Thank you very much. Let's continue with Madam Laverdière for five minutes, please.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

One first question to Madam Roche and Madam Pelton, and it may not be relevant, but you tell me then. I was interested by your comments about what you do at the community level to prevent organized crime without having to ask for either school boards or police to be involved.

I was wondering if you do something similar because what it brings to mind is of course the very timely topic of radicalization. Are you active also with youth who could become radicalized either in Canada or abroad?

Ms. Patricia Pelton: Thanks for the question.

I call ISIS and Boko Haram, etc., horrible gangs on steroids. Essentially it is literally the same kind of thing. People want a sense of belonging to something bigger, I guess, so anything that we can do as a society to bring in alternatives for people in terms of prevention, we do. So with all that we've talked about in terms of leadership and giving people the skills and the tools, using evidence, I must say that as an organization we are very evidence-based and we know tactics that work and tactics that don't work with youth, and we try to use those tools in our programs and working with youth.

Is it measurable? I would say no. At this point in time it's very hard to say how many people we did save by not having them go in and by giving them a feeling of belonging. But I would say that it is leadership training, and training the trainer, word of mouth, and peer-to-peer support. They are like a mushroom. It just keeps ballooning out. So yes, we are very aware and we are focusing on that in our youth programs in Canada where there's active recruitment.

Ms. Mary Anne Roche: If I might add to that, this whole question for the YMCA is all about making sure there are alternatives—legitimate, good alternatives—for young people and that they have a sense of choice when they're confronted with this challenge of perhaps joining a group, and they can choose no.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Thank you very much. I find that very interesting.

If I may suggest, if you have any written documentation about what you do in that respect, generally gang and radicalization, I would think it could be interesting for the committee to receive. From my point of view the more you have the better, so thank you very much in advance.

I have two minutes left. Very rapidly, to Madam Stevenson, we know that many child and early forced marriages result in either unintended or unwanted pregnancies. What kinds of services do the young girls need in order to face those unwanted or unintended pregnancies and what could the Government of Canada do to support these services eventually?

• (1235)

Ms. Sarah Stevenson: Thank you very much.

The services that we find are very helpful... It's very similar to what we were talking about earlier in terms of the youth engagement. How do you create peer supports for young girls who are mothers? It raises awareness within communities of the impact of being a young mother but it also creates a support network for that girl. Ideally there is also an opportunity for the girl to continue with her education. Her education is something that will in the long run continue to help the family.

In terms of what the Canadian government can do, I think the Canadian government should be congratulated. As a proud Canadian, I sit here in New York always proud of the work that Canada has done when it comes to this issue. The Canadian government has been a champion for the issue of child marriage. There is more that needs to be done in terms of being a champion against violence against children, but the Canadian government should be congratulated for its leadership on the resolution that recently passed and for its ongoing commitment to the issue of child marriage.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to go back to Mr. Hawn for five minutes, please.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Thank you, Chair, and thank you all for joining us.

You talked earlier in the YMCA presentation about underlying social determinants and understanding those, and so on. But when we're talking about places outside of the developed world I think we're talking about cultural and religious determinants more than what we would call social determinants here.

I'm wondering how we train.... Are we equipped? Are we in the developed world equipped professionally, emotionally, whatever, to go and deal in those areas where there are cultural and religious determinants? Things like what we would call maybe inappropriate tenets of Islam in places in Africa or maybe some different religious or cultural determinants in South America.... Are we equipped to go over there and deal with that? How do we train our folks who are going into that environment? How do we train the folks that we're going to work with there to deal with that?

Mr. Lukowski.

Mr. Mark Lukowski: Our focus has been on implementing programs to educate the communities. An example I can give you is a program that we've implemented in conjunction with Hincks-Dellcrest out of Toronto. It's a program designed to help parents play with children. As we're teaching them how to play with children and teaching parents how to have activities with children, we're also teaching parents they need to protect their children and also teaching the parents, as the children are very young, to give the opportunity for each child to achieve their full potential.

As Canadians we should be proud of the fact that we do have expertise in this area, as exemplified by Hincks-Dellcrest. It's a global organization known for its work with youth and adults. That is one way we can continue to expand and implement programs in communities.

We've used these techniques from Hincks-Dellcrest in some of the developing countries and that methodology is being adopted by the Government of Burkina Faso.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: I want to go back to the ladies from the YMCA.

Following from that, we talk about best practices, which may be different in Africa and in South America, etc. Can you give some examples of best practices from Canada that have been adapted to either of those places? Are there best practices from there that we can bring back here?

Ms. Patricia Pelton: I'll give it a go. I think Mary Anne will fill in, certainly regarding specific programming.

In terms of working in a foreign culture, the whole basis for how we work internationally is with partners. We respect our partners, and we don't do anything to the partners. We've tried to get past that old colonial feel and work with our partners in terms of the reality of the cultural context in which they're working and the ways in which we can take small steps.

In terms of best practices, I will tell you that all of our local YMCAs that have international partnerships, which is almost all of them, always say that they get more from the partnership than what they give in terms of the relationship.

For specifics, I'll pass it over to Mary Anne.

● (1240)

Ms. Mary Anne Roche: As Patricia was saying, the fact that the YMCAs are led and owned locally is a critical factor for us. When we're dealing with these kinds of issues, for people or cultures to change requires a level of trust. The leadership, and the people leading change, need to be members of their own community, where there's already trust and a feeling that there's an understanding of the realities of that particular community.

In terms of best practices and learnings, we've seen great success, as have many other organizations, with youth exchanges.

This allows me to make a comment to you, Ms. Brown. We had a situation where we had a young person from a YMCA who came to a youth exchange program in Canada that was partially funded by the federal government, where he learned and was exposed to Canadian culture and Canadian values, and approaches to how to work with children. After several weeks in Canada, he gave unsolicited testimony in which he said, "I have learned not to hurt the children through those practices like caning. I have learned that there are alternative ways of working with children to engage them in their school work." That was very powerful testimony for anyone who was in that room.

The value of one-to-one conversation and dialogue-sharing cannot be underestimated, particularly in youth exchanges, where people are forming their understanding of different cultures. Through that dialogue, you have a growing sense that perhaps there are different ways of approaching things. We have had our learnings in Canada as well, through those exchanges with other countries.

The Chair: Thank you.

That's all the time we have. We're going to start the third round. I think we have time for one more round.

We're going to start with Mr. Goldring for five minutes.

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I thank everyone for appearing here today.

My comment would be, I suppose, to Ms. Stevenson. It is with regard to what my colleague was talking about: the Convention on the Rights of the Child. My first comment is that it's pretty well universally accepted and certainly well promoted here in Canada.

I have difficulty with article 38. Article 1 says that you're a child if you're under the age of 18; article 38 says, except, if you get recruited into a military, you can be 15. I have difficulty with that, and I would hope that they would rewrite it. I understand they've covered that with some recent protocols but not all countries have accepted the protocols.

Would that not an apt place—and maybe it is there already and I've just forgotten about it—to add for the right of a child to be certified at birth? It seems to me that would be a very important thing to do. Perhaps you could comment on whether child marriage or

female genital mutilation is covered in that document. Would that not be an apt document to clarify some of these issues, and put it on record? As I said, it's pretty universally accepted as a document that's followed in most countries.

Could you comment on that, Ms. Stevenson?

Ms. Sarah Stevenson: Yes, thank you very much.

As you mentioned, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most widely recognized and ratified document we have. I am pleased to say that recently Somalia has also signed on to the document, so it has become even more ratified. We do have some optional protocols that were written after the original convention was drafted. The reason for that is that it is significantly easier to draft and sign on to optional protocols than to revise the convention itself. That's why that's been happening. Among the optional protocols, there is one on child soldiers, which does update the documents, as you mentioned. The convention itself also looks at issues of child marriage, etc., so there are options within the convention to deal with this language.

One of the challenges that we have with all of these conventions is that states have the option to have reservations on certain articles, and that's where, hopefully, within the UN system and across bilateral negotiations, there can be conversations in terms of encouraging states not to have certain reservations about different articles within the convention.

● (1245)

Mr. Peter Goldring: The written version that we get in the booklet that is passed around to all schools still has the original wording in article 38, saying that a child can be taken into the military at the age of 15. I would think that if they could put out an official publication that would make note of the protocols and include them, we could have the confidence of knowing when we read it that those have been attended to.

Ms. Sarah Stevenson: That certainly is something that I can bring to my colleagues at UNICEF and make a recommendation to them in terms of carrying that forward.

Mr. Peter Goldring: Thank you.

The Chair: You have one minute, Mr. Schellenberger. What we don't get to, you can do in the next round.

Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC): To the ladies from the YMCA, you mentioned earlier that you worked with child soldiers.

How have your programs worked with these child soldiers after their stint?

Ms. Mary Anne Roche: The Sierra Leone YMCA has done phenomenal work, and there is a truth and reconciliation process within that country. Through YMCA's involvement, they were able, after the conflict ended in 2002 or so, to engage child soldiers into their programming, which was challenging, to such an extent that many of those soldiers were able to return to their families and to their communities. Through the experience of being with others, learning to trust adults, having opportunities to be children and play again, and talking a little bit about their experiences, through that kind of group process and individual attention, some healing is able to take place, and child soldiers are able to move on with their lives. It's very difficult and inspiring work that my colleagues are doing in those communities, for sure.

The Chair: Thank you.

Gary, we'll come back to you.

We're going to go over to Madam Laverdière for five minutes.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I would like to go back to Ms. Stevenson.

What do you see as the relationship between armed conflict, failed state, state fragility, and disaster, and the prevalence of forced marriage? I don't know why I'm asking all my questions in English today, but anyhow, here it is.

Ms. Sarah Stevenson: Thank you very much.

We've seen over time that fragile states and situations of both war and internal conflicts within countries are where we are going to see increased prevalence of children affected by that, both as soldiers and as children affected by the conflict itself beyond the role of just being a soldier, which is, on all sides, horrendous for these children to have to go through.

It's been interesting to note that during the recent Ebola crisis the prevalence of FGM/C has actually gone down, and that's one of the reasons why we are calling for an interagency review—including our civil society colleagues, ChildFund being one of them—of the Ebola response to see what are the lessons that we can learn in terms of some of the issues that have come up from that. Since we're seeing a reduction in FGM/C, has there also been a reduction, for example, in child marriage taking place during this crisis? Those are some of the questions that we would like to see answered by an interagency review. That's something that, again, would be great to see countries pushing for as well, in terms of how to carry this forward.

Thank you.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: More generally, on the overall issue of child, forced, and early marriage—I'm sorry I never say that in the right order, but I covered all the bases, I think—on this general issue, what do you see as the way forward, the next steps?

• (1250)

Ms. Sarah Stevenson: The next step, from the lens I have while sitting here in New York and the conversations taking place currently within the next 15-year development agenda, is going to be how do we ensure that the target we currently have, which is looking at child, early, and forced marriage, is retained within the negotiations? That's a place where we're hoping Canada can continue to be a champion in terms of safeguarding that target. Without that target in

2016, there's always going to be the potential that it won't get the focus it deserves and requires within countries. That's because it not only is affected by national budgets and priorities within national budgets, but also, as this committee is well aware, in terms of overseas development assistance.

Within all of these issues affecting violence against girls and boys, it's how we ensure the targets that we have are preserved, and how, as Mr. Lukowski was saying, we ensure that within a global partnership on violence against children, these are all issues included within that as a main priority.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Schellenberger, did you have any final questions?

Mr. Gary Schellenberger: Sure. Thank you.

Youth unemployment has been mentioned at different times here today, and how important it is that these youths have some jobs.

You've all talked about different programs to educate people, and various programs that are peer-to-peer or whatever. If one was to pass one of these programs, you came out and you passed it, and there are still no jobs there, is there not a big vacuum that has to be filled?

I say this because in my riding of Perth—Wellington I have what is known as the Stratford Festival. The Stratford Festival has endeavoured, along with the Government of Canada and in the Americas, in Suchitoto, El Salvador... Again, Suchitoto is not a big town, but it just had so much violence and gangs. What the theatre did is it went into partnership with the town, and with some government support, to create a theatre company, not just a bunch of actors but a whole company. In that company they need electricians, they need carpenters to make sets, they have lighting people, they have people making costumes, they teach sewing, they do all of those things, and they also act. They teach actors. They go through the whole thing.

They've worked with the street kids. They brought them in. Right now there's a lineup of people who want to belong there. What they do is they go in and they're taught how to be carpenters, how to be electricians, how to be whatever. After a year or two they have some experience, and they can go out into their community and work in that community doing those jobs. They are then entrepreneurs. Whether they're getting a nickel an hour or whatever, they're out making money. They're doing something. They get a job when they come out of this.

Maybe it's only a statement I'm making here today, but I think with something like that, if you can partner with someone who can give those skills to those people for when they come out of there, maybe the unemployment rate would come down.

Could any of you comment on what I've just said?

Ms. Mary Anne Roche: Absolutely, entrepreneurialism is one of the potential solutions. I think all of our programs are also helping provide young people with those particular skills. The larger challenge is to find some of that decent work. The fact that there's a specific target in the SDGs related to taking a new step forward in developing a global strategy for jobs is very important and one that we hope will eventually make a difference.

It's a great story you've shared with us, though.

• (1255)

The Chair: Are there any comments?

Ms. Patricia Pelton: If I could just say, in terms of being on the ground and trying to ensure employability and not underemployability, I was in the West Bank with the YMCA a couple of years ago, and it had a large vocational training facility. I say "large facility" because it's large in space, but poorly equipped. In Canadian terms, we would say that the equipment was not enough. What amazed us was all the training that did go on and how prepared the youth came out in their various fields. There was some computer training and some mechanical training, etc.

What the school did very clearly was to work with the communities to try to ensure placements for apprenticeships. As we do here, they had that model, and they were very proud to share with us the relatively high rate of employability of their students. Training just isn't enough; we know even in Canada that being underemployed just isn't good enough either.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mark, do you have a final comment?

Mr. Mark Lukowski: I could share with you about a program that we worked on in Ethiopia called youth-headed household. It was designed for youths who had basically lost both of their parents to AIDS. We implemented a 10-week training program for the youths who were between 17 and 20. The youths were selected. They were the oldest in their family, and they had two or three siblings. After the training was completed, through capital that was provided by a generous donor, we provided some start-up funding so that each of these folks set up a small business.

One of the youths who participated in this program developed wheelbarrows because he realized that people needed something to move their goods around from their markets to home. He painted every wheelbarrow blue. As you walked around the community, you thought of this youth and our program because every blue wheelbarrow in his town was because of the program.

The exciting thing about this is that not only did this youth have training through the training program, he had sole start-up capital, and he also had a mentor. He met with a mentor on a regular basis, who was a seasoned businessperson in the community, to help him expand his business. That's one of many examples of how we work to try to get youth to create employment.

The Chair: Thank you.

To our witnesses today, thank you very much for your time and your insight on this very important topic.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

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