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# **Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, September 27, 2016**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Michael Levitt**



## Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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• (1305)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.)):** Good afternoon, everyone. I want to thank the posse that has come in from Global Affairs Canada.

I will give you a quick introduction: Ian Burchett, director general, south and southeast Asia and Oceania bureau; Jean-Bernard Parenteau, who I believe was here the other day, director, west and central Africa division; Angelica Liao-Moroz, director, southern and eastern Africa bilateral relations division; Chantal Labelle, director, South Sudan program, southern and eastern Africa; David Morgan, acting director, eastern Europe and Eurasia relations division; Sébastien Beaulieu, executive director, Middle East relations; and Sylvia Cesaratto, director, South America.

With that rather lengthy introduction, I would now turn the floor over to you. If you can keep it to around 20 minutes, plus or minus, that would be fantastic.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean-Bernard Parenteau (Director, West and Central Africa Division, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development):** Good afternoon Mr. Chair and members of the subcommittee.

Thank you for inviting Global Affairs Canada representatives to update you on key situations of concern related to international human rights, with a focus on developments over the summer while Parliament was recessed.

As you know from the ongoing work of this subcommittee, human rights is a cornerstone of Canadian engagement abroad, which features prominently in our relationships with governments and partners around the world.

Given the time constraints on this afternoon's meeting, however, my colleagues and I will address the situation in a limited number of countries where human rights are a concern. Those countries are the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Philippines, South Sudan, Syria, Turkey and Venezuela.

We will deliver opening remarks in alphabetical order by country, starting with the DRC and ending with Venezuela. Once again, we recognize that you may have questions beyond the scope of those countries I have just noted. We would be happy to provide you with follow-up information in due course.

As director of the West and Central Africa region, I will start with the DRC.

Political tensions have been rising in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) following delays in the organization of elections as required by the constitution, and the uncertainty as to President Joseph Kabila's intentions to respect his constitutional obligations, most notably those relating to the term limit that would require him to step down. Public demonstrations on September 19 and 20, which resulted in over 50 deaths, were violently repressed, adding further evidence of the narrowing democratic space that has already been highlighted by the United Nations.

According to the last report of the United Nations Commissioner on Human Rights, the rights and freedoms of 602 members of the opposition and representatives of civil society were violated between June 2015 and May 2016, including the rights to liberty and security of the person, and the freedoms of peaceful assembly, expression and opinion. In addition, hundreds of people have been arrested and sentenced since that time.

The situation in the eastern DRC also remains a major concern. According to the United Nations Joint Office on Human Rights in the DRC, during the month of August 2016 there were at least 145 recorded human rights violations by members of armed groups, resulting in the deaths of at least 109 civilians. Combatants presumed to be affiliated with the Allied Democratic Forces committed a particularly deadly attack that resulted in 46 casualties in Beni, a region that has seen multiple attacks for well over a year.

The United Nations Joint Office also recorded 32 cases of rape in July and August 2016. The United Nations Joint office was informed that, in August 2016, at least 28 law enforcement personnel were convicted for human rights violations, and that a number of trials had begun, most notably a military court trial of six Allied Democratic Forces combatants, and another for six accused in relation to a massacre in June 2014.

Before the events of September 19 and 20, a reduction in human rights violations by law enforcement agents had been observed.

[English]

The Government of Canada has on several occasions denounced the human rights situation in the DRC through various media and the embassy in Kinshasa, as well as through participation in the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva. The embassy is also particularly active in promoting the human rights of women and children. In 2014-15, Canada provided approximately \$92 million in development assistance to the DRC. Canada provides support to victims of sexual violence in the DRC and the Great Lakes Region as well as financing activities geared toward civic education, and targeted training for judges and police officers on the rights of children.

Canada has also been actively involved in MONUSCO, the United Nations peacekeeping mission to the DRC, through the participation of members of the Canadian Armed Forces and financial support.

That will be all for Congo. I'll turn to my colleague for the Philippines.

[Translation]

**Mr. Ian Burchett (Director General, South and Southeast Asia and Oceania Bureau, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good afternoon.

My name is Ian Burchett and I am the director general of the Southeast Asia bureau at Global Affairs Canada.

[English]

Allow me to give you a brief update on the human rights situation in the Philippines. Rodrigo Duterte was sworn in as president of the Philippines on June 30, 2016. A central promise of his electoral campaign was to eradicate the trade in illegal drugs in less than six months.

According to the latest data available from the Philippines national police, there have been more than 3,000 drug-related killings since Duterte became president. These developments are of concern and this is why Canada is paying close attention to the situation there.

Canadian officials continue to regularly engage their counterparts in the Philippines on this important topic, namely, good governance, security, and human rights. For example, Prime Minister Trudeau and then Canadian ambassador to the Philippines have both raised Canada's concerns directly with President Duterte. Ministers Dion and McCallum also discussed the human rights situation in the Philippines during recent meetings with their counterparts in July and August of this year.

• (1310)

[Translation]

Canada also advocates for the promotion of human rights in the Philippines in multilateral fora.

[English]

One of the most important of these is the UN Human Rights Council where the universal periodic review or UPR process takes place annually. At the last UPR of the Philippines, Canada raised issues of impunity, extrajudicial killings, and enforced disappearances. We will continue to do so again in 2017.

Armed conflicts between Muslim separatists and government forces in the southern province of Mindanao have also led to significant human rights violations.

[Translation]

Canada is working with local authorities and international partners to bring the perpetrators to justice.

[English]

To help bring lasting peace to Mindanao, Canada actively supports the ongoing peace process there. For example, we seconded an officer of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police to chair the independent commission on policing in Bangsamoro in 2013 and 2014, and a second officer of the RCMP will be deployed later this fall.

We are involved in many other areas and have a variety of tools to draw on in the Philippines, including the Canada fund for local initiatives, managed by our embassy in Manila with which you are already very familiar.

[Translation]

Canada will continue to place emphasis on the promotion and protection of human rights in the Philippines and will sustain our efforts to advocate for our values in this regard.

Thank you.

[English]

**Mr. Jean-Bernard Parenteau:** We'll now turn to my colleague, Angelica Liao-Moroz for South Sudan.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Angelica Liao-Moroz (Director, Southern and Eastern Africa Bilateral Relations division, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development):** Good afternoon Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

I am pleased to provide an update today on the human rights situation in South Sudan. I am accompanied by my colleague, Chantal Labelle, director of the South Sudan Development Program.

In December 2013, only two years after its independence, civil war broke out in South Sudan. After a short period of tenuous calm following the signature of an agreement in August 2015, fighting erupted again in July 2016 between forces loyal to President Salva Kiir and those loyal to former Vice President Riek Machar.

Serious weaknesses in command and control on both sides resulted in widespread violence and attacks, including against civilians and aid workers. South Sudan has been the subject of several recent high-level reports, including by the United Nations and Human Rights Watch. These reports have documented large scale violations of human rights, including brutal cases of sexual violence against women and girls. Tens of thousands of people have been killed since December 2013, and attacks against civilians and aid workers have persisted

[English]

The conflict in South Sudan has displaced more than 2.4 million people. About 1.6 million have been internally displaced, and more than 880,000 have fled to neighbouring countries. Approximately 4.3 million people, roughly one-third of the population, remain in critical need of emergency food aid.

In his recent report, the UN Secretary-General stated that the government of South Sudan has regularly obstructed the operations of the UN mission in the Republic of South Sudan, known as UNMISS, and has harassed local and international humanitarian aid agencies. Newspapers and other media organizations have been periodically closed. Journalists have been beaten and on several occasions killed.

The situation in South Sudan is complex and has resulted in Canada's engagement on multiple fronts.

We are actively contributing to the UN mission in South Sudan through the deployment of Canadian Armed Forces personnel. We are also engaged in the peace process through our participation in what is called the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission, which monitors implementation of the August 2015 peace agreement.

Canada has publicly voiced its support of the UN Security Council resolution to strengthen UNMISS's mandate and all efforts to implement an arms embargo in concert with the international community, in addition to expressing our deep concern over continued gross violations of human rights in South Sudan. We currently have in place targeted sanctions against individuals on each side of the conflict there.

Between 2012 and 2015, Canada's international development and humanitarian assistance to South Sudan totalled approximately \$389 million. Our development assistance program, almost \$270 million, has been focused on increasing food security; livelihoods support; maternal, newborn, and child health; as well as some capacity building for media organizations. In 2016, so far, we have provided over \$45 million in humanitarian assistance to improve access to food, shelter, medical care, safe drinking water, sanitation, and protection in South Sudan.

I will be pleased to answer any questions.

• (1315)

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean-Bernard Parenteau:** Mr. Chair, with your permission, we'll now move on to the situation in Syria. I'll turn the floor over to my colleague, Sébastien Beaulieu.

**His Excellency Sébastien Beaulieu (Executive Director, Middle East Relations, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development):** Good afternoon Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

I am the executive director of the Middle East Relations division. In keeping with the alphabetical order, I am here to speak to you about Syria.

There are frequent human rights violations in Syria. Unfortunately, they continue to occur today. By watching the news, we can follow the situation very closely.

[English]

Canada follows closely the deplorable situation of human rights in Syria. We condemned, in the strongest terms, the gross violations and abuses of human rights in Syria over the past five years, and in particular since the Arab Spring.

Canada repeatedly expressed grave concerns over the violence, including torture and sexual violence, and has called for an end to arbitrary detentions and enforced disappearances, and for greater attention to the situation of detainees.

Canada condemns in the strongest terms the unlawful, indiscriminate, and disproportionate attacks we see in Syria to this day, and all eyes these days are turned to Aleppo. The repeated use of barrel bombs and incendiary weapons in the Syrian conflict, as well as the siege and starvation tactics, are unacceptable.

Canada was deeply concerned by the recent findings of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. There's also a joint investigative mechanism there that Canada contributes funding to, and we strongly condemn the repeated use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime and the use of sulphur mustard by Daesh.

[Translation]

Canada made clear that it is unacceptable that civilians, including children, humanitarian and health care workers, and civilian infrastructures, especially medical facilities and schools, are deliberately targeted in this conflict. Canada is actively engaged in providing humanitarian assistance to the victims of the Syrian conflict, in Syria and across the region, and has consistently called for sustained humanitarian access in Syria, in particular in besieged areas.

Lastly, I want to emphasize that Canada is an active participant in international efforts to pave the way for a resumption of peace talks. Many activities in this area took place in New York last week.

I will be pleased to answer your questions.

Thank you.

[English]

**Mr. Jean-Bernard Parenteau:** Mr. Chair, we can move to neighbouring Turkey with David Morgan.

• (1320)

[Translation]

**Mr. David Morgan (Acting Director, Eastern Europe and Eurasia Relations Division, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development):** Thank you, Mr. Chair

My name is David Morgan and I am the acting director of the Eastern Europe and Eurasia Relations division at Global Affairs Canada.

Thank you for inviting me to speak today about the situation in Turkey over the past two to three months, the period of the attempted overthrow of the democratically-elected government, and Turkey's response to that attempt.

Canada's relationship with Turkey is strong. We are G20 partners, NATO allies, and partners in the global coalition to counter Daesh. Turkey provided extensive support to Canada for Operation Syrian Refugees. For its part, Turkey has expended over \$8 billion in caring for almost three million Syrian refugees.

Turkey's location has long ensured its geopolitical significance. Today, Turkey is directly affected by a number of the world's most pressing security challenges. It also faces serious threats to its democracy.

[English]

On July 15, elements of the Turkish military attempted to violently overthrow the government in contempt of the democratic principles our countries affirm and uphold. Using commandeered F-16 fighters and tanks, the plotters attacked parliament and the presidential palace. Hundreds were killed and thousands injured. In Turkey, people in all political parties rose up to defend their country. In Canada, the Prime Minister and Minister Dion immediately issued a categorical condemnation of the coup attempt and emphasized our support for the Turkish government in bringing those responsible to justice.

As with other countries who have suffered like attacks on their citizens and institutions, the issue presents itself: how far should and must a government go to secure itself and its citizens' security? Where is the line to be drawn?

Turkey has declared a state of emergency to address the causes of the coup attempt and is within its prerogative to do so. But Canada is concerned by the scale of the detentions and dismissals, by allegations of serious human rights abuses, and by officials considering the reintroduction of the death penalty. Two Canadians have been caught up in the Turkish counter-coup response. Our Prime Minister has raised this issue with President Erdogan directly. Politicians and government officials at all levels also pressed for consular access.

Officials meet with our Turkish counterparts regularly on this and more broadly to work constructively together to ensure that the ongoing situation in Turkey comes to a peaceful and stable resolution while respecting fundamental freedoms, human rights, and the rule of law. Canada continues to advocate that the coup response be proportional and that the line to be drawn be at maintaining the democracy and rule of law that the Turkish people flocked to the streets to defend on July 15.

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Chair

**Mr. Jean-Bernard Parenteau:** To finish, my colleague Sylvia Cesaratto will speak to you about the situation in Venezuela.

**Ms. Sylvia Cesaratto (Director, South America, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development):** Good afternoon Mr. Chair and members of the subcommittee. I'm here to give you an overview of the situation in Venezuela.

[English]

Given our long-standing bilateral ties with the people of Venezuela, we are gravely concerned about the rapidly deteriorating human rights situation as well as the political and economic crisis that is affecting so many Venezuelans at present, who struggle daily to gain access to basic food and medicine.

[Translation]

Among many concerns, let me highlight the sharp rise in the arbitrary arrest and detention of political figures. Three high-profile cases include the ongoing detention of opposition leaders Leopoldo Lopez (leader of Voluntad Popular), Antonio Ledezma (mayor of Greater Caracas) and Daniel Ceballos (former mayor of San Cristobal).

But they are not alone. One independent NGO, Foro Penal, estimates there have been more than 160 detentions for political reasons since September 1, and more than 2,400 since the beginning of the year. Most, but not all, have been released, yet the fear and intimidation remains.

• (1325)

[English]

Minister Dion has issued statements calling for the release of political prisoners and for political expression in Venezuela to be respected. He emphasized that dialogue between the government and opposition is essential to overcome the crisis. The two are intrinsically linked. For successful dialogue to take place, it is essential that elected representatives and political actors operate free of intimidation.

[Translation]

I would like to emphasize that Canada is closely watching efforts by Venezuelans to organize a referendum to recall President Nicolas Maduro. This type of referendum is permitted under Venezuela's constitution. However, we are discouraged that the National Electoral Commission continues to throw up arbitrary roadblocks to this process, which call into question its impartiality.

[English]

Canada will continue to press these concerns with Venezuelan officials bilaterally and within the Organization of American States.

I'm happy to answer any questions. *Merci.*

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for taking us around the world to some of the hot spots in 20 minutes.

With that, we will open it up to questions. The first question is from my colleague, MP Sweet.

**Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I have a couple of questions, but I'll start with Venezuela because it was the subject of the last presentation.

You are correct. There's a veritable standoff between the elected executive and the parliament, and that's meant that the whole population is held hostage. There's rampant starvation and little to no access to medical care or drugs. Are we able to get aid delivered on the ground presently? Are they accepting that? Can you give me an idea of the nature of our help and assistance to the Venezuelan people?

**Ms. Sylvia Cesaratto:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Canada does not have a bilateral aid program with Venezuela. The Government of Venezuela is presently not working with any UN agencies on an appeal for aid, and to date, has refused to accept international assistance. We have urged the Venezuelan government to engage with multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and other organizations to reform their economic policies in an effort to alleviate shortages of food and medicine caused by price controls and shortages of hard currency.

Where Canada is actively working in the world, as has been mentioned by colleagues elsewhere, is through our Canada fund for local initiatives, where we work with local NGOs through our Canadian embassies to make their voices heard and to press these issues with their governments and civil society stakeholders.

**Mr. David Sweet:** I take it that we're having no further success, either, working through the Organization of American States to reach them.

**Ms. Sylvia Cesaratto:** Canada firmly believes that the OAS member states must support democratic practices in accordance with the values enshrined in the Inter-American Democratic Charter. The democratic charter provides for a range of actions to respond to threats to the constitutional order in OAS member countries and appropriate action needs to be carefully assessed. We support the OAS Secretary General in his efforts to bridge the divide in Venezuela and we also support OAS members who are increasingly seized with the issue of political and economic crises.

Canada was a signatory, along with 14 other countries of the Americas, to two recent declarations, in which we pressed the Venezuelan government on the issues that I've just mentioned: political prisoners, right of assembly, the need to deal with their political impasse, and putting the needs of their citizens first and foremost.

**Mr. David Sweet:** I'll go on to another country. I know that neighbours are always a good way to—how would I say—encourage good behaviour, but in the case of Burma, Myanmar, this committee has been seized on a number of occasions with the terrible situation in the Kachin State, and with the Rohingya particularly, in our most recent study. Their treatment, by far, ranks up there with the worst of any human rights abuses, from being stateless to having to live in villages surrounded by barbed wire with no food or medical care.

We are investing in Myanmar and I'm wondering what we're doing to pressure the Burmese government now, with Aung San Suu Kyi winning the last election, to remedy this situation and get hold of the renegade military that seems to be victimizing these groups of people in these various areas.

• (1330)

**Mr. Ian Burchett:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

As the new director general for southeast Asia, I have certainly been seized with this issue, and our new ambassador to Myanmar will continue to raise these matters with the officials at all levels.

As you know, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Dion, was in Yangon and other parts of Myanmar to vigorously raise these issues not only with Aung San Suu Kyi but with the president, and expressing Canada's concern for good governance and the security issues and breaches of human rights. We will continue to do so.

**Mr. David Sweet:** I hope he continues to focus outside the capital because it's a much different situation in the capital than it is outside the capital where all the human rights abuses are happening, away from the cameras of the broader world media.

Lastly, I think there's a really great opportunity for Canada right now. In 1964 the FARC movement began in Colombia. Now we finally see some kind of peace agreement. There are mixed feelings among the Colombian people, I can understand that, but I think there's a really positive story here to be supported.

Are we planning some kind of strategy to be able to get a peace and reconciliation process, or at least assist them in that process so they can enjoy the stability this could bring, with a reduction in human rights violations and maybe even a stable economy, now that this long-term conflict looks as if it could possibly come to an end for good?

**Ms. Sylvia Cesaratto:** Thank you for the question, Mr. Chair.

It truly is a historic moment in Colombia. Yesterday we saw the signing of the peace accord, which ends the last armed insurgency as we know it on our continent, which will bring peace to Colombia but also to the rest of the continent, including Canada.

We were very pleased to have Minister Dion represent Canada at this historic signing ceremony. During his participation yesterday he also announced Canadian support for the peace accord implementation, \$21 million over three years, directly responding to areas identified by the Government of Colombia in assistance in demining, reintegration of FARC soldiers, and transitional justice. This package of support is under the auspices of our peace and stabilization operations program called PSOP, I believe.

You may also know that in July 2016 the Minister of International Development, Minister Bibeau, was also on hand in Colombia following the announcement that a peace agreement had been reached, where she announced \$57.4 million in support of the peace implementation accord, several bilateral co-operation projects, including \$20 million to a multi-donor trust fund managed by the United Nations. I think we're on solid footing there.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for that.

We're now going to move over to the other side of the room, and MP Khalid is going to lead off.

**Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for coming to apprise us of what's going on in the world.

My question is specific to Aleppo and the situation there. You stated that Canada is engaged in providing humanitarian assistance on the ground in Aleppo. Can you please provide specific examples of what that humanitarian assistance consists of?

• (1335)

**Mr. Sébastien Beaulieu:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Canada is providing humanitarian assistance in Syria but also around Syria. As to Aleppo specifically, perhaps I wasn't clear in my opening statement. While we are watching and we are supporting international organizations, the humanitarian assistance is not coming through. There is a major issue of access in Aleppo but also across Syria. That's a major concern of ours.

We've raised it repeatedly in international forums. We've pressed through the International Syria Support Group partners to pressure both sides of the conflict to enable and to secure humanitarian access to the people who need it, the victims of this conflict.

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** Thank you.

You said that Canada is also an active participant in trying to resolve this issue politically. What steps has Canada taken so far with respect to resuming peace talks between the parties involved?

**Mr. Sébastien Beaulieu:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm happy to answer that question.

Canada was invited in May to join the International Syria Support Group, which is a group of 26 countries represented at the foreign minister level, to come up with plans for a cessation of hostilities and to pave the way for peace talks to resume between the opposition, represented through the high negotiations committee, and the Assad regime.

In February earlier this year the group led by the co-chairs, which are Russia and the United States, were able to arrive at a cessation of hostilities. Unfortunately, over time that ceasefire unravelled and the ISSG, including Canada, made great efforts over the summer and into last week to try to salvage it and come up with a new cessation of hostilities. A deal was announced early in September in Geneva by Secretary Kerry and Foreign Minister Lavrov. There was a ceasefire that entered into force on September 12, but unfortunately, events on the ground quickly made sure that the ceasefire unravelled.

Last week the ISSG met twice at the foreign minister level, and there was quite a bit of intense diplomatic activity pressuring the parties through these 26 countries' own channels to entice the parties to come back to a ceasefire and to pave the way for talks to resume. Unfortunately, that deal is in jeopardy today.

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** Is there a role for the International Criminal Court to play in resolving the situation or at least providing justice for the atrocities that are occurring?

**Mr. Sébastien Beaulieu:** The response is multi-faceted. First of all, let me perhaps break it up into three parts. First are the investigative mechanisms, and there Canada is contributing, for example, to the Commission for International Justice and Accountability for the fact gathering and evidence gathering.

There is the support to the victims, including victims of sexual violence, and there Canada is also active.

As to the mechanisms themselves, the legal mechanisms, whether it's the ICC, ad hoc tribunals, or other mechanisms, the international community is indeed struggling given the complexity of the conflict, the many actors, and the politics that play out in the various bodies for action to be taken, but Canada is certainly pressing.

Minister Dion earlier this year wrote to the UN Security Council to ask for action to be taken and an investigation of the crimes of Daesh.

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** I have one more question.

In your opinion then, is there another role that Canada can play in really resolving this situation, not just in the short term but also in the long term?

**Mr. Sébastien Beaulieu:** Yes, there is one, and again, it's complex. But our response is multi-faceted, whether it's taking part in the anti-Daesh coalition, leading the diplomatic efforts that do continue despite the outlook being grim, or supporting the victims, and that's the essence of the question around accountability. Talks are ongoing between partners to examine means to bring greater accountability, and in the context of a ceasefire, to enhance the monitoring and find ways to enforce that ceasefire.

• (1340)

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** We will move on to MP Hardcastle.

**Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all of you for your presentations. They're very thought provoking for us when we're trying to move forward and really get to the heart of a matter.

I want to talk a little bit about the rights of women and girls. I think it was mentioned. I'm sure all of you have a brief comment to make with regard to this, but I don't know if you have eye signals you can give each other on who's going to take it.

With regard to the brief report from South Sudan, where we have the disturbing observation that we have brutal cases of sexual violence against women and girls and that they seem to be increasing, I know that we have international development projects and supports that are supposed to be for the empowerment of women and girls. We're supposed to be stemming these kinds of crimes against humanity in this way. I'm feeling like perhaps we're missing something that you might understand.

Are there gender empowerment initiatives? Are there programs that we should be focusing more on? Are we not deploying this enough? Are there areas where it's been effective? Why wasn't it mentioned in some of your other reports? I would just like to hear a little bit more about that.

This is an issue that, I know, part of the reason we hear more and more about it is social conscience and because we have access to more of these global details. It is an important part of our role in understanding your viewpoints on addressing that situation.



**Ms. Angelica Liao-Moroz:** I think you highlighted one of the key issues in the South Sudan conflict right now, which is the vulnerability of women and children. We have seen this repeatedly and regularly over the past several years, and most recently with the recent renewed conflict that started in early July.

One example I'll point out that you are likely aware of already is the incident surrounding the mass rapes and sexual assaults against women, including girls, shortly after the conflict broke out in July. From a political standpoint we are quite public, vocally. Minister Dion as well as Minister Bibeau have expressed our deep concern over this and our support for UN efforts, including the UN mission in South Sudan, to help support the protection of civilians and to limit this culture of impunity.

Beyond what we are doing in terms of political and diplomatic efforts, I'll turn to my colleague Chantal Labelle, who can speak specifically to Canadian programming that is benefiting women and girls in South Sudan.

**Ms. Chantal Labelle (Director, South Sudan Program, Southern and Eastern Africa, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development):** Thank you very much.

As you've mentioned, the conflict has certainly highlighted even more the gender-based violence, violence against women, in South Sudan. But even before the conflict, this was a phenomenon that was culturally entrenched in the culture of South Sudan.

For quite some time now, through our investments in improving access to health care for women, we've been working on helping victims—women who have been victims of gender-based violence—through appropriate health care. We've also been working for quite some time on family planning to give women rights over their own health, their own sexual reproduction. We've also, through our investments in agriculture, been working with communities and with families on a day-to-day basis on informing what are women's rights, in the communities and in the family. We work with community members, and the husbands and family members, as well.

This is work that's been going on for quite some time and that will continue to be ongoing. If anything, we'll be focusing even more on these areas.

• (1345)

**Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle:** That being said, I want to go back to, I think it was, Mr. Morgan's report. There was also a thought-provoking statement about where the line should be drawn.

How can we identify whether it is true that gender-based violence is culturally entrenched in a lot of these cases and a lot of these situations? How do we include that with respect to where the line is drawn in sanctions? Is that a challenge right now? What do you see as our next best steps to identify and include gender-based violence?

**Mr. David Morgan:** I would state straight off that we don't have sanctions against Turkey. Turkey is a NATO ally. It's a G20 country, and we consider that, in general, it's a fully and well-functioning democracy. That is not to say that concerns have not been raised with regard to human rights in general. I would say that the focus, however, has been more on political rights. There have been questions as to how robust those rights are at this particular moment in time. Specifically, organizations such as Human Rights Watch,

Amnesty International, and the like have raised their concerns about freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, and excessive use of force. That is where the current emphasis is now.

Of course, our embassy in Ankara does cover the full range of human rights issues that present. I am in no way minimizing the challenges that specifically women and girls face in Turkey. I would only state that in the last two to three months, the emphasis has been, as I said, on those more traditional political rights.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We're going to move on to MP Tabbara for the next question.

**Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.):** Thank you. I'll be splitting my time with MP Miller. I'll try to be very short.

My question will be to Ms. Labelle and Ms. Liao-Moroz.

Regarding the recent closing of the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya, more than 300,000 Somali refugees are being forced to return to Somalia, a country undergoing civil war. The UN has urged Kenya to delay the closing, warning that sending Somalis back to their homeland would be unsafe and inhumane.

What is Canada's stance on this particular file?

**Ms. Angelica Liao-Moroz:** If I don't provide enough details, please let me know and I'll undertake to provide some more following this meeting.

Canada has, first of all, in many of our interactions with Kenyan officials at all levels discussed this issue. I assume you're referring to Kenya's recent announcement about repatriating these refugees and closing the Dadaab refugee camp over the next couple of years.

The way we see it, first of all Kenya has in its own right shouldered a major responsibility in the hosting of these refugees over the past few years. Obviously, our concern is that if refugees are to be repatriated back to Somalia, the conditions need be right. That includes the security conditions, and that means that they must be returned in a voluntary and dignified way. These are messages that the UN High Commissioner for Refugees has underscored many times as well with Kenyan authorities.

• (1350)

**Mr. Marwan Tabbara:** Okay, thank you.

I'll pass it on to my colleague.

[Translation]

**Mr. Marc Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Parenteau, I appreciate the fact that you speak in both official languages. We rarely have the opportunity to hear presentations in which English and French are used equally. Continue making the effort and try to integrate this practice into the public service.

The question I want to ask you is more or less hypothetical.

Imagine the minister tells you he wants to get involved in a region of the world. Take Burundi, for example, since the study starts with that country. You are experts on the subject. What would you tell him?

**Mr. Jean-Bernard Parenteau:** Under these circumstances, I would remind him—and this has already been addressed by some of our colleagues—that Canada has a variety of tools. We're able to intervene diplomatically through our ambassadors, public servants, or ministers themselves.

As noted during the discussions on Burundi—and this applies to most of the countries mentioned today—Canada frequently uses multilateral channels. That's also the case for sub-Saharan Africa. No intervention is carried out without taking into account, for example, the position and capacity to intervene of the African Union or other regional political fora. Moreover, there is always the possibility of working with the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie or with certain players such as Burundi or the DRC, when the work involves members of that forum, or with the Commonwealth, for certain other countries.

We already have a cooperation portfolio that enables us to be quite flexible in our interventions. Most of the time, we address the most pressing humanitarian needs while continuing to work on improving the basic aspects of a given society over the longer term. That's what we're doing in the DRC, for example. All the humanitarian support we provide to the eastern DRC covers refugees and internally displaced persons. However, at the same time, we're working on improving health, in particular the health of women and children.

Not only do we note the difficulties with the electoral process, we also support the process together with the Independent National Electoral Commission or work with the civil society to improve the situation.

That was a long way of saying we have a variety of tools. The tools are available, and we'll discuss them with the ministers when the time comes to make recommendations.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We have time for a slightly shorter question.

MP Anderson, the floor is yours.

**Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC):** I wish I had time for a couple of them, but I will just focus on one thing.

I had a chance to go to a conference in Berlin about two weeks ago. There were about 90 members of parliament from around the

world who came together to talk about religious freedom. One of the questions I heard consistently was “Where is Canada?” They are familiar with the Office of Religious Freedom, the small budget that it had, and the work it had done. It was known around the world and seen as a real leading light in that area. Canada was chairing the international contact working group and was seen as being completely pivotal in putting that initiative together.

I see that the government has said they are going to continue the chairmanship of the group, but no one seemed to know or understand that Canada was still involved in that. Can you tell me if we are continuing to chair that group? What is the plan going forward with that international working group?

• (1355)

**Mr. Jean-Bernard Parenteau:** I'm not sure we have someone around the table—

**Mr. David Anderson:** I just want to bring this up. Is it a surprise to you that someone would bring up the office of human rights, freedoms and inclusion at the subcommittee for human rights? I am surprised that somebody hasn't come prepared to answer some questions about that. It was a major initiative of the previous government. This government is spending four times as much on that office. They are already \$3 million over budget. They've hired 40 people, and I can't get a question about what the mandate is and what it is involved in.

**Mr. Jean-Bernard Parenteau:** Mr. Chair, we will have to come back to you with a response.

**The Chair:** Thank you. If you can provide us with a written response about the mandate, and in particular the question on the working group that MP Anderson raised, then that would be greatly appreciated.

With that, I see our time has come to an end. I want to thank all of you again for coming in and addressing this group today on a number of the hot spots. I'm sure we're going to be hearing individually from you as we move forward with a series of studies over the next number of months, but thank you and we look forward to getting the follow-up information that MP Anderson has raised. Thank you very much.

Colleagues, just a reminder that if we can get you to submit the names of witnesses for the list by October 7 for the upcoming Yazidi study, then that would be fantastic. We need to get those in by October 7 so that we can start drafting a bit of a game plan.

The meeting is adjourned.







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