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Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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• (1535)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC)): I call this meeting to order.

Thank you very much for coming today.

We have the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Honourable François-Philippe Champagne.

With him, from the department, we have Marta Morgan, deputy minister for foreign affairs. We have Arun Thangaraj, chief financial officer and assistant deputy minister for corporate planning, finance and information technology, and Mr. Steve Verheul, chief negotiator and assistant deputy minister, trade policy and negotiations.

Thank you very much for coming.

In accordance with the motion that we passed, Minister, you have 10 minutes to give us your opening remarks, and then we will have questions and answers until about 5:20 p.m., at which point we will go in camera and do some committee business.

Thank you very much.

Minister, please go ahead.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Foreign Affairs): Madam Chair, thank you very much.

I just want to say, colleagues, thank you for welcoming me to the foreign affairs committee at a time when I think our nation is faced with a number of challenges.

I want to take this opportunity, Madam Chair, to thank the outstanding officials who are standing with me. Many of them have been working 24-7 for the last few months, I would say, and they have been doing their utmost to provide the best services to Canadians in difficult circumstances, whether in coronavirus assistance in Japan and China, to efforts in Iran, where we had to face a number of challenges, and then obviously in our relationship in trying to obtain the release of Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor and clemency for Mr. Schellenberg.

Madam Chair and honourable members, thank you for welcoming me to appear before the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development to speak about our government's foreign policy mandate and our current priorities.

I would like to begin by emphasizing that Canadian interests, values and principles are the heart of everything that we do on the

international stage, from our commitment to multilateral institutions to our trade agreements and our defence and promotion of human rights. This approach is critical in an increasingly unpredictable world where the rules-based system is under strain.

[Translation]

This is evident in the rise of populism and protectionism and the growth of economic and technological inequalities around the world.

This is evident in the serious doubt being cast upon multilateral institutions and the rules-based international order.

This is also evident in the decline of human rights and the increasingly selective enforcement of international law.

[English]

Increasingly, human rights are under threat, from the plight of the Rohingya to the rise of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia to attacks on human rights defenders. Add to that an immense demographic transformation. By 2050, the world's population could increase by 2.2 billion people, and 2.2 billion people will also be facing the existential threat of our time, which is, obviously, climate change.

[Translation]

This observation may, of course, seem daunting, even insurmountable to some. However, there are also encouraging signs that give hope.

Inspiring people are advancing our societies and improving the lives of marginalized people the world over.

There is also a growing consensus on human rights, including women's rights, LGBTQ2 rights and democratic rights, around the globe.

[English]

Madam Chair, major international challenges require global solutions, and I think we're seeing it today with the coronavirus in particular. Hence, the importance of a rules-based international order that every country can count on to defend their interests while ensuring the collective interests of all.

However, that rules-based international order, as you well know, my dear colleagues, is under threat in many, many corners of the world. This is why we must support and modernize the multilateral system to ensure its sustainability, and this is where Canada can, and indeed must, play a leading role.

[Translation]

Canada has a voice in almost every major international forum: the G7, the G20, the Francophonie, the Commonwealth, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or NATO, the North American Aerospace Defence Command, or NORAD, and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, or OECD, to name but a few.

The very principles on which the confederation of our country is based—peace, order and good government—resonate in many parts of the world. Our reputation and credibility as a country rest on our ability to demonstrate to our partners and allies how our principles and values concretely guide our diplomacy around the world.

• (1540)

[English]

Let me now present to you the priorities that guide my mandate so far.

First is Iran and the tragedy of flight PS752. If anything, it illustrates the importance of diplomacy and multilateralism. Faced with this tragedy, we chose engagement, while remaining firm so that justice could be done for the families of the victims.

Canada led the creation of the international coordination and response group for victims of flight PS752 to ensure that the international community could speak to Iran with one voice, and despite the pitfalls, despite the lack of diplomatic relations with Iran, we were able to quickly dispatch investigators to the field and repatriate the bodies of the victims in accordance with the wishes of the families.

Much work remains to be done, Madam Chair, for Iran to assume full responsibility, including a complete and transparent investigation, the downloading and analysis of the black boxes and swift compensation for the families. We are working hard to make progress on all these fronts. We will continue to hold the Iranian regime accountable, and as I've said many times, we will judge Iran not by its words but by its actions.

[Translation]

Let me now turn to China.

[English]

The year 2020 will mark 50 years of diplomatic relations between Canada and the People's Republic of China. Unfortunately, the relationship between our two countries is currently undergoing a turbulent period.

Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor have been arbitrarily detained for over a year now. Our top priority remains securing their release. We are also working to obtain clemency for Robert Schellenberg who, as you know, Madam Chair, has been sentenced to death in China.

International partners share our opinion. The action of a state within the framework of an international treaty must never generate reprisals against its citizens abroad.

[Translation]

However, our relationship with China remains complex and multidimensional. Finding the right balance is a delicate operation. There will always be issues where we will have differences and issues on which we will have overlapping positions. So we must learn to live with this new complexity.

For example, it is possible to work with China on reforming the World Trade Organization, or WTO, while having divergent positions on human rights.

One thing is for sure. Our relations with China will always be guided by the interests of Canadians and by our commitment to the roles and principles enshrined in international law.

[English]

Another priority, Madam Chair, is our campaign for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council. As I've said before, a seat on the Security Council is not an end in itself: It is a vehicle for promoting the principles and the values that shape our vision of international relations. We are witnessing a major questioning of the capacity of international institutions to respond to the crises of our time, particularly in Asia and Africa and Latin America. There's an urgent need to develop new approaches and create new consensus to face these challenges. Our campaign for a seat on the Security Council is therefore a great opportunity for Canada to demonstrate leadership: to assert our interests, principles and values; and to strengthen and adapt multilateralism to the realities of today.

[Translation]

Some will say that the fight for a seat on the United Nations, or UN, Security Council is not worth it or that it may be too late. However, it is never too late to fight for women's rights, human rights, the environment or democracy.

Some will even criticize the Security Council, saying it is obsolete or even ineffective. Nevertheless, it remains one of the most important forums in the world where major decisions on peace and security are taken. It is a forum where Canada can have both a relevant voice and an influence.

• (1545)

Finally, I'd like to say a word about our relationship with our neighbours to the south, the United States. We are inseparable allies, partners and friends because of our geography, our personal ties and, of course, our economic ties.

[English]

The new NAFTA opens another chapter in our relationship, one of prosperity, opportunity and stability. As evidenced by the sometimes difficult negotiations over the last two years, our government will never compromise on the interests of Canadians.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Prime Minister and my predecessor for their tireless work, which brought increased stability and predictability to our commercial relationship with the United States, our biggest and largest trading partner.

To conclude, some may say that in a minority government we have to act quickly to achieve our objectives, but as an African proverb I've quoted before says that if you want to go fast, you go alone, but if you want to go far, let's walk together.

[*Translation*]

Hence the importance of an inclusive approach, such as the one I am proposing to you today, where provinces, territories, businesses, non-governmental organizations, artists, civil society and members of Parliament from all parties, in cooperation with our international partners, work with us to build a greener, fairer, safer, more inclusive and more prosperous world.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ)): Thank you, Mr. Minister.

We have received your brief, which alternates between French and English. So we will have to have the French parts translated into English and the English parts into French before the document is distributed to our colleagues on the committee.

Thank you so much for your presentation.

We will start the first round of questions.

Ms. Alleslev, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Thank you very much, Minister, for being here.

I note that in your opening remarks you didn't give us an update on the government's response to coronavirus with respect to international relationships and actions. I wonder if you might do that now.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I appreciate it. I thank my colleague for the question.

I've been in touch with a number of colleagues over the spread of the coronavirus. I've been in touch with my colleague from South Korea to understand how the virus spread so quickly in their country and better understand what we can do and the lessons learned. I talked to my colleague from Italy just this morning. I also had a call with my Australian colleague this morning. I have tried also to talk to a number of colleagues over the last few days and weeks to make sure that we talk to each other, learn from each other, particularly when we had the *Diamond Princess* in Japan. I also spoke to my counterpart in Japan to make sure and I spoke to my Chinese counterpart when the virus erupted in Wuhan. The purpose of that was, first, to allow consular access when we needed to repatriate Canadians. The first wave was in Wuhan in Hubei province in China. The second wave was in Japan.

More recently it was with U.S. authorities to make sure that we would provide consular services and to make sure that Canadians would receive all the care and attention they would need from foreign governments when they need to be quarantined in their countries.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Along those lines, I'm wondering if you could help us with the Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig situa-

tion. Can you give us an update on their health and the impact of the coronavirus on them and the challenging situation that they find themselves in?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I'd like to thank you for that question, because this is top of mind.

The release of Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor is my absolute priority. We made a *démarche* with the Chinese authorities when we saw the coronavirus appearing in China. We have been making sure with Ambassador Barton that we are in regular contact with Chinese authorities to make sure that the health and safety of Canadians who are detained in China—not only those, but others—receive all the attention needed.

I receive regular reports with respect to some of the measures that have been taken by China, such as curbing visits. We've been trying to find other ways to stay in touch with them to make sure that—

● (1550)

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Minister, do you have any information on their health? Our understanding of the agreement Canada has with China is that they would have consular access once a month, and yet they have not had consular access since, I believe, January 14, which is almost two months. That's pretty significant.

Could you please give us any information you have? Are they healthy? Is the quarantine affecting them? When will they have consular access again? What pressure can you bring to bear?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I would say it's almost daily, not weekly, pressure that we put on Chinese authorities when it comes to the Canadian detainees. You will understand that the basis under which I work is a no-harm policy for the ones who are detained, whether it's with respect to their detention conditions or to their release.

There are certain things about their detention conditions that would not be in their best interests for me to describe in detail, but I can assure you that Ambassador Barton and ourselves have been in daily or almost daily contact with the Chinese authorities to follow up on what they are doing, and we are exercising all the rights we have under the Vienna convention to make sure we are in regular contact with the Canadians being detained. We look at their diet and the conditions of their detention.

I've been Minister of Foreign Affairs for four months now and I've had four conversations with my counterpart in China—

Ms. Leona Alleslev: We'll look forward to finding out when they have consular access again.

Would you know if anyone anywhere around there has been quarantined?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I know that the Chinese authorities, based on the latest report I received, have restricted access to a number of detention facilities in China. They told us this was to prevent the spread of viruses, and certainly we have heard that, but we are pushing for our rights under the Vienna convention to be in touch regularly with our detainees in China.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: To follow up on that, I believe 14 nations have come out publicly in support of our desire for them to be released. That's a nice number, but we would like it to be significantly larger.

Could you share any activities and actions that you've taken? Why is that number not bigger? What are other countries looking for to be able to provide that support to Canada in such a significant matter?

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Stéphane Bergeron): You will have to respond in under a minute, Mr. Minister.

[English]

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I raise the issue of Michael Spavor, Michael Kovrig and clemency for Mr. Schellenberg regularly with my counterparts. I have been adamant in saying, as I said in my opening statement, that Canada's enforcement of an international treaty should never allow a foreign state to take measures of reprisal against foreigners, and I've stressed to my like-minded colleagues that we should all be concerned, because Michael's case shows why the world's democracies need to work together.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Stéphane Bergeron): Unfortunately, we are out of time.

[English]

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Thank you very much, Minister.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Stéphane Bergeron): I'm sorry I had to interrupt you.

We will now start the first round of questions.

Ms. Sahota, you have the floor for six minutes.

[English]

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Hello, Minister. Welcome to committee today.

I too am interested to learn more about the response to the coronavirus. The world watched last month when the virus seemed to be spreading to Canadians who were travelling abroad and consular services all of a sudden were extended to provide help and support to people in other countries.

I want to learn a little bit more about the process. You had a large-scale evacuation from China and from Japan. I want to know exactly what steps you have to take to make those evacuations a reality. I know it took some time, especially when it came to China. Are you planning any future evacuations for Canadians through your consular services?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Well, thank you for that question, Madam Chair.

I want to give my thanks to our consular officials. I think what my officials have done with respect to the repatriation of people

from Wuhan and Hubei provinces, from Japan, and more recently from Oakland is probably one of the biggest missions that has been undertaken in a long time.

In the case of Wuhan, we were facing a number of challenges. There are always three steps in that. You need to assess the situation, decide what you are going to do and then implement it. The first moment that we saw that the number of Canadians was sufficient to justify evacuation and that we needed to evacuate them, we chartered a plane. Then we had to organize the ground logistics.

For my colleagues to understand, to get the plane into China, we needed first to stage the plane in a location closer to China, because we had about a six-hour window from the moment we were given authorization to fly in the airspace to be on the ground, and repatriation needed to be done during the night.

In the background to that, we needed to make sure that people were at home, were informed about the flight and could cross all the checkpoints that would lead them to the airport. In some cases they had to go to 20 checkpoints, so it was about providing licence plates, drivers' numbers and vehicle models to make sure that people could have access. I was very proud that we could do that in a safe and efficient way. If you listen to the reports, they say that Canada's boarding process was one of the most efficient.

When it came to the *Diamond Princess*, Canada was there first with the CDC. We sent public health officials with American colleagues to talk to the Japanese as we saw the numbers of coronavirus increasing on the ship we were trying to access what was going on. I was pleased that we could repatriate all these Canadians safely to Trenton, working in an interdepartmental....

In the case of those who stayed there, at one stage we had 50 Canadians in 27 hospitals in a radius of 300 kilometres. We were providing what I called personalized consular services. Different families wanted different things. Some wanted means of communication, some wanted to adapt their meals and some wanted to make sure they had mental support. Again, this was unprecedented in everything that we have done so far, I would say, because of the type of services we were required to provide to provide comfort to Canadians. Also, if people were in a quarantine environment, we provided the type of resources needed to do that.

• (1555)

Ms. Ruby Sahota: As a follow-up to that, has support to consular services been increased, given the current situation? There has been criticism in the news that some Canadians abroad have not been able to make contact. There hasn't been updated information provided. What efforts are being made to increase those supports?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam Chair, I have even called some of the victims myself. Some I called four times to make sure.

This was a unprecedented effort from the ambassadors on the ground. We sent the Red Cross. I called the CEO of the Red Cross to even supplement the services. As you know, the types of services under the Vienna convention... We went way beyond what we would normally do under the specific circumstances that we were presented. There was some great learning in that respect. I am proud of the service that we offered.

Obviously, when you repatriate hundreds of Canadians, you always find perhaps one or another who wished that things could have gone differently. I spoke to a number of people we repatriated. We did it safely and professionally. We brought our people back home. We still have about 20 people in Japan to whom we are still providing consular services because they are still in hospital.

The decision we took to go first and make sure that we would repatriate only people who were asymptomatic was the right decision, as you can see from all the health officials around the world. Now we have been called upon to provide additional services on the *Grand Princess*, which is the ship off the coast of Oakland.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: What would you advise now? March break is coming next week, with a lot of children out of school and a lot of vacations already booked. What would you advise Canadians to do when it comes to going abroad or travelling within Canada? What precautions should they take?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Leona Alleslev): You have 30 seconds, Minister.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I would say that the first step is to go to page 38 of your passports. It says three things. It says to read the travel advisory we put on our website, register if you are going to go abroad so we know where you are and reach out in case of need.

Those three Rs are the best advice I can give. As you saw yesterday, it's changing by the hour, so the best way is to be connected, be informed and reach out for assistance.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Leona Alleslev): Thank you very much, Mr. Minister.

[Translation]

Mr. Bergeron, you have the floor.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Minister, thank you for joining us today and giving us your valuable time. We would have liked you to be with us longer, but it seems that the tradition here in Ottawa is that presentations are about an hour or two long. What can I say, we need to adapt: Times change.

Mr. Minister, one of the purposes of today's meeting is to discuss your mandate letters. In the mandate letters, you are mandated to support the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs on measures related to Canada-U.S. relations. In your opinion, what are the possible consequences of the U.S. decision yesterday to close its borders, so to speak, to all flights from Europe as of the end of this month? Could Europeans possibly try to land in Canada and then go to the United States? Do you foresee any consequences for Canada-U.S. relations in terms of the ability to move freely across borders?

• (1600)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I thank my colleague for his question, Madam Chair.

I was in contact with my European counterparts last night, because the American president's announcement has a greater impact on our Europeans colleagues. I spoke to Italy's foreign minister this afternoon, just before question period.

At this time, there is no indication that travellers would pass through Canada on their way to the United States. As you know, in a situation like this, you have to work with facts. The facts do not indicate that at this point in time.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: We have to anticipate situations, Mr. Minister.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: The U.S. president's measure will take effect at midnight. If you look at the number of cases in Canada, I think the measures Canada has taken, compared to the G7 countries, have been effective in controlling the spread of the virus. We are going to continue to do what we have been doing since day one. Of course, we are in discussions with all government agencies, whether it's the Public Health Agency of Canada, the Canada Border Services Agency or our G7 partners, to fully understand the potential impact of this and to put a plan in place to respond to it.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: If I understand correctly, you don't think there will be any particular trouble with our neighbours to the south, and we should be happy about that.

The following mandate has been entrusted to you:

to work with the Minister of Canadian Heritage to promote Canada's public diplomacy through cultural and educational spheres, such as introducing a new cultural diplomacy strategy with at least one international mission each year to promote Canadian culture and creators around the world.

As you know, this was one of the main thrusts of Canada's foreign policy until 2005. In 2005, under the previous Conservative government, major cuts were made to the trade routes program and the public diplomacy program, the Canadian cultural centre in Paris and cultural positions in various embassies, including Berlin.

You probably know that many events abroad, such as *Surprenante Acadie*, in Poitiers, France, and *Les Déferlantes franco-phones*, in Capbreton, France, were funded by this type of program.

At some point, are you planning to reinvest in this type of program, to enable civil society and particularly the cultural and education sectors to promote all our cultures abroad?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Thank you.

I take great pride in my position as the minister responsible for the Francophonie. Quebec's language and culture, and the French language... The Francophonie will soon be celebrating its 50th anniversary.

My mandate letter states that the Minister of Foreign Affairs now shares a jurisdiction with the Minister of Canadian Heritage. I was pleased to see that, because I think one of the best ways to do diplomacy is to promote Quebec and Canadian culture around the world. It is often said that music brings people together. In my opinion, the whole cultural aspect of cultural diplomacy is a big part of Canadian diplomacy.

Of course, I intend to pull out all the stops to promote the cultural aspect, Canada's different cultures. Everything that Canada has been able to develop is certainly highly attractive for our colleagues abroad.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I imagine that a number of organizations are very pleased with what you have just said today, including the Société nationale de l'Acadie, which has been concerned about cultural cutbacks since the early 2000s.

Within that same framework, a new international education strategy was developed through a pilot project involving Universities Canada and Colleges and Institutes Canada. In my opinion, we should also be happy about that.

• (1605)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Absolutely.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: There seems to be a link missing in this strategy, however. I'm talking about the Réseau des cégeps et des collèges francophones du Canada.

Since you said you were proud to be the minister responsible for the Francophonie and for promoting the French language abroad, don't you think it would be appropriate to include the Réseau in this pilot project so that French-language education can be promoted abroad?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Leona Alleslev): Mr. Minister, you have 30 seconds.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: When I was Minister of International Trade, one of my roles was to help promote education worldwide. That is something that's close to my heart. If the people from the Réseau des cégeps et des collèges francophones du Canada want to come and meet me, we can see what we can do together. Our goal is to promote education and the Francophonie around the world.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Leona Alleslev): Thank you very much.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Leona Alleslev): Next we have Mr. Harris.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for coming to join us today. We often say "thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule", usually out of politeness, but in your case I think it's actually true. You have been very busy for the last number of months.

I wanted to ask a question about Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig. I appreciate the determination with which you stated the principle that there should never, never, never, I believe you said,

be reprisals against citizens for the actions of a state, particularly a legal one like this. Do we have many friends on this point?

We have 14 nations willing to say something about it in public and supposedly others that agree with us behind the scenes. A task force was put together very quickly in the case dealing with Iran. In this particular situation, what I'm wondering is whether there is any capacity and enough of a consensus on your principle, as you've stated it, to have an international collective response or strategy in dealing with the question that we're talking about.

Have you made efforts to set up such a task force? Have you pursued the development of a coalition of ideas and strategy that might have some effect in dealing with China in this regard?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam Chair, he seemed to read my mind.

Definitely, we've been talking to a number of colleagues around the world. I think that arbitrary detention is something that concerns Canada but also concerns many nations, many liberal democracies that are facing a similar situation.

Our relationship with China, as I've said, is going through a turbulent time. It's complex and multi-dimensional. The type of situation we're facing is the same that others have been facing in liberal democracies in Europe and other places in the world. Where the complexity comes from is that you may deal with China on climate change or on WTO reform, but you will disagree profoundly on human rights.

When it comes to arbitrary detention, yes, I've been reaching out to colleagues around the world, and yes, we're looking at ways to coordinate—or, I would say, even better coordinate—to make sure that the case of Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor also serves as a lesson to the world that arbitrary detention is unacceptable, and that if it were ever to happen again, we should act collectively, in a coordinated fashion.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you.

I'm looking at your mandate letter. One of your early mandates is to "lead Canada's United Nations Security Council campaign". The campaign itself has been criticized for starting late, as you made reference to. You can't take personal responsibility for that, as you weren't the minister, but is it enough to start as late as we did?

I have a follow-up question to that. Of course, Canada was "back" in the international world in 2015, but one of the criticisms of Canada in terms of its desire to show, as you called it, and to illustrate "our interests, principles and values" in this effort to be part of the Security Council is that we are well behind Norway with its 1% official development assistance and we have a commitment from our other competitor for it to reach 1.7% by 2030. You know where we are. We're at 0.27%. We're at half as much as the average of our peers in the OECD and well behind the 0.7%.

How does that sit with you if we're talking about our values and principles and our role in international affairs? For four and a half years, we've been going backwards on that point, not forward, and there's a lot to be done, whether you use it for climate change to assist countries in dealing with that or provide the development assistance that's needed and increase it through a considerable effort. Do you plan to recommit to this 0.7% goal and provide a goal and a timetable to reach it?

• (1610)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I think there are two parts to your question.

With respect to our campaign, I would say it's never too late to do good things. Coming back from CARICOM, where I represented the Prime Minister at the heads of government meeting, and coming back from the African Union, where we met a number of African leaders; and after the Lima Group, to which we played host here in Ottawa, I think what I hear more and more from around the world is that people want a positive, progressive voice on the Security Council. They want this transatlantic voice that will make a difference, that will speak up for human rights, that will speak up for climate change, and that will amplify the voice of those who don't have a voice at that table.

When it comes to numbers, I would say that numbers don't tell the whole story. I'll tell you that I was at the MINUSMA mission in Mali, and I met the commander and the deputy secretary-general. We have a female commander of the police force. I asked her to come—

Mr. Jack Harris: If I may interrupt, I realize that numbers don't tell the whole story, and you can use the rest of my time to tell the whole story, but the numbers count, because that measures the effort that's being put into this proposal.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I'll tell you what the mission commander told me: "Sir, no nation makes a greater impact than Canada. If I could ask you one favour, it would be to just keep that commander there; she's making a bigger impact on the whole UN mission than anyone else."

That's one person making the impact.

Mr. Jack Harris: That's one mission—

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: She's making an impact.

Mr. Jack Harris: —and I'm sure we are all as proud as you are of the efforts being made in that particular mission, but I'm talking about the global consequences.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I can tell you about other missions. Pick one.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Leona Alleslev): You have 20 seconds.

Mr. Jack Harris: Well, I think you answered my question, and the answer is no, you're not prepared to recommit to the 0.7% ODA goals and you're not prepared to tell the rest of the world that we're prepared to reach a timetable to get there. I'm very sorry to hear that.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam Chair, do I have time to...?

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Leona Alleslev): Thank you very much, Minister.

Next we have MP Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, I want to start by sharing with you that a few weeks ago I reached out to your office involving a challenging situation of a family abroad. I worked with Nour Kechacha in your office. She was excellent, she was responsive, and she was very helpful. The family is back in Canada today. We ask tough questions to advance the public interest, but we also, I think, should give credit. I want to thank you and your team on that specific case.

Now for the tougher stuff.

Minister, I appreciated your comments about helping Michael Kovrig, Michael Spavor and Gary Schellenberg. This is a formula we've heard from officials before. It's very important to identify those three individuals.

I want to share with you some testimony we heard at the Canada-China committee about our engagement with complex consular cases in China. This is a quote from Charles Burton, a senior fellow with the Macdonald-Laurier Institute:

...the evidence given by our public servants in the previous meetings of this committee repeated over and over the formula that Canada's priority in China relations is "the immediate release of Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, as well as clemency for Robert Schellenberg".

I'm sorry; I got his name wrong. It's Robert Schellenberg.

However, in response to questioning, one of the officials indicated there are two Canadians, Mr. Schellenberg and Mr. Fan Wei, whose charges on the death penalty are public and available. Why is this focus on Kovrig, Spavor and Schellenberg, three Canadians of non-Chinese origin, to the exclusion of Canadians Huseyin Celil and Fan Wei, who are not?

I judge that this would be deeply troubling to all Canadians formerly resident in the PRC prior to becoming Canadian citizens and joining our national family.

Do we also thereby tacitly accept the Chinese government's claim that persons of Chinese origin in Canada have an obligation of residual loyalty to the Chinese state regardless of their Canadian citizenship? Is this why the serious problem of Chinese state harassment of persons of PRC origin in Canada, in gross violation of the protections of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, is essentially unaddressed by our government?

Essentially, the issue he's raising is that there doesn't seem to be an equivalent emphasis on Canadians arbitrarily detained in China who are maybe originally of PRC origin. Do you want to comment and respond to his comments?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I would say it's not the case at all. We have raised these cases. The case of Mr. Fan I'm very familiar with, and Mr. Celil as well. We defend everyone. If you're a Canadian, you're a Canadian. We're going to provide consular services. We're going to fight for your rights. Any insinuation to the contrary is misguided. I can assure you that when I speak to Ambassador Barton, when I speak to our officials, a Canadian is a Canadian. We treat everyone equally. We have talked about some of the cases, but I can assure you that each...

Sometimes, with respect, we have to respect the wishes of the families. For many people detained in China and many people who have consular services, we are requested not to talk publicly about them. My lens is always to make sure that we have a no-harm policy in terms of the detention condition or the potential release of these people. That's the only lens we apply—

• (1615)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Minister, but I have to jump in there, because after we had the testimony from Ambassador Barton specifically on the Celil case, Mr. Celil's wife spoke publicly in the press and expressed concern about the case not seeming to have received equivalent attention.

I appreciate your comment that a Canadian is a Canadian, but you repeated a formula that identifies three individuals and not other individuals.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Listen, I have a full list of Canadians abroad to whom we provide consular services on a daily basis. I could go through the full list of people. We pay particular attention to everyone who is detained arbitrarily, particularly those who are in China, to provide them with all the consular services.

There are even other names that you have probably never heard in the public domain, and this is to respect the wishes of the family, but I can assure you that our officials treat every Canadian in the same way, and when we advocate for one, we advocate for all of them.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Minister, I have a different topic in the time I have left, but again, the formula is out there, and I think people have heard it.

I asked you a question in the House about legal responses to the human rights abuses of Uighurs, and you responded in the House by saying that we're very concerned about the abuse of Uighurs. However, my question was not general; it was specific to legal responses, recognition of crimes against humanity and the use of sanctioning tools against officials involved in the horrific mass detention of Uighurs.

Could you speak specifically, please, to legal responses to this gross violation of human rights?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: We are very concerned. We are deeply concerned about the treatment of the Uighurs in China, and all minorities. I take every opportunity I have to raise human rights with my Chinese counterparts, and we will continue to do so, because the protection and upholding of international law and human rights is a core principle of foreign policy, and I can assure you that every time—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Leona Alleslev): For the next round, for five minutes, we have Mr. Spengemann.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Minister, my thanks to you and your team for what you do. I also thank you for your commitment and your leadership on the international stage.

My first question is about human rights.

[*English*]

Minister, you had the chance to speak in the House on the recent tensions in Delhi, India. I'd like you to take the opportunity to frame for the committee your thoughts on the importance of human rights generally, and the perception that perhaps human rights are a trade-off against diplomacy. Much like the fact that we treat the economy and the environment as going together, we also need to treat human rights advocacy and diplomacy as a pair, as going together.

I'd like to commend our government for keeping the door open in difficult circumstances with countries like Iran, Russia and China. Could you comment a bit on the importance of human rights advocacy and how you see it in the overall fabric of your mandate?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Thank you very much.

I will just take 10 seconds to thank the member who commended some of our members who have provided consular services. Some of them have worked through the night for days and days to provide services, so I just want to mention Nour and the team and the great work they did.

To your point, first of all I'd like to acknowledge your work. You have been a great advocate for your constituents by always raising human rights. As I said, you put it nicely that human rights is a core principle of Canada's foreign policy. We defend our interests and we defend our values and our principles, and one of our core principles is the protection and defence of human rights around the world.

We are proud to do that, and the voice of Canada is respected around the world because we stand up even when it's not easy, or perhaps as others might think, inconvenient. Canada has been there to stand up for minorities in China. We've been standing up to the situation you referred to in Delhi recently, where we were very saddened and concerned about the violence we saw. We have expressed that. I was one of the few foreign ministers of the G20 who called the foreign minister of India to express our concern and ask for a path toward a peaceful and productive dialogue.

We were also trying to engage with our Indian counterparts about the importance of upholding the rights of all religious minorities in India. We do that in a respectful way, but we do it on the basis of our principles, and we will continue there and elsewhere to always stand up for those who perhaps don't have a voice or who don't have a voice as loud as Canada's.

• (1620)

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Minister, briefly, I'd like to ask a second question.

If I were to put to you the proposition that good human rights policy and practice, in the sense of the rule of law, is also good for the economy, how would you engage that proposition vis-à-vis your counterparts abroad?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: As I said, in the relationship we have with states, the way I frame it is always about Canada's interests, values and principles. Your interests might be that you engage in a commercial relationship, but you need to be true to your principles. In a world that is full of uncertainty, a world that is changing these days by the hour, we need to be guided by core principles because of the respect you get around these tables around the world. Whether it's the G7, G20, NATO, NORAD—you name it—la Francophonie or the Commonwealth, people know exactly where Canada stands.

Canada stands on the side of those who perhaps don't have a voice in the world, or who perhaps have been subjected to abuse. Perhaps some would be willing to compromise. We don't compromise. We are able to speak about both of these things at the same time in the same conversation with the same people.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Thank you, Minister.

In the remaining minute that I have, I wonder if I could invite you to follow through on the exchange with Mr. Harris and maybe look at another example where, qualitatively, our development assistance is far above the standard.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Thank you.

To my colleague Mr. Harris, we always want to do more. What I was trying to provide was a concrete example of some of the Canadians who are making a difference in the world in a very concrete way. What I was trying to reflect to my colleague Mr. Harris was about the impact. When I go from mission to mission, I always ask what Canada does best and what we can do better.

What I was telling you, for example, was that in MINUSMA, the commander was telling me that Canada brought community policing and is changing how the UN is policing. We have more women in the forces. We brought them there, and they tell us that we're changing the way they're policing, and not only in Mali. A Nigerian commander told me we're changing the UN. That small group of people we have there is changing all of our practices at the UN. They do better because we're there.

My point is that you can look at the numbers—and obviously one can always look at the numbers—but one also has to look at the impact. I saw our mission in Ukraine recently. I saw our mission in Latvia. I went to the MFO in Egypt. I—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Leona Alleslev): Thank you, Minister.

Now we move on to a round of two and a half minutes—oh, my apologies. It's five minutes.

Go ahead, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I could barely say my name in that time.

Minister, I asked you the question; I don't think you answered it. I want to give one more shot. I want to ask about specific legal responses—speaking, sending letters—on Uighur abuses.

There are specific legal steps that you can take, and I think you know what they are. One of them would be listing officials involved in Uighur detentions under the Magnitsky act. Another one would be to support an international investigation around crimes against humanity to officially support the declaration by the U.S. Holocaust museum.

Again, as one more shot here, are you taking, or contemplating taking, a legal response to respond to this gross violation of human rights against Uighurs in China?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I'll give you an example of a response we have given.

You want a legal response? We supported the Gambia in their case against Myanmar with respect to the Rohingya. That's a very specific—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I mean Uighurs, though. I'm asking specifically about a legal response to Uighurs.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I know, but I gave you an example of our making a legal response.

We are always looking at all the tools of diplomacy that we have. We have raised this issue. We are constantly raising the issues of minorities and religious minorities in China, and we'll continue to do so.

What I was—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

I guess the record shows that's a no, because you went from a question about a legal response in China to talking about something you did in Myanmar.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I think you were asking me for an example. I was giving you an example where we are...and we'll continue to do so. Canada is strong internationally, and we use all tools of diplomacy.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Minister.

I want to jump off on Mr. Spengemann's comments about India.

I think all of us share concerns about the situation involving human rights and pluralism in India. A couple of years ago, your government signed a comprehensive security and intelligence co-operation agreement with India that would have expanded intelligence sharing significantly.

I'd appreciate an update from you on how the government feels about the status of that agreement in light of some of the concerns that have been raised around human rights, including by members of your own caucus.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: As I said, I think I'm one of the very few G20 ministers who called the foreign minister of India to share our concern when we saw the events in Delhi. You can check the record. We did that respectfully, but we also stated Canada's position and asked about the path towards peaceful resolution of the situation we were witnessing. We called, and we were looking at how the rights of all religious minorities could be respected.

When you were asking for examples of things we're doing, I think the record probably shows that I'm the only G20 minister who picked up the phone to the foreign minister to—

• (1625)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Again, Minister, sorry, but my question was very specific.

Is that situation changing the government's thinking at all with respect to security and intelligence co-operation with India?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: We're always looking at the facts. Whenever we have a co-operation, we're always looking.... As I said, you have to go back to the core principle of our foreign policy, and that is human rights. We defend human rights at every step.

Whatever agreement, whatever arrangement, whatever co-operation we have in place is always in light of that, and in respect of Canadian laws and regulations—humanitarian law, international law—and we will continue that. This is a core principle of what we do around the world.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Minister, quickly in response to that, our goal as a committee is to hold the government accountable as to whether its actions line up with those principles. We're going to agree on the stated principles, but the questions have to be in the specifics. I mean, I've asked that question twice, so let me move on to something else.

Can we get a sense of the total all-in cost of the campaign to get Canada a seat on the UN Security Council, the expenses associated specifically with campaigning, including staff time, travel and related expenses?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I don't think Canadians are very much into the accounting these days. They're more about making sure that we can get a seat on the Security Council. As I said, a seat is not an end in itself—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Sir, this is a committee hearing about the estimates, right?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I appreciate that. You can ask me the question and I'll give you the answer, but what I'm say-

ing to you is that I don't think Canadians who are watching at home are focusing on that. They're watching to see what impact Canada can make in the world.

If you want a very specific detail, I'll tell you that as of February 24, we are talking about \$2 million. I think if you compare that to the campaigns of the G7 or other countries in the world who want to make an impact—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Leona Alleslev): You have 30 seconds.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: —I think Canadians would appreciate that this is money invested in order to make sure we have a better world.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You're saying that \$2 million includes staff time and all related expenses?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: No, I'm saying that \$2 million is the amount that is spent on operational expenditures for the UN Security Council campaign.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Could you report back to this committee with an all-in cost estimate of the money that was spent on the campaign to get Canada on the Security Council?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I will be happy to report that back to the committee in a letter.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Leona Alleslev): Thank you very much, Minister.

Now for our next five minutes, go ahead, please, MP Fonseca.

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for navigating through these very trying times and for sharing with us how you're doing it with a principled approach on Canadian values and on rules-based international order, and for delving into issues that are sometimes international but also local.

I have a large Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora community in my area. A couple of weeks ago, you tweeted about how Canada was disappointed with Sri Lanka's decision to change its approach to the United Nations Human Rights Council resolution on accountability and reconciliation.

You also mentioned that Canada stands ready to support a prosperous and inclusive Sri Lanka. I want you to elaborate a little bit on that for us, and on what's planned in terms of human rights conditions and refugee relations concerns that we have with the country.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for the questions, because you've been a big advocate for the people of Sri Lanka. A lot of concern has been expressed. We are concerned. I have been asked about what we are doing.

In a very concrete way, we are quite aware of the allegations of human rights violations that were committed by General Silva during the armed conflict. As you know, we have been, I think, a leading voice around the world to call out the Sri Lankan government with respect to accountability to end impunity, and certainly to advance reconciliation.

We have expressed our concern in particular with the withdrawal of the Sri Lankan government's support for the UN Human Rights Council resolution on Sri Lanka, and we have urged the Sri Lankan government to continue providing the UN with access.

I was asked earlier what we are doing concretely. This is very concrete and this is the type of thing that the world listens to when Canada speaks around the world. We will continue to raise these issues. We do them respectfully. We do them forcefully, but we do them guided by our core principles and our values.

Mr. Peter Fonseca: Thank you, Minister.

Again, we live in a very diverse country. In my community, I have a large Ukrainian and Polish diaspora. I know that recently you were on a trip. You went to Ukraine, Poland and Latvia, and on that trip, what was brought up was, of course, the threat of Russia. Eastern Europe is on the front lines for many of the challenges facing the rules-based international order.

Could you please explain how those countries are fighting back and the impact that Canada, through both military members and diplomats, is playing in that effort?

• (1630)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Indeed, I think it was last week that I spent a week.... We started our trip in Latvia to go see our troops. As you know, the largest contingent of Canadians is in Latvia. They're doing superb work as part of the NATO mission there in Operation Reassurance.

I will say that what I heard from the President of Latvia, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs was that Canadians are welcome. We are at the front line. We are providing assistance and deterrence. They were so proud to serve, and I was so proud to see them serve our country in Latvia, making a real difference. I was asked before what the Canadian difference is. Just go to Latvia and ask anyone on the street. Canadians are known and renowned for what we're doing to ensure stability and security in the Baltics.

Then we went on to Ukraine, which, as you know, is one of the relationships that dates far back. We have more than one million Ukrainians in Canada; they make up one of our largest communities. However, we're not in the Ukraine because we have 1.3 million Ukrainians in Canada. We're there because they're fighting for the values and principles of democracy, stability, security.

They had Crimea, which was illegally annexed. They're fighting in eastern Ukraine. We have Operation Unifier there. I spent time with the commander and the troops there. We have about 200 troops on that mission, providing assistance and training to the Ukrainian men and women who are, many of them, on the eastern front. I met also some amazing women. I remember one who basically led in the Maidan revolution there.

I was pleased that we spent more than an hour with President Zelenskyy of Ukraine. Obviously, Iran is a big topic when we meet, and it's not only about peace and security and how we can help reform the system. I often say that you need the three pillars of investment: stability, predictability and the rule of law. We've been asked what we can do there.

The other thing that we spent quite some time talking about is the black boxes. You may have noticed yesterday that thanks to our common pressure—both at the International Civil Aviation Organization and otherwise—the Iranian regime has said now that it will deliver the black boxes to Ukraine, or alternatively to France, for them to be downloaded.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Leona Alleslev): Thank you very much, Minister.

Now we'll move on to the two-and-a-half-minute rounds.

MP Bergeron is next.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you. I'll go quickly.

I just want to make it clear from the outset that I'm not going to ask a question about the situation in China, not because I don't think it is important, Mr. Minister, but because we will have another opportunity to discuss the specific situation in China at another committee meeting.

Under a previous Liberal government, it was decided to promote human rights, not through pressure or sanctions, but through the economy. Faced with the failure, if I may say so, of that approach, which is obvious when we look at regimes like China, the decision was made to put human rights back on the agenda and potentially even to consider sanctions.

One of your mandates is to use the Magnitski sanctions regime to better support victims of human rights violations, by establishing a framework to ensure that assets seized from anyone who commits serious human rights violations are transferred to the victims under appropriate judicial supervision. The supplementary estimates even allocated just over \$3 million for a strong sanctions regime.

So, Mr. Minister, what has been done on this file since you took office?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: As you rightly said, we have earmarked a significant amount in the budget to create a team who will ensure that the sanctions are implemented.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Many say \$3 million isn't enough, but I will let you continue.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Global Affairs Canada has expertise with respect to its sanctions regime and the Magnitski sanctions.

Let me say this: it is true that we are constantly fighting for human rights in China, but we have also fought for Quebec pork producers, among others, to ensure they have access to China.

Today, the relationship with China is complex. The complexity that exists in Canada is similar to that of many other Western countries with which I have discussions. On the one hand, we can trade.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Leona Alleslev): You have 30 seconds left.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: On the other, we need to be firm about human rights because they are part of Canadians' values and principles. That's what people want us to stand for, and I think we can do both.

• (1635)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Leona Alleslev): Thank you very much.

Mr. Harris, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to address a question that many Canadians and people around the world are worried about: what we see as the relentless advances of settlements in the occupied territories in the Middle East. Canada, of course, supports a two-state solution.

I really have two questions.

It's not easy, and I think you'd say that we support international human rights even when it's not easy. This is a situation that has been going on for many years, and some fear that it's going to go on for many more and that there will finally be no way to get out of it. What do you have to say about that in terms of Canada's efforts and position, and what is Canada doing to advance the two-state solution that it has put forth for the last many years?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As you know, my colleague Mr. Harris served in the House for a long time. Canada's position with respect to Israel has always been to further the goal of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, which includes the creation of a Palestinian state living side by side in peace and security with Israel.

I think we always need to renew these efforts and we always need to think about how we can have a viable two-state solution with two states living side by side in peace and security. We are an ally of Israel, but we are also a friend of the Palestinian people. When it comes to the settlement, as you know, our policy in Canada has been consistent for many years. We do not recognize the permanent Israeli-controlled territories that were occupied in 1967. We are always trying to find ways, and we are looking at promoting dialogue, because that situation can only be solved by involvement of the parties negotiating directly.

Mr. Jack Harris: Is there time for a follow-up question?

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Stéphane Bergeron): Absolutely. You have about a minute and a half left.

[English]

Mr. Jack Harris: Can you tell us what Canada is doing to help the Palestinians prepare for statehood? The Israeli state has been up and running for many years, since 1948, but the Palestinians are having difficulty developing capacity and capability. What is Canada doing to assist in that effort?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: That's a very important question.

We have been involved with UNRWA for a number of years. We've been trying to help vulnerable Palestinians who need assistance. We have refugees and we have been there to provide assistance, and we will continue to do so. We have been monitoring UNRWA very closely, however, because there have been some allegations. We're monitoring the assistance that's being provided, and we will continue to do so. UNRWA, for those watching at home, is the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, which has been providing assistance to the Palestinian people.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Stéphane Bergeron): Thank you, Mr. Minister.

We will now begin another round of questions.

Ms. Alleslev, you have the floor for five minutes.

[English]

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Thank you very much.

I'm going to ask for some specific documents, if I might. I'm looking for the number of diplomats, I'm looking for the number of trade commissioners and I'm looking for the number of staff and their respective locations for the countries in the European Union, for China, for the countries involved in the CPTPP trade agreement, for the U.K., Brazil and India, Minister.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Sure.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: They're quite difficult to get hold of.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Chair, I'll be happy to do that. I'm sure the member won't hold it against me that I don't have all of these numbers off the top of my head, just like that, but we'll be happy to provide them in writing.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: I'm not holding it against you, but I'm surprised, because I know you usually do.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Yes, but with those ones, you caught me. I can't remember exactly in the CPTPP countries.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Also, I know that an impact assessment has been prepared. I wonder if we could have a copy of that for the Mercosur trade conversation that's ongoing right now with Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay.

I'm wondering if we could also have a copy of the impact assessment for the new NAFTA. While I recognize that this was done based on a comparison with no trade agreement, I wonder if we could have an impact assessment for the old NAFTA versus the new USMCA.

• (1640)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Thank you for that very detailed question.

I will turn to one outstanding Canadian who has been at the forefront of all of these negotiations, Steve Verheul. Maybe you want to provide a bit of additional feedback to—

Ms. Leona Alleslev: I don't need any. I'm looking.... We'll have lots of opportunity to ask you questions about them after we've had a chance to look at the documents.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I would say to the extent they exist. The only reason I was turning to my official is that I don't know if all the documents you refer to exist, so that's why, before I responded.... I want to know if they exist before I can tell you if we're going to provide them.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: If they don't, you can let me know—

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Okay.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: —at a different point, because I'd also like to understand how.... I know that we started negotiations on the Mercosur in March of 2018. I'm wondering if you could give us an idea of how close you are to a deal.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Thank you for asking me that.

You're going back to my days when I was the international trade minister for Canada, so I do remember where we started. I would not be able to tell the committee exactly where we are at this point. Mr. Verheul might be able to provide you with a status update, if you allow me.

I do know when we started it, because I was part of it, but maybe, Steve, you have some additional details.

Mr. Steve Verheul (Chief Negotiator and Assistant Deputy Minister, Trade Policy and Negotiations, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Well, I can tell you that we have been planning the next round with our Mercosur colleagues to take place within the next couple of weeks, but like many other events, that one is a bit up in the air at the moment. We haven't made a final decision on whether or not that will take place, but we have been proceeding steadily with that negotiation.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Thank you very much.

I know that there's also another trade agreement that you're working on with India since August 2017. Unfortunately, perhaps our country was not put in the best light when our Prime Minister went there in February 2018, so I'm wondering if that has had an impact on our trade negotiations with India, or if those negotiations are also progressing and getting closer to a conclusion.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Stéphane Bergeron): You have less than one minute left.

[*English*]

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I can say that I have a very good relationship with the foreign minister of India. You may recall that when we met for the first time at the G20, he came to Canada less than 20 days after our first meeting. We did discuss. We have the FIPA with India, which is outstanding—the foreign investment protection agreement, I should say—and we have been trying to finalize that with India. I have talked to the minister.

As you know, India is reviewing its own domestic policy with respect to foreign investment protection agreements and trade agreements in general, so they are—

Ms. Leona Alleslev: It's not progressing as positively as perhaps we were just led to believe with the other agreement.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: My understanding is that India is reviewing domestically how it wants to approach this. It's not just Canada-related, but international. They're reviewing how they want to deal with international trade agreements in general.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Stéphane Bergeron): Thank you.

We will now begin another round of five-minute questions.

Mr. Virani, you have the floor.

Mr. Arif Virani (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): I'd like to begin by congratulating you, Mr. Minister, on your hard work since taking office, particularly with regard to the coronavirus and flight 752 in Iran.

[*English*]

I think it's particularly appropriate when you've been questioned about our efforts to advocate on behalf of all Canadians, regardless of their background or origin. When we say a Canadian is a Canadian, that was manifest in terms of our treatment of and our support for the Iranian-Canadian community in this country at the start of this year.

[*Translation*]

So, thank you very much.

[*English*]

I want to start with one very general question.

You've heard a lot about the committee's concerns for human rights, and I share them. I'm a human rights lawyer and was a constitutional lawyer prior to being a parliamentarian. You've also had some questions asked of you about the money that's being spent by Canada in terms of our international engagement.

Just off the bat, Mr. Minister, it's a very simple question. If you're going to advocate internationally for human rights, could you tell us if that requires you and Global Affairs Canada to spend money doing so by visiting different parts of the planet?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: We are doing that. Not only are we speaking about human rights, but I think you can look at our feminist foreign policy through which, for example, we empower more women to be at the table, more women to be part of peace discussions, more women to be part of leadership and more women to engage. For example, I was in Mali recently, where I had a round table with women who are trying to engage in the peace process. We know there's empirical evidence—we should know by now, and the world—that when you bring more women into the peace processes, they're long-lasting, there are better outcomes and the needs of the communities are better taken care of.

Yes, by defending human rights, I would say that we put our money where our mouth is in the world. Not only do we advocate for that, but where we see gaps, we can make a difference. I always go back to the point that my honourable colleague Mr. Harris made. For me, numbers and impact need to be related. I can tell you the story I heard of the women in Mali, where we are participating, for example, in the next election. They said that the small amount we have given had a disproportional impact on the outcome, a positive impact.

I think we're trying to be smart. We're trying to engage others. We know that Canada alone cannot necessarily change the world, but Canada can lead. You said that Iran was a good example, where we created the international coordination and the response group to help the victims.

• (1645)

Mr. Arif Virani: Thank you, Minister.

Just building on something, you were responding to something that Mr. Harris had asked you. In response to him earlier, you also said that there are times, specifically with respect to the relationship with China, when we must periodically “disagree profoundly on human rights.”

I represent a large number of Tibetan Canadians in my riding of Parkdale—High Park and I'm very proud to do so. I'm also very proud of our track record in raising issues of religious freedom and linguistic freedoms. I know that in 2018, in front of the universal periodic review mechanism at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, we specifically recommended that China end prosecution and persecution on the basis of religion or beliefs, including for Tibetan Buddhists.

I'm also aware that we have spoken out at the UN Human Rights Council in stating that the government of China's ongoing persecution of religious and ethnic minorities, particularly in Xinjiang and Tibet, was incompatible with its international obligations as well as its constitution. I know that we've urged authorities to immediately release all individuals detained for exercising their human rights, including their right to freedom of religion and expression, and to protect advocates of linguistic and cultural rights, such as an individual named Tashi Wangchuk, who is perhaps the most celebrated case.

I want to return to something that's come up during the course of the last hour. Could you provide an update to this committee about the utility of speaking up about these very pressing issues, in particular with respect to the People's Republic of China, and update us

about the steps the government is currently taking to promote freedom of religion for Tibetan Buddhists and Uighur Muslims?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Thank you.

First of all, we're deeply concerned about this situation for the Uighurs and the Tibetans. Let's be clear, and let's be on the record with that. As I said to our colleague Mr. Genuis when he was asking the question before, the fact that I have an open dialogue with my Chinese counterpart allows us to raise these issues and keep them alive. We have met three or four times already, and every time that I meet him, there are expectations, because that's Canada.

There's an expectation I'll talk about human rights. There's an expectation I'll talk about Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig, that I'll talk about Schellenberg, that I'll talk about the other cases that are pending in China, and about our concern with respect to minorities in China, and our concern with respect to upholding international law. The fact that we have a dialogue is providing the opportunity to bring these issues to the forefront every time.

As I said, we have a multi-dimensional, complex relationship. The fact that we are engaging means we are allowed to put them on the table, because I can assure you that they know that when they are going to talk to me, these issues are going to be on the table. They come back to the forefront every time we meet.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Stéphane Bergeron): We will go back to Ms. Alleslev, who has five minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Thank you very much.

I have questions on some other statistics, this time on export permits. I'd like to understand the current backlog, by country, from which we are waiting to receive export permits. How many are in the backlog and how is it divided up by country?

Second, I'd like to know, over the last five years for each year, how many were withdrawn by the applicant and at what point, in what average time, again by country.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I'm sure you won't hold it against me if I don't remember that by heart.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Next time when you come, I'll expect you to be able to give it to me by heart.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I'll have a table, Mr. Chair.

Suffice it to say that we process about 7,000 permits annually. We will provide you the information. I just want to give some context.

I became Minister of Foreign Affairs about four months ago. One of my priorities, and the reason you see Mr. Verheul to my left, is that I have been asking him to review the process pretty much in its entirety, because you know I come from an environment in which predictability is key for businesses. I've always said we need to have a system in place so we can provide predictability. If we're going to say no, we better say no early.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Early and consistently, and obviously that's a significant part of a number of businesses in Canada—

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Totally.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: —particularly since their perception is that the approach has changed. Their perception is that even with our allies, export permits are not being approved. Let's get the facts, and then perhaps we can understand what your new process is so that we can communicate more clearly so that our defence partners know what will be approved and in a timely manner, because they are absolutely losing business, and it's having a significant impact.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: We'll be happy to do so.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Thank you very much.

Last but not least, can you give us a feel for the coordination between your department and Citizenship and Immigration around issuing visas at this point in time for countries that are significantly impacted by coronavirus, one of which would be Iran?

I have a number of people in my constituency, in my area, who are concerned that they are still receiving visas. There are not necessarily flights from Iran, but they're going to other countries and then coming into Canada, yet we don't actually know whether they are healthy. What kind of regime are you putting in place and how are we protecting Canadians through that process?

• (1650)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Our duty is to protect the health and safety of Canadians, both at home and abroad. In Iran we're providing consular services to Italy, which was very helpful when we had PS752. I did thank the foreign minister today. I want to put that on the record because it went far beyond what a protector—as we call them in our jargon—would normally do.

We are working with Italy. We are also closely monitoring what's going on, because we understand that flight restrictions can impose certain complexities for people who want to come back. We're doing the same with respect to Italy, by the way.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Are we looking at a whole-of-government approach and at working with the other governments' citizenship and immigration agencies around visas and visitor visas and all that kind of stuff that we're looking—

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Yes, I would say there are many committees are working together at the deputy level.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Thank you.

Do I have any time left? I'm going to hand it over to Mr. Epp.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Stéphane Bergeron): You have about one minute.

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Minister. I appreciate the opportunity to learn more about Canada's place in the world.

I'm going to go back to our relationship with our neighbour to the south. In your opening comments, you said they're our partners and they're our friends, and we're linked by geography. Obviously, as Mr. Verheul well knows, those are massive economic ties.

Specifically now to COVID-19, can you talk about the level of co-operation and coordination that we are dealing with around this virus with our neighbours to the south?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I would say at different levels of governments, our officials are talking daily. The best example of that is the *Grand Princess*. You may have heard the comments of President Trump when he said that Canada responded immediately and well to the demand.

You remember that there were exceptions we made. We had a request from the U.S. State Department to repatriate Canadians on that ship. I said we had the request, and this was a cruise environment. We wanted to protect health and safety and prevent the spread of the virus in North America, so we acted with our U.S. colleagues. We have been with the CDC in Japan almost from day one.

[*Translation*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Stéphane Bergeron): Thank you for your cooperation, Mr. Minister.

We will begin another five-minute round.

Ms. Sahota, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think I'll carry on with that line of questioning. In terms of coordination, we heard quite a bit after President Trump had banned foreign nationals from entering the U.S. There was a response from the European Union and other allies talking about why coordination and the lines of communication are so important when it comes to COVID-19, since it has become a global problem and not just a Canadian problem or an Italian problem or whatnot.

Can you describe to me what that process looks like? How are the countries coordinating? How should they be coordinating? What are the negative effects if they fail to do so?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Thank you very much, and that's where multilateralism is important.

For example, when the first cases of coronavirus started in China, obviously we were in touch with the Chinese authorities to repatriate people. More recently, with respect to South Korea, I called my counterpart to try to understand lessons learned and what may have happened so that we can learn better and implement best practices and lessons learned.

We are talking constantly with countries around the world. We are monitoring the situation, and again I want to give my deepest appreciation to the team. You have seen, for example in the case of Italy, how things evolved so quickly. How can we update Canadians? My main concern as minister is to make sure we provide timely information to Canadians so that they can make their own decisions with respect to travel.

There's a G7 health minister call, and I'm also trying, as the foreign affairs minister of Canada, to lead and create a group where we can update each other on a weekly basis. I did a call with my Italian counterpart today, and there are some lessons learned there.

We will continue to engage. I was supposed to travel more extensively next week, and we are curbing a bit of that. Clearly we'll need to think about how we do diplomacy now by video conference to keep updated about what's going on while reducing risk.

• (1655)

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Are you finding that countries are being forthcoming with lessons learned and things that they should have done, perhaps, and didn't?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Yes. You see when you face—

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Do you have an example?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Italy was a good example today. I was asking how they went from no cases to the situation they had. They explained to me the spread of the virus, the ratio, the percentages, what they did and why they did so. A lot of that is lessons learned, so as we're looking at our own situation, we are learning how you can shove the peak, how you work with different authorities and what kinds of measures are effective.

Some countries have decided to close their borders. That doesn't seem to have been very effective in many regions.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Where? Can you give us some examples of that, and why not?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: You've seen, for example, that when the virus started, some countries immediately decided to close their borders. I think Italy was one of those.

I think now we're looking back and saying there are other measures they took, which were the ones that stopped the spread of the virus. When they identified patient number one, they were able to identify where that person came from, who she is—I don't know if it's male or female—and the interaction, how long that person could have had the virus, what the spread was and where these people went. They were able to identify regions.

All of that learning is obviously very helpful. I can tell you I spoke to my South Korean colleague and my Turkish colleague. I spoke to my Australian colleague this morning. Everyone is very forthcoming. We're trying to gather a group of countries to keep abreast of the next developments and implement measures that will stop the spread of the virus, not only in North America but across the world.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: When it comes to human rights—I'm going off my colleague's question a bit—it's interesting to see that the Conservatives have been opposing Canada's bid to the Security Council and to see the opposition to some of the measures that have been taken to try to get Canada a seat on the Security Council.

What are some of the benefits you foresee when it comes to human rights that Canada may gain from having access to that seat?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I would hope we can all speak with one voice. If you care about human rights, climate change, gender equality in the world, I think you should care that Canada should be on the Security Council. Canada is that positive, progressive voice. I can assure you, whether I was—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Leona Alleslev): You have 15 seconds.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: —in Africa, whether I was in the Baltics more recently, or with the Lima Group, everyone wants that voice to make sure these voices can be heard around the table where peace and security are discussed.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Leona Alleslev): Thank you, Minister.

We are at the two-and-a-half-minute round again.

We will move to our next questioner, Mr. Bergeron.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Minister, I know you told me a few moments ago that, essentially, you rely on facts, but I would be concerned if you told me that you were ignoring hypotheses that might turn out to be less favourable to Canada.

So I come back to the issue of the closure of U.S. borders to flights from Europe. At any point in your discussions since yesterday, have you had the feeling, if not the conviction, that the Americans want us to follow suit eventually?

On another note, put my mind at rest and tell me that you have planned for a scenario where the Americans might close their borders to Canada. How would we react?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Thank you.

I got no indication of that. When the situation is fluid, I often put hypotheses to one side. In this case, the facts are changing hourly around the world. The best way to anticipate these changes is to look at the facts as they are presented to me, rely on science, consult with our public health experts and talk to our counterparts abroad.

To date, in the discussions I have had, there has been no indication of that.

• (1700)

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I understand that you stick to the facts and to what might appear to be the most elementary logic, but I will allow myself to say something that you probably could not say yourself: We know in particular that the current occupant of the White House has set himself apart by behaviour that might appear unpredictable, to say the least, since the beginning of his term. Some people claim that the decision to close the borders completely to flights from all European countries except the United Kingdom is consistent with this type of behaviour, which is unexpected, to say the least. Let's put it that way.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Leona Alleslev): There are only 30 seconds left.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: With the *Grand Princess*, you saw the coordination that took place to repatriate Canadians. It's a great example of how we are working to share information and make sure that everything is done properly to stop the virus from spreading in North America.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Leona Alleslev): Thank you very much.

[English]

Mr. Harris, you have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Chair.

Minister, I'd like to raise the question of the elections in Bolivia, which occurred around the same time as our elections last October.

Canada participated with the OAS in what seems now to have clearly been a failed effort at election monitoring. Fraud was alleged, based on a statistical analysis. For the first time this has proven to be flawed, without substantive evidence, leading to significant demonstrations and eventually the installation of a different government by the military and promises of elections, which haven't taken place, etc. They're now going to take place some time in May.

Canada has been part of that and supported it. Do you think there's a need for a different approach to the elections that are being held in May? We've seen the representatives of the party that Mr. Morales was part of being prevented from running. We've seen various things happening. There seems to be a need for a different sort of election monitoring, and perhaps more parties than the OAS. Is Canada prepared to call for greater involvement of other nations in election monitoring to ensure, as best we can, the greatest possible fairness in the election that should take place in Bolivia?

It's made a big difference to what's going on there now. If we were going to support democracy, should we not be encouraging a broader look at that election and encourage the direct involvement of Canadians in election monitoring there?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Madam Chair, one thing that should concern all of us is the retreat of liberal democracies in many parts of the world. What we've seen recently in South America in particular should be concerning to all of us, whether it's in Venezuela or in the countries that you mentioned. Canada always stands ready to help. I'll take the comments of my honourable colleague if he has any practical suggestions on how we can improve, because one thing we see in our world now is the retreat of people who believe in the principle of liberal democracies and free and fair elections.

That's why, for example, when I called the Lima Group, the reason was obviously to help the Venezuelan people, but also to talk to my colleagues and say that we need to do more. I was actually supposed to be in Panama next week with a number of colleagues to talk about—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Leona Alleslev): Thank you. Sorry, Minister.

Moving on to the next round of questions, we have MP Epp.

Mr. Dave Epp: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Minister, I'm going to go back to our relationship with our southern neighbour. We share the longest unfortified border in the world, I believe. Talking about the COVID-19 virus, along this line you talked about the co-operation around repatriating some Canadians from the cruise ship off San Francisco. We have so many border crossings all along this undefended border.

Let's go back to the level of coordination that we're doing at those border crossings with our American friends.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: In my understanding, Minister Blair has been in regular contact with his U.S. counterpart. Officials are talking because, as you said, with the longest unguarded border in the world, the only way that we can deal with that is by talking to each other. As I said, the *Grand Princess* was a good example of everything being coordinated. We talked to each other. We knew when the ship was coming. We talked with state and local officials. We made sure that the disembarkation would be done in an orderly fashion.

• (1705)

Mr. Dave Epp: Aside from that cruise ship, I'm going to go specifically to the whole border all the way across the country. Are we tracking? What are we doing for protocol across that border now, specifically in relation to COVID-19?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: That's what I was saying. Officials are talking, I would think, more than regularly with respect to all the measures that are being taken.

As you know, yesterday some measures were announced by the president. My understanding is that they come into effect at midnight tomorrow. People have been talking. Our ambassador in Washington has been in touch with U.S. officials, and we are always talking to each other. The common goal that we have is to find out how to stop the spread of the virus.

So far, if you compare North America with Europe and other parts of the world and if you look at the number of cases in the population, for the measures that have been implemented on both sides of the border—we're both sovereign nations, but we have relied on health officials and the World Health Organization—you would say that we have implemented the right measures to protect Canadians.

Mr. Dave Epp: Exactly.

I'll pick up on the American move to block or to cancel flights from Europe and my Bloc colleague's questioning. I have the fortune to live in Leamington, which is actually south of Detroit. For international travel, I actually often use Detroit as my international airport. Leamington is also a town with a large diaspora of Italians.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Yes, I've been there.

Mr. Dave Epp: What are we doing at that border crossing to track and to monitor? I think you said you were not aware of people coming in from Europe through American ports or coming into Canada or the other way around. Are we tracking anything along those lines?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: As I said to our colleague earlier, I have to work on the basis of facts. The measures that have been announced by the United States have not yet taken effect. There's no indication of the type of flow that you're talking about. We are talking with U.S. officials and will continue to talk and to take all the measures that are necessary to protect Canadians both here and abroad.

That's why I talked to my Italian colleague this morning—well, at lunch time. It was to make sure I understand what the impact was for him. My question was also about how effective the border closures were, because they had to take measures.

We had a number of discussions. That's the best thing we can do to protect Canadians. Those who are watching at home understand we've been doing that 24-7.

Mr. Dave Epp: You referenced Italy's monitoring of individual cases. That was actually very effective in reducing the spread, possibly even more than border closures. What is Canada doing right now?

You speak of measures. Are we tracking that? Could this committee receive some data on that tracking and on those measures and reports as this unfolds?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I appreciate your question. For Canadians who are watching at home, we have done almost daily press briefings. If you wanted further details about some of the measures, the Minister of Public Safety would be the one to provide you with the types of details you're looking for.

Just as we did in the Iranian crash—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Leona Alleslev): You have 30 seconds.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: —we have been providing daily information to Canadians. We understand that in times like these, we need to inform. We need to reassure. We need to be forthcoming with Canadians. We'll continue to do so.

Mr. Dave Epp: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Thank you, sir.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Leona Alleslev): MP Spengemann is next.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, I'd like to take you back to the feminist international assistance policy.

You've spoken recently at CORIM, which is the Conseil des relations internationales de Montréal. You've indicated that you're interested in developing a white paper on the feminist foreign policy. I wonder if you could take a moment just to elaborate for Canadians why that policy is important, but I think more importantly, what we're seeing in terms of its impact now.

There's some very good messaging coming out. For those of us who are engaged in parliamentary diplomacy, the policy is known among our counterparts, but maybe there's more to say to Canadians and to people abroad about the importance of this policy.

Also, what is the frontier? What are the boundaries we're trying to push in the next phase of this policy?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Thank you very much for that question. Yes, when I did my speech on foreign policy, I did say that we would do a white paper on our feminist foreign policy.

The reason is that around the world people see the impact on the ground and they want us to document that and to engage civil society as well. I think all parliamentarians can certainly endorse our approach.

We have implemented a number of measures. For example, when we appointed Ambassador Jacqui O'Neill as our ambassador for women, peace and security, this was transformative. She's going around the world to provide positive examples of what a feminist policy can do around the world.

We had an earlier question that asked what concrete actions we are taking. Let me be clear to Canadians who are watching: This is more than a slogan. This is really about demonstrable impacts on the ground. We will provide that in a white paper.

Many nations have been asking us to give them some examples. There's the contingent of women we sent policing in Mali, for example. The way we have been policing has been making a difference, as well as the way we have sent women on peacekeeping forces, the Elsie initiative and the Vancouver principles. All of these things we have been doing.

People around the world look at these things. Canada is really leading by example. Hopefully we can engage other nations through that white paper. We understand that Canada alone cannot necessarily transform all, but we can do it by sharing and engaging others to speak with one voice with us about the power of engaging women and of gender equality in the world.

• (1710)

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Minister, in post-conflict settings, presumably you see large numbers of households that are headed by a single woman. The husband may have been killed or displaced or have fled, and there are multiple children, so economic empowerment at the micro level is equally as important as security considerations.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I would say so. I always say you need security to bring stability to bring prosperity.

I'll give you the example of Mali. I was with the President of Mali. Because of the conflict, 900 schools have been closed. You're losing, potentially, a generation. Those who are the most impacted are young girls and women. When the area is unsafe, they cannot go out. Girls don't go to school because they've been closed, so it's really creating a deplorable environment. That's why we're there with MINUSMA. We're trying to make a difference on the ground, and we'll continue to do so.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Minister, I want to take the remainder of the time to ask you about Africa and Canada-Africa relations.

Africa's a vast economic, cultural and social space, with very heterogeneous, very different regions. What do you see as some priority areas of engagement? You mentioned Mali. There are many other opportunities. Which ones are high on your list in terms of what you're thinking about? There are all sorts of opportunities: economic development, democracy development, security, business-to-business partnerships.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Thank you for asking me that. I think I went to Africa three times in three months. Now with the coronavirus, my plan for more visits might be curbed.

Yes, we went to North Africa. I was in Morocco to strengthen our relationship. I went with the Prime Minister to the African Union. We were in Senegal. We were in Mali.

We were there to learn and engage. Many of the African nations, whether or not they share la Francophonie with us, want us to partner more closely.

What Canada has been talking about is how we can have a positive impact on security. How can we provide the building block of stability in institutions and governance to make sure we provide economic security?

Our goal at the United Nations is about economic security, because we understand that until and unless you provide economic security—

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Leona Alleslev): You have 30 seconds, Minister.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: You want to empower people. I think I saw statistics that six of the 10 youngest populations in the world are in Africa, if my memory serves me well. When you say that half of the population in 2050 will be in Africa, these people will want to have an education, they will want to have work and they will want to make a contribution. Think about the power of these women in Africa if we push for gender equality.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Leona Alleslev): That's time. Thank you very much.

MP Genuis is next.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm going to try to clean up a few of what I think are loose ends from the discussion in this final round. I feel that I need to start by responding to the outrageous misstatement of our position by Ms. Sahota.

I want you to know, Minister, that our party would love to see Canada on the UN Security Council. What we're concerned about is some of the decisions that seem to be made with an eye to getting that seat, such as the decision of your government to vote in favour of a North Korean-sponsored resolution that singled out Israel. We haven't seen resolutions put forward on other human rights issues, yet Canada broke from what had been our pattern and voted in favour of that resolution.

I just want to drill down. If Canada is successful—and we hope Canada is successful—can you commit to us that you will champion substantial UN reform from the Security Council, that you will make it a priority that the UN address some of these perverse out-

comes, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia being on the women's rights commission? Under your leadership, will Canada be a champion for substantial reform at the UN if Canada has that position?

• (1715)

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: First of all, I'd like to thank you for being a champion of our seat on the UN Security Council. I look forward to your coming with me and championing Canada around the world so we can work together to make sure we get the seat and bring the positive voice and the reforms you would like to see.

From the beginning, we have seen that reform is needed. We need an institution that fits the purpose, that fits the challenges of the 21st century. We have been engaged. As you know, we're the chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, and already we are trying to make a difference there to make sure that we provide more stability and predictability and engage in stability in these missions, not only on the military side but also in the need to build civil society and institutions.

I think we've been saying that. If you have some suggestions, I'm sure that we'd be willing to listen to you, but yes, we intend to bring a reform agenda with other countries. I think many have spoken already in the UN to say there are some voices that need to be heard a bit louder than they are today.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Minister. We'll hold your feet to the fire on that. Thank you for saying that. I appreciate it.

On the issue of Sri Lanka that Mr. Fonseca brought up—and I appreciate his raising it—I want to be more specific, because this is where the rubber hits the road.

I asked the Prime Minister in the House on February 26 if we would join the U.S. in applying sanctions to the Sri Lankan army chief, Shavendra Silva. I didn't get an answer from the Prime Minister at the time.

Again, I think statements matter. Statements of concern are important. You said Canada is a leader in responding to human rights in Sri Lanka. Let's put our money where our mouth is. If I look at the Magnitsky sanctions list, there are no officials in Sri Lanka who have been listed. Are you considering listing Mr. Silva and others involved?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I think you would say that there are many ways to do diplomacy. One is to speak up and speak out, and this is what I've been doing. We have been engaging, I would say. Colleagues have brought this issue up. You have brought this issue up in the House. I think we have made our concern.... We're deeply concerned about this situation. We've made our voice heard. One tool of diplomacy is to make sure you call it out the way you see it, and that's what we've done with respect to Sri Lanka.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Again, I'm not hearing an answer on the specific question about the sanctioning of Mr. Silva. We'll have an opportunity to follow up on that later.

There's another issue I wanted to raise as well. A report came out today from the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians. There are some really damning comments from that committee, which is chaired by Mr. McGuinty, a Liberal MP. The committee raises significant concerns about foreign interference in Canada. It says, "The threat to Canada from foreign interference is increasing. The perpetrators have become more brazen and their activities more entrenched." The report is also critical of the government's response.

I want to ask you specifically if you are prepared to expel diplomats who are involved in foreign interference and if you have expelled any diplomats involved in foreign interference.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I am concerned about foreign interference, as we should all be as parliamentarians, because we're here to uphold democracy.

As you know, the rapid response mechanism was the outcome of the G7. I was at StratCom, the Strategic Communications organization, recently in Latvia to understand hybrid threats.

We would expect any diplomats—and I'm talking to the camera now—who are in Canada to abide by Canadian law and regulation, and we will—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Can you tell them if they—

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I'm saying that we expect every diplomat operating in Canada to do that.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Leona Alleslev): Thank you very much, Minister.

We have two minutes left. The Liberals have graciously given a minute each to Mr. Bergeron and Mr. Harris.

Mr. Bergeron.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I thank my colleagues from the Liberal Party.

Mr. Minister, today we passed a motion to provide consular services to Raif Badawi. The Saudis are refusing to allow Canada to grant consular services to Mr. Badawi because he is not a Canadian citizen.

In a nutshell, what will today's motion change?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Badawi's case is close to all Quebecers' hearts. His name is one that every family in Quebec and Canada knows.

We will continue to take all possible steps and consider all options. I met with his wife today for about 15 minutes. We are your allies, I hope, in this process.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Yes, absolutely.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Whenever we can, we will champion Mr. Badawi's rights.

This year's G20 meeting will be chaired by Saudi Arabia. I often say that we should separate the presiding country from the event, but this will give us one more opportunity...

• (1720)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Leona Alleslev): Thank you very much, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Harris, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you.

Mr. Spengemann brought up the question of a white paper on foreign policy, which I think would be very valuable in letting Canadians know exactly how their government sees foreign policy in a coherent manner.

Do you have a timetable for such a paper? When can we expect to see it and have a look at what you have to say?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Let me correct something. It's our feminist foreign policy, the white paper. It's on that particular aspect of our foreign policy, because this is where we wanted to provide best practices, examples, and lessons learned to other colleagues around the world who want to implement and follow Canada's example.

Mr. Jack Harris: What about foreign policy generally? There's been a call for foreign policy review by various people since there hasn't been one in some time. Is that on the agenda as well?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: I would say we have a lot of things on our plate these days. You can appreciate that. For the time being, there is no plan for that review, because we have to deal now with a number of emergencies in supporting Canadians abroad and at home.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Leona Alleslev): Thank you very much, Minister.

Thank you for giving so generously of your time over this almost two hours to talk about pretty much anything and everything with respect to foreign affairs.

Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne: Thank you for inviting me.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Leona Alleslev): I will now suspend as we go in camera and deal with committee business.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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