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Chair

Mr. Michael Levitt

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● (1230)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.)): Colleagues, we have some documents that have been provided by our witnesses. They are in English only. We haven't had the chance to have them translated. Does anybody have an objection to our handing these out?

We're good? Okay. Let it be so.

Before we begin the last session in our study examining the human rights situation in South Sudan, I want to recognize the previous chair of the subcommittee on international human rights, Scott Reid.

Welcome to our committee. It's an honour to have you here.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Thank you.

The Chair: Welcome as well to MP Kent, who's the other guest this afternoon.

Our first witness today is from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the UNHCR. Jean-Nicolas Beuze has been in the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees as the representative in Canada since January 16, 2017. He has more than 19 years of international humanitarian and human rights experience, and has worked in various capacities within the United Nations. Most recently he was the UNHCR deputy representative for protection in Lebanon.

I'll also welcome Michael Casasola. Mr. Casasola has been a resettlement officer with the UNHCR in Canada since 2002. As a resettlement officer his responsibilities included identifying the most vulnerable people in a refugee camp or similar situation, and then submitting those identified for resettlement to Canadian immigration authorities for their consideration.

Gentlemen, thank you very much for joining us here on what has been a most interesting study. We're clearly dealing with a country that is in the midst of the most immense crisis and catastrophe. We're very pleased you're able to be here as our final witnesses.

With that, we'll give you 12 to 14 minutes in total to provide some testimony. Then we'll open it up to the members for some questions.

Thank you.

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze (Representative in Canada, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees): Mr. Chairman, dear committee members, thank you for this very timely opportunity to present UNHCR's efforts to address the humanitarian situation unfolding in South Sudan and the repercussions in terms of forcible displacement. In the last few days we've seen quite a number of media reports, and therefore we are very pleased to be here with you today.

● (1235)

[*Translation*]

The South Sudan refugee crisis has become the largest in Africa. In terms of numbers, it's the third largest crisis, after Syria and Afghanistan. It certainly warrants more attention from the international community.

I'll give you a number. Almost 2,000 South Sudanese cross into Uganda each day. They're fleeing conflict and famine in South Sudan and arriving in northern Uganda.

We therefore appreciate the opportunity today to discuss issues related to the protection of human rights and humanitarian assistance.

As you know, UNHCR's mandate is to protect and assist displaced people and resolve refugee problems worldwide, in keeping with the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

We work in over 129 countries. In 2016, our budget was over US $3.7 billion. We provide assistance to almost 52 million victims worldwide.

[*English*]

South Sudan has spent much of its short life at war with itself—I don't need to tell you the details—torn by political conflicts fuelled by ethnic divides that turned once again into bloodshed at the end of 2013. Since December 15, 2013, when the conflict broke out again, there have been more than 1.9 million displaced persons within South Sudan out of a population of 12 million, so approximately 10%.

The war's effects on areas that saw fighting are very clear and known to everyone—emptied villages, unplanted fields, and looted and destroyed schools and clinics—but the conflict's ripple effects have even reached people living in places that have not been directly affected by the clashes.

The human rights violations and abuse committed by all parties to the conflict are well documented: widespread killings of civilians, forced recruitment of children, sexual violence and rape in particular, and torture and enforced disappearances, particularly in Yambio and in the Unity, Wau, and Yei states of South Sudan. Coupled with the famine, this has pushed almost four million South Sudanese on the road.

Drought and protracted instability coupled with widespread destruction and massive displacement have triggered unprecedented levels of food insecurity. Around 4.9 million people out of the 12 million South Sudanese are now severely food insecure, unable to secure their daily food intake, because they are unable to bring in the harvest. The United Nations has projected that this will increase to 5.5 million people, almost 50% of the population, at the height of the 2017 lean season, which is in July, a few months ahead of us.

UNHCR has been working with partners on the ground since the conflict broke out in December 2013 to provide protection, health care, education, shelter, and livelihood opportunities to internally displaced people within Sudan and South Sudanese refugees. However, I want to bring your attention to the fact that our assistance is very limited due to the large funding shortage. We simply do not have the required resources to assist and protect South Sudanese at home or in exile.

In addition to responding to the nutritional needs with our partners, in particular WFP and UNICEF, the UNHCR provides, *inter alia*, medical and psychological services for rape survivors, birth notification for newborns to ensure family unity, but also plastic sheets and soap to restore the dignity of people who have travelled in very harsh conditions, or simply school supplies for children to resume their education.

Let me also draw your attention to something that has been raised in the media recently. Access to conflict areas remains an extremely difficult challenge for us to address. There has been a growing trend of violence against aid workers, as well as bureaucratic impediments that prevent us from reaching the needy people.

Since the start of the conflict, attacks against aid workers have continued with full impunity, and at least 79 aid workers have lost their lives since December 2013. This is one of the highest rates of loss of life of our colleagues on the ground. Parties to the conflict must respect aid workers and facilitate unimpeded humanitarian access to all those in need.

Let me turn to the situation of refugees. Outside the country, we are seeing massive outflows of people, particularly women and children. The daily average of new arrivals from South Sudan in refugee-hosting countries in the first week of February 2017 was almost 3,500 per day, of which 2,000 were going to Uganda.

There are close to 1.7 million refugees who sought asylum in neighbouring countries, mainly in Uganda, where more than 800,000 have gone since the beginning of the crisis. Others have sought asylum in Sudan, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, and Central African Republic. This is very much a regional crisis, and we really need to approach our humanitarian and protection assistance from a regional point of view, as we are now doing with respect to the Syrian situation.

All the countries neighbouring South Sudan have opened their borders and provided asylum and security to the refugees, and this is really to be commended. For those countries to have kept up with the rate of arrivals, kept their borders open, while allowing us in and putting their own resources to use in welcoming and supporting the refugees, these efforts are something that ought to be noted with great pride in those countries.

With the present rates of arrivals, the figures of South Sudanese fleeing out of Sudan will surpass a million before the middle of this year, before the summer. Over 60% of the new arrivals are children.

Although Uganda's approach in dealing with refugees is among the most progressive, promoting self-reliance in refugees and their hosts with a plot of land, access to clinics, and access to education, chronic underfunding continues to affect relief activities. You may have seen our High Commissioner with the Prime Minister of Uganda calling for help in terms of financial support. Without this help, we are afraid that the capacity to host the refugees in northern Uganda will not be met and that there might be a backlash resulting in closing the border and not offering a protection space for refugees.

We have significant challenges in providing adequate food rations —you know that the WFP is struggling with its budget—health and educational services, and simple access to clean water. I have lived for two years in Uganda in the northern part of the country, and I can assure you that getting access to clean water for me as a white *mzungu*, as they call us, was difficult for me, so I can only imagine what it means for those South Sudanese refugees and for my colleagues on the ground.

Currently, we need more than a quarter of a billion U.S. dollars to support South Sudanese refugees in Uganda in 2017. You also may have seen the call from the Secretary-General relating to the famine which is unfolding in the eastern Horn of Africa, warning that we are going to lose lives if a commensurate effort in funding is not given to the United Nations very soon.

● (1240)

In 2017 UNHCR is requesting $780 million for our operation in South Sudan and in the region. As of today it's only funded at the level of 12%, and we are in April.

In comparison, just to give you a figure, last year we were only able to get 45% of our funding requirements, which means that half of the needs we had identified could not be met. We are speaking about services for torture survivors, rape victims, children out of school, and children who have been forced into military groups and will need rehabilitation.

However, let me convey UNHCR's deepest gratitude for the Canadian funding, which has recently been announced in support of humanitarian relief efforts in four African countries affected by drought and famine, including South Sudan. As you know better than I, almost $120 million Canadian has been effected to those four countries, and $37 million is specifically for South Sudan, out of which $4.15 million is for UNHCR. We are very grateful for this financial support. This is in addition to the Canadian funding for UNHCR towards our operation in Africa, which is at the level of $25 million, out of which, as I said, an additional $1.4 million will be for South Sudan.

As other humanitarian crises in today's world, the South Sudanese crisis can only be solved through a negotiated political settlement. You have heard our former high commissioner Mr. Guterres, who is now the Secretary-General, repeatedly saying not to count on the humanitarian to do the work of the politician. It's a political dilemma; it's not one which as humanitarians we can fix.

On July 9, 2011, there was much jubilation in Juba, at the independence day celebration, for this young nation, and hope for democracy, rule of law, development, and human rights. Today, unfortunately, there's an urgent, and I really stress the word “urgent”, need for more commitment and financial support to the South Sudanese people, both inside Sudan, with all the complications I have mentioned in terms of humanitarian access, and also outside, so that we guarantee the protection space for refugees in the neighbouring countries, in particular in Uganda. Imagine 2,500 persons crossing the border per day. Therefore, we are very much looking to your recommendation, as a human rights committee, to see how we can collectively assist and support South Sudanese refugees and displaced persons.

Thank you very much.

● (1245)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go straight to questions. We're going to begin with MP Kent.

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

Thank you for the critically important work you do in the countries around South Sudan.

I'd like to ask for your thoughts and insight on something that committees of the House of Commons have examined in a variety of ways over the past couple of years relating to the status within UNHCR operating protocols with regard to internally displaced people. We've seen quite an emotional discussion back and forth with regard to the situation of the Yazidi IDPs in northern Iraq.

Given the 1.7 million externally displaced civilian population driven out of South Sudan by a variety of circumstances and the violence, given that there are even more internally displaced—1.9 million, so almost two million, by your numbers—are there camps? You mentioned the various NGOs operating at great risk within South Sudan.

Is it time for the United Nations, given the nature of conflicts in this century, to review operating procedures and protocols with regard to the exceptionally large number of internally displaced people?

Also, given the famine, there's even another dimension to this horror. Do you believe it's time for the UNHCR to examine its policy on internally displaced people in crisis?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: Thank you very much for this question, which has been around in the UNHCR for quite a few years. Let me give you a bit of an update on where we stand.

You're right that, out of the 65 million displaced people in the world, only 21 million are refugees. The rest are internally displaced.

For a long time, UNHCR has looked at the issue of the internally displaced from a protection angle, saying that since we need to also prevent their displacement as refugees, we need to do something before people leave their country. Often when refugees return to their country, they return as internally displaced or among a population that has been internally displaced.

The discussion really started with the former high commissioner Aga Khan in the 1970s in Latin America. We took a lead within the United Nations on the protection aspect. That was really very much formalized at the time of Jan Egeland when he was the emergency relief coordinator. We're speaking of about 15 years ago, when there was a division of labour between the different United Nations organizations. OCHA, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, is coordinating the assistance for everyone, but there is somewhere between nine and 12 clusters, as we call them: protection, telecommunications, shelter, WASH, education, which have been assigned to different agencies in internal displacement. UNICEF does WASH and education. WFP does food and telecommunication; it's called logistics, I think. UNHCR has the mandate of shelter and protection because of our expertise.

The coordination is a challenge, as in every single family. I don't need to go into the details, but it works well in terms of ensuring that we do common needs assessments and we respond to the humanitarian needs. As far as UNHCR is concerned, we need to keep the distinction between refugees and internally displaced people because it's a question of sovereignty of the state. As the human rights committee, you are best placed to know that as long as people are within and can still avail themselves of the protection of each state, it's very difficult for us to intervene; whereas when people are outside, we can even do resettlement, as in the case of Canada, for which we are very grateful in terms of the numbers, by the way.

The distinction has to remain from a legal point of view, but in terms of responding to the need, we don't make any distinction. A rape victim, whether internally displaced or a refugee, for UNHCR is a rape victim. We need to provide psychosocial, medical, and legal help and rehabilitation, livelihood opportunities, and so on. There's no distinction.

The question of the camps is an important one in a situation like that of South Sudan. We do not advocate for camps for displaced populations because they are extremely complicated to manage from a security point of view. They are extremely complicated to manage in terms of the logistics. Yes, in a way it's simpler because you establish your own clinics and your own schools, but you also disenfranchise the displaced population from the host community and don't allow them, as in the case of Uganda, to actually contribute to the local economy and to the development of the part of the country. We are moving away from a camp-based policy for displaced populations.

In the case of South Sudan, as you probably know, a number of people took refuge in the UN compounds. That is quite complicated for us to manage, especially when there is not a Security Council resolution, which allows the peacekeepers to use force to protect civilians. We have the situation in eastern DRC where the Security Council has given the specific mandate, but as far as I know, it has not been given in the case of South Sudan. Therefore, people come to our compound, but when the compound is attacked, there is not much we can do. You may remember that two years ago, or a year and a half ago, there were some humanitarian workers who were actually attacked and raped. A young woman was raped, and the peacekeepers were around this hotel and could not do anything because they were overwhelmed by the firepower of the group.

There's always room for improvement, but I would like to conclude by saying that there is a division of labour within the United Nations in terms of internal displacement.

● (1250)

The real issue, in my view, if I may offer my own suggestion, is the whole question of the protection of civilians. I think the United Nations has not yet found the magic formula—and not only the United Nations, I think, but the NGOs, their partners—to protect civilians in the nature of that kind of conflict. I was not born in the 19th century, but we used to be better at that, because the laws of war were more clear. There was one group and then another group.

Hon. Peter Kent: That's right.

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: Now it's becoming extremely difficult. We do a lot of monitoring to try to fight against impunity with the Damocles' sword of the ICC, the International Criminal Court, but I am not sure that any commander in South Sudan today really sees being brought to The Hague as a deterrent to his or her actions.

Therefore, I think the real question is, how do we.... That's why we need to be very careful about maintaining the right to seek asylum, because that's the only way people will be able to protect themselves: by crossing an international border and saying that that they don't feel safe in their country, that there is nobody there to support them, and that therefore they have the right to seek asylum.

That's what is at stake today, because if we don't receive the money.... I was in Lebanon, as mentioned by the chair, and I've seen the shift. In Lebanon, we had 50,000 people crossing per month. The border was the issue for the Jordanians. For the Lebanese, it was the Turkish authorities. We don't want that to happen to the Ugandans, the Kenyans, or.... The Kenyans already have some issues with refugees, so we need to really preserve this space. That will come only if we can deliver assistance not only to the refugees but to the host communities that are living together, for example, in the north of Uganda.

I'm sorry for this long response.

● (1255)

The Chair: That's fine. Thank you.

We'll now move to MP Tabbara, please.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Thanks to both of you for being here today. It's good to see you again. We saw each other back in Lebanon with the delegation and former minister Dion.

There's a question I want to ask you about your statement. You mentioned three key areas: food rations, access to clean water, and a quarter of a billion dollars to support South Sudan. If there is a reluctance from the governing party to have the UN and the AU on the ground to help with peace and security—to my colleague, Mr. Kent, you mentioned protecting civilians—how can we protect civilians and how can we get those much needed services to the Sudanese people when there's this reluctance from the government?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: I think we confer much on the political support that a country like Canada can offer to be a broker between the different parties and with the Government of South Sudan in assisting the United Nations and our NGO partners to have full, unimpeded, and safe access to all areas in the country. I think, again, this is really a political discussion, not one that is necessarily only from a humanitarian point of view. We can refer to the responsibility to protect. We can refer to all international norms and humanitarian law. That's not going to help. We really need people like the Government of Canada, who can come with the pressure of their assembly, their parliament, to say that those deaths are completely avoidable. What is happening now is that the massive displacement, the conflict, and the fact that the land has been destroyed—you cannot harvest the land anymore—mean that famine is going to be the number one risk coming up for almost 50% of the population.

That is something on which I believe a country like Canada is well placed to give some strong political messages to the South Sudanese government and the parties to the conflict. We also have to think of the funding, because with 12% or 13% of the funding, it means that you cannot hire a truck to truck the clean water. We simply cannot have a long-term vision to say we are going to hire this company for the next six months to be able to deliver water. We have to do it almost month by month. I'm sure that my colleagues are signing contracts with service providers every other minute, which delays the service on the ground for the people. Of course, if you have a long-term view, perhaps you can make a better deal in terms of the services, but also you can really ensure continuity in the services. I think the funding is part of the political aspect and the funding goes hand in hand.

Ultimately, we also have to make sure to remember that it's not only a famine issue, but it's also a protection issue, and for that, we need to be able to provide services inside and outside in terms of family reunification. When people flee conflict, especially in South Sudan, the family gets divided. Then we have the responsibility, usually with the International Committee of the Red Cross and the national committee, to do family tracing and reunification by identifying where the parent is. This is absolutely key, because if we have separated children, you do understand that the cost of us keeping them alive is far greater than the cost of having them reunited with their family. We need to really look at the two dimensions: the famine and the protection needs.

My colleagues on the ground are telling me that when people arrive in Uganda, the stories about the violations are quite horrible.

● (1300)

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: This question is for Mr. Casasola.

Perhaps you could add to that, but what are some of the short term solutions? We're wrapping up this study. I think that for a solution to come to South Sudan it's going to take many years. I'm looking at short-term solutions, low-hanging fruit, a way in which we can assist so that we can protect as many individuals as possible, something in which Canada can be playing a role in the short term.

Mr. Michael Casasola (Senior Resettlement Officer, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees): I will just highlight a few points Jean-Nicolas made.

Certainly there is the question of access to territory, the ability to continue to police. Uganda needs to know and to have the international community reaffirm that it is not alone in terms of dealing with this, because while it is a regional issue, Uganda has overwhelmingly felt the brunt of this movement.

Part of what we're working on internationally with countries like Uganda is models. We're not just dealing with one problem, but we're looking more comprehensively at the refugee population in terms of financial assistance and in terms of protection. That's actually on the short-term horizon. That's not the political solution. Given the pressures, Uganda has been an important host to refugees from Somalia, from the Congo, and from many different nations, not even including all the people from the Great Lakes region. I think it's critically important that they know we're providing support within the whole range of assistance, including humanitarian assistance on the ground.

We can also look to the day when some of the refugee population can do, on a broader scale, self-reliance activities. I always go back to money and access to protection.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: I'd make one point. As you know, because your Prime Minister was co-hosting the Leaders' Summit on Refugees last September in New York with President Obama about the refugees and the migration compact, at some point we were trying to identify the best practices among different countries in terms of receiving, hosting, integrating, and giving livelihood opportunities to refugees. You will be surprised to hear—or perhaps not—that the first country that came to mind to all of the UNHCR officers was Uganda, because Uganda for years has been a country.... Uganda has its own human rights issues, but in terms of accepting refugees, it has been a model in terms of local integration, access to land and access to schooling and education.

It started with their own IDP population from the Lord's Resistance Army 20 years ago. It was understood very rapidly in a very smart way that there was a connection between development and the humanitarian response: the first thing that is on the agenda of everyone today.

They understood that by getting humanitarian interest, they could also get the development actors to come and develop the country in much longer and sustainable terms.

This is what's happening in northern Uganda. Northern Uganda was a place where there was very little happening in terms of economic productivity, and so on. They needed, to some extent, some workforce to be able to harvest the land, and so on. By using this double approach of humanitarian and development money they are able to respond to the protection needs and respect international law in accepting refugees, but in a smart way develop their own country for the very long term.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

MP Hardcastle.

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

I would like to hear a little more about what you think the strategies need to be and where we need to advocate more in terms of the political brokering that needs to be done, especially when you're talking about a long-term plan and recognizing that we have in the refugee camps predominantly children under 18. What are the differences? Also, what have you seen and what are you anticipating in the future our needs are going to be that way?

● (1305)

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: The main needs are probably in terms of access to education and access to psychosocial and recreational activities for children to be able to have a sense of normalcy. Let me draw your attention to the fact that, in general, we assess that only 3% of children having gone through a traumatic experience such as displacement or conflict will need specialized psychotherapy treatment. The rest of them, 97%, will be able to resume that by going back to school or by having their family hosted or sheltered in a private environment where the family dynamics can be rebuilt.

This is really what is at stake today. If we want to zoom in on the children, we need to make sure that we provide the necessary resources. I'm sorry to come back always to the resources, but at the end of the day, this is what is at stake. We need to make sure that the children can go to school, and that after school there are some recreational activities organized by the civil society partners, in particular the national partners in Uganda and Kenya or elsewhere, who will be able to reconnect the children with their childhood. It's as simple as that. It's reconnecting.

This will happen in 97% of the cases without specialized psychiatric intervention, but education is a very costly intervention. Shelter is a very costly intervention. You need to build houses literally from scratch. Living as a family under plastic sheeting is not a life. It doesn't provide privacy. It doesn't provide space for the parents to continue being parents and for the children to continue being children. Everybody is in there two by two.

That's what is at stake. If we take the case of Uganda, Uganda is offering a plot of land. The host communities are offering the land, so it's a question of providing them the tools and the material for them to build those little houses, to have something more than just plastic sheeting.

I used to work for another organization, UNICEF, which specializes in children. One thing I always want to flag is that you have to look at the needs of the parents. It's extremely difficult to address the protection needs and the trauma of a child when the parents are unstable or do not feel welcome or do not feel supported. At UNHCR we try to always have an integrated approach that goes into age, gender, and diversity. A child is different according to his own characteristics.

Let me explain. A child with a disability does not have the same needs as another child. A woman with a disability is not to be seen or looked at, in terms of her own potential to be self-reliant, the same way as a woman without a disability. We need to have this intersectional approach to protection and to look at the family as a full entity.

I am not sure I am responding entirely to your question.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: No, that's good.

My other question is about our approach, or what we need to be doing, in terms of the supports that are required to address the problem of the impunity. You've talked about these attacks. It distinguishes these refugee camps, I think, that we have so many aid workers with these civilians. Should we be taking a new-found approach now in terms of the evidence gathering to address the impunity? I don't want to sound callous, but is this something that basically sorts itself out when you address other problems?

● (1310)

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: I come from a human rights background, where monitoring human rights violations is absolutely key to any attempt to fight against impunity. The DPKO mission, the peacekeeping operation in South Sudan, has a large component of human rights monitoring. There is a large team to protect civilian officials. They are gathering on a daily basis the violations which are occurring by all parties to the conflict through testimonies they collect from the victims inside South Sudan. Of course, it's much easier to do it outside, and that's what we do always, looking to the refugees to tell us their stories, because they're not at risk of reprisals. We can entirely protect them, and they feel much more confident about volunteering the information.

The problem is what's next. Those reports go up the chain within the United Nations on a weekly or monthly basis, and will go to the General Assembly, eventually. To some extent they are also sent to the Security Council. The problem is moving it one step forward, and saying what kind of action will be taken so those responsible are held accountable, and eventually punished for those atrocities.

For a long time, Canada has been, and still is, one of the most vocal advocates for international criminal justice and for the ICC tribunal. It's complicated in the context of South Sudan, because of the political sensitivities or ramifications that we are all aware of. The documentation of the human rights violations is key. We have seen that in other parts of the world. It can take 10 or 15 years, but it stills helps at some point. Let's not forget that impunity is not only about punishing the perpetrator; it's also recognizing the victim as a victim.

This is absolutely key in rebuilding a society. That's the whole concept of transitional justice, of making sure that there is an acknowledgement, a historical record of the violations which have happened in a country. The only way the South African society is trying to stay together, or the Argentinian one, is through truth telling, record telling, eventually accountability, but also a recognition that what you did was not wrong, that you were just a victim of a regime, an armed group, and so on. We must continue to monitor, but we have to look at it in a longer time frame.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move now to Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here today.

There's nothing inevitable about conflict. Unfortunately, that perception exists. This is the last day this committee will be looking at the conflict in South Sudan and the humanitarian crisis that's resulted from it. Conflict, as we know, in very general terms, is the result of inequalities, the result of particular historical trajectories. It is the result of a lack of democracy, the result of infighting between the political elite, and so on and so forth.

Here's what's going to happen in a few weeks. This committee will table the report. It will be read by the government. It will be read by journalists. It will be read by members of international organizations. Some members of the public will certainly take a look at it. The concern that I have, the fear that I have, is that when Canadians, or any citizens for that matter, turn on the television and look at what might be happening in South Sudan or they open the newspaper and read about what's happening in South Sudan, they might come to the conclusion that this is just what happens over there in the global south of Africa. They might come to the same conclusion with respect to conflicts that this committee has also looked at, the Rohingya issue, the Yazidi genocide, the situation in Burundi, and there are others.

Can you speak to the committee about the point you mentioned at the outset, the fact that these are human-made outcomes, human-made conflicts, and the resulting humanitarian catastrophe is not something inevitable, but has been manufactured as a result of the experience that these countries have gone through, and that there are very good historical reasons for the state that South Sudan, in this case, finds itself? That is a fundamental point, and helps to overcome the very false perception that this is somehow inevitable, that conflict and bloodshed are just a natural part of the African experience, and the South Sudanese experience, in particular.

● (1315)

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: I'm not sure I can really add anything to your very eloquent articulation of the dilemma.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I think you can, because you're on the ground. You've seen the situation. I wonder if you can integrate that into the answer.

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: What we have been calling upon is the fact that indeed, it's often a question of deficit in the rule of law, deficit in development, and deficit, as you rightly said, in the fair distribution of the dividends of the investment in a country. From an economic point of view, from a social point of view, and from a cultural point of view, we really have to look at all those issues.

That's why we had hope in 2011 with the creation of the South Sudan state. There was a major investment on the part of the United Nations, on the part of development actors, and on the part of NGOs. We have to be careful and mindful of the fact that there is a historical divide within society, because the partition of the natural resources has not been done in a fair and equitable manner. We have tried to address those issues at the political level, with a president and a vice-president coming from different ethnic groups and different political alliances, but what has been really difficult in a country like South Sudan is that the resources available are so limited. It's difficult to divide when there is very little to be divided. That's one of the issues.

I think the second thing is really—and I will come back to the point I was making earlier—that we don't look enough at the issues of reconciliation, transitional justice, and holding people accountable for what they have done. A number of people who are in power now are the same people who, prior to 2011, were actually the ones waging the war. You need to make some compromises for the sake of moving the country away, but there's also a limit to that, because you also ingrain the political divide in the political structure.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I don't mean to cut you off, but my time is limited.

You mentioned something at the outset of your answer, the fact that South Sudan is a very new country. It's unfair to you because it's a question that would require more time, but it still should be asked.

In such a new country, the institutions are just emerging. Think back, quite apart from the experience in South Sudan, or in Africa, for that matter. Think about the French experience. The French Revolution happens; there's a period of democracy and hope, and then all of a sudden, France falls into a period of outright dictatorship and enormous bloodshed. Then it reverts to democracy, and back to dictatorship, and so on and so forth. You don't have real democracy there until the mid-20th century.

Can you speak about the importance of institutions and those institutions coming into being, crystallizing, and really, the way that serves as a prerequisite for peace in the long term?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: It's having the right institutions, but also having the right leaders in those institutions. That is far more complicated, because it cannot be imposed by the United Nations or by external panels. The leaders have to be chosen by the people. When it's a nascent democracy, I think it's also a challenge to make sure that the population participate in the democratic process and choose the leaders that they want to be represented by.

There is one thing I would like to return to. You said that the Canadian public or the media will look at the report and will not necessarily feel engaged on the issue.

● (1320)

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Canadians are a politically engaged population, certainly, but it's a worry that I have that it simply—

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: I want to back that up by a quote from our high commissioner at the last executive committee. For the Syria situation, we get 60% of our funding. For any sub-Saharan African country, we get only 20%. That's unacceptable because the needs of an African child to go to school or, say, a Syrian refugee child in Lebanon to go to school are exactly the same. The cost of bringing the child to school may be entirely different, but actually, in a lot of instances, the costs in Africa are much less than what our operation in the Syrian situation costs.

That's a political decision. Where does the international community want to put their money, and who do they want to help? From my point of view, and I'm sure you have your own objective with this report, if one thing can be achieved with this report, it's to caution you to be careful. We are in a situation where there are 1.9 million IDPs, 1.7 million refugees. It's 2,000 people a day crossing into Uganda. It's people we can barely provide with access to potable water. Draw your own conclusions, Canadian public, on where our values as Canadians stand with not supporting the South Sudanese. I can also make the case for other African crises, while we are putting a lot of effort into another crisis.

It's not to take away from Syria. That's not my point because we were together in Lebanon, and I know, having lived there for four years, that the needs are incredible. But I think it really is an ethical question for this committee to consider. Human dignity is the same for all of us, whether we are in Winnipeg, Yei, Juba, or wherever, and the support that we give is not the same to realize the human rights of those people.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move to MP Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

We're going to a shorter question and answer period, unfortunately, five minutes instead of seven. Let me just ask this question, and depending how you answer it, this may take up our entire time.

The Ugandans you've singled out as having a particularly effective way of allowing people to come into the country, to go into, I think, refugee camps, but these cannot be camps in the traditional sense. They're much more spread out. I wonder if you could describe how this is dealt with. Uganda is not one of these vast, empty countries with lots of land that's available. They must be taking land that is either privately owned or communally owned. Also, could you explain, somewhere in your response, whether this is a model that could be used in other places or is it unique to Uganda's culture and land ownership patterns, etc.?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: It's not unique to Uganda and we are trying very much to replicate it, but indeed taking into account housing, land, and property rights issues. In Uganda, the land is owned one of three ways: by the state, public land; privately owned; or by the tribes. Northern Uganda has—I don't remember now anymore—a large number of different tribes and subdivides. The privately owned land is actually very limited in the northern part of the country. It's more land owned by tribes or public land.

What happened in the first instance was the government offered the land and people had plots of land attributed to them. When that became unavailable because there were too many people, the host tribes decided to lend the land to the newcomers. It's based on some arrangement where they cultivate the land, and some of the harvest is given back to the community. It's an arrangement that benefits—and that's really, in a way, the beauty of it—both the refugees and the host Ugandans who were underprivileged because, as you may know, the northern part of the country was where the LRA, with Joseph Kony, was established for quite a long time. That area was underdeveloped. That has allowed for development actors to step in, rebuild roads, and develop agricultural projects.

● (1325)

Mr. Scott Reid: Right. In a sense, what has happened is there actually is space for people to settle down and make useful contributions to the economy. They're essentially acting as tenant farmers.

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: Yes.

Mr. Scott Reid: There's room where someone like that can be seen as—I'm trying to think what the right word is—a helpful contributor to the economy.

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: Sure, but they are also sharing the school. They are also sharing access to the potable water. So, if the host communities do not feel that they are equally helped, they will simply see the newcomers as a burden with no benefit whatsoever.

Mr. Scott Reid: There must be some kind of decentralized decision-making. This is not the Ugandan government responding monolithically. This is the individual tribal groups with whatever decision-making mechanism they have indicating that they're willing to accept this. I'm assuming that's part of the success, a willingness of the central government to allow decentralized decision-making.

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: It's both ways, because actually there's a strong ministerial coordination group in Kampala to which UNHCR has added some staff to help them to actually put in place the policies. That dates back, really, to what we were doing with the IDPs 10 years ago, developing an IDP policy for the government to then coordinate. You are entirely right that it's also because of the decentralization. It's organized by—I don't remember the name; it's not governorate—where the local authorities are very much represented along tribal lines and can make those decisions. But that's not unique in sub-Saharan Africa. This is something we are trying to easily replicate. If you think of West Africa, for example, you have the same model of society and of delegation of power.

Mr. Scott Reid: Right. Essentially, what would have been the pre-European intervention proto-states are essentially captured and maintained.

You said the kids from the refugee communities will then go to school. Do they go to existing schools?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: They go to existing schools. There's a question of absorption capacity in terms of space, but also in terms of teachers, because one teacher, instead of teaching 40 kids, which is the ratio in that part of the world, suddenly ends up with 80 kids. We need also to support, for example, the teachers, to have more teachers or to shift morning and afternoon.

Mr. Scott Reid: I know I'm at my time limit here, but I have just one last question.

I'm guessing that this is happening in part because the children speak the same language as the children in the host communities.

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: That is correct.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

The Chair: We'll go to MP Khalid for a very short last question.

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, gentlemen, for your very compelling testimony today.

I do have a very short question. It's just to follow up with what you described as a situation in Uganda, and how they are incorporating refugees into their country.A refugee family comes into Uganda, starts farming and spends 10 years there. Then the conflict in the family's home nation ends. What happens? Are they obligated to get up and leave and go back to their nation?

Also, you had mentioned that this model of intake of refugees is not unique to Uganda. Can you list a few other examples of countries that are using the same method of integration?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: Yes. There is what we call in international law the cessation clause, which is, you have the status of refugee as long as you cannot avail yourself of the protection of your home country, the country of origin, nationality or habitual residence. Indeed, at some point the United Nations and UNHCR, our agency, may declare that it's safe for people to return because there's been a radical change in the political scene, or peace has been achieved. In that case, people who were refugees will be encouraged and supported by UNHCR to return to that country through a voluntary repatriation program.

It is important to say that it's voluntary because you will always have people who will refuse to go back because they have a certain profile, an ethnic profile, or they were journalists and still would face some reprisals if they were to go back. It's not an automatic blanket thing. We still look at individuals to see, and it has to be a free and informed choice for people to return. But, yes indeed, people will return.

The second best solution is when people can locally integrate. That happens in quite a number of countries, in Canada, for example, where you claim asylum, are recognized as a refugee, and within five years you become a citizen. That happens in quite a number of countries. It all depends on the economic situation, the ethnic and linguistic ties, and so on.

On your second question, let's take an example from this part of the world, the internal displacement in Colombia. People have been displaced for many years, and have been able to reintegrate as internally displaced, to shift away from refugees, in new communities, in new parts of the country. They are still displaced in the sense that they're not in their place of origin, but they're completely integrated in another part of their country. This is, of course, much easier when you are a national of your own country, because we all have the freedom of movement within the boundaries of our own country.

It does happen in a number of places. There is, for example, the whole Kenya issue and the Dadaab and Kakuma camps. It's all about that. How can we transform those huge camps into actual urban centres, which will integrate the population and contribute to the economy of the region, and even of the country? That's what is at stake now in the discussions that UNHCR is having with the Kenyan government.

● (1330)

The Chair: Before we wrap up, I want to ask one more short question.

Interestingly, we're doing a one-day study on the Dadaab camp in May, which MP Anderson and MP Tabbara have brought to the committee. We will actually be looking at that, I think, right before it goes to close.

One of the things that we've heard repeatedly from multiple witnesses is the regional influence on the conflict. We've heard that Uganda supports the government while, for example, Sudan supports the opposition. Meanwhile, we have different refugee flows.

You mentioned the thousands of refugees flowing into Uganda. Why is Uganda so involved in the insurgency, given the impact it's having on sending refugees spiralling across borders? Can you give us a very short—I want to be fair to everybody—answer on that? It is something that's come up a lot.

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: It's going to be very short because I'm going to avoid responding to the question. I'm an impartial and neutral humanitarian worker, and I cannot comment on those political aspects. I'm sorry.

The Chair: Okay, that's fair enough.

With that, gentlemen, thank you very much. It was a very insightful way to conclude the testimony and our study. We greatly appreciate your being here and illuminating us.

To all members of this committee, staff, and everybody else here, I wish to those who celebrate it a very happy Easter. We will see you in a couple of weeks.

Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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