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Chair

The Honourable Robert Nault

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Robert Nault (Kenora, Lib.)): Colleagues, I'd like to bring this meeting to order.

For the record, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are going to continue with our study on women, peace, and security for the first hour, and then we'll have the appearance by the Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau, the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie. That brings you up to speed.

Before us from Amnesty International Canada is Jacqueline Hansen, and from the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security is Louise Allen.

Welcome to you both.

I'm going to turn it over to Ms. Hansen to start her presentation, and then we'll go to Ms. Allen. Then we'll go to questions.

Jacqueline, the floor is yours.

Ms. Jacqueline Hansen (Major Campaigns and Women's Rights Campaigner, Amnesty International Canada): Good afternoon, and thank you for this opportunity to address the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development as part of your study on women, peace, and security.

Amnesty International is a global movement of over seven million people in more than 150 countries working together to protect and promote human rights. We do not accept government funding to support our work.

Amnesty has extensively documented the violation of the sexual and reproductive rights of women and girls in conflict, post-conflict, and peacetime environments around the world, and I will focus my remarks on this issue.

Our concern over the scale of these rights violations is so great that three years ago we launched our My Body My Rights campaign calling for an end to the control and criminalization of sexual and reproductive rights by states and non-state actors.

Amnesty is a member of the Women, Peace and Security Network-Canada.

Globally, in times of peace and in times of conflict, women and girls experience gender-based discrimination, violence, and barriers to realizing their sexual and reproductive rights. The gender inequalities at the root of these human rights violations are

heightened in conflict situations. The consequence is all too often an increase in sexual and reproductive rights violations.

Amnesty fervently advocates for the protection of civilians in armed conflict situations. These protections must include concrete measures to safeguard the sexual and reproductive rights of women and girls as identified by women and girls themselves.

Sexual and reproductive rights are the rights to make decisions about our bodies. They include the right to receive accurate information about sexuality and reproduction; access sexual and reproductive health services, including contraception and post-exposure prophylaxis; choose if, when, and whom to marry; and decide if, when, and how many children to have. They also include the rights to live free from all forms of sexual violence including rape, female genital mutilation, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, and forced sterilization.

Laws, policies, and practices violate the sexual and reproductive rights of women and girls in conflict and non-conflict situations. In addition, particular types of sexual and reproductive rights violations are often experienced by women and girls living in or fleeing from armed conflict situations.

The closure of schools often leads to a lack of access to education about sexuality and reproduction. Service reductions or closures of health clinics and hospitals create barriers to accessing contraception, testing for sexually transmitted infections, safe abortion, prenatal and postnatal care, and other services.

When women are on the move fleeing conflict both within and outside their country's borders, they face barriers to accessing everything from menstrual products to contraception to prenatal and postnatal care and birthing facilities.

Women on the move are often in situations where they are at a heightened risk of experiencing sexual violence, and sexual violence, as we know, is all too often used as a weapon of war with devastating consequences for women and girls.

I will give some examples of sexual and reproductive rights violations that Amnesty has documented in relation to the armed conflict in Syria. I have focused my remarks on the Syrian conflict, but in the question period, I will be happy to share examples drawn from our work in other parts of the world.

Access to education and health care, including information and services related to sexuality and reproduction, are limited in Syria. The IS closed health facilities and reportedly barred women medical workers from working in areas it controlled curtailing civilians' access to medical care.

Government forces have repeatedly bombed hospitals and other medical facilities, barred or restricted the inclusion of medical supplies and humanitarian aid deliveries to besieged and hard-to-reach areas, and disrupted or prevented health care provision in these areas by detaining medical workers and volunteers. Almost 700 medical workers were killed in Syria between 2011 and 2015—almost 700.

Even after women and girls have fled Syria, many remain at risk of sexual and reproductive rights violations in refugee camps and communities in neighbouring countries.

● (1535)

International organizations have been reporting for several years on instances of child marriage among Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Refugee families struggling to pay for rent and food may see the marriage of a daughter as one way to reduce their financial difficulties. Marriage is also sometimes seen as a means of “protecting” girls from sexual harassment and violence. One Syrian refugee woman told Amnesty, “When we came to Lebanon my children couldn’t continue their education.... Since she was a young girl and a stranger, young men would harass her verbally even when she was with me or her uncle. We couldn’t protect her from this sort of harassment. She wanted to get a job but my brother refused and he beat her. As a reaction to this beating, when my brother’s wife said that she knew of an old man who wanted to get married, my daughter agreed. My daughter was 16 years old when she got married to a man 20 years older than her. Now she suffers a lot of problems because of this.”

Syrian refugee women and girls have spoken with Amnesty about their fear of being attacked and raped while moving around Zaatari camp in Jordan, and in particular, when using unlit communal toilets. As a result, women at the camp were avoiding using the bathroom at night, and doctors confirmed treating urinary tract infections resulting from women restraining themselves from urinating. The cost of health care in Jordan also creates an access barrier for Syrian refugees, including pregnant women and girls.

Refugee women and girls travelling through Europe may not have access to menstrual products or contraception. Pregnant women have described a lack of food and basic health care. Women and girls are reported being sexually harassed in European transit camps. Others have reported being afraid to sleep or go to the bathroom in facilities shared by women and men. Amnesty has called for, at the minimum, the setting up of single sex, well-lit toilet facilities and gender-segregated safe sleeping areas to help protect women and girls from sexual violence. When refugee women and girls are raped, as a mobile population they have very little access to testing for sexually transmitted infections, post-exposure prophylaxis, safe abortion services, and other sexual and reproductive health care services.

Women who stand up for human rights often do so at great risk to themselves and to their families. Next week, the family of Syrian women human rights defender and lawyer Razan Zaitouneh will gather in Ottawa for a vigil to mark another birthday without her. On December 9, 2013, Razan, her husband, and two other colleagues were abducted by armed men during a raid on their offices near Damascus, and they haven’t been seen since. Amnesty believes Razan’s abduction was a direct result of her peaceful work to defend

political prisoners and support civil society groups in Syria. I could give you an endless list of women human rights defenders who have been similarly targeted for their work.

Women and girls experience violations of their sexual and reproductive rights in peacetime, and more so in armed conflict situations. They are best placed to identify concrete solutions to the rights violations impacting them, and must be meaningfully involved in the planning and implementation of projects to prevent sexual and reproductive rights violations and to support survivors. They need an equal voice in peace negotiations to identify the rights violations experienced by women during armed conflict and to help craft solutions that will lead to a lasting peace. The courageous women who stand up to human rights violations must be protected from threats and violence. There can be no impunity for those who perpetrate acts of violence against women human rights defenders.

As the committee moves forward with its study of women, peace, and security, Amnesty would like to encourage Canada, as a country committed to promoting gender equality, and as a country that has provided a home to so many women and girls who have experienced rights violations during armed conflicts, to: become a global leader in promoting the women, peace, and security agenda by committing significant human resources and investments; articulate a clear goal and outline and focus priorities, with measurable targets, in a robust national action plan accompanied by a strong cross-departmental implementation strategy, and led by a senior-level champion; and promote protection of sexual and reproductive rights, and the women, peace, and security agenda more broadly, in all multilateral and bilateral fora, and call on states to hold perpetrators of human rights violations to justice. Amnesty also encourages Canada to: use Canada’s new role on the Commission on the Status of Women as an opportunity to advocate for the adoption of special measures to protect women human rights defenders; make sure that women are meaningfully involved in all peace negotiations; continue to prioritize women at risk and girls at risk of human rights violations and LGBTI individuals for resettlement in Canada; fund the work of women human rights defenders and women’s organizations; and last, support projects that support a comprehensive tool kit of sexual and reproductive health information and services to women and girls.

● (1540)

What has changed in the last 15 years for women and girls as a result of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security? Not much.

We challenge Canada in the next 15 years to make a measurable difference in the lives of women and girls. We know that there can be no peace until the guns stop, but for women and girls, there can be no true recovery from armed conflict until they have control over making the most basic decisions about their bodies and their lives.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Hansen.

Now we'll go to Ms. Allen.

Ms. Louise Allen (Executive Coordinator, NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security): Good afternoon.

Thank you very much for the invitation to participate in these hearings, which I've been following with great interest from New York over the last few weeks.

The NGO working group consists of 16 international NGOs, including the Nobel Women's Initiative, the Institute for Inclusive Security, CARE International, Amnesty, and Human Rights Watch, which you have heard from in these last few weeks.

We jointly conduct monitoring, analysis, and advocacy on the full implementation of the women, peace, and security agenda at the UN Security Council in peace operations, at UN leadership levels, and by member states. We also facilitate the civil society statements during women, peace, and security open debates at the Security Council.

I want to echo a lot of the recommendations and analysis that you have already heard and that have been presented by my civil society colleagues, particularly in terms of supporting grassroots women's organizations and women human rights defenders, insuring women's meaningful participation across all peace and political processes and donor conferences, supporting holistic services for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, and the need for dedicated funding to go to gender equality and women's empowerment.

Many of my colleagues have outlined for you in detail recommendations on how to improve Canada's national action plan. Without repeating these, I do want to reiterate the importance of national action plans involving ongoing consultative processes with civil society, ensuring that they are cross-government strategies with shared responsibilities across ministries for their implementation, including strong results-based monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and having dedicated budget and receiving high-level support, as Jacqueline has just outlined, as well.

Today I would like to focus my remarks on the role Canada is playing at the UN and in other multilateral settings, and the role we hope it continues to play in advocating for the systematic implementation of women, peace, and security across all peace and security settings.

Our analysis shows that despite the progress being made at the normative level, and the annual women, peace, and security Security Council open debates enjoying record levels of participation with last year's open debate marking the 15th anniversary having the highest number of member states participating in open debate in the Security Council's history, our analysis shows that the implementation by the Security Council UN leadership at headquarters and in the field and by member states does not match the rhetorical support we witness every year in October.

Overall, the implementation of the agenda continues to rely on political support by individual countries, and sometimes even individual diplomats within missions, rather than serving as a systematic lens by which to view peace and security and long-term conflict prevention. This is why we need strong women, peace, and security champions such as Canada at all multilateral processes to play an increasing monitoring and advocacy role relating to the

consistent implementation of the women, peace, and security agenda.

I do want to take this opportunity to commend Canada and the Canadian mission in New York for the leadership role it has taken both as the chair of the Group of Friends of 1325 and as the co-chair of the working group on the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, known as "C-34".

As the chair of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace and Security, the Canadian mission systematically initiates and convenes regular meetings for diplomats and women, peace, and security civil society. It has called on Security Council members and other member states to make strong political and financial statements ahead of last October's high-level review. It also convened a special meeting to specifically discuss sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers. These meetings are always very well attended both by diplomats and by civil society and UN staff. We always appreciate the opportunity to brief participants on behalf of civil society.

This year Canada also chaired robust negotiations in the C-34 committee, which resulted in a stronger position being taken on sexual exploitation and abuse by all member states. Negotiating a consensus report is testament to the role Canada can play in multilateral deliberations, especially considering the troubled history the committee has had previously in reaching consensus.

● (1545)

We would like to recommend that Canada increase its women, peace, and security advocacy at the UN across four particular areas: first, increasing women's participation in civil society engagement, both at UN headquarters and across all peace operations and processes; second, advocating for improved and consistent workings of the Security Council to integrate women, peace, and security; third, calling for UN leadership and accountability for women, peace, and security; and fourth, calling for greater transparency in sexual exploitation and abuse reporting by peacekeepers.

Last year, the high-level review on peace operations emphasized the need for better conflict and country analysis to inform peace operations, and for gender analysis to be conducted throughout the mission planning, mandate development, implementation, review, and mission drawdown processes. The peace operations review also called for peace operations to be more people-centered and to increase their community engagement.

Institutionalizing regular community and civil society engagement in New York and across all peace operations will ensure peace and security decisions reflect, and are more responsive to, the needs and experiences of local communities. Canada should join the calls for senior peacekeeping and political mission leadership to be tasked with holding consultations with civil society organizations soon after a mission is deployed, and then establish a regular schedule for consultations that include systematic and specific outreach with women leaders and women civil society organizations representing different ethnic, faith, and minority groups. Such outreach also then needs to be reflected in mission implementation reports and briefings to the Security Council.

In Resolution 2242, which was unanimously adopted in October last year at the Security Council and co-sponsored by 71 member states, including Canada, the Security Council committed to invite civil society representatives, including from women's organizations, to participate in country-specific considerations, that up until now have been closed spaces for civil society. The Security Council has yet to act on this commitment.

We urge Canada to be a strong advocate for women civil society leaders to participate both in Security Council country briefings and in mission community engagements. Support for women civil society representatives during women, peace, and security open debates at the Security Council is not enough, especially as we know that the commitments being made during thematic debates do not then translate into the integration of gender considerations in country-specific decision-making at the Security Council, and by UN leadership.

The Security Council mandates of peacekeeping and political missions, our analysis shows, largely stayed the same last year. To give you a specific figure, only four out of the thirteen peacekeeping missions that had their mandates renewed last year called for the mission to consider gender as a crosscutting issue. Of concern, only 40% of Security Council resolutions and presidential statements responding to a specific crisis had any element on women, peace, and security, or any sort of gender considerations.

We urge Canada to advocate for all Security Council mandates to include gender as a crosscutting issue, as well as specific language relating to women, peace, and security both in terms of assessing their protection needs and for women to participate in all processes. Part of that is also calling for the systematic deployment of senior gender advisers to all peace and political missions. We would be happy to continue to work with the Canadian mission in New York, as well as Parliament, to identify opportunities for increased advocacy toward the Security Council on specific mandates.

We have put a lot of emphasis on the need for improved accountability systems for UN leadership both at headquarters and in missions, and for women, peace, and security promoting women's participation and engaging with women's organizations to be written into the terms of reference for all special representatives to the secretary-general, senior envoys, mediators, and force commanders. Interview processes should also assess a candidate's understanding of what a gender perspective is. The incoming secretary-general must also have demonstrated knowledge and experience in and support for the women, peace, and security agenda.

● (1550)

Both the high-level review on peace operations and the global study on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 called for the appointment of more women to senior mission leadership positions to be prioritized.

A comprehensive strategy involving UN entities and countries which contribute troops and police is needed to address both the pipeline and the structural obstacles preventing women's recruitment and professional advancement. So far, we have seen no movement on this, yet high-level attention is needed. We would welcome Canada taking this up, including the need for the increased accountability of UN leadership and the prioritization of women's leadership positions as part of its overall women, peace, and security advocacy work.

Finally, in terms of sexual exploitation and abuse, Canada is to be commended for the role that it played last year in raising the issue in New York, but we would further encourage Canada to continue shining a light on this issue. As part of this, Canada should call for a robust and mandatory pre-deployment training and vetting of all personnel; for regular field missions to include a conduct and discipline section which captures information on allegations, repatriation, and judicial measures; and to give priority to the security and well-being of survivors in its response to sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers, including through promoting best practices such as maintaining confidentiality, minimizing repeated trauma from multiple interviews, and ensuring rapid access to medical and psychosocial care.

The four areas I have highlighted this afternoon are also reflected in Canada's national action plan priorities, and we strongly encourage you to include these areas in your recommendations on Canada's policy on women, peace, and security. We continue to encourage Canada to be the champion that we have seen in New York and in other multilateral processes. We need champions who encourage and push for consistent implementation and who lead by example, not just by giving supportive statements in October, but through action and financial support for the agenda.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Allen.

We very much appreciate both of your opening comments, statements, and recommendations.

We'll now go to questions by members. We'll start with Mr. Kent.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you for your testimony and for your advice.

In speaking to a point that each of you made that there are huge gaps in the UN system's implementation of UN Security Council resolutions as they pertain to women, peace, and security, and given the graphic testimony in the recent paper of former United Nations assistant secretary-general Anthony Banbury, which tragically listed many of these specific outcomes, it would seem that the United Nations, after almost a hundred years—we're getting into the second half of the United Nations century—needs a massive overhaul. Various witnesses have made suggestions of what needs to be done, including that perhaps it's time for a woman secretary-general.

I don't say that lightly. We know in fact that in this area, very often it is women who make the difference on the ground in pre-conflict, conflict, and post-conflict situations. I wonder if you could briefly give us your thoughts on what needs to be done at the UN.

•(1555)

Ms. Louise Allen: In terms of what needs to be done at the UN for consistent implementation on women, peace, and security, there needs to be consistent leadership. Too many times it's left up to the individual, and that's from the secretary-general down. It's a question of consistency, political will, and financing. Even the deployment of gender advisers, for instance, is not systematic.

In terms of the secretary-general, as a coalition we're not going as far as to say that it should be a woman. There's a lot of support for the next secretary-general to be a woman, but what we really want to emphasize is that the next secretary-general must prioritize the agenda across all areas of the UN's work, and have demonstrated experience and support for that agenda. With the process that has already started taking place in New York, we're really interested in the opportunity for candidates to interact with member states and civil society. So far, the issue of women, peace, and security is one that's being integrated into question and answer sessions between the candidates and the member states.

Ms. Jacqueline Hansen: For us, regardless of the gender of the next secretary-general, we want to ensure that whoever that person is, that person be an advocate for the rights of women and girls and an advocate for gender equality. That is what is most important to us.

In terms of gaps within the UN system, rather than focus on that, I think it's important to also look at what particular member states have a responsibility to do. When we're looking, for example, at allegations of misconduct or allegations of abuses committed by peacekeepers, there are national obligations. At Amnesty what we encourage is, if there are any allegations of misconduct, ensuring that they are thoroughly, promptly, and impartially investigated at the national level and making sure that any perpetrators are held to account.

Likewise, we also call on Canada and other countries to call out their partners and engage partners in other countries if that is not happening with other countries. Outside of the United Nations system there are national structures and there are national obligations, and we can also do much in our bilateral relations.

Hon. Peter Kent: That would seem to lead to my next question.

We're seeing governments of a number of western democracies, including Canada and the United Kingdom, incapable of speaking the word "genocide" as it applies to the treatment by ISIS of women, girls, and men, religious minorities in Iraq and Syria, because of the

dysfunction at the UN in the Security Council where, because of China and Russia vetoes, the Security Council is incapable of directing the International Criminal Court to proceed against ISIS.

This would seem to address or speak to your last suggestion that governments have a moral responsibility to speak above the United Nations.

Ms. Jacqueline Hansen: I wouldn't say above. I would say that all states have an obligation to protect and respect human rights, and in our globalized world we're not just looking at what happens within our borders; we know that what happens within our borders is related to what happens outside of our borders.

If we are observing human rights violations occurring in other states, then yes, states can call that out. I wouldn't say it's necessarily going above the UN system, but there's nothing preventing us from having bold leadership.

•(1600)

Ms. Louise Allen: In terms of the treatment, particularly of Yazidi women in northern Iraq, a number of organizations are calling for that to be classified as genocide, the systematic sexual enslavement and the kidnapping of young women and children as well. There is advocacy being made and there's starting to be support at the UN level for the treatment of Yazidi women to be classified as genocide.

When the horrendous human rights violations that we're seeing being undertaken by ISIS eventually appear before some sort of international court, there are a lot of organizations that are documenting the human rights violations that are happening on both sides of the conflict both in Syria and in Iraq.

We work with partners who also provide human rights documentation training on the ground so that, if and when there is ever an international prosecution, there will be the information and the evidence ready to hold the perpetrators to account.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kent.

We'll go to Mr. Levitt.

Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.): Thank you for being here today.

We've heard now both of your testimonies added to the narrative that's been laid out for this committee over the last four or five sessions, whether it's on women's human rights defenders or sexual violence.

One thing that strikes me most is the catch-22 of the importance of having women's participation in civil society and the difference it can make in establishing peace and establishing good governance. We've seen some of that happening in Rwanda post-conflict, but we also know that the threats, again, of sexual violence and threats to families that these women face in entering into civil society and playing a role, especially as human rights defenders, makes it all the more difficult. I'm wondering if you could give some more general thoughts, not just in terms of the capacity of the UN, but some general thoughts on that.

Then, specifically, where justice systems may not be responsive to violence against women, how do you go about imposing justice on perpetrators of sexual violence, particularly in conflict and during the chaos afterwards?

Ms. Jacqueline Hansen: Women's participation in many parts of the world is accompanied by threats and violence, and that's just how it is, as you said, but that shouldn't be a barrier. There are women who continue to participate knowing full well what the risks are.

What needs to happen is that we need to be making sure that perpetrators are held accountable for those acts of violence against women human rights defenders. If people know they can get away with violence against women, then they're more likely to commit acts of violence against women, so the signal needs to be sent loudly and clearly at all levels that this is not acceptable.

I will give the example of Berta Cáceres in Honduras, who was murdered not long ago. That's an example in which Canada immediately made a very strong statement about her murder. We need to see more of that sort of relationship so that when acts of violence are committed against women human rights defenders, and those who are in public life speak out, who often may transgress gender norms within a particular society, the international community is watching. That aspect of watching and monitoring and of having the world know what is going on in a particular country is an incredibly powerful tool with which to hold governments accountable. Calling out those acts of violence and engaging partners to look at and explore protection measures that can be put in place, whether those involve having security or accompaniment, is also certainly incredibly important. We need to make sure we're not seeing that as a barrier. Women are going to be participating, often regardless of the threats, so how can we work to deal with the threats and to make sure the perpetrators are held to account?

Ms. Louise Allen: I want to concur with what Jacqueline said and to build on it. In every single crisis and conflict and post-conflict situation that we are collectively working on, women are already there trying to be local community peace builders, and working with different ethnic and cultural divides. It's not a question of whether women are able to do this work; women are doing this work.

The role of the international community is really to do two things: to provide them with political support and to provide them with financial support. As Jacqueline said, it's calling out the increasing instances of crackdowns and intimidation, and enforced disappearances of women human rights defenders across all settings. It's not just the extremists who pose risks to women human rights defenders.

We've worked with women in Nigeria, in Somalia, in Rwanda, and in Burundi, where the threats and intimidation they face are from local security forces, police, and militia. It's from the government officials and those who are associated with the government that they are most at threat.

The international community really needs to play a vigilant role and also needs to be able to provide them with financial and political support.

In terms of the justice component, I don't want to repeat what Jacqueline said, but this is an example of why it's so important to have gender-sensitive institutions, legislation, and policy, including

across the security sector and police and justice systems. If a woman doesn't feel that she is able to report instances of any form of sexual or gender-based violence because doing so is either going to lead to further persecution or put her at risk of honour killing or lead to harassment by the police, then she's not going to report it. Within police forces, military, and other institutions, there needs to be a monitoring role as well as encouragement for gender-based sensitivity.

● (1605)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Levitt.

We'll go to Monsieur Aubin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I want to thank you for your testimony. It is helpful for us to experience the reality on the ground in this way.

In the few minutes I have, I would like to take advantage of your expertise to explore the matter in more depth.

I have met with a good number of NGO representatives and some of them tell us that, when military and humanitarian operations are conducted jointly, the situation often becomes counterproductive, because it is more difficult to establish a relationship of trust with the local population.

In the situation you are familiar with, do those operations have an effect on the ability of women to be fully included in the reconstruction process?

Ms. Louise Allen: Thank you for the question.

I will answer it in English, if you don't mind.

[*English*]

Your question points to the importance of community engagement across the peace operation. We've been doing a lot of work with some of our colleagues who have appeared before you already in terms of community-based protection of civilians.

This is an example where women's participation is vital, not only for the trust to be established between a peacekeeping operation and the local community, but also for the peacekeeping operations to be cognizant and then responsive to the particular threats a community is facing.

That builds the confidence for when a mission is changing from the immediate protection of the civilian component of a mandate to when it is looking at more the long-term peace-building component. If there isn't the community trust established at the outset, it's very difficult for them to then establish it down the track. We hear from our partners all the time that sometimes the only engagement they have with the UN mission is with the white UN convoys they see driving down the highway. There's no engagement, or interaction, or an opportunity for the local community members to have any sort of say into how a mission is either being designed or implemented.

I hope that answers your question. I could go into more specifics, but that's the need for a people-centred approach. There aren't any conflicts where it wouldn't be appropriate.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: In your experience, should the government adopt approaches that are appropriate for each of the regions, or can the approaches be more general because the problem is the same everywhere? Take the Middle East, for example, or anywhere else that is presently in difficulty. Should we be targeting our approaches?

•(1610)

[*English*]

Ms. Louise Allen: There are two parts. We never advocate a cookie-cutter approach to peacekeeping. In fact, we've seen some mandates where the mandate's almost the same across different peacekeeping missions, but they've just changed some of the language. That's not an approach that works. It's not integrating local gender and conflict analysis.

There are a couple of components we think should be systemized, for instance, the deployment of gender advisers, and the deployment of human rights advisers and of women protection advisers. Having their expertise and the regular deployment of their expertise should be standardized across all missions.

What needs to be context specific is how they're responding to the different threats, and sometimes the changing threats, but the deployment of the expertise allows for the mission to be context specific.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin: You have talked a lot about the importance of diplomacy. In the very short term, for a country like Canada, should there not also be an internal process that fosters gender equity when diplomats are appointed? On the diplomatic front, would having more female diplomats representing Canada not be a major first step?

[*English*]

Ms. Louise Allen: If I may answer in English, I think the prioritization of women's recruitment is the responsibility of the UN system and of individual member states as well.

The UN system often says the reason there aren't more women diplomats and women in senior positions is that member states aren't putting them forward to be considered as candidates. From the other perspective, we also hear there are structural problems in terms of the criteria sometimes, and that you need to have demonstrated, say, 10 to 15 years of experience. With some of the women who have gone on maternity leave, it's sometimes difficult to provide that continued level of uninterrupted experience.

That's why we think a multi-cycle strategy is needed, where it's a troop contributing, police contributing, and the UN Secretariat all devising a multi-pronged strategy to ensure women are part of the UN leadership and more reflected in diplomatic missions.

The Security Council recently undertook a Security Council mission to Mali. Samantha Power from the U.S. is currently the only female ambassador on the Security Council. She was not able to make that mission, so it was an all-male delegation that went to Mali.

Following extensive advocacy, a number of women, peace, and security issues we know were raised with the Mali government, and

as well with the peacekeeping mission that was there. One of the points the Mali government representative made to the Security Council was that the Security Council was emphasizing the importance of women's participation, but it was an all-male delegation.

That's a very important point. It doesn't detract from the fact the Mali government needs to be responsible for prioritizing women's participation, but that's an example of the point he was trying to make that the participation of women was muted given that it was an all-male delegation.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to Ms. Dzerowicz.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Thank you for your presentation, and thanks for all the work that you do. It's really heroic. As someone who did a tiny bit of work in this field many, many years ago, I can say that none of the issues are new. I wish they were. It's only exacerbated because we have far more conflict now happening in the world.

In some of the work that I did, I felt we took one step forward and two steps back. I was doing some work with microcredit loans internationally and we were trying to help women get jobs, create a bit of income, and also improve their local education and health care, which was huge in terms of healthy communities and building up civic society. However, we found there was a lot of corruption, so the institutions in many of the places we worked couldn't sustain change and there was no foundation for a healthy civil society.

A country like Canada can step up to the plate and do all the things you've been advocating—supporting grassroots, women, human rights, dedicated funding to gender equality, more transparency, championing strong women—but my question is, is there some parallel work that we also need to do around helping to build some of that foundation in the countries we hope to influence?

•(1615)

Ms. Jacqueline Hansen: I think one of the biggest things that can be done is to ensure sustained multi-year core funding. One of the things that is such a huge challenge, and it's also the same in Canada, is that women's organizations end up going from project to project to project and no one wants to pay the money to keep the lights on and to sustain it. As a result, you're not able to keep the staff you need in the long term and really have this big vision of where you're going, and then have a number of years to see it through.

Something that would make a significant difference would be to have funding dedicated to this issue and making sure it's focused on the grassroots, and that it is core, that is sustained, that it really is long term enough to support some of the incredible work that's being done. There are a lot of women around the world who are doing an awful lot with very, very little, and it doesn't require too much of an investment to multiply the impacts of that incredible grassroots work they're doing.

Ms. Louise Allen: To add to that, when we talk about grassroots support—and this is the criticism that we hear directed across different UN entities—it's always the same organizations that end up being funded by the international systems, and they're not necessarily representative of a diverse population. They're not multi-faith or ethnic and multicultural organizations that are either invited to participate in national or regional consultations, or are provided with funding.

Adding to what Jacqueline said, it's important for any support that goes to women's civil society organizations to be accessing the small organizations, those that might be advocating different positions from what the government is currently pursuing, and also that they be representative of the local communities.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you.

One of the more depressing remarks you've made, Ms. Hansen, is that not much has changed over the last 15 years. What I'd like to believe is that there might be some gold nuggets out there, that if Canada could replicate some of this work, it would be very beneficial for us. Are there other countries that might be doing it well that we might want to look at, not so much as a model but in terms of some of the things we might use as a guideline or guidepost?

Ms. Jacqueline Hansen: Absolutely. I think looking at Sweden and their feminist foreign policy is certainly a great place to start, and looking at Norway, which has dedicated funding for grassroots organizations. A key thing about funding like this is making sure that it really is channelled to some of the smaller organizations which don't have access perhaps to even know about other funding opportunities. To really support some of those initiatives is incredibly important.

One thing that's incredibly important is to make sure there's a solid baseline, to make sure that with the next national action plan there's a really clear goal: here's where we are now and here's what we're trying to accomplish; here are matrix and here are metrics, and we're going to be able to measure that. Whether it's two, four, five, or fifteen years from now, we're going to be able to measure that change. Sometimes it will be baby steps, or sometimes there might be grand leaps in some countries and a step backward in another, but by having things that really measure progress on the ground, and the impact Canada has had on that positive change, is what's really important.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: How long do I have?

The Chair: That will be the end of the first round, colleagues.

Now we'll go to the second round.

Mr. Sidhu.

Mr. Jati Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, Lib.): I'd like to thank you for your testimony to our committee. I'd also like to thank you for what you do on the world stage to protect women's rights and security.

I'd also like to echo my colleague's comment on the 15 years. You mentioned that the work is rather stagnant. The question thus arises, to what degree are concerns related to women, peace, and security being integrated into the core mandate of UN peacekeeping operations, mediation efforts, and development work?

• (1620)

Ms. Louise Allen: Unfortunately, it's far from consistent. I can give you a couple of examples, just from 2015.

In 2015, in the UNMISS mandate in South Sudan we saw strengthened language, such that the mission has now been tasked with considering gender as a crosscutting issue. The reason we think that's really important is that gender has to then inform decisions involving rule of law, security sector reform, disarmament, and demobilization. All aspects of a mission, therefore, have to have gender considerations. This was a positive.

In the same year, we've seen the Libyan mission be completely stripped of any gender specifications in its mandate, which is more than just one step back. It's really disappointing, because the Libyan mission had had some really progressive language and had been the only one to specifically mandate the senior gender adviser to look at women's empowerment. That language was completely stripped from it in the latest rollover of that mandate in, I think, March. It was a technical rollover only, so the council really didn't consider the mandate.

Thus, it's really country by country. To go back to some of the comments I had in my opening remarks, it's no longer enough for member states who consider themselves to be advocates of women, peace, and security to be making positive statements, which we welcome, and we heard positive statements in October. Emphasis on advocacy is needed across all of the different country situations, because we're seeing progress in some areas and seeing complete backwards steps in other areas, and this is the same body that is making these different decisions.

Mr. Jati Sidhu: Thank you.

The Chair: Let me follow up, if I may.

We've been told by witnesses a couple of things. One is about the effects of not having core funding. I understand that because there was no core funding, a lot of NGOs that were in the business no longer exist. I've heard that story, which in itself is something that needs to be discussed by this committee.

The second part of this is the discussion about pre-conflict, a continuation of working on the ground. Is that also impacted by having no core funding? For example, if you're on a specific proposal funding strategy, then you do the one year, and even though you should stay for two or three years, you don't because that's not a priority vis-à-vis the funding structure.

I'm just looking for some information on those two matters, because you're consistent with a lot of witnesses about them.

Ms. Jacqueline Hansen: It is consistent from what we have witnessed that looking at women's rights issues or other issues, whether it's at pre-conflict, during-conflict, or post-conflict situations, civil society organizations writ large have been impacted by the cut to core funding. This really makes it a challenge to keep good staff, to have the vision for projects, to carry out the work that needs to be done. This is true both for projects taking place within Canada and projects funded by Canada's overseas development assistance as well.

Ms. Louise Allen: To add to that, the feedback we're receiving, particularly from some of our Middle Eastern colleagues, is that not only are they being affected by the shrinking space and the shrinking availability of core funding, but some of them also are being caught up in the anti-terrorism financing laws, which means it's often very difficult for local organizations working in these areas to access funding.

The Chair: Thank you, and thanks to Mr. Sidhu for giving me a bit of his time. I was not prepared for that.

We'll go to Mr. Genuis, now.

Garnett, you have five minutes. We're doing the five-minute round now.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Thank you both for your testimony.

Ms. Hansen, you spoke generally about the situation in the Middle East. If I have time to get through all three, I want to get your thoughts on just a couple of other hot spots right now.

There has been some discussion of our Prime Minister making a trip to India soon. I know you're actively looking at human rights issues around the world.

I have an article in front of me from March, in which an Indian government minister said that they wouldn't be proceeding with plans to criminalize marital rape because the concept "cannot be applied in the Indian context".

Obviously, that's very concerning. My hope would be that our Prime Minister would raise issues of women's rights in India and with the Indian government. I want to hear your comments on the situation in India vis-à-vis women, peace, and security.

• (1625)

Ms. Jacqueline Hansen: We have worked on a number of cases in India recently, and our colleagues at Amnesty International India have a specific project right now whereby they are working on breaking down some of the barriers to women reporting incidents of sexual violence. It's a right-to-report project trying to get women to feel comfortable with going to police stations and reporting.

We have raised concerns about the lack of criminalization of marital rape. We likewise have raised issues regarding rampant sexual violence and violence against women more broadly. We've worked on a number of specific cases recently. We congratulated India and welcomed the recognition in some forms of third gender or hijra rights, transgender rights. However, at the same time, same-sex sexual conduct is still criminalized, so there's some work that needs to be done there.

We would very much hope that through all possible channels it would be possible to raise these issues bilaterally, because there is work that needs to be done.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

I'll go to the next hot spot. I know in your recent report you highlighted the situation in Russian-occupied territories in Ukraine, especially that facing certain minority groups like the Tatars in Crimea.

I ask the question because I don't know. Is there a gender dimension to that that you're following at all in terms of women being particularly affected by the Russian occupation?

Ms. Jacqueline Hansen: To be really honest, it's not something that has crossed my desk. I'm sure it's something that colleagues of mine who follow that file are looking at, but I can't speak to that.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

If your organization has information, you could certainly forward that to the committee in written form later on.

Ms. Jacqueline Hansen: Certainly.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You talked about women's reproductive rights.

One of the issues we have discussed at committee before is coercive family planning. You mentioned the traditional conception of reproductive rights including the right not to have children and also the right to have children if you want to have children.

I wonder if you could share some thoughts on the situation in China with regard to coercive family planning and in other countries that have proceeded with coercive family planning policies.

Ms. Jacqueline Hansen: As I mentioned in my presentation, every person has the fundamental human right to make choices about their own bodies and really has the right to decide if, when, and how to create a family and if, when, and how to have children.

We are certainly against forced pregnancy, forced abortion, and forced sterilization, because people have the right to make decisions about their bodies and their lives. Regardless of the country, that is the right that people have.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Is it your understanding that the one-child policy in China—I know it was recently modified—constitutes coercive family planning? Is that your perspective on that policy?

Ms. Jacqueline Hansen: People should have the right to decide on the family structure that they want.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: This committee had an earlier discussion about China's one-child policy specifically, so I just want to clarify whether Amnesty International views that as coercive family planning.

Ms. Jacqueline Hansen: It's not something we are actively working on, and it's something that doesn't fit within the women, peace, and security file, but we do advocate that women and men have the rights to make decisions about their bodies and their lives without state-controlled criminalization or interference.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Saini for the last question in this round.

You have five minutes, and you can share that if you like.

Mr. Raj Saini (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much to both of you for coming here.

I want to pick up on your opening comments regarding the UN.

It has now been 15 or 16 years since Resolution 1325 was passed. I'm sure you know that the UN commissioned a global study keeping score, in a way, of what has transpired over the last 15 years. One of the things that came up in that study was establishing a new UN assistant secretary-general position within UN Women. The thinking was that maybe this position would be necessary, with a dedicated budget and with the responsibility of working in areas of conflict and emergencies.

I think it was you, Ms. Allen, who mentioned that of the UN projects that have come forward, only 40% of them have been crosscutting. I just want your feedback on whether you feel that having this specific position would be ideal for making sure that, if not everything, most projects or most issues coming out of the UN would have that gender-based analysis or that crosscutting mechanism that you spoke of.

• (1630)

Ms. Louise Allen: UN Women is known to be under-resourced, particularly in terms of women, peace, and security. We welcome the recommendations for the assistant secretary-general role, particularly to ensure that there's a UN Women representative who is able to attend all the senior management meetings that bring together all of the different UN entities.

In the lead-up to the high-level review, we were advocating for increased resourcing of UN Women but also increased resourcing of gender expertise within the departments of political affairs and peacekeeping. We think there need to be higher levels of gender expertise at headquarters, mirrored across all of the different peacekeeping and special political missions.

As I mentioned before, the resourcing of gender expertise across the UN is inconsistent. We're not privy to those negotiations, but we do know that even in a mission where gender advisers have been mandated, they're not necessarily deployed, or if they are deployed, they end up filling a different position once they're actually in the mission.

Our call to all the member states who sit on the Fifth Committee, for instance, the budgeting committee at the UN, is that there is a need for ongoing gender expertise at headquarters across the different UN entities and field missions. Very similar to the overarching problems with funding of the agenda, a lot of the gender experts aren't part of the core budgets. The mission leadership

or even departments are having to systematically fundraise for these positions as well, because they're not part of the formal structure of a department. We think that's problematic as well, for similar reasons, because there's no long-term continuity in the provision of senior-level gender expertise.

Mr. Raj Saini: The reason I suggested it was that you had mentioned earlier that it would be a great idea, and one I fully endorse, to have the next UN secretary-general be a woman. But on a more long-term basis, if that UN Women position were held by a woman, then any policy coming from the secretary-general or other departments could be funnelled through that department to make sure that any policy or any decision going forward would have gender-based analysis on that policy from that department to make sure it was equitable on all grounds.

Is that something that would be ideal?

Ms. Louise Allen: This is the recommendation that the members of the working group and other civil society were really working with. The reason we've been calling for increased resourcing not only at UN Women but across the board is that it's very similar to a cabinet structure, where we see that each head of department needs to be responsible for their gender obligations. Peacekeeping would have their set of responsibilities, and an external or differing UN entity wouldn't have that oversight because of the way the UN is structured.

Yes, there needs to be additional resourcing of UN Women, but there also needs to be greater accountability for the leadership within the different entities that are responsible for women, peace, and security.

I hope that answers your question.

The Chair: I think I'll stop you there.

On behalf of the committee, I want to thank Ms. Hansen from Amnesty International Canada, and of course Ms. Allen from the NGO Working Group for Women, Peace and Security. Thank you very much for your presentations.

It's always a pleasure to sit and listen to people who are committed to this particular file. It's a very large one and one on which I hope we'll make some serious progress in the years to come, so thank you on behalf of the committee.

Colleagues, we'll take a two-minute break and then we'll set up for the presentation by the minister, who will be in front of us here shortly.

Thank you.

• (1630)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1640)

The Chair: Colleagues, appearing before us today is the Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau, who is the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie. We're here to speak to the minister on her mandate letter, and of course on the direction of the department as it relates to that mandate letter and her role as the minister.

Minister, I'll give you a chance to introduce your colleagues and then turn the floor over to you for the beginning of the presentation. Then we'll go to questions after. Welcome to the committee.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of International Development and La Francophonie): Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

My thanks also go to the members of the committee.

I would first like to introduce my colleagues. Vincent Rigby is Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy at Global Affairs Canada. He is also the Prime Minister's sherpa for the G20. Arun Thangaraj is Assistant Deputy Minister and Chief Financial Officer at Global Affairs Canada.

Previously, you heard from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who talked to you about his priorities, and from officials from Global Affairs Canada, who introduced you to the work that is currently being done in the department. My remarks today will therefore follow in those footsteps.

As Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, I see my major priority as being to lead Canada's efforts to provide international assistance with the goal of reducing poverty and inequality in the world.

The international development landscape has changed a lot in recent years. The desire to reach the millennium development goals, together with solid economic growth in a number of developing countries, has helped more than 1 billion people to get out of poverty in the last 20 years.

The fact remains that one individual out of every five in developing regions still lives in extreme poverty. Most disadvantaged people live in middle-income countries at the moment, while the most persistent poverty is to be found in fragile and low-income states.

In September 2015, when Canada and other UN members supported the Agenda 2030 program and its sustainable development goals, we all embraced the ambitious goal of eradicating poverty by 2030, with no one left behind. Canada is well positioned to encourage all the measures in that program, one of crucial importance. Of course, we unreservedly support its implementation, both here in Canada and overseas.

So the time is right to adapt our international assistance policies and approaches to the new global context in which Agenda 2030 is set. By so doing, we can respond to the challenges our planet is facing today and tomorrow.

In the last five months, I have travelled inside and outside Canada meeting my colleagues from other countries and from international civil society and private sector organizations. Those discussions have allowed me to exchange ideas and better understand the strengths, Canada's comparative advantages, and the areas in which we can improve. They have also helped me to reflect on the best way in which I can accomplish the priorities inherent to my mandate.

One of my major priorities is to implement a new policy and funding framework for Canada's international assistance. In the coming weeks, we will begin a review of our international

assistance. In fact, we have already begun to review the policies and the funding framework so that we can focus international assistance on the poorest and the most vulnerable, including fragile states.

Consultations are a key aspect of that effort. Parliamentary Secretary Karina Gould and I have already met with several dozen, perhaps even hundreds, of our Canadian and international partners to seek their advice and to benefit from their experience. We are continuing our outreach efforts through discussion groups, through our website and through social media in order to reach those involved, including young people. I would also more than welcome the committee's contribution as to the best way to assist the poorest and most vulnerable, and to provide aid to fragile states.

The results of the policy and funding framework review will, in terms of international assistance, be focused on the government's next budget, in 2017. We are conducting this review in order to provide the best assistance possible, according to the needs and as a function of Canada's comparative advantages.

In these times of rapid global changes, we can no longer rely on what we have done beforehand. We must also use innovative approaches and technologies, and new partners, including civil society organizations, the private sector, the major foundations, and the beneficiary countries themselves, so that our development assistance produces the greatest impact.

Public development assistance cannot meet all the needs alone. In that sense, the role of the private sector specifically will be crucial in a context where we are seeking to mobilize new financial resources for developing countries, through mixed financing and public-private partnerships, for example.

● (1645)

In order to guide the consultations, the priority themes have been identified based on what Canada is able to offer as added value and benefits in development. As the consultations evolve, the themes are refined. In that regard, the rights and the health of women and children come first.

[*English*]

I was pleased to hear that the committee is currently studying the topic of women, peace, and security, a very important issue that links to my mandate to champion human rights, including the rights of women.

Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is a priority for me and our government. We are committed to eliminating all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls so that they can enjoy their full human rights.

We will continue Canada's leadership role in ending child, early, and forced marriage, and we will continue to work to remove the barriers girls face in accessing safe, quality education. We believe that educated girls today become the empowered women of tomorrow.

Canada's recent election to the UN Commission on the Status of Women will give us a stronger voice in advancing the rights of women and girls around the world. A disproportionate number of women and children are dragged down by malnutrition and preventable diseases, simply because they do not have access to adequate nutritious food, clean water, and basic health care. Every day around the world, 16,000 children die before celebrating their fifth birthday, mostly from preventable causes such as pneumonia, malaria, and diarrhea.

Over 160 million children under the age of five have stunted growth due to insufficient food. Far too many women continue to die from childbirth-related complications. The maternal mortality ratio in the developing regions is 14 times higher than in developed countries, and profound inequalities in access to and use of sexual and reproductive health services persist within and across regions. This is why our government is putting a strong emphasis on the rights of health of women and children.

We are proud that our support is already contributing to positive changes on a number of critical fronts. As part of the review, we will consider how Canada can continue its international leadership on maternal, newborn, and child health, while taking a more comprehensive approach that fully recognizes the importance of sexual and reproductive health and rights as central to the health and empowerment of women and girls.

The second priority is green and sustainable economic growth. Economic growth is essential to lifting people out of poverty. Helping developing countries create a business-enabling environment and supporting entrepreneurship, job creation, and skills training are needed to foster inclusive growth.

When I was in Vietnam late last year, I saw first-hand how Canada's assistance is helping farmers increase their income and productivity. During my visit, I announced the support for an initiative to help farmers expand their business and improve the livelihood of their families by increasing access to agricultural financing.

However, economic growth cannot be at the expense of environmental sustainability. For all of us on this planet, climate change threatens prosperity. For millions of people in developing countries, the effects of climate change, such as changing weather patterns and rising sea levels, directly imperil their livelihood and security. Climate change is already having adverse impacts on water resources, ecosystems, economies, and communities, and it threatens to undermine development gains.

Efforts to enhance the environmental sustainability of economic growth are essential to ensure that development progress is not undermined by the destabilizing effects of climate change and pollution.

Green economic growth can also contribute to job creation and improved livelihoods. To support developing countries to transition to low-carbon economies and adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change, Canada has recently committed \$2.65 billion in climate finance to help achieve real climate results.

● (1650)

Going forward, Canada will also need to consider how its international assistance investments can continue to address ongoing problems of food insecurity and water scarcity, in addition to the growing impact of climate change.

The third priority area is inclusive and accountable governance, peaceful pluralism, respect for dignity and human rights, including the rights of women and refugees, that I will work on together with the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

We need to build on these Canadian strengths and provide support internationally for the promotion of these values that have benefited our country.

In countries where the government is accountable to its citizens, where power is transferred regularly and peacefully, and where protection exists for the entire population, the dividends are clear. There is a greater chance of political, economic, and social stability. Human rights are more likely to be respected. Governments are able to respond to the needs of their citizens, and communities are more resilient in times of crisis.

For example, it is important to continue to support countries like Burma that have made the important choice of democratic change. To this end, we have recently announced \$44 million to help build and strengthen democracy in Burma and improve opportunities for the country's most vulnerable people.

Turning to the fourth priority area, Canada needs to use all its tools to contribute to global peace and security. Fragility, conflicts, and violence hamper their prosperity and social development and deepen poverty.

Violent conflict and insecurity are on the rise and are driving levels of forced migration not seen since the Second World War. More than 11 million people have been displaced as a result of the conflict in Syria alone. Protracted displacement has become the new norm. Studies show that by 2030, without coordinated action two-thirds of the world's poorest will be living in countries and regions plagued by endemic violence and fragility.

The international community is taking note of these worrying trends. At the global meeting in the international dialogue on peace-building and state-building in Stockholm earlier this month, Canada, along with over 40 other countries and multilateral organizations, reaffirmed its commitment to implement the new deal for engagement in fragile states.

We agreed that the root causes and symptoms of fragility and conflict need to be addressed as a matter of priority in the agenda 2030 if sustainable development is to be realized.

As we increase our focus on fragile states, we will consider how we can best support peace-building and conflict prevention, as well as post-conflict reconstruction efforts. Canada is already investing significantly in countries affected by fragility, conflict, and violence.

We announced funding of \$585 million in budget 2016 for renewal of important peace and security programs in Global Affairs Canada.

• (1655)

[Translation]

Conflicts place tremendous pressure on the international humanitarian system. Globally, humanitarian needs have quadrupled since 2005 as a result of increasingly protracted conflicts, the increasing number of displaced persons and the growing frequency of natural disasters, such as floods and earthquakes. This is why humanitarian assistance must be a priority for our government, in addition to investments in long-term prevention measures. We will continue to play a role in delivering vital and much needed humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable populations. This is a matter of human dignity and respect for humanitarian principles.

Canada is already providing essential humanitarian assistance to many vulnerable populations, including those affected by conflict. Canada's engagement strategy in Iraq, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon is expected to provide \$1.1 billion over three years in humanitarian and development assistance, as part of an integrated action strategy. Of that amount, \$840 million are earmarked for humanitarian assistance in the form of emergency health services, water, food, shelter, protection and education provided in emergency situations to the most vulnerable people affected by crises. That funding also includes support for countries hosting refugees.

During my travels in Jordan and Lebanon, I was able to see the generosity of the communities that are hosting large numbers of refugees. The massive influx of refugees is exceeding their ability to provide adequate services. The number of Syrian refugees in Jordan represents about 10% of its population. Lebanon has taken in more than one million Syrian refugees, and 450,000 Palestinian refugees are registered. Refugees represent over 30% of the Lebanese population.

So we are helping to strengthen the resilience of the communities in those countries. The situation in the Middle East speaks to the need for a government-wide approach to improve security and stability, to provide humanitarian assistance and to help partners to provide social services through long-term development initiatives.

I would also like to briefly talk about Canada's priorities within La Francophonie.

It is a fact that many French-speaking countries are among the poorest in the world. Those priorities also align well with our international assistance goals. Our government will continue to promote peaceful pluralism, democracy, human rights and inclusive and accountable governance in francophone countries. Those are the values underlying all our actions, as are the protection and empowerment of women and girls.

We are working to consolidate the economic mandate of La Francophonie in order to reduce poverty and support inclusive and sustainable growth.

We look forward to working with all our partners to ensure the success of the Sommet de la Francophonie in Madagascar in November. Our participation in this event will allow us to deepen our cooperation and partnership with France.

Let me also reiterate our government's commitment to focus on effectiveness, transparency and excellent results in development, as well as on engaging Canadians, especially youth, in renewing our international assistance policy and funding framework. I am convinced that we will be working with the committee on an ongoing basis and we will maintain a close and positive relationship with you.

In closing, ladies and gentlemen, let me stress my desire to work with you on those issues. Rest assured that my decisions will be based on facts.

Developing innovative solutions to encourage new partners to contribute to development and humanitarian assistance is something that we share with other donor countries. To that end, we must ensure greater policy coherence in allocating aid, and ensure that the results from innovative solutions can be replicated on a larger scale to benefit as many people as possible.

The members of this committee have tremendous experience, knowledge and insight. My team and I are open to dialogue. I am sure that we will successfully engage with you in the coming weeks and months, through this committee, or on a more individual basis.

When it comes to helping vulnerable populations and fragile states, we can all make a contribution.

Mr. Chair, I would be pleased to answer any questions members of the committee may have.

Thank you.

• (1700)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister, for a very impressive presentation.

I'm going to start with the first round, and I understand that Mr. Obhrai is going to begin.

Hon. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, welcome to the committee for the first time.

I welcome myself to the committee as I'm not a regular member of the committee.

Madam, it was very interesting to hear you comment most specifically about your travelling overseas and getting results from the high esteem in which Canada is held in international development.

I'm very happy that you were able to see all the work that was done over the last 10 years, specifically on what you talked about, child and maternal health, which is very important, as well as early and forced marriages, which the government came out against and which, on many occasions we were forced to lead on. I'm glad that your government is carrying on with that.

You mentioned Vietnam and you mentioned Burma. In both cases, I was there on those programs. I was with the Governor General on a state visit to Vietnam, and I led an all-party delegation to Burma to build their democratic institutions.

I have one important question for you. During the last Parliament, the two Parliaments before, one of your Liberal members came out very strongly in directing the aid specifically as per the will of the Parliament, and according to that, there was a law passed, the Official Development Assistance Accountability Act. This act drives how international development will be handled by everybody. Therefore, the question is, is the mandate letter that you got from the Prime Minister complying with this act or not? If it is not complying with this act, then that is wrong and that is going against the law of this country, because this act was passed in 2008. It was proposed by a Liberal member of Parliament. After committee hearings and everything, this act was passed, and this is the official law on how international development will work.

Let me ask you another way. Did you actually read this act to know exactly what is in it? Did you ask your officials, who were there at the time, about this act? In that mandate letter, are we diversifying away from this law of Parliament?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Yes. Actually, I read the law the day after I learned that I was going to be the Minister of International Development, but I didn't learn it by heart.

As far as I understand, yes, it complies, but I will ask my colleague to talk more about it, and eventually, maybe I can even get back to you directly.

Mr. Vincent Rigby (Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Policy, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Maybe I could say just a couple of things.

I don't think there are any inconsistencies between the mandate letter and the act as it's currently laid out.

As you know, sir, there are three key elements to the act: taking into account the perspectives of the poor, respecting human rights, and of course ensuring that development assistance is focused on poverty reduction. I think if you look at the mandate letter commitments, they're very consistent in that regard.

Hon. Deepak Obhrai: You're sure of that, are you? All right.

I don't want to go very deep here, because what you have said is what we have been consistently doing. Governments change, but the policies don't change, and our reputation internationally is fine. May I wish you the best of luck as you continue doing this work.

I will now let my colleague go ahead.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Hon. Tony Clement (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): I would like to bid you welcome.

My congratulations again for your appointment in the new government.

I have a question about an interview.

[English]

It was on the *Everything is Political* show. The reporting of it was around the middle of February. You talked about how it was difficult to ensure that Canadian humanitarian aid would not go to enemy combatants, that is to say, terrorist organizations. At the time there was quite a bit of controversy over that.

I think most Canadians would be surprised, if we were unconcerned about Canadian developmental aid going to enemy combatants. I'm wondering whether you've been in a position, since the middle of February, to assure members of this committee, and through us Parliament, that aid paid for by the taxpayers is not going to enemy combatants, such as the Islamic State or other terrorist organizations.

• (1705)

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: A number of you have a lot of political experience, enough to know that the headlines do not always reflect the content of a meeting. Your considerable experience in international development means that you know what Canada has always done in terms of international assistance, and we have not changed the policy in that regard.

We are working with major organizations with a lot of experience. We act with all due diligence before making funds available to them. Our various teams monitor projects in the field and we validate the results when they are over.

Getting emergency international assistance to communities and villages under siege in Syria, for example, is no simple matter. The major international organizations are doing everything possible to reach civilians in the besieged villages. There is no intention to provide food aid to terrorist groups in any way.

Major humanitarian principles come into play. That is what I was trying to explain to the reporter, the importance of neutrality, impartiality and humanity. It is still difficult to explain that clearly, but I would say that is very important for all the parties in a conflict to recognize the neutrality of those major humanitarian organizations, so that they can reach the civilians in order to feed and care for them safely and to avoid situations that are happening too often at the moment, when hospitals or schools are targeted.

That is what I was trying to explain. For the humanitarian organizations, it is extremely difficult to get to the villages. Clearly, all the efforts and resources put at the disposal of those organizations are in order to reach civilians and the besieged villages.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Clement.

I'll go to Mr. Miller now.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs, Lib.): Welcome, Madam Minister.

In your presentation, you mentioned that you are going to conduct a review of Canada's priorities in international assistance. The members of this committee are anxious to find out how that goes.

Could you tell us a little more about what you anticipate in the coming months? Could you focus on the parts about the elimination of extreme poverty as well as on Canada's objective and contribution in that regard? That is an important subject for Canadians and I would like to hear you talk about it a little more.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: The most important aspect of my department's mandate letter is to refocus international assistance on helping the poorest and most vulnerable, and supporting fragile states. That is at the centre of all our reflection.

As I was saying earlier, with my colleague the parliamentary secretary, I have already undertaken a process of consultation. It has already allowed us to establish five priorities that will guide further consultations.

We already know that women and girls will be at the heart of our concerns. I believe profoundly that the key to success in a country's development is to protect and educate its girls. They must also be provided with employment possibilities and the ability to contribute to the economic growth of their community so that they in turn can provide their children with a good education.

So, whether we are talking about health, human rights, economic growth or humanitarian assistance, women and girls, who for me are the most vulnerable, will really be at the heart of our priorities.

There is also the matter of young people in general. It is important to encourage the education and empowerment of young people in general, not only girls but also boys. When boys can be sent to school, there is less chance that they will be recruited by extremist groups. We also know that, in those countries that we are targeting, especially those in Africa, the percentage of the population under 30 years of age is extremely high. Those young people must therefore be offered the possibility of a fulfilling life, in order to avoid them being led astray by harmful forces.

That is as true of humanitarian assistance as it is of development assistance. The people suffering from extreme poverty are often those living in countries in conflict. We have to find the right balance between our involvement in humanitarian assistance in those developing countries and in fragile states.

So the consultation that we are conducting at the moment is intended to find out how we can balance Canada's international assistance to these vulnerable client populations.

• (1710)

Mr. Marc Miller: Thank you.

I'll turn things over to my colleagues, who are eager to ask you questions.

[English]

Mr. Raj Saini: Madam Minister, it's always a pleasure to see you.

Thank you very much for your opening comments. I also want to thank your two colleagues.

Mr. Rigby, I think this is the third time you've been here, so you're an honorary member of this committee, it looks like.

Minister, as someone with a background in science, I'm always interested in metrics and how we measure the success of our programs. I wonder if you could elaborate on how you ensure our programs achieve the results that we expect from them, specifically the types of data we use to establish those benchmarks of success.

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Indeed, it's very important for our government to make decisions based on facts, on conscience. We also have the challenge of developing an entire framework of deliverology to ensure we meet the objectives that we will set within the respective mandates of the various departments. So our teams are looking at these issues quite actively.

We are also concerned with finding results indicators that are based not only on the financial assistance we give, but really on the results. It isn't necessarily the size of the cheque that influences outcomes the most. So we are studying that issue.

I have two interesting examples to give.

Canada provided \$16 million to establish a centre of excellence for vital statistics registration systems at the International Development Research Centre, or IDRC, which is an extremely important organization that we want to promote because there are opportunities for work, knowledge and skills here, in Canada, but also in the countries we are working with. That's why we are acting quickly to give the board of governors and every IDRC organization the governance means to operate at its full potential. We are currently recruiting governors and a new president for the IDRC. It's an organization we really believe in.

I'd like to give you another example.

[English]

I'm referring to Grand Challenges Canada. We believe that it's a great initiative and we intend to pursue this collaboration. It encourages researchers to create products, services and technological solutions to maternal, newborn, and child health challenges. It is another great example of a project based on facts and science.

• (1715)

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Minister.

We'll now go to Monsieur Aubin.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, Madam Minister. Thank you for being here.

Since time is tight, let's get right into it.

The Prime Minister gave you a mandate of supporting the implementation of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. I was pleased to hear a few references to this in your opening remarks. Unless I'm mistaken—and feel free to correct me if I am—I didn't see anything in the budget about the 2030 objectives.

Also, I heard you say in an interview that the UN target for developed countries to set aside 0.7% of their gross national income to public development assistance was too ambitious for Canada.

First, I'd like to know if the objectives of agenda 2030 are also too ambitious for Canada.

If not, and that's the answer I hope to hear, I'd like to know what you intend to do to increase the portion of Canada's budget set aside for these two objectives.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: We believe in agenda 2030 and we support it.

I'll start by telling you about the government's approach.

The Prime Minister asked me to provide leadership within cabinet so that all ministers keep the agenda 2030 objectives in mind. If you read our election platform, or the one that is currently guiding our actions, you will see that they are very close to agenda 2030. We are targeting several of its objectives, and I will make sure I encourage my colleagues in that regard. The discussion has only just started.

In terms of international development, the five priorities that I mentioned earlier are very well aligned with the sustainable development objectives, some more directly than others. There are 17 objectives that we are always keeping in mind. When we develop outcome indicators, we do so in line with the agenda 2030 outcome indicators.

As for the objective of 0.7% of the GNI, we'd need some \$10 billion more a year to attain it. This is indeed too ambitious in the current financial context. However, the federal budget does make it possible to increase the development assistance budget. So by reviewing the policies and financial framework, I intend to set an objective that is both ambitious and realistic.

As I said earlier, it isn't the amount of the cheque that counts; it's the results on the ground that matter. So we need to be creative, innovative and find new financial partners, new funding mechanisms, to be more effective. That's a challenge.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you.

You have also been given the mandate to promote inclusive and responsible governance in developing countries.

You weren't with us in the previous government, but at the time, we at the NDP tabled Bill C-584, which I'm sure you've heard about. It was about creating an independent ombudsman for corporate social responsibility. Your colleague from Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Westmount, who was a member of the opposition, said the following about the Conservative government:

One way that it might demonstrate good faith and show that Canada is taking this issue seriously is to...

With regard to the bill itself, let me reiterate again that it is a very well-intended piece of legislation. Liberals recognize that, and we are supportive of it.

Where are we at with this ombudsman position? It seems to me that there's a little back-peddalling going on.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: We aren't there yet, but I wouldn't want us to go backwards. Honestly, I have to tell you that I haven't had any serious discussions about this or given it serious thought. We are currently focusing on reviewing policies and evaluating the situation and Canada's co-operative advantage to determine how we can do more and better.

Creating an ombudsman may come back on the table when we are thinking about outcome indicators, but I don't have an opinion on this at the moment.

Mr. Robert Aubin: I would also like to speak on behalf of an organization in my region, the Comité de solidarité Trois-Rivières. There are equivalent organizations in many regions of Quebec and across Canada. Since these people are carefully following your work, they know that a review of the programs has started. They would like to know if, in the context of calls for proposals, they could submit international development, education and public awareness projects. I know that it would be too much to ask you for a specific date, but perhaps you could at least give me an idea of when these organizations might be able to submit funding requests.

● (1720)

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: I can't give you an exact date, but I want to point out that Minister Paradis has already held significant consultations. So I don't reinvent the wheel, I'm going to use the same process in this exercise.

Discussions are ongoing with the organizations, like the one in Trois-Rivières. There is one in Sherbrooke, as well, and its representatives remind me of their objectives on a regular basis. Their representative has already participated in a few roundtables. So I'm in contact with these people constantly, and I do intend to follow up, perhaps with a few small changes, on this thought process that has already taken place, so that the exercise is not repeated needlessly.

Although I can't give an exact date, my goal is to do this as soon as possible.

I know how important these organizations are. I'll take this opportunity to mention that it's important for me to re-engage Canadians in international development. I think there are some shortcomings and a disengagement in this respect. That's why I want us to implement a strategy aimed at ensuring that Canadians are re-engaged in international development through our partnerships with organizations like this one, student internships and our communications in general.

Mr. Robert Aubin: Thank you.

I wouldn't want to end my intervention without asking you a question about the Francophonie.

The objective of the new secretary general of the Francophonie, Michaëlle Jean, is to help create a francophone economic space. It seems that this at least should be the priority of her first mandate.

Do you have any ideas about how Canada can help create or, if it's already emerging, help strengthen this francophone economic space?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: I admit that when I started my job, there wasn't much under way for the Francophonie. Unfortunately, a large number of French-speaking countries are among the poorest in the world. That's why a large part of Canada's role within the Francophonie consists of development aid. That said, my goal is to develop a broader action plan that will address the Francophonie in a more proactive and more comprehensive way.

In terms of your question about economic growth, as I said, green and sustainable economic growth is my second priority. I think this aligns well with Ms. Jean's priority. The projects we are going to develop, particularly in French-speaking Africa, will focus on job creation, especially for youth and women.

As for the discussion about the francophone economic space, we hope to broaden the scope beyond developing countries.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

We'll go to Mr. Levitt, please.

Mr. Michael Levitt: Before I ask my question, I want to take 30 seconds. We're six months into this mandate, and I want to recognize your efforts, and in particular also the efforts of your parliamentary secretary, Karina Gould, in hitting the ground running in this first six months with what is a very difficult file with many challenges. In terms of working towards your mandate, you've done a lot in this first period. I just want to recognize that.

As to the question, your mandate letter states that you should champion human rights, especially those of women and refugees.

It's a sad but true reality that when women and girls are deprived of their rights, all of society suffers. How will you be working with civil society and grassroots organizations in Canada and abroad to promote and protect women's and girls' rights?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Earlier I spoke about my priority. My primary focus is really women.

[English]

My main priority is definitely to protect and empower women and girls. I want this to be related to women and girls in the most efficient way possible.

I talked earlier about reproductive and sexual rights. This is an important project, which we want to enlarge and apply as much as we can.

Talking about rights and working with local NGOs, we haven't started our reflection on what the new mechanisms would be, but one I am thinking about is to increase the local initiative fund. I don't remember the exact name, but it is the fund that is managed locally.

I'm told it's the Canadian Fund for Local Initiatives. It's the one managed by the embassies.

I believe we can do good things with CSOs, civil society organizations, in the field directly.

This is one example, and it hasn't been decided yet, but I look at it very seriously, because I believe we can do real stuff on the ground with small but very efficient projects.

I have been invited by the UN Secretary-General to work on the every woman every child committee, so I will have the opportunity to discuss with the international community how to find the best ways to champion this subject.

● (1725)

Mr. Michael Levitt: Thank you very much.

I'm going to pass on my time to one of my other colleagues.

The Chair: Okay. There are three minutes remaining.

Raj, is it you, or is it Jati?

Mr. Jati Sidhu: I can go quickly.

Thank you, Minister. You have a large portfolio and you're doing a great job.

You mentioned in your address, if I heard it correctly, that about \$2.6 billion has gone towards the environment.

This is a twofold question, but the main question is this. We know that Canada has committed to providing assistance to countries that are vulnerable to the destabilizing effect of climate change. Can you describe some of the planning that is under way to deliver on this notion?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Yes. We're talking about \$2.65 billion over a five-year period. Some projects are already going on, and we are recognizing that they have a direct impact and that they meet these objectives. For example, Canada's recent \$300-million contribution to the Green Climate Fund would be recognized as being part of it. As well, there is \$90 million to the Global Environment Facility, and \$124 million for bilateral climate change projects in general.

Some projects are already going on, and for the balance, I am working in collaboration with the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Madam McKenna, to design and to define the new criteria for the projects that will fall under this objective. There will be grants and contributions, and there will be loans also. It goes with our second priority, which is to grow the economy. I call it, for now, sustainable and green economic growth.

Mr. Jati Sidhu: The way I hear it, it is a good start, and half done. Is it going to continue?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Oh yes, and we will enlarge it significantly.

Mr. Jati Sidhu: Thank you.

The Chair: We have 30 seconds, so I think we'll just give up that time for the second round and go right to Ms. Dzerowicz, please. You have five minutes.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Minister, you and your colleagues Minister Dion and Minister Sajjan announced a very ambitious plan in early February to address the ongoing crises in Iraq and Syria. Can you tell the committee about the humanitarian aspects of these efforts?

[Translation]

Last week, you announced matching funds for Syria. Could you tell us how you will use these funds in the region?

• (1730)

[English]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Regarding the overall commitment for the Middle East, the \$1.1 billion, \$840 million will be dedicated to humanitarian assistance, and \$270 million to development projects.

I announced last week a \$400,000 project that will be going on, and it includes the matching funds.

I'll just rewind a little. You remember that we had a matching fund. It started last September, and at the end of December, Canadians had given \$12 million. We decided, because the NGOs asked me, to postpone the date to the end of February, and the recognized organizations got \$32 million, more or less.

We matched this fund, and doubled it. We decided to dedicate this amount to three UNICEF projects. The biggest one is the Makani centres. I had the opportunity to visit a Makani centre in Jordan. I would call it an alternative school. It is a place where children and teenagers can go to catch up on their studies and training. Most of them were out of school for one, two, even three years, so they have to catch up to be able to go back to a real school. As I said earlier, it is so important to get these kids in school. It is one way to avoid early and forced marriage. We are trying to avoid having the kids working and we are trying to keep boys in school, so there is less chance to have them recruited by extremist groups. It is very important. These Makani centres also give psychosocial assistance to these kids who have suffered greatly.

I will give you a few examples.

The matching fund also includes school supplies and learning materials in Syria, and a national immunization campaign. This is the matching fund, and we are doing it through UNICEF. We decided to increase our contribution right away up to \$100 million; we were ready to match up to \$100 million, so we decided to do so right away. An additional \$23 million is for projects in Syria: food assistance, access to essential primary care service, clean water and sanitation, and help for farmers to restore their farms. Another \$33 million is for projects in Iraq, and \$11 million for projects in Jordan and Lebanon.

This is the first step, and now we are discussing with the international organizations, because it is the first time they have had the opportunity to plan projects for more than one year. This is very innovative in terms of financing humanitarian assistance. They are working on designing three-year projects, so we are waiting for their response. We are also ready to respond to specific needs as they come.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Excellent. Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Kent and then we'll go back to Mr. Saini.

Hon. Peter Kent: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, as the government considers again the possible renewal of funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, UNRWA, I think it's really important to remember that UNRWA was originally created in 1949 as a temporary humanitarian relief agency to assist both displaced Jews as well as Arabs in Israel after the creation of Israel and the Palestinian territories.

We all know that in recent years, UNRWA has become somewhat anachronistic and, in fact, has been penetrated by some of the Hamas terrorist factions who have interfered in a variety of ways with the delivery of Canadian humanitarian relief, which is too dangerous for Canadians to deliver, we understand, and has been in some cases mishandled in its intended delivery to needy civilian populations.

There have been suggestions from a number of quarters in Canada and abroad that, in fact, the government should abandon any thoughts of renewing funding through UNRWA and instead deal with the United Nations Refugee Agency, because the UNHCR, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, is intended for a population that has been, since 1949, held captive as human flags, if you will, by the populations in Gaza and the West Bank and would be better both in making sure that the aid is delivered to the civilian populations in need, but also to begin finally to rebuild those societies to prosper, to negotiate coexistence with Israel, and to live in peace.

I'm wondering what your thoughts are in these early months.

• (1735)

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Yes. To be honest, I was and I'm still—less than I used to be, less than I was a couple of months ago—concerned with the situation of UNRWA.

I had the opportunity to speak to the director once, and I speak with some of my counterparts when I'm travelling. For example, last week in Washington, I had the opportunity to talk about it with my counterparts from other like-minded countries.

We are the only one of the G7 that is not funding UNRWA. I understand there were some specific events a couple of years ago that were definitely not appropriate, and I'm looking into this.

I understand that they have—I could use the words “cleaned up”—improved the way they work and manage. For example, the United States has asked for more....

[Translation]

The United States and other countries have strengthened the clauses concerning follow-up to ensure that this doesn't happen again. It's important to understand, though, that an organization like that and the context in which it works and the number of employees it has, it isn't unheard of that there will occasionally be problems, but we understand that this shouldn't be the norm. It still needs to be able to manage the risk a little, but not too much.

I'm still evaluating the situation. I want to make a fact-based decision. I have a lot of discussions on the matter. Honestly, it isn't simple. My mandate is to refocus the aid to the poorest and most vulnerable people, and the Palestinian refugees are certainly a very vulnerable group. The UNHCR isn't working in the area where UNRRA is present. There are currently Palestinian refugee camps in Syria where the UNHCR isn't present; UNRRA is there.

I don't have an answer, and I haven't finished thinking about it. I still need to have more discussions. I want to make a fact-based decision, but at the same time, we need to help the Palestinian refugees.

[English]

Hon. Peter Kent: Thank you.

I'll cede the rest of my time to my colleague.

The Chair: That is the time. We'll go right to Mr. Saini, please.

Mr. Raj Saini: I have a quick question, Minister. It's a science question again. There's a strong rumour that science is back in Canada, so I want to stay within that theme.

When you talk about health data and accurate health data, you need accurate data to make informed policy decisions. Unfortunately, many developing countries do not have adequate systems for civil registration or vital statistics. Could you give us an idea of how Canada is working with developing countries to improve these systems?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: The Global Financing Facility which I talked about is specifically working on this issue. When I say that health and rights for women and girls, or for women and youth, is very important, rights for children start with this registration, the right to have an identity, the right to exist and to have access to public services, and to help the government make the right decisions because they have access to this information. That will help for democracy.

Canada has made a \$220-million commitment to the Global Financing Facility, of which \$100 million is earmarked for strengthening the civil registration and vital statistics system. This is one specific project.

● (1740)

Mr. Raj Saini: I can cede my time to somebody else if they want to ask a question.

The Chair: I do have one piece of business I'd like to keep the committee around for.

What I think I'd like to do is thank the minister for her first appearance before the committee. It certainly won't be her last. I understand she's coming for estimates on May 5, so this is her warmup to the estimates. I want to thank her very much for a good afternoon and a good presentation. I'm looking forward to many of these opportunities.

On behalf of the committee, Minister, thank you very much for your appearance.

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau: Thank you. I'll see you soon.

The Chair: I'll let the minister exit, and we'll just do a quick piece of business. It won't take more than two seconds.

In front of you is the second report of our subcommittee, which met on Tuesday, March 22, and Tuesday, April 19, 2016. It was to consider the business of the committee and agree to make recommendations. The recommendations are before you. If I could have a mover, and we'll pass this, and then that will be the end of the day.

Mr. Sidhu.

You can't Garnett, because you're not a member today.

Oh, you're doing it now. Okay.

Now you're signed in. Go ahead, Garnett.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, I had submitted a suggestion of a number of Yazidi women activists to participate in the women, peace, and security study. Did they make it on the list?

The Chair: Yes, they are.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: They are? Excellent.

The Chair: If you take a look at our schedule, your witnesses are on that list.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Wonderful. Thank you. That's all I wanted to know.

The Chair: You've heard the motion.

All in favour of the report?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you very much. That will be the end of today's meeting. Have a good week in the riding, and we'll see you next Tuesday.

The meeting is adjourned.

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