



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

43rd PARLIAMENT, 2nd SESSION

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 031

Thursday, April 29, 2021

Chair: Mr. Sven Spengemann



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• (1530)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.)): Dear colleagues, welcome to the 31st meeting of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

[*English*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), the committee will proceed to an examination of the main estimates. Before us today we have votes 1, 5, 10, 15, 20, L25 and L30 under the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development; vote 1 under the International Development Research Centre; and vote 1 under the International Joint Commission (Canadian Section), which were all referred to the committee on February 25.

I would also inform members at this time that we will not vote on the main estimates today, but rather will do so after the appearance of both ministers.

[*Translation*]

To ensure an orderly meeting, I encourage all participants to mute their microphones when they're not speaking, and to address comments through the chair.

When you have 30 seconds remaining in your questioning time or testimony, I will signal you with a piece of paper.

Additionally, as always, interpretation services are available through the globe icon at the bottom of your screens.

[*English*]

I will now welcome to the committee Minister Gould, the Minister of International Development, as well as the following team of officials from Global Affairs Canada: Leslie MacLean, deputy minister of international development; Elissa Golberg, assistant deputy minister of strategic policy; and Paul Thoppil, assistant deputy minister, Asia-Pacific.

[*Translation*]

Also from Global Affairs Canada, we have Caroline Leclerc, Assistant Deputy Minister, Partnerships for Development Innovation; Peter MacDougall, Assistant Deputy Minister, Global Issues and Development; Anick Ouellette, Assistant Deputy Minister and Chief Financial Officer, Corporate Planning, Finance and Information Technology; and Annie Boyer, Director General and Deputy Chief Financial Officer, Financial Planning and Management.

Madam Minister, welcome.

You have five to seven minutes for your opening remarks.

You have the floor.

[*English*]

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of International Development): That's great. Thank you so much, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. I am very pleased to be here today to speak to you about the main estimates as they relate to Global Affairs Canada's international development portfolio. I'm very pleased to be joined by so many members of our senior leadership team at GAC.

It has now been over one year since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and it has not been an easy journey for our Canadian or developing country partners. We recognize that the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic have resulted in increased levels of poverty and social inequality. In fact, the World Bank has estimated that between 119 million and 124 million people might be pushed into extreme poverty due to COVID-19, reversing development gains earned over the last two decades.

Since February 2020, Canada has committed more than \$2.5 billion in international assistance in response specifically to COVID-19. These funds have been directed, for example, towards life-saving assistance to deliver emergency health care; increased disease surveillance and infection prevention; provision of water, sanitation and hygiene; and to support continuity of education for children through programs run by our CSO partners in countries like Afghanistan and Colombia. Over half of these funds, more than \$1.3 billion, have facilitated equitable access to COVID-19 medical support measures.

Throughout this global crisis, Canada's feminist international assistance policy has proven to be a robust and strategic framework, focused as it is on those actions that support the poorest and most vulnerable populations. In the midst of the pandemic we have continued to implement our core commitments and to achieve results and impact. For example, in the 2019-20 fiscal year, 65 million children were immunized through Canada's support for Gavi, the vaccine alliance; 3.2 million women were provided sexual and reproductive health and rights services through the Her Voice, Her Choice initiative; more than 300 women's rights organizations were supported through the women's voice and leadership initiative; over five million entrepreneurs, farmers and smallholders received financial or business development services; 11,005 peacekeepers were trained to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse; and we continued to make progress toward our overall commitment to direct 95% of bilateral international development assistance to initiatives that target or integrate gender equality by 2021-22. These initiatives and others were strategic and targeted to what was needed most by the communities we support. They made a considerable difference in the context of the pandemic, reinforcing resilience and our wider sustainable development efforts.

Before I conclude, I would like to turn to the main estimates.

To assist with the pandemic response, the Public Health Agency of Canada transferred \$705 million in 2020-21 in new funding for international partnerships to Global Affairs Canada to support access by developing countries to COVID-19 vaccines and therapeutics. This includes the procurement and effective delivery and administration of vaccines and therapeutics.

The Public Health Agency of Canada will be transferring \$75 million later this year in additional support for this pillar, to be disbursed in 2021-22.

Additional funding provided to Global Affairs Canada in 2020-21 to support our international assistance response to COVID-19 included \$120 million to support the access to COVID-19 tools accelerator, ACT-A; and \$400 million to support the humanitarian and development response to COVID-19.

• (1535)

[Translation]

More recently, in Budget 2021, the government committed an additional \$375 million to support Canada's international response to COVID-19 in 2021-2022. These resources will also be allocated to the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator partnership. These investments have been critical to our international assistance efforts to respond to the acute health impacts of the pandemic, and will contribute to supporting a sustainable and equitable recovery for all.

This has been an unprecedented year. Our government is committed to implementing the Feminist International Assistance Policy, and we are working hard to address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through these efforts, we are achieving results and generating positive impacts, helping to build a more peaceful, inclusive, and prosperous world for all.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to answering your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Minister.

We are now moving into our first round of questions. These are six-minute periods. The first one is for Mr. Genuis.

[English]

Mr. Genuis, please go ahead. You have the floor.

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

Thank you, Minister.

In its last report, this committee denounced the direction and control regime and called on the government to immediately reform it. We unanimously recognized that direction and control requirements impede important international development work and perpetuate colonial structures of donor control.

Senator Omidvar's Bill S-222 proposes to replace direction and control with a system that emphasizes resource accountability. As we all know, however, private member's bills generally face a long and uncertain journey, even when they have wide support.

I'd like to ask, then, whether the minister agrees with this committee that direction and control is an impediment to effective international development work and should be reformed. What is the government's view of Bill S-222? And is the government contemplating their own legislation on this?

Minister, in the interests of managing my time, I'll give you two minutes to respond on direction and control before I go on to other topics.

Go ahead.

Hon. Karina Gould: Okay, thank you, Mr. Genuis.

We have been engaging with civil society organizations on direction and control over the past year as well.

I would like you to know that any reforms to the Income Tax Act fall under the Minister of Finance. That being said, my department has been engaging with civil society partners here in Canada to better understand their concerns and has been liaising with the Department of Finance on this issue.

Amendments to this act, however, really are in the purview of the Minister of Finance. We completely understand where CSOs are coming from, though, and look forward to continuing to engage with them in a constructive manner.

• (1540)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Minister.

I have two follow-up questions, then.

Does the government as a whole recognize that the direction and control system requires reform? Secondly, does the government support Senator Omidvar's bill?

Hon. Karina Gould: Again, thank you.

These are conversations that are ongoing between civil society partners, our department and the Department of Finance, as the Department of Finance is the lead on the Income Tax Act, as I mentioned.

I've certainly heard from Senator Omidvar on this and have had a conversation with her, and I shared her feelings with the Minister of Finance.

I would turn this question over to Caroline Leclerc, who has been engaging in these conversations with civil society partners, if you'd like to hear from her.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Minister, I would prefer to use the time to hear from you, but if the department wants to follow up in writing, I would welcome that as well.

This has been an issue for a long time. I'm glad it's on the table, and I hope it will move from conversation to action on the part of government. I'd like to now transition, however, to another topic.

When it comes to delivering development spending, the budget refers to trusted humanitarian partners. It does not, though, make specific reference to the inclusion of Canadian organizations and in particular to small and medium-sized organizations. I routinely hear frustrations from the Canadian development sector that the government is sending an increasing share of development dollars to large foreign multilateral organizations, some of which then actually subcontract to Canadian organizations, but only after they've taken a portion off the top.

Are you hearing these concerns from the development sector as well, and what is your plan to address those concerns?

Hon. Karina Gould: Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

Yes, our government has been hearing these concerns since we took office back in 2015. I would just note that since we came into office, we've actually increased the amount we provide to Canadian civil society organizations by more than \$300 million annually. In 2014-15, the previous government provided \$652 million to Canadian partners. By 2019-20, it was already at \$950 million.

We are, then, listening to Canadian civil society partners. We've increased the share that goes to Canadian CSOs from what under the previous government was less than 19% to about 25% now. This is a commitment I continue to work with the department on, to make sure that we are supporting Canadian civil society organizations that provide valuable work right around the world.

In addition, we have been working with small and medium-sized organizations on a \$100-million window to enable them to access funds through the department. We've already put out two calls. If you look at our website, we are putting out an additional call, which will be launched very shortly, for the next window for small and medium-sized organizations.

We have heard Canadian CSOs, have listened and have significantly increased the amount of money we provide to Canadian CSOs, particularly when you compare us with the previous Conservative government.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Minister. I want to get one more question in before the end, although I do want to note—and this was a frustration last time—that we heard a lot of reference to dollars in nominal terms rather than in real terms or as a percentage of gross national income. Our overall aid levels are down as a percentage of gross national income, even though the government constantly wants to point to the fact that they're up in nominal terms, but the nominal dollars are not the essential issue.

Minister, just coming back on the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, something that we've discussed before, I know that last time you were reluctant to answer questions about it because, you said, the governor of that bank is the Minister of Finance. I found it curious and still do that you are the governor on all development banks except the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. This might seem to me to imply a recognition that what the AIIB is doing is not development.

Could you explain why you are not the governor of the AIIB, but you are the governor in the case of every other development bank?

• (1545)

Hon. Karina Gould: I might just go back to your opening there, because your factually incorrect. The ODA as a percentage of GNI is at 0.31 after the last year, which is the highest it's been since 2012, and on a volume basis, we have been increasing it since we came into government in 2015. In fact, the previous Conservative government froze the aid budget in 2010 and began cutting it on an annual basis starting in 2012.

When it comes to the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, as I mentioned, it is the Minister of Finance. As I said the last time, these are machinery-of-government decisions, so I couldn't tell you why it's the Minister of Finance and not the Minister of International Development. I would encourage you to direct your questions with regard to the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank to the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: But it is—

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Genuis. That's your time, sir. We'll have to go on in the interest of time.

The next round goes to Mr. Fonseca, please.

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

Thank you, Minister. Thank you for your remarks and for being a champion and an advocate for women and girls so that they have control over their bodies, their health and their future and for challenging power imbalances.

Minister, the feminist international assistance policy set important goals for our international assistance. Ninety-five percent of Canada's initiatives are supposed to target or integrate gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls by 2021-22.

From your opening remarks, could you expand on how we're progressing on that? Are we on track to meet that goal?

Hon. Karina Gould: For the past two years—and it was just confirmed this week by the OECD DAC once again—Canada is the top donor when it comes to gender equality in the world. This is very exciting, I think, and it is a really positive reflection of what we've been able to achieve with the feminist international assistance policy since its launch in 2017, which was highly informed by the Canadian development sector as well as partners right around the world.

We are indeed on track to meeting our target of having 95% of our official development assistance focused on having a gender equality component to it by this year. We will continue to have gender equality form the core, the basis and the heart of the work that we are doing, because we know that gender equality improves the lives of everyone. It's something that we are very proud of.

We are also on track with the Her Voice, Her Choice initiative, which committed \$650 million back in 2016 to sexual and reproductive health and rights around the world. We know, again, that if we're going to do development effectively, we have to include the full suite of women's rights. That includes a woman's right to bodily autonomy and to the choice over her future, if and when she marries, and if and how many children she decides to have. That is extremely important to us, and it's something that we will continue to work on to support women around the world and continue to advocate for.

Mr. Peter Fonseca: Minister, that's excellent. Thank you for that progress report.

We've heard from witnesses over the past few months at our committees the claim that COVID-19 will set international development progress back by decades. We know that the remaining needs are great and that challenges like climate change, women's rights and economic empowerment of the most vulnerable have not gone away.

Can you please share how your work has adapted to continue to address these challenges during this difficult time of the pandemic?

Hon. Karina Gould: Thank you, Peter.

As I said in my opening remarks, the number of people who are estimated to go into extreme poverty is astronomical. The number who are expected to go into acute food insecurity is doubling. We're seeing this play out on the ground right now.

While I mentioned the \$2.5 billion in additional resources that we've mobilized for COVID-19, part of that is to address the medical challenge, but part of that is also to address the humanitarian and development needs that we're seeing on the ground this year.

This is in addition to our base ODA funding and programming that is already working to address poverty and inequalities around the world. We remain committed to our primary objectives and the feminist international assistance policy.

One of the things that was the most important for me when we look back a year ago was that any of our responses to COVID-19 be in addition to what we were already doing. None of the challenges that you mentioned go away because of COVID-19. In fact, they are exacerbated.

I am very proud that Canada has mobilized additional resources to address COVID-19, as well as their secondary and tertiary impacts. This is something that we have been encouraging other countries to do as well. Whether it's keeping girls in school to help them pursue their education and a bright future, or providing critical nutrition interventions, routine immunizations for children, access to sexual and reproductive health services, or agricultural inputs for low-income farmers in different parts of the world, these issues have not gone away. They've been exacerbated. Canada has remained committed and steadfast to our development and humanitarian programming while we have also responded to COVID-19.

• (1550)

Mr. Peter Fonseca: Minister, again, thank you.

I know you focused on the numbers and what we're doing in terms of foreign aid. Can you tell us a little bit more about where the focus has been? How do we compare and where do we see others around the world in terms of their aid?

Hon. Karina Gould: A lot of different countries have different focuses. Certainly for Canada our feminist international assistance policy puts gender equality at the heart of what we do.

About half of our development funding goes towards health interventions. We made the Thrive commitment at the Women Deliver event in June of 2019 that commits us to reach \$1.4 billion in annual funding for global health. Half of that will go to SRHR and the neglected areas of SRHR. This was an important commitment towards SDG 4 to really ensure that we are setting ourselves a stable path towards 2030.

We remain very committed to fighting climate change, as well as humanitarian assistance. We provide about \$800 million a year in humanitarian assistance.

Those are just some of the areas where we focus. Canada has a long history in international development and a lot of competencies in a lot of different areas.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Fonseca.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, welcome to the committee. I will now turn the floor over to you for six minutes.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair. It is a pleasure to be with you today.

I thank the minister for appearing today. I think it is important. Taxpayers expect us to contribute internationally. That requires, first and foremost, transparency about what we actually do.

I would start with a simple question: what is the total amount allocated to your department?

Hon. Karina Gould: Hello, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe. It is always a pleasure to see you.

I believe the amount is \$6.9 billion. Ms. Anick Ouellette could confirm this.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: That seems to be the right number, as far as I can see.

How much of this amount goes to development assistance in general?

Hon. Karina Gould: Ms. Ouellette, can you answer this question?

Ms. Anick Ouellette (Assistant Deputy Minister and Chief Financial Officer, Corporate Planning, Finance and Information Technology, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Certainly. Thank you for the question.

A large part of the \$6.7 billion budget is allocated to development assistance in general. I would say it's about \$4.2 billion.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Ms. Ouellette.

At present, approximately what percentage of GDP is spent on development assistance?

Hon. Karina Gould: Last year it was 0.31%. This was recently announced by the OECD Development Assistance Committee.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: It went from 0.27% to 0.31%, but one of the reasons for this is that GDP has shrunk. Am I wrong?

Hon. Karina Gould: Can you repeat your question?

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: This is due to the fact that GDP has shrunk. So it's not necessarily new funding. The percentage has gone up because GDP has shrunk, hasn't it?

Hon. Karina Gould: It also includes an increase in the total volume. Ms. Ouellette could elaborate on that, but I think about \$600 million was added last year.

• (1555)

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Okay. So that's not what has increased the proportion of GDP devoted to it by 0.04 percentage points. Thank you very much.

I would point out that 0.31% is still lower than the percentage under the Harper government, I believe. That was just a quick comment.

Madam Minister, Budget 2021 proposes to provide \$527 million in 2021-2022 to Global Affairs Canada, the Department of National Defence, Communications Security Establishment Canada and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service to extend Canada's Middle East strategy for another year.

Of this amount, how many millions of dollars go to your department?

Hon. Karina Gould: I think it's about \$700 million for this fiscal year, but that doesn't include the \$1.7 billion amount that was added last year.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: No, you misunderstood me, Madam Minister.

In Budget 2021, there is \$527 million. This is one of the budget's themes.

Hon. Karina Gould: You are talking about Canada's Middle East strategy.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Yes, exactly.

Hon. Karina Gould: All right.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: How much of this funding goes to your department?

Hon. Karina Gould: My understanding is that it's \$67 million, but Ms. Ouellette can confirm that.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: So it's \$67 million out of \$527 million. So which department gets the better part of the \$527 million?

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: All right.

Madam Minister, does it not make you uncomfortable that the largest budget item in the "Building a Safer, Resilient and Equitable World" category of Budget 2021 is predominantly administered by the National Defence?

Ms. Leslie MacLean (Deputy Minister of International Development, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Madam Minister, allow me to comment.

I believe that the bulk of this funding will go to the Department of National Defence.

Hon. Karina Gould: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, that's an excellent question, because Canada's Middle East strategy is primarily funded from our existing budgetary reserves.

[*English*]

I'll continue in English because I'm not getting the words right.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Yes, go ahead. That's fine.

[English]

Hon. Karina Gould: Basically, when it comes to the Middle East strategy, the majority of the development funds come from our existing reference levels. This is in addition to what we are already providing. But for National Defence, they don't have that money in their existing reference levels. They are getting it for this additional year.

We already have the bulk of the funding. The \$77 million is in addition to what we already have.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I understand, but this is a new initiative and it's said to be about building a safer, resilient and equitable world, when it's the National Defence that gets the bulk of the funding.

Hon. Karina Gould: This is not a new initiative; it is an extension.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: All right. We will not dwell on this, Madam Minister.

Do I have enough time left to ask a quick question, Mr. Chair?

[English]

Mr. Peter Fonseca: Mr. Chair, I'm not getting translation.

[Translation]

The Chair: You have approximately one minute left, but there seems to be a problem with interpretation. I will stop the clock.

[English]

Does everybody have interpretation?

Monsieur Fonseca, are you picking up interpretation?

Mr. Peter Fonseca: I just heard a little now.

The Chair: Okay, let's assume it works.

[Translation]

You may continue, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe. You have about one minute left.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: All right, thank you.

Canada is currently experiencing the consequences of multiple disastrous global crises. I am not telling you anything new. We hear of potential famines in some 20 countries, which would affect many people, especially women and children. We had made progress over the last 25 years in human development, but as we know, we have lost a lot of ground and are now falling behind. There are so many issues that need to be addressed, but I do not see any funding for this in the budget.

How is Canada going to achieve its crucial international development goals if there is no increase in funding for international development in this budget? That is what annoys me.

Hon. Karina Gould: The budget provides for new investments of around \$700 million this year. This includes \$375 million to re-

spond to the COVID-19 crisis, \$165 million to provide humanitarian assistance and \$300 million to respond to the Rohingya crisis.

• (1600)

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Do you think these \$375 million are enough? Do you think the COVID-19 crisis is over?

Hon. Karina Gould: That's an excellent question.

This is a huge crisis, but we have already given \$1.7 billion in the last year to fight it. In addition, \$940 million has been provided to the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator. Canada ranks fourth globally for its financial assistance in response to COVID-19.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Minister. I have to stop you there for the time being. You will no doubt have the opportunity to come back to this point later.

[English]

I will now give the floor to Ms. McPherson, please, for six minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the minister for joining us today, and her colleagues from Global Affairs Canada, many of whom I've had the privilege of working with in the past.

Minister, you won't be at all surprised to hear me say that I was disappointed by the numbers we saw in the budget. We've had many discussions. I think you know that while I appreciate the feminist international assistance policy—indeed, I contributed to it before I was elected as a member of Parliament—the words and the announcements we hear just don't match the ambitions of our budget for international development and for Canada's role and obligations around the world.

I'm going to ask a few questions. First, I'm going to start with some of the development objectives that I think may have been neglected within Global Affairs.

Canada is currently suffering, like the rest of the world, from multiple dire global crises. There's rising poverty. There's a climate crisis. There is the COVID-19 pandemic. We know this has deeply impacted women and girls. We know it has deeply impacted marginalized communities. We know we are further away from achieving the sustainable development goals, we are further away from achieving what we had put forward as objectives within the feminist international assistance policy, and we know that in the last 25 weeks we've lost 25 years of human development progress. There will be incredibly long-lasting consequences. We've seen this with all of the studies we've done within the international human rights subcommittee and within the foreign affairs committee.

How will we be able to invest in some of those critical objectives we've identified when there have been no increases, or very small increases, in our international development efforts?

Hon. Karina Gould: Thank you very much, Ms. McPherson. Of course, I always welcome your input. You have a lot of experience in development and it's great to work with you on this file.

When it comes to the budget, I just want to clarify a couple of things because I think you raise some really good points.

There was an increase of \$1.4 billion in the ODA budget on top of the existing budget in Budget 2021. This is in addition to the \$1.7 billion in new resources we mobilized last fiscal year that went to, on the one hand, fighting COVID-19, with \$940 million for the ACT A process, making Canada the fourth largest contributor in the world to the ACT A. This I think is something that is extremely important in the global fight against COVID-19. It also included \$400 million in additional dollars for humanitarian and development programming last year.

I agree that there is huge challenge around the world, but we have mobilized significant new resources in the last year alone. This year alone it's \$700 million in additional dollars to fight many crises around the world.

Ms. Heather McPherson: With all due respect, Minister, realistically we are hearing the United Nations' call that we are facing famines of biblical proportions. We are looking at an extremely long tail on COVID-19. Yes, there was \$1.4 billion, but in the current budget going forward there's only \$375 million. It isn't going to be sufficient. People are going to die and we are lacking ambition.

I just feel like, in a way, that what you're trying to say is that this pandemic is behind us, when we know from everything we've heard that the impacts of this pandemic on low and middle-income countries are just beginning. It is just starting; it is not ending, so why is our ambition getting smaller?

• (1605)

Hon. Karina Gould: At no point am I saying that the pandemic is behind us. To the contrary, we announced \$10 million to the Red Cross just on Monday for the response in India. This is very much a live issue. However, we also need to mobilize other donors.

Canada is the tenth largest donor in the world, but we're the fourth largest donor to the ACT A. There are others that also need to step up, and we're doing that work, encouraging others to step up as well.

When it comes to food security, we've contributed new resources to the World Food Programme and to Nutrition International this past year to help with their efforts. We've increased our humanitarian funding by \$165 million this year. We contribute every year \$800 million to humanitarian crises because we recognize that there are these challenges around the world.

I agree with you. This is a very difficult world with lots of different crises. That's why Canada is responding. In this budget, we extended the Middle East strategy, we extended the Rohingya strategy and we extended our response in Venezuela as well.

Ms. Heather McPherson: It's all with insufficient motivation, all with insufficient ambition.

With all due respect, I have to say that our development assistance is still far below the 0.7% that was a Canadian target, a Canadian initiative. We are still so far below that. We are still well below international commitments and global standards.

Saying that Canada is doing enough is not sufficient. I think what Canadians need from their Minister of International Development is a commitment to push the government of the day further, to push the government to do more and to have greater ambition. We're depending on you to be our voice at the cabinet table to ensure that Canada is doing what needs to be done around the world, and we're not seeing it.

We're not seeing the funding that we want to see in terms of humanitarian care. We're not seeing the funding we wanted to see in terms of support for women and girls for our education initiatives.

Where is the \$450 million promised in the 2019 federal election platform for education for refugee and displaced children? We didn't see that money in the budget.

The Chair: Ms. McPherson, I apologize. You're just about out of time.

We'll give the minister a brief chance to respond, and then we'll have to move on to the next round.

Minister.

Hon. Karina Gould: Ms. McPherson, again with all due respect, in the last year alone we mobilized over \$2 billion in new funding. When you consider what our base budget is, that is a significant increase in one year. I fight every single day for the poorest and the most vulnerable around the world and I'm very proud that we've been able to mobilize those additional resources.

At a time when many of our peer countries are cutting their assistance budget, not only have we been able to maintain and protect it, we've actually been able to continue to grow it. I will continue to fight for that, but we have mobilized additional resources. Canada has stepped up, and when it comes to the fight against COVID-19, we've been holistic in our response.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Ms. McPherson.

We'll now go to our second round. These are shorter allocations. The first one is a five-minute round.

Mr. Diotte, please.

Mr. Kerry Diotte (Edmonton Griesbach, CPC): Minister, thanks for being here.

You said gender equality is at the heart of everything the Canadian government does, and that's admirable, so I want to talk a bit about another important thing: human rights.

The 2021 estimates state that nearly \$154 million will be going to help provide sovereign loans to foreign countries. What countries would be eligible to receive this funding and what steps are being taken to ensure that countries that abuse human rights can't receive the funding?

Hon. Karina Gould: Certainly. Thank you for the question.

The sovereign loans program is a new tool we have in the Government of Canada that was provided through Budget 2018. We are currently in negotiations with countries, so I can't talk about it until those conversations come forward.

We base all our official development assistance in line with Canadian values. That is one of the objectives in the criteria of the ODA, and that is something that our officials take into account when they are entering into any agreement with different organizations.

Perhaps I can also just say that our feminist international assistance policy obviously has gender equality at the heart of it, but it also takes human rights into account, and we take a human rights-based approach in all the work that we do.

Mr. Kerry Diotte: Thank you.

You mentioned Canadian values, so this is another question along that same vein.

Last year, UNRWA acknowledged that hateful content had been present in its educational materials for about eight months but professed that this was the result of an error and that error had been rectified by November 2020.

Are you now confident that today, in April 2021, Canadian and UN values of tolerance, non-violence and peacemaking are consistently emphasized in UNRWA schools?

• (1610)

Hon. Karina Gould: Thank you for the important question, Mr. Diotte.

As you know, UNRWA provides education to over 500,000 vulnerable Palestinian children in five different areas. Canada has been a long-standing partner of UNRWA. I also want to recognize and welcome that the U.S. government has made a commitment to re-engaging with and re-supporting UNRWA.

As soon as I learned of this issue, I contacted my officials. I had a conversation with the commissioner-general of UNRWA. We have been engaged very thoroughly in what happened and in understanding what happened. We are working with UNRWA to ensure

that they have the policies in place to ensure that something like this doesn't happen again.

It was an oversight, but UNRWA recognizes this and they are very committed to ensuring that the materials they provide do align with UN values.

Mr. Kerry Diotte: Thank you.

The Government of Canada recently announced a \$49.9 million pledge of humanitarian aid to Syrians. The news release talks about how this amount builds on a previous commitment, bringing Canada's humanitarian aid to Syrians in 2021 to about \$330 million.

Are these amounts included in the appropriation sought in the main estimates in 2021-22?

Hon. Karina Gould: I will have to defer to Leslie MacLean to confirm that.

Mr. Kerry Diotte: Answer very briefly.

Ms. Leslie MacLean: I believe the answer is that they are. That announcement was made in the month of March, which would mean the funds would be appropriated in the main estimates before [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

Mr. Kerry Diotte: Okay.

What regions of Syria will receive humanitarian aid funded by Canada? Can you specify a bit?

Hon. Karina Gould: We provide our humanitarian assistance to trusted humanitarian partners. We generally provide flexible funding so that they can respond where the needs are greatest. The objective is always to reach those who are most in need.

Mr. Kerry Diotte: How can Canada help ensure full access to humanitarian aid in regions such as northeastern Syria?

Hon. Karina Gould: We engage with our UN partners to advocate for humanitarian access. We support the UN resolutions that call for full, unimpeded access and the protection of humanitarian workers. Particularly when it comes to certain border access points, we continue to support that access. Canada has been a strong supporter since day one.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Diotte. That's your time.

I'll be a little tighter on these allocations to make sure we get through them.

Dr. Fry, you have five minutes.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Welcome, Minister. I want to congratulate you on the job that you're doing with regard to the feminist international policy. It is actually admired by so many countries that think Canada has taken an important role and plays an important role in women's equality.

I wanted to ask you a question. I know that in the Harper era, with regard to sexual reproductive health and rights, they focused a great deal on child mortality, infant mortality, perinatal mortality and of course, preventable deaths in women who are pregnant and giving birth.

As you and I know, that is not the full range of sexual and reproductive health and rights. Sexual reproductive health and rights, as articulated in the whole IPCI, is about women's and youth's—girls' and boys'—access to contraception and to the prevention of pregnancies they don't want to have. The second part is that when they are pregnant, they get very good prenatal and postpartum care. The third part, of course, is if they do not wish to become pregnant, they are actually able to have access to safe abortion.

This ability for women, not only in terms of sexual and reproductive rights to have control over their bodies.... We know that COVID has forced the hand of a lot of young women into marriage and, therefore, into being forced into getting pregnant. A lot of young girls and women are being raped as the refugees fleeing conflict, environment and famine are travelling rapidly around this world to try to find a place where they could be safe and secure. We know that this is an important part.

I have two questions. Are you going to commit to the full range of reproductive health and rights? Tell me how you see that happening.

The second one is the piece that is going to defence. Is that to help with the peacekeepers who can keep women in refugee camps safe? I know that women in refugee camps are not safe. Quite often, their keepers are the ones who they should fear most. Can you respond to both those questions?

If we have time, I have a third one to ask you.

• (1615)

Hon. Karina Gould: Okay, sure.

Thank you very much, Dr. Fry, for your question.

I think we can be proud of the work Canada has done on MNCH. One big failing, however, was the inability to include sexual and reproductive health and rights. In fact, we know that if you're not including a woman's full access to her right, you're not supporting women's rights at all.

I'll share two examples that I've heard recently which are particularly heartbreaking, about when women don't have access to the full suite of SRHR.

A young girl in Haiti was raped and impregnated by her father and was not able to access an abortion. She was 11 years old, and she had to carry that child to term.

A woman I was speaking to in El Salvador who had a miscarriage and called an ambulance was arrested and charged with having an abortion and was sentenced to 40 years in prison.

These are horrific stories that we are hearing. I am so proud that our government has made our commitment to sexual health and reproductive rights to support women in their entirety and to ensure

that it is their choice as to whether and when they have children and how many they have.

We will not be able to advance on the SDGs if we do not include the full range of sexual health and reproductive rights in that objective. Canada's SRHR commitment includes bodily autonomy, it includes comprehensive sexuality education, and it includes access to abortion and post-abortion care where it is legal.

We will continue to advocate for women's rights. I am a very proud She Decides champion on the global stage and am engaging with inspiring young activists the world over who are fighting for these rights. I'm so glad to be able to support them.

With respect to your second question, Canada provides significant support to train peacekeepers against sexual exploitation and abuse. These are people who are supposed to be there to protect people, not to harm them. We will continue to do this important work. We're doing it through the Elsie initiative, in partnership with the United Nations and working with partners in civil society organizations to root out SEA.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Thank you.

I gather I have no time left.

The Chair: Thank you. You're spot on now, Dr. Fry.

Thank you, Madam Minister.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have the floor for a very strict two and a half minutes.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will try to be succinct.

Madam Minister, I want to talk about the employees who work in international cooperation organizations, particularly the Centre de solidarité internationale du Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, the CSI, which is located in Alma, in my riding. These are committed people who believe strongly in community development and who are deeply and personally involved in the projects.

I spoke to the CSI's President, Annie-Claude Laflamme, and to its project manager, Véronique Fortin. They had some questions for you. The funding of their organization is an ongoing problem: as an international cooperation organization, the CSI receives no funding for its basic operating expenses.

As you know, these organizations do a lot with few resources; each time, their results are considerable given the amount of money invested. However, in such a context, it is difficult for the organizations to ensure the sustainability of their activities and, above all, to offer stability to the workforce on site. Because of the vulnerability of their funding, these organizations are more affected by crises such as the current health crisis.

You are aware of the problem, Madam Minister. Do you plan to fund part of the basic operations of these valuable international development actors?

• (1620)

Hon. Karina Gould: That is a very good question, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Of course, I am aware of this problem, which many civil society organizations in Canada are experiencing. It is an issue that the department is currently studying.

Some of the resources provided by the Government of Canada may be used to pay for the basic costs of federally funded projects. I think it is important to ensure that we take a systemic approach to this.

I know that civil society organizations work very hard and manage, despite limited resources, to achieve results on the ground. Ms. Leclerc and Ms. MacLean and their teams often hold roundtables with the organizations to ensure that we will meet their needs.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Can we hope for a quick result?

Hon. Karina Gould: We have already made changes within Global Affairs Canada. In addition, during the pandemic, Ms. Leclerc and her team worked closely with the department's partners to ensure that their projects would continue despite changes in the field and in funding. We learned a lot of lessons, and are now looking at how we can apply them in the future.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: So, we—

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe. I'm sorry, but your time is up.

Thank you very much, Madam Minister.

I now give the floor to Ms. McPherson for two and a half minutes.

[English]

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses for being here today.

For my next set of questions, I'd like to talk about how we are designing an aid program that will be predictable, sustainable, and good for the Canadian government—Global Affairs Canada—and for civil society actors.

What we've seen over the past number of years is that the government tends to do international development assistance announcements as political announcements and as big showy announcements.

I spoke to you, Minister, about future announcements that you may be bringing forward and that there may be something for us, that we may hear more from you at the G7, for example.

I'm wondering if it wouldn't be smarter and if we couldn't come together to make it a bit better by having our overseas development assistance, our international development efforts, be more strategic, more planned, more predictable and easier for the CSO community to access.

A voice: Sheesh.

Hon. Karina Gould: Thank you very much, Ms. McPherson for the question.

I think there are a couple of aspects to this. On the first, Leslie and I actually just had a conversation about making calls for proposals more predictable and having a clear calendar for civil society organizations to see so that there is that predictability. I'd like to thank you for that conversation because I think it's an important issue for our partners and civil society: to make sure that we are providing more predictability for them. The fact that we have the window for the small and medium-sized organizations is an important one, but that's something that I think Global Affairs Canada can continue to work on and improve for that predictability.

The other part of that is that we continue to have our base budget of official development assistance that has bilateral programs that are consistent on a yearly basis and that operate with Canadian partners and partners around the world. Then there are additional commitments that arise because of international events. There are moments to make announcements for additional contributions. However, I do want to reassure you that that base budget of international assistance has been maintained and continues, and there are a lot of conversations happening between departmental officials and partners in Canadian civil society.

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

Thank you, Minister.

We have two more interventions left. They are each five minutes. The next one goes to Mr. Genuis.

Go ahead.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

In response to a question from my colleague, you talked about how Canada has been engaged with UNRWA in addressing problematic materials. You've spoken previously about conducting an investigation, but I didn't hear a clear answer to his question, which is this: Are you confident that the materials being used in UNRWA schools today are now consistent with Canadian and UN values?

• (1625)

Hon. Karina Gould: We continue to engage with UNRWA officials on a regular basis. UNRWA has also changed how they are providing materials through the course of the pandemic. When kids were in school, they knew which textbooks were being presented. In the transition to online learning, there were some accidental slippages that are unacceptable for us in Canada, and we have been working to correct that. Now UNRWA is going to be releasing curricula—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Minister, I'm going to jump in because you're repeating a similar answer. Can you just answer the correct question—

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, wait just one second. I'm just going to pause the clock, here, for a second.

The one thing that won't work is this: If two people speak simultaneously, we will lose interpretation. I'm just encouraging everyone to separate questions and answers to the greatest extent possible.

I will resume the clock.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Mr. Chair, but I have limited time, and I have a specific question that isn't being answered, so let me just ask it one more time.

Minister, you can answer it or not; it's up to you. The record will show either way.

Are you confident that today, in light of the engagement and the investigation that you've conducted.... Can you affirm that the problems have been corrected, as UNRWA has said, and that the materials being presented today are consistent with Canadian and UN values?

Hon. Karina Gould: What I was trying to do was to explain how UNRWA has responded to the situation and they now have a single online portal where they are releasing educational materials. I think this is actually important to provide context with regard to the question that was asked. Therefore, UNRWA is reviewing all of the material before it is being sent out. They are doing so in a way to ensure that it is consistent with UN values, and this is something that Canadian officials, as well as our partners, other donor governments, are reviewing with them as well.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I don't know if that was precisely the question, but I do appreciate the information you provided, especially at the end, which is to say that, if I understood correctly, the departmental officials are reviewing that content as it comes online.

Did I understand that correctly, that Canadian officials are reviewing the content that's being produced by UNRWA, to ensure it's in line with our values?

Hon. Karina Gould: The Canadian officials are working with UNRWA. It would be very difficult for Canadian officials to sit down and review all of the content. I mean, we're talking about curriculum to children from K to 12 in five different jurisdictions that UNRWA operates in.

However, we are working with them, expressing our concerns and making it clear what our expectations are, and UNRWA has been very engaged with us because this was not something that they wanted to happen either. They take very seriously the fact that they are a UN organization that needs to promote UN values and they do that very seriously.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Minister. I want to ask one more follow-up question before we run out of time.

IMPACT-se, the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in school education, published a review this February of UNRWA-generated material in use after November.

This is UNRWA-generated material.

The report identifies many examples of continuing violent and hateful content. I want to read you one sample from that curriculum. This is grade 9 spelling material. Students were asked to copy this out and then check for spelling errors:

Our Enemies dare to defy us, because of our weakness and disunity. They are killing our sons, our old and our children, and make examples of them. Does that mean our sons responded with silence?! Our sons have risen up in revolt on our Enemies, resisting them courageously, in a resistance which embarrasses our Enemies and threatens their existence. However, our Arab relatives have sadly recognized our Enemies and began interacting with them, which weakened our sons' resoluteness, and prolonged the life of Occupation on our land. But a day will come, when this land will return to us and to our sons, and our Enemies will be banished, God willing, as failing losers.

This is a contemporary example, after the errors were allegedly corrected, from an UNRWA-produced spelling textbook, which contains denunciation of peace, in particular of the Abraham accords, and an implied call for the banishment of Jews from Israel.

I understand that you might not have read all of the curricular materials that were in use after that deadline, but what is your response to IMPACT-se's February report that outlines these key examples, and do you have continuing concerns about content like the content I just read out?

Hon. Karina Gould: First of all, as the granddaughter of a Holocaust survivor, I am always committed to doing my part to ensure that we are standing against intolerance in all its forms.

What I would like to make very clear, though, is that UNRWA does not produce materials. They operate in jurisdictions—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Minister, that's not correct. That is UNRWA-produced material.

Hon. Karina Gould: No, it's not.

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, one moment.

• (1630)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: The quotation I read is not Palestinian Authority curriculum.

Hon. Karina Gould: Mr. Genuis, you are incorrect.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, just on a point of order, if I can come back in on the same argument I made a few minutes ago, in the interests of maintaining interpretation, it simply won't work if members and witnesses talk over top of each other. Please give the minister the opportunity to answer and then you can ask another question.

You have about 45 seconds left in your allocation.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Minister, I'll take the floor first and then give you the remaining time.

I want to be very clear that the content I read is from supplementary materials produced by UNRWA.

UNRWA uses Palestinian Authority produced textbooks; however, UNRWA also produces supplementary materials. The quotation I read is not from Palestinian Authority materials. Palestinian Authority materials make no reference to the Abraham accords. The quotation I read is from materials produced by UNRWA.

I'll pass the floor over to you.

Hon. Karina Gould: Mr. Genuis, with all due respect, UNRWA does not produce materials. They use the materials provided by the jurisdiction in which they operate. They are very conscious of the fact that some of those materials are inappropriate and they provide teaching guides to ensure that the material is taught around.

However, it is important for Canada, for me personally, that we are conveying to UNRWA, as well as to the jurisdictions that create this material, what Canada's position is, what our values are and what our expectations are. We have been very clear in this regard. It is one of the reasons we provide support for neutrality training for UNRWA teachers and UNRWA personnel, because our objective is to support the 500,000 children who receive education in UNRWA schools, to do our part to ensure that UNRWA is able to provide that education in an appropriate way and to continue to stand up for values of tolerance and inclusion.

The Chair: Minister, thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

We'll now go to our final round, which also consists of five minutes.

Ms. Saks, please, the floor is yours.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks (York Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for joining us today. It is wonderful to hear about all of the work we are doing to advance the feminist international assistance policy, and our other endeavours to advance women and girls in the many areas of the world where work in development.

As my colleague, Ms. McPherson, did highlight and as you shared with us, we value the planning of sustainable programming throughout the world in many of our projects.

I'd like to talk about the importance of having the ability to pivot and to answer the call of need when there is a crisis in the world. For example, when there was the Beirut explosion last year, Canada was able to respond swiftly and appropriately to help the residents of Beirut.

The world is a tough place with many conflicts, with neighbourhoods and countries in crisis, and Canada proudly responds. That's really also a big portion of our development policy and our development budget. We're looking at the situation in Ethiopia right now, including the killing of civilians, and there's also been a great rise in sexual and gender-based violence, indiscriminate shelling, and the forced displacement of residents of Tigray and the Eritrean refugees.

Could you take a moment to share with me and with this committee how Canada is helping with the response in Tigray?

Hon. Karina Gould: As you and many committee members have mentioned, there are a number of very tragic and difficult situations right around the world, and Canada does respond and step up and do our part to try to both save lives and work for a peaceful resolution, particularly when there is conflict.

With regard to Ethiopia, I'm very grateful to the committee for undertaking this study because I think it is extraordinarily important. Just last month, I announced \$34 million in humanitarian as-

sistance for Ethiopia this year. We provide it to our humanitarian partners on the ground in a flexible way so that they can respond to where the needs are. This includes partners such as the Red Cross, UN OCHA, the World Food Programme, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and UNICEF, for example, as well as NGO partners on the ground.

The situation, particularly in Tigray, is very concerning. The reports we're hearing with regard to human rights abuses and, in particular, sexual and gender-based violence are very concerning.

As I mentioned in question period today, I have spoken to my counterpart, the Minister of Peace, in Ethiopia. Minister Garneau has spoken to his counterpart, and the Prime Minister has spoken to Prime Minister Abiy to convey Canada's deep concern with the situation in Ethiopia.

We are supporting the work of the UN High Commissioner to work with the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission to have an independent investigation into the allegations of human rights abuses. We think this is something that is very important.

We have stood alongside our international counterparts in calling for a cessation to the violence and the conflict, as well as a respect for human rights, and for Eritrean troops to leave Ethiopia. We will continue to engage in this regard and of course monitor the situation.

Perhaps one final thing I would say on this is that we've also pivoted \$18 million of our bilateral assistance programming in Ethiopia to provide food assistance to those who have been affected by the conflict.

• (1635)

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Thank you, Minister.

Chair, how am I doing for time?

The Chair: You have just over a minute, Ms. Saks.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Okay, perfect.

In the line of discussing how we are able to pivot and be nimble in a complex global environment, India is a perfect example of where the world needs to come together right now. In the midst of the COVID crisis, time and again, Canada has stood up to be a lead voice and supporter of assistance in various parts of the world through COVAX and other participatory programs.

Can you share with us a little bit about our commitment to India at this critical time?

Hon. Karina Gould: I'm sure everyone has seen the alarming situation happening in India right now, with the incredible spread of COVID-19 and the devastating results it has for people in India. Canada stands in solidarity with the people of India. On Tuesday, the Prime Minister announced that we would immediately be sending \$10 million through the Canadian Red Cross to the Indian Red Cross to support their efforts in fighting COVID-19. This funding will go towards the ambulance service that the Indian Red Cross provides and towards public health awareness and messaging campaigns, but importantly, the Indian Red Cross also needs this support to build isolation centres and treatment centres for the hospital system that, quite frankly, is overwhelmed right now.

We are in discussions as to what else we can do to support India. We are currently reviewing this with the Minister of Health, as well as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and their counterparts in India, to ensure that we can provide the support that is needed.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

Thank you, Ms. Saks.

This takes us to the end of our first hour with the minister, on the estimates.

We now go into our second hour, which is a discussion on COV-AX, as agreed by the committee on April 15.

As we transition, some of our witnesses from Global Affairs will leave us. We would like to thank them on our collective behalf.

[Translation]

Thank you very much for your testimonies this afternoon.

[English]

At this point, Leslie MacLean and Peter MacDougall are staying with us, and we would also like to welcome Joshua Tabah, director general of health and nutrition, Global Affairs Canada, for the second hour.

[Translation]

Madam Minister, I will give you the floor again. You have five to seven minutes to make your opening remarks on the COVAX facility.

[English]

Hon. Karina Gould: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the committee for inviting me to speak with you today and for allowing me to spend two hours with you on what is a very important issue, Canada's role in the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly through our important support for the ACT Accelerator and the COVAX facility.

I would like to thank my officials who joined for the previous session and to recognize both Peter and Josh, who are on the call with us today. They and their teams have been absolutely extraordinary and have been working around the clock for the past 14 months with regard to our global health response from Canada.

It was over a year ago that we began to realize the scale of the challenge we faced with a virus that respected no borders. Disruptions to health systems and food security have had significant impacts on maternal and child mortality and access to sexual and reproductive health services.

Every day, schools are closed and the risk of dropout increases, as does the likelihood that families see no choice but to marry off their daughters as they struggle to feed and house them. Unpaid workloads have increased for everyone, but women are taking on greater intensity of care-related tasks and are leaving the workforce more than men.

With a global situation of more than 140 million COVID-19 cases and three million deaths, with many countries going through a third wave and with new and worrying variants driving this deteriorating situation, the scale of what we are facing is worrying for everyone.

That is why we need to ensure that our response includes a particular focus on the world's poorest and most marginalized and that it considers the differentiated needs of women and girls.

To date, Canada has mobilized more than \$2 billion in international assistance in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including funding for humanitarian and development assistance. Budget 2021 highlighted an additional \$375 million to support the global response.

We are funding our humanitarian partners to provide increased surveillance systems and infection prevention; water, sanitation and hygiene; protection services; emergency health care; and other common services.

In order to support the needs of those most at risk and in particular to support health workers and high-risk populations, the world truly came together to develop a mechanism to provide solutions for all.

One year ago, the ACT Accelerator had just been launched and the COVAX facility did not yet exist. Now we have the global mechanisms we need to respond to this challenge. I am proud that Canada was at the forefront of the creation of the ACT Accelerator and COVAX facility. We have been a key supporter and leading donor since the very beginning.

I am proud to be the co-chair of the COVAX AMC engagement group and to sit on the facilitation council of the ACT Accelerator, further solidifying Canada's position as a global leader in the fight against COVID-19.

As I mentioned in my previous appearance a short while ago, Canada has provided \$940 million to the ACT Accelerator across all pillars to support equitable access to COVID-19 tests, treatments and vaccines and to support the health systems so critical to delivering these life-saving tools to populations in need.

The COVAX facility within the vaccine pillar of the ACT A is the global procurement mechanism led by Gavi, the World Health Organization and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations.

COVAX was designed with two windows: a self-financing stream window, through which upper middle- and high-income countries like Canada are able to purchase vaccines; and the advance market commitment, designed to procure doses for 92 low- and lower middle-income countries.

• (1640)

[*Translation*]

The self-financing mechanism offered a procurement insurance policy for participating countries, giving access to a wide range of vaccine candidates before anyone knew which, if any, would prove to be effective.

In parallel, the investments of high and upper middle-income countries in the mechanism increased the purchasing power of COVAX, helping to ensure a fair price point for COVAX's procurement of doses for lower-income countries.

Because higher-income countries like Canada have invested in the facility for their own needs, COVAX has been able to increase its leverage with pharmaceutical companies to negotiate for all countries.

This is one of the reasons why the Government of Canada decided last September to use the COVAX facility to procure vaccines; it helped ensure access to a broad spectrum of vaccines, at a fair price, and it would do this for all participants, including low- and lower-middle income countries.

We have now contributed \$325 million to procure and deploy COVID-19 vaccine doses through COVAX for low- and lower-middle income countries.

The facility is up and running. It has become operational quickly and effectively. In the last two months, more than 120 countries have received over 49 million doses, and this is just the beginning.

This initiative includes doses for Canada and other high-income countries, as had been planned for from the beginning; it is central to the facility's success. It also includes doses for dozens of low-income and middle-income countries. For many, COVAX is and will continue to be their key mechanism to access World Health Organization-approved vaccines.

• (1645)

[*English*]

Over a year into this pandemic, we have learned many things and continue to adapt our response to a rapidly changing context both in Canada and internationally, but one thing has only become more clear: We will only beat this pandemic in Canada when we beat it

everywhere. The ACT Accelerator and COVAX facilities are the world's initiatives to beat the pandemic. These are the most powerful tools we have in the global fight against COVID-19. They need and deserve our continued support.

With that, I thank you for the opportunity to have this conversation and I welcome your questions.

The Chair: Minister, thank you very much. We will go to our first round of questions, which will be six-minute segments again, just like in the previous hour.

The first person to lead us off is Mr. Genuis. Please go ahead.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, I have many questions about COVAX, but I do want to briefly return to the UNRWA issue. You mentioned that you had a grandparent who was a Holocaust survivor. This is something we have in common; I also had the same. Therefore, I hope I can ask this question at a human level and that it won't be perceived as partisan. It's important that we do all we can to not be complicit in a case where there is incitement to anti-Semitic violence happening.

Yesterday, the European Parliament adopted an unprecedented resolution condemning UNRWA for teaching hate and incitement to violence, and insisting that the EU make aid conditional on educational materials' compliance with UN values. This is significant because the EU is UNRWA's top funder, and clearly our European partners think we have a problem.

The issue I raise is that the IMPACT report from February identifies hateful content in UNRWA-generated materials. This is an important distinction: UNRWA uses the textbooks in the jurisdiction in which they operate, so in UNRWA schools, the textbooks they use will be Palestinian Authority textbooks.

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, one moment. We have a point of order from Mr. Fonseca.

Stop the clock.

Mr. Fonseca, go ahead, please.

Mr. Peter Fonseca: On a point of order, Chair, there was agreement and consensus among the members that the second hour would be spent on COVAX. That is what all the members agreed to. Would we stick to COVAX?

The Chair: Thank you for raising the point of order.

Mr. Fonseca, the committee did agree that the second hour would be on COVAX. This question is not.

I invite debate on the point of order.

A voice: Chair, if I could—

The Chair: Use the “raise hand” feature, please, to come in and speak to it.

Ms. Saks.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would have to agree with my colleague Mr. Fonseca. There was ample time in the previous hour to explore Canada's response in addressing the UNRWA situation. As the minister well knows, I have been deeply involved in the review of materials, being both a fluent Hebrew speaker and having background in Arabic, and am well familiar with curricula in Israel and within the Palestinian Authority.

That said, there is ongoing oversight of this matter and the minister answered these questions. I'm really anxious, as are many of my committee members, to focus our time for this hour on COVAX as it was appropriately outlined, and not waste the time of either the minister or our officials who are here to answer those questions.

The Chair: Ms. Saks, thank you very much.

I have Mr. Genuis, and then Mr. Chong.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, there are a few things. I'm concerned that some of the comments on this point of order are clearly venturing into debate on the point. I'll also just observe that everybody has their own time slots. Members are generally welcome to, within a pretty broad latitude, ask the questions they wish.

I will also say that, within the limited time we have for the minister, there is a significant relationship between these different elements. Of course, UNRWA is involved in responding to the circumstances of COVID-19, and the particular circumstances of these materials did arise from the context of COVID-19.

The issue here is that UNRWA was producing at-home study materials as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. They were UNRWA-produced study materials, which were for that particular context. They were not Palestinian Authority textbooks. They were UNRWA-produced materials for the context of the pandemic.

That is the point I wish to clarify: how the pandemic context impacts the hateful materials that were produced. However, I would suggest we don't allow the debate to go on too long on this point, because it seems to negate the point of the point.

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, thanks very much; I appreciate that.

There has been, however, a question of relevance raised by one of our colleagues, a member of the committee, and we should have a survey of the committee's view on this. In case the committee wishes to change its orientation away from COVAX. I don't think that's the case, but let's hear from Dr. Fry and Mr. Fonseca briefly, and Ms. Sahota.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Chair, I believe that I was next.

The Chair: My apologies, Mr. Chong. Yes, you are, absolutely.

Go ahead, please.

• (1650)

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Chair, I think members should be afforded a great amount of latitude as to how they use their time in committee and in the House. I've chaired a number of parliamentary committees. From time to time members would interrupt on a point of order, raising the issue of relevance and repetition. I always deferred to the member in question who had the floor prior to the point of order and gave them the latitude to use their time as they saw fit.

I think it's clear that this has been the trend in recent decades in the House of Commons. We just have to watch the 45 minutes of question period to realize the latitude given to people and ministers of the crown with respect to relevance and repetition in their answers to members of the House.

That is particularly important during this pandemic, when Parliament has essentially been stunted and is sitting in a very abbreviated form. I encourage you on this point of order to give the member in question the greatest amount of latitude possible to use his time as he sees fit.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chong, for that point.

I have three colleagues who have their hands raised. I'd like to canvass their views very quickly, just to make sure that we don't delay the discussion to any greater extent than necessary.

Dr. Fry is next, followed by Mr. Fonseca and Ms. Sahota, please.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Chair, with regard to the issue of a point of order, I think Mr. Genuis has explained why he sees this particular question as pertinent to COVAX. I don't agree that it's pertinent to COVAX, but I think it is pertinent to COVID. He says kids are locked down, and now we have the production of educational materials for them at home.

However, I would like to point out that we should be very respectful of our witnesses, and when a member has asked the same question so many times and been given the best response the witness is able to give, I would like to suggest that we not continue to do what I think is disrespectful, which is to badger the witness and beat the point into the ground.

While I acknowledge Mr. Genuis's saying that this is pertinent, it's not pertinent to COVAX; it's pertinent to COVID. I am prepared to let him have leeway, but I am not prepared to have the very same question asked over and over in the hopes that we will get a different response, when the witnesses have already responded, or tried to respond, three times.

What we see is the questioner trying to get the answer the questioner desires in the words that he asked the questioner once, and not to really ask a question and get an answer to the best of their ability. That is what worries me.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I didn't even get to the question—

The Chair: Dr. Fry, thank you very much.

Let's keep order. I'd like to get through the—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: This is a delay tactic by the Liberal members who don't want us to have a chance to question the minister—one way or the other.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Nobody is delaying anything.

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, I'm trying to get through the speakers list.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: That was [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] point of order. Let's just move on.

The Chair: There was a point of order raised. I can invite debate on it to canvass the committee. I'd like to do so expeditiously without wasting time.

Quickly, in order, I have Mr. Fonseca, Mr. Sidhu and Monsieur Brunelle-Duceppe. Then we can return to the discussion with the guidance of the committee.

There was a very specific agreement to focus the second hour on COVAX, and I'd like to just hear briefly the views of the colleagues who have raised their hands and return to the discussion.

Please, Mr. Fonseca, go ahead, followed by Mr. Sidhu, then Monsieur Brunelle-Duceppe.

Mr. Peter Fonseca: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I couldn't say it better than Dr. Fry has. The member has posed the question in many different ways and forms, and out of respect for the minister and the officials who are here—and especially, for this second hour, to talk about COVAX.... The minister has answered the question eloquently, has given detailed answers, has provided all the information that the member may want.

The member commenced his questioning by saying it was non-partisan. Well, the member is being totally partisan on this and continues to badger these witnesses—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Let's move on, Mr. Chair. It's a total farce. Let's move on.

The Chair: Mr. Fonseca, let us confine the discussion to the point of order itself.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It's a total farce.

Mr. Peter Fonseca: Mr. Chair, the member continues to interject in a very disrespectful way again. Again, Mr. Chair, this member—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, take control and end this farce. We have limited time to talk to the—

Hon. Hedy Fry: He's doing it again.

Mr. Peter Fonseca: It's very disrespectful of the committee, disrespectful of Parliament, disrespectful of the minister. This member should actually go back and learn how to be a respectful member.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, let's move on.

Mr. Peter Fonseca: The member needs some education.

The Chair: Mr. Fonseca, thank you. I'd really like to keep the discussion focused on the point of order, which was the relevance to COVAX.

• (1655)

[*Translation*]

I'm going to give the floor to Mr. Sidhu and Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for quick interventions, and then we'll go back to the discussion.

[*English*]

Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Brampton East, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I like what my colleague said. We need to be mindful and respectful of the witnesses and the departmental officials who are here. We have people watching. They know what the agenda is. We want to discuss COVAX, and we have a lot of witnesses here who want to speak on that.

Out of respect for time, I'd like to stick to the topic.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sidhu.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have the floor.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Right now, it is really not easy for the interpreters. I would just like to say that they are doing an exceptional job.

This is the first time I have participated in a meeting of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. I'm putting myself in the shoes of our constituents who are watching the committee meeting and I think they must be wondering what justifies our salary.

I would ask everyone to calm down a little. Both the opposition and government members have their faults and their share of bad faith. Let's calm down and get back to what we were doing, which is talking about the COVAX initiative, of course.

As a newcomer to the committee, I just want to say to members that the way they are behaving does them no credit. I would ask everyone to calm down. We can continue, but members have to stop yelling. I'm thinking of the fine interpreters who work for us. I really feel sorry for them, and even more sorry for the people watching at home.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, my dear colleague.

[*English*]

Thank you, everybody, for your interventions.

I think the committee's will is to continue the discussion, to make sure that Mr. Genuis is focused on COVAX and makes it relevant to the issue that the committee agreed is the issue of discussion for the second hour, and also not to repeat points that were already made and are on the record.

Mr. Genuis, with that, I give you back the floor. You have three and half minutes left in your allocation of five minutes.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, I do not have three and a half minutes left. I believe I'm supposed to have six minutes, because it's a new hour.

For you to allow every member of the Liberal caucus to offer their view on this point of order is, frankly, a disgrace. However, I am limited by the tools I have in front of me, so let me just say briefly to the minister that I encourage her, I implore her, to read the February IMPACT report that discusses how, in the context of COVID-19, study materials were produced by UNRWA with hateful content.

That's it. Now let me proceed to COVAX.

Minister, it seems to me that the issue of COVAX comes down to our own vaccination supply. If we were doing better in accessing vaccinations and supplying them to Canadians, we would be in a much stronger position to provide surplus supply to other countries in need.

It has been much remarked on that Canada is the only country within the G7 to draw on COVAX for its own use. Of course, Canada has contributed to COVAX, but many other countries have, yet we're the only G7 country to draw on COVAX. This seems to me to suggest and to underline again that the government has failed to secure in sufficient time the vaccination supply that was required.

Is the government content with the vaccination rollout thus far, including with the use of COVAX? Is everything proceeding as planned, or does the government acknowledge that there have been failures along the way?

Hon. Karina Gould: Mr. Genuis, thank you very much for your question.

With regard to UNRWA, please know that I am very committed to ensuring that it is promoting UN values. That is something that Canada does take very seriously.

With regard to COVAX, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, Canada has been both a purchaser of vaccines through COVAX and a donor through COVAX, and COVAX was set up with these two windows in mind.

As I mentioned, part of Canada being a purchaser through the self-financing facility also enables COVAX to purchase and secure doses for the developing world, so from September, COVAX was always part of our procurement strategy in Canada.

COVAX also has a range of different vaccines in its portfolio, much like Canada does for our domestic portfolio as well. As different vaccines become available, they are offered to COVAX members, both self-financing and AMC countries.

At the time the AstraZeneca vaccine was offered to Canada, that vaccine would not have been available through our bilateral program agreement until later in this year. Therefore, Canada made the determination, so that we could have the diverse portfolio available to Canadians, to access that allocation of AstraZeneca.

There are other G7 countries that are accessing other vaccines that they might not have within their own portfolio.

• (1700)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Minister, and at the risk of getting “point of order” again for repeating a question, it is a question that wasn't answered.

I asked you quite simply whether the government is happy with the direction of the vaccine rollout. So do you think things are by and large going as planned, or will you acknowledge the fact that we are not in a position to share vaccines with other countries? In fact we're drawing vaccinations from COVAX. Is that indicative of some failures in terms of the government's procurement of vaccinations?

Hon. Karina Gould: No, as I said, COVAX was always part of our procurement strategy from the beginning, and in fact, if you go back to the delivery schedule that was made public in December last year, you'll see that we are receiving vaccines pretty much on track with the information we provided publicly to Canadians at the end of the last calendar year. I will note that as of next week, we'll be receiving two million doses of Pfizer each week, going up—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: So just to clarify, Minister, your view is that everything is fine.

Hon. Karina Gould: My view is that what we committed to doing back in December with regard to vaccines is precisely what we are doing, and with regard to COVAX, it was important for Canada to be both a self-financing country and a donor country, to support the mechanism, provide competence for it and support developing countries at the same time.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

The next round goes to Mr. Fonseca.

Go ahead, please, for six minutes.

Mr. Peter Fonseca: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, and I say thank you for being a compassionate, calm and very respectful person. I think you are the perfect person to be in your role for what you need to do, so thank you for that.

Following somewhat in the vein of what Mr. Genuis was talking about, can you give us a comparison with other G20 countries in terms of COVAX? How much funding does Canada provide? Having heard you, I believe this is something we should be very proud of. We've taken a leadership role in COVAX, right from the get-go. I know other countries have come on board now, but can you tell us a little bit about the genesis of that, and can you tell us how we compare with others in the G20 in terms of how much we are contributing to COVAX?

Hon. Karina Gould: Certainly. I am actually very proud and excited that COVAX exists in the first place, because this is the first time there's been a global mechanism to confront a global health crisis of this nature. It's actually the largest multilateral initiative since the Paris climate accord and it really is about the world coming together to try to provide equitable access to vaccines around the world. Canada is one of the largest contributors to COVAX. We provided \$325 million. We were the second-largest contributor until the U.S. joined, and of course we welcome the U.S. contribution of \$2 billion. That's a good thing, because it's going to help us procure even more doses for lower-income countries right around the world.

But Canada was instrumental in getting COVAX set up. We worked with Gavi and the WHO back in June already, and actually Josh Tabah, who's on the line with us, and his team were instrumental in getting COVAX set up. Canada provided the first \$25 million from what was left over from our Gavi pneumococcal vaccine contribution, to establish COVAX. We were one of the first G7 countries to say that we were going to make a commitment to COVAX and to say that this was a mechanism worth investing in, and because of that, I am also the COVAX AMC—advance market commitment—co-chair, working with Indonesia and Ethiopia, to ensure that we have a successful rollout for low- and middle-income countries around the world.

I can turn it over to Josh, if you're interested, for a comparison with the donations from other G20 countries.

Mr. Peter Fonseca: Yes, sure. That really puts it in perspective, in terms of the scope and what we've done on COVAX, but I'd like to hear from the official, yes.

Mr. Joshua Tabah (Director General, Health and Nutrition, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you, Minister.

Thanks to the member.

I can go into more detail in writing, of course, afterwards, but some of the other leading donors right now include Germany, with a substantial commitment, alongside the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada. Those are sort of your top four. Other than that, we have Italy at a much more modest level. I'm just taking a look here. For Korea, it's still quite modest.

I guess, by way of an answer, I would say that the minister in the last segment spoke about the importance of all countries starting to carry their fair share of this burden, and we're actively engaged, through our mission network around the world, in ensuring that we're communicating to other countries what Canada is doing and that we need everyone to roll up their sleeves and get engaged, because this is a collective effort and we need everyone to pitch in.

• (1705)

Mr. Peter Fonseca: Thank you, Mr. Tabah.

On April 23, 2021, France announced that it would be the first country to donate doses from its national stockpile of COVAX AMC. The country has committed to donating 500,000 doses by June 2021 in accordance with COVAX principles for sharing doses. President Macron encouraged other countries to follow France's lead.

Now, according to COVAX, Canada has already indicated a willingness to donate these vaccines.

Does the Government of Canada intend to donate doses of the COVAX AMC? If so, when would we do this, and how many would it be? Can you just give us some insight into that?

Hon. Karina Gould: Sure. Already back in December the Prime Minister announced that Canada would donate any excess doses that we have here in Canada, and most likely through COVAX. In fact, in December I announced \$5 million to COVAX specifically to set up a dose-sharing mechanism. I am very pleased and I welcome France's announcement of 500,000 doses to be shared.

It is because of the work that Canada put in, including Josh and his team, with Gavi to establish that dose-sharing mechanism that France is able to do this. Once Canada gets to into a place where we have excess doses—and we're not there yet—we will absolutely be sharing them through COVAX and donating them to AMC-eligible countries.

Mr. Peter Fonseca: Chair, how is my the time?

The Chair: You have just over 30 seconds, Mr. Fonseca.

Mr. Peter Fonseca: Okay. I just want to thank the minister and officials. I do think we should be very proud of how Canada is standing on COVAX and what it has done to help the most impoverished countries. I understand that we will be helping 92 countries around the world through the COVAX program, so thank you.

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I agree with my colleague Mr. Fonseca, the chair of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights, on which I sit. He has just told us that Canada is a leader in COVAX. However, when I was in high school, my mother used to tell me to watch out for leaders, because there are good ones and bad ones. Right now, Canada is a leader, because it is the only G7 country that has used COVAX. So I'm not sure whether that's a good way to be a leader. However, I agree with Mr. Fonseca that Canada is a leader. But being a leader and being a good leader are two different things.

I would like to know whether the minister is uncomfortable with the fact that Canada has used COVAX when a country like Haiti has yet to receive any of the doses available through this initiative.

Hon. Karina Gould: Thank you for the question.

It is important to remember why COVAX was set up. To make it work, wealthier countries have to buy and share doses through this initiative.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Excuse me, Mr. Chair, I don't want to sound like Mr. Genuis, but I asked the minister whether she was uncomfortable with the fact that Haiti has received no doses, while Canada has used the COVAX initiative. That was my question. That was my only question.

Hon. Karina Gould: Okay, that's fine. I'll answer the question, but I would also like to explain that COVAX relies on the co-operation of countries. Doses are offered to countries and they decide whether they want to accept them. Haiti said no to the AstraZeneca doses offered under this initiative. Of course Haiti had the opportunity to get COVAX doses, but they didn't want them.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I was expecting that answer from you. However, other countries wanted doses but did not get them, whereas Canada did. Could you tell me whether this makes you uncomfortable?

Hon. Karina Gould: It's important to know that there are two different sources of vaccines available through COVAX: those for developing countries come from the Serum Institute of India, whereas those for richer countries come from South Korea. So vaccines are provided to countries through two different mechanisms.

• (1710)

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: That's not my question, Madam Minister.

Hon. Karina Gould: It is also important to know that Gavi works with developing countries to ensure that they have the necessary structures in place to distribute the doses they receive. Countries receive the doses at different times depending on whether or not their reception plans are approved.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: So you're telling me that you took advantage of the fact that some countries were not able to receive the doses they wanted to receive in order to dip into the COVAX bank.

Hon. Karina Gould: No, that's not what I said at all.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: That's what I just understood.

Hon. Karina Gould: That's what you want to understand, but that's not the reality.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: So I misunderstood.

Hon. Karina Gould: The COVAX mechanism has two windows, which are very important for its proper functioning. When wealthier countries buy doses, they help poorer countries buy more doses.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I'm going to stop the discussion here, otherwise we will waste time. I see that you are comfortable with the idea that countries may have asked for vaccines but may not have received them, while Canada has dipped into the COVAX bank.

Hon. Karina Gould: That's not really how the system works. It's important to clarify and not make it seem like Canada is doing something inappropriate.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Okay, that's great.

To my knowledge, the government has not yet taken a position at the World Trade Organization on vaccine patents. However, about 100 countries have already done so. This is a critical issue for developing countries that have some production capacity but do not have the rights to produce generic vaccines.

Will Canada support the vaccine patent waiver? At the very least, will it not harm the process?

Hon. Karina Gould: Canada has not harmed this initiative. In fact, we are there to find a constructive solution. We have been in discussions with countries that support such a waiver and with countries that do not support it.

This is more a question for the Minister of International Trade.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: You are absolutely right. However, you are in a good position to know that, since you are a member of cabinet.

Hon. Karina Gould: I am happy to answer the question as best I can.

Minister Ng is currently working with the new WTO director-general to find a third way, because we are really at an impasse right now. Canada is working with everyone, as we always do, to find a solution.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: We are working with everyone except the 100 countries that agree on the waiver.

Hon. Karina Gould: No, we are working with those countries, of course. We are having many conversations with them in Geneva.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: That's wonderful. I see that they are really producing results.

Earlier, you said that we were going to give back the surplus vaccines. That's what I understood. Are you going to announce this to Canada's international co-operation partners so that they can react quickly?

Hon. Karina Gould: Could you repeat the question?

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: You told us that you were going to send surplus vaccines abroad. That is what I understood.

Hon. Karina Gould: Yes, of course.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: That's great.

Have you made the announcement to Canada's international co-operation partners on the ground?

Hon. Karina Gould: Are you asking me whether we are going to make the announcement to Canada's partners on the ground?

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Yes.

Hon. Karina Gould: If we are giving vaccines through COVAX, COVAX will distribute the doses, not Canada's partners, such as civil society organizations.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: So you're not going to call them.

Hon. Karina Gould: I'm not sure I understood the question correctly.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Canada will actually have surplus doses. That's what I heard in the House of Commons. I'm not talking about COVAX.

Hon. Karina Gould: No, no—

The Chair: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, I'm sorry, but your time is up.

We'll have to go to Ms. McPherson.

Hon. Karina Gould: Could I finish my answer very quickly?

The Chair: Go ahead very quickly, Ms. Gould.

Hon. Karina Gould: Canada may have surplus doses. If that's the case, we'll donate those vaccines to COVAX, which can send them to less fortunate countries.

• (1715)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Minister.

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

[*English*]

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you again to the witnesses for being here. It's nice to see Mr. Tabah here. I worked with him prior to being elected.

I have a lot of questions about this. I do thank the minister for coming and speaking to us about the COVAX vaccines. This is at the behest of the motion I had brought forward with regard to Foreign Affairs, looking for more clarity on this, so I will start with a series of questions about COVAX. If we have time, I'll ask about the TRIPS waiver as well.

The minister has explained how COVAX works in some detail. Unfortunately, what I think we haven't been able to unpack here today is how the COVAX vaccine works if other countries, wealthy countries, aren't also making side deals with pharmaceutical companies for bilateral agreements.

Could the minister talk about how the Canadian government has reconciled the fact that it has made bilateral purchasing agreements—bilateral agreements equivalent to 10 times the doses, from I've heard, that Canadians will require—despite the fact that Dr. Tedros publicly announced that these advance purchases undermine COVAX's ability to secure adequate doses? The WHO is saying that because we've done this, because Canada has secured these doses, COVAX won't work as well. How does the minister reconcile that?

Hon. Karina Gould: First of all, thank you, Ms. McPherson, for the question and for moving this motion. I think it's a really important one and I'm very glad to be here on this issue.

With regard to COVAX and bilateral deals, when COVAX was created last June, it was intended to serve as a stopgap to ensure that vaccines went to the developing world. Its objective was to provide vaccines for 20% of the populations of countries that joined COVAX. COVAX is on track to deliver this by the end of 2021, which was its objective from the beginning, and in fact it looks as though it will be able to deliver up to 30%.

When it was conceived, it was precisely to deal with this issue, and it locked in that supply for COVAX member countries right from the beginning and recognized that—

Ms. Heather McPherson: You will know that I have very little time, but you're not in fact answering why the Canadian government made bilateral agreements.

I hate to interrupt you, Minister, but I'm running out of time.

Hon. Karina Gould: It's okay.

I was getting there in the sense that COVAX was always intended to try to protect those doses, recognizing that wealthier countries would be entering into bilateral deals. It was trying to protect that supply to provide doses for the most vulnerable frontline health care workers in developing countries.

Canada entered into bilateral deals because we also recognized back last summer that we didn't know which vaccines were going to be successful. Some of the deals we have are for the same vaccines that are part of COVAX. Some are for different ones. One that is the same is AstraZeneca. Another that is the same is Novavax. Moderna is not one of those, and Pfizer wasn't at the beginning either. Not knowing which one would be successful and knowing that our objective was to ensure that Canadians got access to vaccines, we have had a diversified portfolio.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Of course, everyone's objective is to make sure that's the case, but, of course, we as government—or you as government and I as opposition—need to also consider the global implications of not making sure that other countries get access to the vaccines, because it puts Canadians at greater risk if we allow variants to develop. It destroys our global economic recovery if it takes until 2024 for some countries to get access to that 20% piece.

You talk about making those bilateral agreements, but my understanding is that Canada was making bilateral agreements after the WHO explicitly asked countries to stop making those agreements, particularly with the Serum Institute of India, for example. I question whether or not it's actually accurate to say that it is intended for us to take all 10 times what we can get our hands on and to leave the rest of the countries to develop these very, very dangerous variants.

You talk about COVAX and the intention that it be 20%. We know that falls far short of the 60% or 70% that would be needed for herd immunity, so I'm curious why the government is delaying and saying that it is something it's thinking about. It's asking questions that we know it already has the answers to in terms of the intellectual property waiver.

So, knowing that—and these are your words as well as my own—none of us are safe until all of us are safe, what would be the rationale for not waiving intellectual property rights? These pharmaceutical companies use public dollars, and they're making billions of dollars of profit this year. Why wouldn't we be able to waive those intellectual property rights so that other countries could reach that 60% or 70%? Doing that will protect Canadians, protect lives, and protect our economy. I just don't get it, Minister.

• (1720)

Hon. Karina Gould: Thank you, Ms. McPherson.

You know, I agree with you that we have to protect everyone. That's why we have been, from the get-go, one of the top contributors to and most avid champions of COVAX and this really unique initiative. Forty-nine million doses have been delivered to 120 countries, and they are on track to deliver 1.3 billion, that 20%, by the end of this year.

Just on the TRIPS waiver, as I was saying in French—hopefully in French before—Canada has not been opposed to this. We have actually been a very constructive player, but, as you likely know, the WTO operates on consensus. Recognizing that there is a bit of an impasse in the WTO, we've been very supportive of the work of the new director general, Dr. Okonjo-Iweala, who is proposing a third way, because it's partly intellectual property but a lot of it is also about manufacturing and transfer of technology and knowledge and know-how, and so Minister Ng—

Ms. Heather McPherson: Would you feel comfortable—

The Chair: Ms. McPherson, I apologize. We'll have to leave it there.

Ms. Heather McPherson: —in saying that you support the TRIPS waiver?

The Chair: Ms. McPherson, I'm sorry. We'll have to leave it there. Your time is up.

I now turn the floor over to Mr. Chong, please, for five minutes.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister, for appearing in front of us today.

I'd like to highlight a small developing country, to build on what Ms. McPherson was talking about, to illustrate through comparison and contrast why the concerns she and others have raised are so relevant to the whole COVAX issue.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines is a very small country in the Caribbean. It has only about 100,000 people. It's not large enough to have its own full embassy here in Canada. It has a consulate general in Toronto. It was recently hit by the eruption of a volcano, La Soufrière, which continues to wreak havoc over St. Vincent and the Grenadines as well as some of the neighbouring Caribbean islands.

The government there estimates that they need hundreds of millions of dollars to rebuild. Over 40 centimetres of ash have fallen down into that community. The UN has put a call out for some \$30 million in emergency assistance to help the poor residents struggling with this natural disaster. Governments like the United Kingdom government have given over \$1.3 million Canadian in aid to the island.

In that context, it's really difficult to jibe that with Canada's use of the COVAX facility. As you know, the COVAX advance market commitment provides access to vaccines for countries like St. Vincent and the Grenadines. To date, they've received 24,000 doses from that facility. Canada has taken 317,000 doses out of the COVAX facility—Canada, a developed country and one of the wealthiest countries in the world. That's in contrast to what Mr. Fonseca pointed out, which is the Republic of France's recent announcement that they are donating half a million doses by June to the COVAX facility.

In that context, I think that's why we are raising concerns about how Canada has utilized the COVAX facility.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines is like many other developing countries. It doesn't have significant resources. The World Bank estimates that an additional 150 million people within the last 12 months have been plunged back into extreme poverty, undoing decades' worth of progress.

It seems to me that the government's mismanagement of vaccine procurement has really led to the situation where we, as a G7 country, are taking advantage of a facility that other advanced countries are not, one that was primarily intended to assist those people in the developing world.

I guess I don't have a question here. It's just more of a broad comment to illustrate what I'm talking about. St. Vincent and the Grenadines has just received its first delivery of 24,000 doses in the shadow of a volcano that continues to spew ash that's severely disrupting the lives and livelihoods of residents on those islands, yet Canada has withdrawn 317,000 doses from the COVAX facility while G7 countries like France donate 500,000 doses to that facility.

Mr. Chair, I don't have any questions here. I just wanted to make that comment.

Thank you very much.

• (1725)

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

We have about three minutes left for Mr. Sidhu.

Hon. Karina Gould: Am I able to respond to that?

The Chair: We have a hard stop at 5:30, so we will need to keep that in mind.

Mr. Sidhu, please.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: I would like to give some time to the minister to respond to that, please.

Hon. Karina Gould: Thank you, Mr. Sidhu.

Thank you, Mr. Chong, for raising those important issues. It is exactly for that reason that Canada contributed \$325 million to COVAX. That \$325 million has purchased about 100 million vaccines that will be going to the developing world. That is a significant contribution from Canada to developing countries. When we talk about 49 million vaccines having been delivered to 120 countries, that has been possible because countries like Canada have contributed significant resources.

We also purchased vaccines, \$220-million worth of vaccines, through the COVAX self-financing facility for use in Canada, as did other wealthier nations like the U.K., Singapore, and New Zealand, some of whom drew on COVAX because there were vaccines they were interested in drawing upon and some who have not yet drawn upon COVAX but who may in the future.

When it comes to Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, I also just want to make note of the fact that Canada provided \$440,000 in response to the La Soufrière volcanic explosion. That is in addition to the millions of dollars we have provided over the years to the Caribbean to prepare for disaster response, climate insurance, natural disaster insurance and risk response.

Just to be clear, I share your concerns about what's happening in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. COVAX is delivering to countries around the world on a proportionate basis. Their aim was to provide vaccines to 3% of the population in their first delivery window. That's why you see those proportionate amounts being delivered around the world. Those deliveries are made possible because of the contributions Canada made last September and throughout the course of this year. We are going to continue to do our part.

That's why we've committed to contributing the surplus doses we've purchased when they are available here in Canada. But we're going to continue to work with our partners around the world to ensure that they're ready and that their health system is prepared and able and has the capacity.

One of the other things that have been really important for me, as the Minister of International Development, is to fund the ACT Accelerator holistically. That \$940 million that goes to the ACT A includes support for diagnostics, for therapeutics and for COVAX, but also, importantly, support for health systems. As Dr. Seth Berkley, the head of Gavi, said to me—and I take this very seriously—it's not vaccines that save lives; it's vaccinations.

Canada has responded in a really holistic way and will continue to do more, because that's what Canada does.

The Chair: Minister Gould, thank you so much for being with us today, both on the estimates and COVAX.

Colleagues, on our collective behalf, I'd like to thank the minister and her team for their service and for everything they're doing to make our world a better place.

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much, colleagues.

[*English*]

Everybody, please keep safe.

With that, we stand adjourned until our next session.

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