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Chair: Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal



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• (1830)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number eight of the House of Commons Special Committee on Afghanistan, created pursuant to the order of the House of December 8, 2021.

Today's meeting is taking place in hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of November 25, 2021.

I would like to remind all those present in this room to please follow the recommendations from public health authorities, as well as the directive of the Board of Internal Economy on October 19, 2021, to remain healthy and safe.

Should any technical challenges arise, please advise me, as we may need to suspend for a few minutes to ensure all members are able to participate fully.

Witnesses should also be aware that translation in English and French is available through the globe icon at the bottom of their screen.

As we had discussed during meeting number seven on March 28, I want to outline for the members the tentative schedule for the next few weeks following the break weeks.

On April 25, we will have Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada Sean Fraser and his officials. He will be here for the first hour. For the second hour we will have Minister of Foreign Affairs Mélanie Joly and department officials.

For the May 2 meeting, in the first hour, the tentative witnesses will be Afghan interpreters Masood Matin Hotak, Jamy Kohistany and Zareef Mayar. For the second hour, we tentatively have witnesses Warda Shazadi Meighen from the International Association of Women Judges, and Robert St. Aubin from Rainbow Railroad.

On May 9 for the first hour, we will have Anita Anand, Minister of National Defence and her department officials. For the second hour, we will have Canadian Armed Forces members and department officials.

After May 9, we will begin report consideration beginning with the drafting instructions on May 16 and, hopefully, report consideration on May 30 and June 6. We have been instructed by the House to present our report by June 8, as per the motion creating this special committee.

Is everyone okay with that plan?

Madam Kwan.

• (1835)

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I was informed that for the week of April 11, originally we were to have witnesses. However witnesses would not be able to come on April 11. I'd like to propose that for April 11, we invite former Afghan interpreters to come to fill that slot.

I would be able to submit their names and information for the clerk.

The Chair: Madam Kwan, I just want to clarify. Are they the same witnesses who are scheduled on May 2?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: No, they're not.

The Chair: Okay.

Is it the will of the committee to...? I don't see any opposition.

I'll instruct on behalf of the committee, Madam Clerk, to please arrange that on April 11.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to committee members.

I'll make sure that information is passed on to the clerk to make the contacts.

The Chair: Thank you.

I would now like to welcome here today the Honourable Harjit Singh Sajjan, Minister of International Development, minister responsible for the Pacific Economic Development Agency of Canada and, of course, formerly the Minister of National Defence.

Accompanying Minister Sajjan is the deputy minister of international development, Christopher MacLennan. Also from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, I would like to welcome assistant deputy minister, Asia Pacific, Paul Thoppil; director general, international crime and terrorism, Jennifer Loten; director general, international humanitarian assistance, Stephen Salewicz; and executive director and senior general counsel, Patrick Hill.

On behalf of the committee members, I welcome each of you again.

I understand, Minister, that you will be with us for the first hour until 7:30 p.m. The department officials will remain with us for the second hour from 7:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Is that correct?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of International Development): Yes, sir.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. You have five minutes for your opening statement. Please be mindful of the time allotted for members to interact with you and for you to field questions.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the members of the committee for having me here today.

Canada has a long history of supporting the Afghanistan people. Over two decades we have seen Canadian development funding that helped a generation of Afghans achieve a higher standard of living and the resettlement of thousands of Afghan refugees to Canada. As well, 40,000 Canadians bravely served in Afghanistan from December 2001 until 2014.

Our focus has been on the people of Afghanistan, supporting development, peace and security, and humanitarian aid for the Afghan people. However, since the Taliban takeover in August, we have seen an appalling regression on many of these gains. Most disturbingly, the Taliban continued its zealous and ideological intolerance for the equality of women and girls. This must stop.

The humanitarian situation is dire. The UN estimates that 24 million people inside Afghanistan require humanitarian assistance in 2022. They urgently need food assistance, treatment for malnutrition, shelter and access to basic health services. Right now 23 million people, half of Afghanistan's population, are acutely food-insecure, including 8.7 million people who are at risk of famine. Almost five million people in Afghanistan will require treatment for acute malnutrition. That includes 2.8 million children. Currently, 6.5 million people are lacking the appropriate shelter and supplies to survive Afghanistan's harsh winters. As well, three million children under five and 3.4 million women of reproductive age will require emergency health services in 2022 alone.

In this immense suffering, we cannot lose sight of those Afghan women and girls. They have been disproportionately impacted by this food insecurity, which has only been made worse by Russia's unjustifiable war in Ukraine. Their lives have been uprooted and destroyed because of the Taliban's unjustifiable discrimination against women and girls. We must continue to stand up in their defence. We must ensure that our support meets the unique needs that women and girls have.

In the face of these multiple crises, Canada is focused on helping. We're supporting experienced humanitarian partners that are delivering results on the ground, helping to provide food, nutrition, shelter and health care. Last week I announced that Canada is providing an additional \$50 million, for a total of \$142 million in 2022, to help support the people of Afghanistan, particularly women and girls.

Currently, the World Food Programme is delivering food assistance at critical need, where half of the population is food-insecure. With our support—it amounts to over half of Canada's recent hu-

manitarian assistance—the World Food Programme has provided 13 million people with the food they desperately need. We also support UNICEF's procurement of ready-to-use therapeutic food, which treats cases of severe acute malnutrition in children under five, helping them to save over 56,000 children from dying of starvation.

We are partnering with International Organization for Migration, who, along with other humanitarian partners, have helped provide over 500,000 people with shelter, fuel, heaters and winter clothing. The ICRC is supporting hospitals and the staff who work in them to help prevent the total collapse of health services in Afghanistan. They continue to scale up their efforts with Canadian support.

I want to thank our humanitarian partners who are doing critical work in Afghanistan and the region. They operate on the front lines of this response day after day, under challenging circumstances.

Afghanistan is on the brink. We know that our partners need more help to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe. That is why Canada will continue to be part of the solution. Our humanitarian response since August is the largest it has ever been for Afghanistan. In 2022 Canada's humanitarian assistance will be \$142 million. We will continue to work to address the pressing humanitarian needs, including access to humanitarian relief, health care and education. We will continue to fight for the rights of women and girls. We will continue to be there for the people of Afghanistan.

Thank you.

I'll take your questions now, Mr. Chair.

● (1840)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister, for staying within the time frame.

Members of Parliament, before we begin the rounds, you know that I hate cutting you off when you're questioning, so please keep an eye on your clock today. That way, all the members can have time with the minister.

We will begin our six-minute round with my own member—and my friend—Madam Findlay, followed by Mr. Sidhu, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe and Madam Kwan.

Ms. Findlay, you have six minutes for questions. Please begin.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, Minister and Deputy Minister.

You know we have a short amount of time, so I'm going to get to my questions.

As the former minister of national defence, can you tell us what role you played in the planning, execution and evacuation of Canadians and Canadian allies from Afghanistan?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, as the minister of national defence, we obviously played a very important role in the evacuation when the security situation drastically decreased, especially for our personnel in our embassy.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: In terms of the evacuation, how actively involved were you at the time in terms of being kept informed? How much time did you spend in the command centre?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, during that time, I was totally focused on the mission to Afghanistan.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: You were solely focused on the mission, but I'm asking about the evacuation.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Yes. I'm talking about the evacuation. At that time, our sole focus was the evacuation in Afghanistan.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: I understand.

What proactive steps did you take to get people who may have been your colleagues, or even friends, out of Afghanistan during the evacuation?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Which time frame are you referring to?

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: During the time of—

The Chair: If you could go through the chair, that would be much appreciated.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: I started by saying that. I assumed you understood that.

Through the chair to you, Minister, I'm asking at the time of evacuation, when people were leaving, what proactive steps did you take to get people who were your colleagues, or even friends, out of Afghanistan during that evacuation?

• (1845)

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: During that time, as the security situation was decreasing, there was a request from Global Affairs to provide security for the embassy personnel. It was something I authorized in early April. After that, because the situation was drastically deteriorating, the team on the ground, which we increased, changed its system of support toward the evacuation of as many people as possible at that time.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Through the chair, Minister, when did the military start planning the evacuation of Canadians and Canadian allies from Afghanistan?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, as I stated, when we received a request from Global Affairs Canada.... Keep in mind that we had not had a military footprint in the country since 2014.

When the request came from Global Affairs Canada that they required greater assistance from the military for the security of our personnel doing assessments, it was early April—April 1—when I approved the request.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: I'm sorry. When was it?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: It was April 1.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: We heard testimony from the then-ambassador, Minister, through the chair, that they had very little

warning that Kabul would fall. When they left, they left, frankly, in a pretty big hurry. However, we heard other testimony that, for some months, veterans and others in the national defence sphere knew this was happening.

When would you say that you, as minister, were aware that we were really in danger of Kabul falling?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, during that time, we were proactive. Because the situation on the ground was deteriorating, a request came from Global Affairs Canada. I, as the minister of national defence, could not authorize troop deployments into a country. There had to be a request. Once a request was made, it was authorized the very next day.

Our troops went into theatre to do the assessment and, because of the team we had on the ground, they were able to start assessing the situation. We were monitoring things literally daily. That allowed us to pivot some of our work that we were doing for the evacuation as well.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Through the chair, were you able to share that intelligence in real time with the embassy?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, in fact, our people on the ground were working hand in glove with the embassy staff at that time. Because we didn't have a footprint on the ground, our team there—alongside the embassy, which also had its own networks—was working hand in glove physically and feeding the information back to us.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: My last question, Mr. Chair, is with respect to the evacuation of the ambassador and embassy staff, which no doubt had become urgent. We've heard testimony that when they left, they left in a plane that was only about half full.

Can you confirm that?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, I can't confirm exactly what the planeload was. What I can say, though, is that, once the decision to leave was made by our ambassador, because an ambassador has the authority to do so, the security situation was severely degrading, and the decision that was made was the appropriate one to get everybody out quickly enough so that our Canadian officials were not put at risk.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Findlay, and thank you for being respectful and professional while fielding your questions.

Mr. Sidhu, please go ahead for six minutes.

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

I'd like to, first and foremost, welcome Minister Sajjan to our committee and thank him for taking the time to be with us today.

Minister Sajjan, I had the honour to welcome many Afghan Sikh refugees a few weeks ago at the airport, including little Tanveer Kaur, who was extremely energetic and playful and looking forward to her childhood experiences in Canada, even after a lengthy flight. It was a moment that I will remember forever.

I know you have working closely with the Manmeet Singh Bhullar Foundation in their work to settle Afghan, Sikh and Hindu refugees over many, many years. Thank you for your hard work on this incredibly important initiative. I saw first-hand what it meant to the families arriving in Canada. Huge kudos to the Manmeet Singh Bhullar Foundation for their tireless work in bringing the community together to welcome so many families from Afghanistan to a new and prosperous life here in Canada.

Minister, in your opening remarks, you mentioned the inequality towards women and girls and how truly disturbing that is. Many of us on this committee saw the news out of Afghanistan just a few weeks ago that the Taliban will not allow women and girls to go to school after the sixth grade. This is extremely disheartening and needs to change.

Speaking of women and girls, Minister, through the chair, can you please tell us what Canada is doing to support women's education within Afghanistan?

• (1850)

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, first of all I want to thank the member for the question. I also want to take this opportunity to thank the Manmeet Singh Bhullar Foundation for the tremendous work they have done over the years.

The situation in Afghanistan is extremely dire. The regression by the Taliban to bring in the old ideology they had is extremely alarming. One thing, first of all, with the message that we're sending is that the education of women and girls is not negotiable. You can't put a grade limit to it either, as we have heard from recent news stories.

Right now we're focused because the humanitarian situation is so dire. We're providing immediate humanitarian support when it comes to food and health, and we will look at the other opportunities when it comes to education as well, but we cannot ever relent on the condition, which is to allow unconditional access to school for girls.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Thank you for that, Minister.

Minister, you spoke a bit about food insecurity in the region. We know that Ukraine, especially eastern Ukraine, is the breadbasket for a lot of Europe and a lot of developing countries. Right now one of the greatest issues facing the Afghan people is food insecurity. I know you mentioned a \$50-million response. Can you speak more about that response?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Right after the country fell to the Taliban, we knew there was going to be a significant humanitarian crisis, and we wanted to make sure that we supported the Afghan people. That's why earlier in December we authorized funding to the World Food Programme to provide support. Right now you have the World Food Programme getting the majority of the funding to literally save lives. That's what this is about.

I spoke with David Beasley, who runs the World Food Programme, of making sure that there is equitable distribution and of making sure that women, girls and minority groups across the country get the support they need. As well, we're providing additional support through different NGOs to make sure that women and girls get the appropriate attention.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Thank you for that.

Mr. Chair, through you, we've had many witnesses on our committee come and speak to us from a lot of NGOs about access to Afghanistan in terms of aid delivery, humanitarian assistance and many different issues arising from that. We know that there are the counterterrorism provisions in the Criminal Code that don't make things as easy as we wish they were.

Minister, can you tell us how Canada is still able to deliver humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan despite the provisions in place in the Criminal Code?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, thank you very much for the member's question.

Yes, there is a law currently in place. The Taliban is a known and registered terrorist entity. We have to abide by the law. When it comes to the humanitarian support we're providing through our partners, the humanitarian support is getting through. We are able to work with those partners. Because of the current law, there are certain restrictions in place, so we are currently exploring options for the next steps.

Keep in mind that the majority of the work and the support that are needed are in the humanitarian space. We are able to provide the appropriate humanitarian emergency support. We are exploring other options, with the appropriate departments, to look at the next steps if the situation changes in Afghanistan.

• (1855)

The Chair: You have 15 seconds left.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Oh, okay. Well, I'll just take some time to thank the minister and the whole team at International Development and Global Affairs for their ongoing work.

It's definitely a challenging time, but I do appreciate everything you're doing. Thank you again.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sidhu, in particular for raising the Manmeet Singh Bhullar Foundation. I'm sure that, since Manmeet was a former minister in Alberta, he was very near and dear to all of us. Thank you.

Now we'll go to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for six minutes. Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the minister for finding the time to join us in committee today.

I just heard him talk to us about problems NGOs are facing when it comes to delivering humanitarian assistance on the ground. So I assume he knows that Canadian criminal law is one of the causes of those problems, right?

[*English*]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, as I mentioned, the law that's in place is not preventing us from providing humanitarian support. Obviously, organizations do know the parameters of our Canadian law that stipulates how we can give money right now. We are able to work with organizations like the UN, the International Red Cross and some other organizations that are able to work within the parameters we have.

However, we are exploring options on the next steps and the things we can do to work through some of those concerns.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I understand, but a number of NGO representatives have come to tell us, in committee, that this was causing issues for them because they feared prosecution. You can look at the committee evidence, where that is written in black and white. If those people have such fears, they must be helped.

Following a lot of testimony we heard in committee on the difficulty of delivering humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan, I moved a motion, a month ago, asking that NGOs be assured that they will not be prosecuted, so as to enable them to play their cooperation and humanitarian assistance roles in the areas most at risk. NGOs themselves told us that such a motion would be welcomed. The next day, I moved my motion. It was your party, the Liberal party, that refused to adopt it. All the other opposition parties were in agreement. Even members of your party told me they agreed with the motion. Unfortunately, your party said no to unanimous consent.

So, if I were to once again move that motion, could I count on you to put pressure on your colleagues, so that they would not oppose it this time?

[*English*]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, I appreciate the honourable member's question.

One is that when it comes to the actual law itself, all of us have to abide by it. It's not something that I can just facilitate. Having said that, I have heard also, and spoken to a lot of the NGOs, and especially Canadian NGOs—which have done tremendous work—about the impact that this law has. However, it doesn't prevent us from providing humanitarian support through organizations like the United Nations. This is one reason we are exploring the options within this law and looking at other opportunities for what we can do, everything from having—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: It may not completely prevent them from delivering humanitarian assistance, but they have told us it prevented them from doing their job fully. They told us that here outright. If you like, I will send you the committee evidence. It was definitely said.

Do you know what our allies are doing? It appears that the Americans and the Europeans have adapted. Are you aware of that?

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, I would say, respectfully, to please come through the chair, and please don't interrupt the minister when he is talking.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I'm really sorry, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, to answer the member's question, those are the things we are looking at when I say we're exploring options. We are looking at what other nations are doing. The law is currently in place. We have to follow it.

The other partners we normally work with do understand the law. I've spoken to many of them. I've heard their concerns directly. I know the tremendous work they can do. This is one of the reasons why we are actively exploring other options, and looking at other nations and what they do. That's why we're exploring for ourselves what the next steps could be.

• (1900)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Why is it taking so long?

Why have the Americans and Europeans already been able to do it, while we are still exploring certain options? I don't understand that.

Mr. Chair, can the minister tell me why it always takes longer in Canada? The Americans and Europeans have already adapted to the situation.

[*English*]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, our law is currently where it's at. There are certain parameters set by it. The U.S. already has certain laws in place that allow certain NGOs to conduct that work. It's already in place. That's why they are able to act right now. This is why we are now exploring the types of options we need.

If you like, Mr. Chair, I can have one of our officials explain what the current U.S. structure is.

The Chair: Go ahead, Deputy Minister.

Mr. Christopher MacLennan (Deputy Minister, International Development, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

The problem is that every country has a different legal framework.

I am not an expert on U.S. legislation, but I know that the United States already had a mechanism in place, which enabled it to provide a license related to certain activities outside its legal framework. That was already in the legislation when the events of August 2021 took place.

Canada's problem is that, since 2002, legislation has been in force, but we don't have that mechanism. So the legislation needs to be amended.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Okay.

How much time would that take?

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, your time is up. We'll come back to this. Thank you kindly.

Now we'll go to Ms. Kwan for six minutes.

Please go ahead.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the minister and the officials for coming to the committee.

I would like to follow up on this issue.

World Vision Canada's president said:

At World Vision Canada, we have funding and supplies that are needed now but that we cannot send to our teams on the ground. As just one example, we had two containers ready to ship full of packets of ready-to-use therapeutic food, which is used to treat children facing the severest forms of malnutrition.... It was heartbreaking that we had to say no.

This is because the Taliban is on Canada's Anti-terrorism Act's list of terrorist entities. The view is that payment of direct or indirect taxes or fees to them in any form, even for goods like these, would be in violation of this Canadian law.

He then goes on to talk about the Criminal Code, and so on.

The government has been aware of this thanks to witnesses who have testified. They have been aware of this since August. That's eight months ago. There is still no workaround. There is still no resolution. Meanwhile, children are dying. That is the reality of what is happening on the ground.

My question for the minister, who is continuing to study this issue, is, how long is it really going to take? How many more children are going to have to die until they actually find a resolution?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, first of all, I appreciate the member's question.

I want to make it very clear that the current law, in terms of our support, has not prevented us...all the funding that we provided for the immediate emergency humanitarian needs of people, especially of children. We are working with partners who have experience and are able to deliver the appropriate support to the women and children who actually need it.

When it comes to this law, as I stated, it does pose a challenge for some organizations that are not able to meet the current parameters we have. The immediate need, right now, is for emergency humanitarian assistance, which we are able to deliver.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: The minister must realize, through you to him, Mr. Chair, that a huge number of people have needs. Even Canada's contribution is not going to be sufficient. World Vision, as well as Care Canada and other Canadian-based organizations, cannot get this work done. They have resources that they have received from other sectors, but they have food packets and medicine ready to go, sitting in containers that they cannot deliver.

I appreciate that, in the meantime, some work is being done, and it should be done. It needs to continue being done. However, there is zero justification in this urgent situation that additional resources are not put on the ground and are allowed to not be put on the ground.

I asked a question of the president and other NGOs to find out if Canada were to enter into an agreement with them—a letter of understanding, a memorandum of understanding and such—to say that if they delivered care packets and such on the ground to starving children and children dying of malnutrition, they would not be prosecuted under Canada's Criminal Code. That would suffice for them to do this work.

Is the minister looking at this option?

• (1905)

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, I'm glad the member raised this question. In fact, we have been looking at all of the various options and speaking to the organizations directly. I want to reiterate once again that all of the funding we're providing is getting to the people who need it.

I'd like to have Patrick Hill answer the legal question. He can provide greater detail if possible.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: No. I'm sorry.

Mr. Chair, I'd like the minister to answer this question. How much longer do these organizations have to wait until he finds a resolution and puts it in operation?

The Chair: Minister, I have to respect the member, because—

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, I'm happy to answer the question. I can't give a timeline. I wish I could.

Right now, as the Minister of International Development, I have to work within the current law that we have. One thing I can assure you, Mr. Chair, all of these members and the entire House is that we are not going to leave any stone unturned to provide support for the Afghan people. That's exactly what we have done. It's the reason we announced our funding very quickly—as early as last December—and we continually do so. We have been monitoring the situation on the ground for the immediate humanitarian needs.

However, to alleviate this, we have been actively working on options—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan:—with other departments, so that we can find a solution for this.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you, Minister.

I have to say this, Mr. Chair. The minister can repeat the same answer over and over again, as he's turning pebble by pebble to turn each rock that he wants to overturn to find the answers.... It's been eight months.

I'm sorry. It is not good enough. The witnesses have said that the government does not feel the urgency of the situation. I think we see that right now from the minister's answers. They do not feel the urgency of the situation to act. Other countries have done it. Canada is the only nation that has not been able to resolve this issue.

The Chair: Minister, you have 30 seconds to respond.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, I respectfully completely disagree with the member's assertions there. To say that I don't feel the urgency.... I feel the urgency.

I've seen the famine that takes place on the ground. I've seen the positive impact that humanitarian aid can deliver. One thing that I can assure you is that we have acted and we'll continue to act very quickly to make sure that humanitarian support gets there, even as we work through this—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Just to—excuse me, Minister—

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Kwan. You're out of time and—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: To correct the minister, it's not me; it's the witnesses who have made that assertion.

The Chair:—I will come back to you in the next....

Mr. Chong, please go ahead for your five-minute round. You'll be followed by Madame Zahid and Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for two and a half minutes, and then Madame Kwan, we'll come to you after that for two and half minutes.

Mr. Chong, please go ahead for five minutes.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The minister said that planning for the evacuation from Kabul began when Global Affairs requested it of the department and the Canadian Armed Forces on April 1. When was that plan completed?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, when it comes to the planning, we sent in a military team at the request of Global Affairs for the—

Hon. Michael Chong: When did you send in that military team?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: I authorized it on April 1.

Hon. Michael Chong: Did they fly into Kabul shortly thereafter?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: I don't have the exact date—

Hon. Michael Chong: Shortly thereafter, they flew into Kabul.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair. I can't—

The Chair: [*Inaudible—Editor*] being the minister, you understand—

Hon. Michael Chong: Yes, I understand.

The Chair: Instead of having a fight, if we can have a respectful conversation through the chair, I would really appreciate that.

Hon. Michael Chong: Sure.

I just want to clarify this for the record. Shortly after you authorized it on April 1, a military team went into Kabul.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, I got the request. The following day it was approved. I don't remember the exact date, but it was as quickly as possible.

Hon. Michael Chong: Sure. It was within a couple of days or so.

When was that plan completed?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: The team went on the ground. This was a very fluid situation, obviously, in monitoring what the security needs were.

There was no plan right at that time to evacuate even the embassy staff. Because we had a team on the ground, we could understand the situation much better.

Mr. Chair—

Hon. Michael Chong: Let me ask the question differently. Was the plan completed by June 1?

• (1910)

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, this is not a typical thing where you're creating an actual plan.

Based on the situation on the ground, first we assessed in terms of.... As the situation was deteriorating, we shifted the focus immediately to trying to bring as many people back.

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay, that's fine.

When did you receive intelligence that Afghanistan, particularly Kabul, was going to fall?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, I don't remember the exact time frame for it. We were monitoring the situation at that time on a daily basis, hence the reason we—

Hon. Michael Chong: You don't recall the date that you received—

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: I don't have the date offhand.

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Chair, the government went into caretaker mode on Sunday, August 15, which was the same day the writs were issued by the Governor General for the general election. This was the same date that Kabul fell.

My question for the minister is, how did the minister's involvement in the evacuation change because of the shift into the caretaker convention?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, my responsibility as the minister of defence did not change. I continued to work on the evacuation.

Hon. Michael Chong: There was no change after August 15 because—

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: I continued to work until our airplanes could not bring any more people out.

Hon. Michael Chong: In other words, there was no change in your role or responsibility with respect to the evacuation out of Kabul after August 15. Is that correct?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: I continued to work, yes.

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay.

The last Canadian flight from Kabul left on August 26. Who made the decision that it would be the last flight to depart from Kabul?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: All the decisions are based on the military advice that is provided. Based on the military advice, that was the decision that was made.

Remember, Mr. Chair, we weren't working alone. We were working with a lot of our allies and coordinating with many nations in very close proximity. It was extremely complicated. That coordination had to be done. The decision was made once—

Hon. Michael Chong: A lot of allies were involved in the evacuation. I understand. NATO allies were involved, so there were different flights from different member states of NATO departing from Kabul trying to evacuate some 70,000 people in the latter half of August of last year.

Were you involved with the coordination of any flights that departed from Hamid Karzai airport with empty seats—either Canadian planes or planes of allies?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: I'm not sure what involvement you're—

Hon. Michael Chong: There were reports of flights that were leaving from—

The Chair: Excuse me, let the minister finish.

Hon. Michael Chong: He asked me to clarify, so I'm clarifying.

There were flights that left from Hamid Karzai International Airport that were not full flights. There were empty seats on these flights.

I'm asking you, Minister, if you were involved with the coordination of the passengers for those seats on any of those flights that departed Kabul in August of last year?

The Chair: I'm sorry, Minister. His time is up. We'll come back to this again.

Thank you, Honourable Chong.

We'll go to Madam Zahid for five minutes.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thanks, Minister, for appearing before the committee.

Minister, we have heard very powerful testimony at this committee about the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan and the challenges of delivering the aid to the most in need. I was really glad to see the announcement last week that Canada has committed an additional \$50 million in humanitarian aid, raising Canada's total commitment for humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan and the neighbouring countries to \$143 million.

I would like to ask about the \$93 million that was previously announced. How much of that money has actually flowed? Where have we delivered it? How is that money being used?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, if I can have my deputy minister answer that question in more detail, it would be more appropriate.

The Chair: As long as, Madam Zahid, you don't have any objection.

Go ahead.

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: Thank you very much.

The humanitarian aid flows on an ongoing basis. We work directly with partners to ensure that we release the money to them on a time scale that makes sense for them in terms of the procurement of the goods that they are providing, and also their ability to get it into the country. As our principal partners with the first tranches of humanitarian assistance we were using the World Food Programme, as has been mentioned earlier. The critical importance of the food security situation in Afghanistan has been recognized, given the fact that there are upwards of 22 million people who are in need of food assistance, some of them in very dire situations. So the World Food Programme is one of the very first choices there.

A second organization that we work with very closely is UNICEF. UNICEF provides dedicated supports for food security, including the ready-to-use packets that are required for children.

• (1915)

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Of this \$93 million, all that money has flowed out in the form of humanitarian aid—

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: Yes.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: —the \$93 million that was previously announced?

The Chair: If you can come through the chair, we would really appreciate it.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Sorry, Chair.

Through the chair, we have the terrorism provisions in the Criminal Code that relate to the Taliban. Could you clarify how the laws in the other countries are different and why the Taliban are able to work around them. Could you shed some light on that?

The Chair: Madam, are you okay with the deputy minister answering?

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Yes.

Mr. Christopher MacLennan: As I mentioned previously, this is actual Canadian national law. Every single country has its own national frameworks for managing terrorist financing. Within each of those individual frameworks, some countries have put in special measures that allow them to permit things such as a licencing scheme or a way of permitting certain activities that otherwise would be deemed to be a contravention of the code.

On the individual examples of that, I'm not an expert on other countries' terrorist financing, criminal and otherwise, national frameworks, but fundamentally, that's what it is. They have a mechanism of some sort that permits them to do it.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you.

Through the chair, what is Canada doing to support women's rights advocacy within Afghanistan? Can I ask the minister to please answer that.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, through you, this is something that we have raised in every conversation we have with any partner that's going to be working in Afghanistan. In fact, we are funding three different organizations that focus strictly on this; one is War Child Canada, and there's Relief International and the UNFPA. All our work emphasizes making sure that all our support goes out in an equitable fashion, making sure that there's an equal distribution for women and girls and minority groups across the country.

The Chair: Forty-five seconds, Madam.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you.

My next question is around women's education.

Minister, supporting the right for women and girls to have equal access to education is a cornerstone of Canada's feminist foreign policy. Your department funds programs around the world to help women and girls get an education. Many of my constituents are fundraising to sponsor female students to attend the Bayan institute of higher education and other institutions. What is Canada doing to support women's education in Afghanistan as well as ensuring women and girls who are refugees in neighbouring countries can have access to schooling?

The Chair: Ten seconds, Minister.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: We are supporting neighbouring countries, Mr. Chair, but also one of the things that's probably most important is we're strongly advocating with our like-minded partners to make sure that there is no restriction of girls going to school. Even going up to grade 12 is not acceptable to us; it has to be unconditional.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Zahid.

Now we'll go to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, for two and a half minutes.

Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

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

I want to come back to the issue of NGOs that are unable to do their work properly because of Canadian laws.

Mr. Chair, I feel like I am in one of those movies where politicians gathered around a table, in committee, are saying they are assessing the situation, finding solutions and considering all the options available. We are now in that movie, and we are looking for solutions. During this time, families in Afghanistan are deciding what child to sell to be able to feed their other children. Men, women, children and grandparents are dying of hunger. Hunger is widespread in Afghanistan.

Can the minister tell the committee how much longer he will be assessing the situation? How long will he work on finding solutions?

Can he tell NGOs when he will help them and find a real concrete solution for the Afghans on the ground, in Afghanistan?

• (1920)

[*English*]

The Chair: Minister, go ahead, please.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, first of all I just want to reiterate that even the current laws are not preventing us from providing the humanitarian support that is needed on the ground. That will continue.

In terms of NGOs not being able to do their work in Afghanistan because of the current laws we have, as I said, I can't give a timeline. One thing I can assure the member and everyone here is that our department is working with Justice and Public Safety to figure out the best step to move forward.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: With all due respect, Mr. Chair, I volunteer. If the minister would like to spend the night working to find solutions, I am ready to support him.

I will give the rest of my speaking time to someone else, as I have heard enough.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much for your suggestion, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Minister, you have 30 seconds to respond.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, I'm always happy to accept any member of Parliament willing to offer advice on how we can do our job better.

The Chair: Thank you.

You have 25 seconds, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: In that case, Minister, I will go to your office when it's convenient for you, and I promise you that I will propose a solution pretty quickly.

[*English*]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: I look forward to it.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Now we will proceed to Madam Kwan for two and a half minutes, please.

Go ahead.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Just to add to that, I've also written to the minister on the same issue. I've yet to receive a response. I think it was back in February when the letter was sent. I'd be happy to offer suggestions as to what the minister and government can do to address this urgent situation.

I'd like to ask the minister a question. Witnesses mentioned that there were flights that left in the evacuation process that were half empty. I wonder if the minister can provide this committee with information on the number of flights that left in the evacuation where seats were left unfilled and how many of those seats were on each of those flights. Can we have that information tabled to the committee, please?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, one thing I can say is that, in times of crisis like this, a lot of the decision-making is to make sure that the people on the ground have the appropriate delegation authority to make those decisions. I also just want to take the opportunity to thank the Canadian Armed Forces for the tremendous work they did in extraordinarily difficult circumstances.

I'm not the minister of defence now, and those requests will have to flow through Minister Anand.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'm trying to get the stats on how many flights were evacuated, how many seats were on those flights and how many of those seats were filled with people. Then from there, of the people who filled the seats, how many of them were Afghan nationals and how many of them were people who worked for the embassy or were Canadian workers? Can we have that information tabled for the committee?

The Chair: Minister, you have 35 seconds to respond.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, that information is held within the Ministry of Defence.

One thing I can say is that creating that air bridge was extremely important, that work that Canada did to bring that together. Our folks on the ground did amazing work to get many people out. I just want to take this opportunity again to commend them. Every single day, to be able to witness the tremendous work that they did—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: Madam Kwan, your time is up.

We'll come back to the next round now. We have three minutes each. First I will go to Madam Findlay for three minutes, then Mr. El-Khoury for three minutes, and that will end the round.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to give the minister an opportunity to flesh this out a bit. My question to the minister is whether he was directly involved with any flights, Canadian or allied flights, that left Afghanistan that were not full.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, I do not recall the manifest or number of people in each aircraft. One thing I can say for certain is that our folks on the ground were trying to get as many people out as quickly as possible. The decisions they made I know were made

with that intention in mind. Again, I want to thank them for the work that they did.

● (1925)

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Mr. Chair, in this committee we're well aware of the chaos that was happening at the airport and with the evacuation generally. I think we all are very grateful for those who created those air bridges and the work they did.

These questions, of course, are about the ones left behind. Although many were brought out, many were left behind. We've heard that there are identifiable groups that got left behind, such as women judges or some ethnic minorities such as Sikh community members.

Was any work done, specifically by this minister, to try to get those specific groups out?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, I'm glad the member raised it. Trying to get vulnerable groups out was a priority for us. Our folks on the ground were taking every opportunity they could.

We were successful in some cases. We weren't successful in others. I think the members know and I, personally, know well what was taking place on the ground. Our folks did just tremendously amazing things to make this happen, while putting themselves at risk.

When it comes to your question on vulnerable groups, yes. It was not just those two groups, but many others as well.

The Chair: Honourable member, you have 50 seconds still.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: With respect to this intelligence sharing at the time leading up to this, a lot of concern has been expressed that the government could have acted more quickly and started evacuation more quickly.

Mr. Chair, does the minister agree that evacuation efforts should have started earlier?

The Chair: You have 25 seconds to respond, Minister.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, our evacuation started as soon as we felt the situation was deteriorating. Keep in mind that we had never had a footprint on the ground. Sending that team in gave us far more of an understanding of what was taking place. Evacuations started as quickly as possible.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Findlay, for your questions.

I will now go to Mr. El-Khoury for three minutes, please.

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, and welcome to this committee. Thank you for the good job you did when you were minister of defence.

You're doing a great job in your new portfolio. With the announcement you made last week, which you spoke about in the chamber, you're really doing a great job.

Your presentation gives us a clear idea. By your illustrations and the way you're answering questions, we have a very good degree of understanding of what is going on and the urgency of the situation.

For my first question, Mr. Minister, due to the fact that I am from Quebec, I would like to speak in French here. Feel free, if you want to answer or your deputy minister....

[*Translation*]

What steps could the international community, including Canada, take to mitigate the economic and financial crises plaguing Afghanistan?

[*English*]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: Mr. Chair, first of all, I look forward to one day conversing with you in French as I work to improve mine.

We have to look at the immediate crisis that's before us. Right now, it's making sure that people have enough food. That's what we're really focused on. The numbers are extremely dire, so we're strictly focused on that.

We also have to be extremely mindful that there is a Taliban regime currently in power. Absolutely, we're moving full-scale ahead on the humanitarian support that we're providing. We're also mindful that any actions that we take do not inadvertently legitimize the Taliban.

We want to make sure that we hold the Taliban to account for its actions right now. What we're seeing right now is not something we want. We want to make sure we're sending a message that we're here to support the Afghan people. That's exactly what we're doing right now. If the Taliban regime allows all girls to unconditionally go to school, regardless of grade and including post-secondary, that will make it better for them in terms of what further steps we as an international community can take for Afghanistan.

Right now we're focused on humanitarian needs.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds, Mr. El-Khoury.

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: What difficulties were caused by the Taliban on the ground that hampered your efforts to continue distributing food or any other assistance?

• (1930)

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan: From our reports right now from the World Food Programme and some others, we are able to get the food out to the various places. In fact, they're able to go to places they weren't able to go before, which were originally controlled by the Taliban.

The concerns right now are about the Taliban leadership making decisions to not allow girls to have secondary education and that they must have a chaperone when they have to travel a long distance. That's unacceptable to us.

As we provide humanitarian support, which we're able to get through now, we still have to be mindful of everything else that's going on. Our message has been very clear. We will be there to provide humanitarian support for the—

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt, Minister. The time is up.

On behalf of all members of the committee, Minister, thank you for appearing.

Thanks to the deputy minister, as well.

Thank you for your presentation.

I'll suspend the meeting for a few minutes, so that we can get ready for the second hour.

In the meantime, Minister, you can interact with the members, if you have time.

• (1931)

(Pause)

• (1938)

• (1935)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

Thank you again to all of the members for being very respectful during the first hour.

Now we'll go to the second hour with the officials. I would request again, members, that you please respect the time and mention who you are putting your question to.

The first round is six minutes each. We'll start with Mr. Ruff, and then we'll go to Mr. Baker, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe and Madam Kwan.

Mr. Ruff, please go ahead for six minutes.

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Thanks, Chair.

My first question will be to the ADM, Mr. Thoppil.

How long have you been in your position? Were you in the position you're currently in during the fall of Kabul last August?

Mr. Paul Thoppil (Assistant Deputy Minister, Asia Pacific, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Mr. Chair, yes, I was.

Mr. Alex Ruff: Could you explain who was involved in the decision to pull out our embassy staff and shut the embassy down in mid-August?

Mr. Paul Thoppil: Mr. Chair, I believe the minister explained that our ambassador had the delegative authority. All of our ambassadors, based on protocol globally and depending on a crisis, have the delegated authority to make the decision of whether or not to close the embassy. It depends upon the situation on the ground.

• (1940)

Mr. Alex Ruff: Thanks.

My next question will be to Ms. Loten.

Can you explain the current ongoing threat a bit more? I'm assuming, based on your position, that you understand the crime and the terrorism links into Afghanistan, but what is the current threat to those Afghan minorities, Afghan women and children in Afghanistan as it stands right now with the Taliban back in control?

Ms. Jennifer Loten (Director General, International Crime and Terrorism, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): The Taliban represents the threat inasmuch as it has a fundamentalist ideology that is very anti-women's rights. It's also a very dangerous regime from an anti-terrorism perspective.

The other thing that's important to keep in mind is that it's a volatile and dangerous situation, where several violent extremist organizations are also on the ground and active in Afghanistan.

Mr. Alex Ruff: I will not disagree with you.

I have first-hand experience on the ground in Afghanistan. I know how terrible the situation was, even in the best of times, under a legitimate, democratic government, and the challenges in that country. I've seen what the Taliban is capable of doing. That's why I think it's so vital that Canada does everything in its power to get these Afghans who are facing prosecution by and threat from the Taliban out immediately. The focus needs to be on getting them out of the country.

Before I get to my next question, but still to you, Ms. Loten, what is your professional assessment of the risk of Afghanistan becoming a safe haven for increased terrorism, terrorist cells and other organizations?

Ms. Jennifer Loten: It's a very complicated question. We work very closely with Five Eyes partners and a range of other intelligence partners that monitor specifically those situations and provide ongoing reporting. As to whether or not the Taliban is likely to become a safe haven, I think is going to be as a result of a range of factors. It's looking currently for legitimization from international actors and from neighbours around it, and the degree to which it can organize itself to make deals in those environments would have to do with what arrangements it makes with the terrorist organizations at play in Afghanistan.

One thing I can say—based on the intelligence, and I'm sure that you're aware, as well, sir—is that several of the terrorist organizations currently on the ground in Afghanistan have no interest in the Taliban's ability to develop the capacity to govern and to become a stable presence. In addition to the possibility of it becoming a safe haven for organizations like al Qaeda, we also have to be looking out for violent situations and volatility that are generated from tensions between these organizations.

I hope that answers your question. Again, there are many complex factors at play, and it really is an intelligence-based question.

Mr. Alex Ruff: That helps, especially your point about the other outside influences to keep the country destabilized.

When did you first become aware of the potential threat of the Taliban retaking Afghanistan writ large or taking the capital?

Ms. Jennifer Loten: I would suggest that is a question for military intelligence. The degree to which they were in a position to overtake the country was something that took, I think, everybody by surprise. On the timing, certainly ADM Thoppil may have more to say about this.

The speed with which the U.S. departure from Afghanistan converted into a situation where the Taliban were in control surprised, I think, the entire world. I won't go so far as to say it also surprised the Taliban, but I don't think any of us would have predicted an August fall of Kabul.

Mr. Alex Ruff: Well, I'll agree to disagree, I guess, on that. It did fall a lot faster than a lot of us thought it would. I personally was disappointed in how fast it happened; however, I know, as some-

body who wrote about it publicly a month in advance of the actual fall and said that we had two weeks at that time to get everybody out, I was disappointed we didn't.

I guess my final question, again to you, Ms. Loten, is: What is your assessment of risks?

One of the push-backs we're getting and what we're hearing, especially from IRCC, is that we can't do...the failure or lack of biometrics. The threat is different, when you compare Afghanistan to Ukraine, to get these Afghans out.

What is the real risk? I don't accept that risk of these cells coming out, of these women and children out of Afghanistan coming into Canada to get them out...if we could create the corridors to get them out of there.

• (1945)

The Chair: You have only 10 seconds.

Ms. Jennifer Loten: Can I just ask you to clarify your question, please?

The Chair: You have only 10 seconds.

Ms. Jennifer Loten: Okay, sorry.

I just want to know if you mean the risk to Canada of bringing refugees out?

Mr. Alex Ruff: Yes.

Ms. Jennifer Loten: I think it's very important. This is sort of IRCC's field, but let's make sure that we screen carefully and that we provide protection to those who require it, and that we maintain a focus on the national security needs as well.

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

Now we will go to Mr. Baker for six minutes, please.

Go ahead.

Mr. Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all our officials for being here with us today.

I will direct my questions to you, Mr. Thoppil. If you want ask your colleagues to assist, I turn to you to decide that.

We talked in this meeting during the portion with the minister about the counterterrorism provisions in the Criminal Code. The reality is that we still need to deliver humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan.

A lot of constituents ask me how we are still able to deliver humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan, given these provisions.

Could you respond to that?

Mr. Paul Thoppil: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will start with an initial comment and then ask my colleagues Stephen Salewicz, Jennifer Loten and Patrick Hill to supplement.

Obviously, the Criminal Code, as currently defined, has its constraints in terms of what we can do or not. We take into account the risk mitigation protocols that partners are able to put into place in order to give us assurance to their degree of adherence to the Criminal Code provisions. We have to do a risk assessment based on our due diligence of each partner's ability to comply based on their kind of risk mitigation parameters to flow the funds on the ground without directly or indirectly providing benefit to the Taliban.

I'll turn to you, Stephen.

Mr. Stephen Salewicz (Director General, International Humanitarian Assistance, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Yes, thank you.

Indeed, that is the key part of our ability to respond in this kind of environment. It's working within the parameters of the law, working with partners who can mitigate the support, whether it's direct or indirect, to the Taliban.

I'll give you a very concrete example with UNICEF. We work with UNICEF. We finance the procurement of RUTF, ready-to-use therapeutic food, which is critical for responding to malnutrition in under five-year-olds. We procure that external to Afghanistan, so it's not impacted by the tax code of Afghanistan. As such, it sits outside, and it's not affected by the counterterrorism law. It's those types of mitigation measures we put in place to still be able to respond to critical needs but in a way that it is within the parameters of the law.

Mr. Yvan Baker: That's helpful.

The Chair: Sorry, honourable member, do you want to continue with Mr. Hill?

Mr. Yvan Baker: Sure.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Hill, go ahead, please.

Mr. Patrick Hill (Executive Director and Senior General Counsel, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think my colleagues have answered the question. I really don't have anything to add.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Honourable member, we'll go back to you.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you.

I'm hearing that Canadian resources are being used to purchase goods, as in the example you just provided. Those goods are then being transferred or provided to partners who can deliver them to the people in need. Correct me if this is wrong.

• (1950)

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: That's exactly right.

UNICEF is the main distributor of this therapeutic food. They bring it into Afghanistan with our support. It's distributed through

the NGO and other UN networks to support the response to malnutrition in the country.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Do you have any sense of what our impact has been in terms of delivering humanitarian aid of any kind into Afghanistan?

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: I could give you some examples of our partners' activities in this context.

As the minister said during his intervention, the key needs on the ground are around food and malnutrition, as well as health. Through our programming to date, we have provided \$77.5 million to the WFP to support the procurement of food and also the distribution of that food in Afghanistan.

If we look at the needs in terms of food insecurity, 22.8 million people are food insecure in 2022 in Afghanistan. There are 4.7 million people who suffer from acute malnutrition. The support that we provide through the WFP is critical. In the first half of March, the WFP reached 6.1 million people with food assistance. Their pipeline is such they expect to reach 22 million people over the course of the year with food in Afghanistan.

Those are some concrete examples.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Do you have a sense of Canada's contribution to those numbers?

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: From the WFP's perspective, they have a budget requirement of \$200 million U.S. per month to feed Afghan citizens.

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

I'm sorry to interrupt. Mr. Baker, your time is up.

We'll go to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for six minutes, please.

Go ahead.

[Translation]

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

I thank all the witnesses for joining us this evening and for taking the time to help us write this report.

Mr. Thoppil, your department recently announced additional assistance of over \$50 million that should go directly to the Afghan people in need.

How can the Canadian government ensure that the money gets to the Afghan population?

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, do you want to direct your question to a particular person?

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Yes, my question was for Mr. Thoppil.

Mr. Paul Thoppil: I thank the member for his question, but I think Mr. Salewicz could answer it better.

[English]

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: Mr. Chair, I'd be happy to answer the question.

The Chair: Mr. Salewicz, please go ahead.

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: Thank you.

I'm the director general responsible for humanitarian assistance, given the focus of our support right now on humanitarian assistance.

Canada works with a small number of very trusted partners who have a great deal of experience working in these kinds of environments. They have established measures in place to minimize the risks of misappropriation or diversion of humanitarian assistance and to make sure these emergency relief items go to the people they are intended for.

There are occasional incidents of diversion. There's no question about that. That happens in any high-risk environment. In this case it's no different, but it's not a systemic risk. It's a risk around criminality, where occasionally criminals take advantage of humanitarian activities to take some of the goods.

We get notifications about this. The systems are in place. They work. It's an unfortunate consequence of working in high-risk environments that we do get these kinds of small-scale diversions.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you very much.

I will continue to put questions to you, Mr. Salewicz.

There was a recent announcement of \$50 million for Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries.

What do you mean by "neighbouring countries"? What specific countries are concerned, and in what way?

[English]

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: Mr. Chair, there are a substantial number of Afghans who have had to flee Afghanistan over the decades from conflict. I believe there are approximately 5.7 million Afghans in neighbouring countries such as Pakistan, which is a refuge to millions of Afghans. They've been there for a long time. The governments in the neighbouring countries require assistance to help sustain those populations, and we support them through the UNHCR as well as the World Food Programme.

We're also there, of course, looking for the future, should there be increased flows of populations from Afghanistan, to be in a position to support that as well.

• (1955)

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Is that money given directly to the countries? In what form is that money given to Afghanistan's neighbouring countries? Is it simply done through the UN?

[English]

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: Mr. Chair, indeed that is the case. We don't use humanitarian assistance to directly fund governments. We

channel the funds, the resources, through trusted partners, in this case the UNWFP and the UNHCR.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: It's good to bring it up, as this is the reason I asked the question. Thank you for answering it.

I have a slightly more delicate question to ask. Ms. Loten could answer it.

This is not my opinion, but a number of witnesses have reported that, since the western forces left, the situation on the ground has been less dangerous. As I was saying, this is a delicate question. I would ask you candidly whether it means that we should change our approach concerning the Taliban.

What is your take on that?

Ms. Jennifer Loten: All I can tell you is that we depend on the advice of experts on the ground and of Canadian experts.

They have told us that the situation has remained dangerous and unstable, and that it was evolving rapidly. I know that NGOs are operating, but, according to what we know and the information we are receiving from our Five Eyes partners, the situation is still dangerous and unpredictable.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: On the same topic, a few weeks ago, I read in *La Presse* that a Taliban delegation went to Switzerland at the invitation of an NGO and that they called on the international community to recognize the "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan". Those same Taliban mainly asked that humanitarian assistance needs be met in Afghanistan.

What is your department's position on this?

Ms. Jennifer Loten: I will ask the assistant deputy minister, Mr. Thoppil, to answer that question concerning our department's position on a geographic region. I prefer that he answer you.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I am listening to you.

Mr. Paul Thoppil: I thank the member for his question.

Canada has four priorities.

[English]

Our first priority is for safe passage of Afghanistan individuals to Canada. Our second is to ensure an inclusive governance within Afghanistan for all Afghans. Our third is ensuring risk mitigation to counter terrorism, and our fourth is related to efficient and timely delivery of humanitarian assistance.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Now we will go to Madame Kwan for six minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all the officials.

My first question is for Mr. Thoppil.

With respect to Canada's diplomatic relationship with Pakistan, one of our goals, as you just indicated, is to help Afghans get to safety, particularly those who helped serve the Canadian military, and their extended family members. We've heard from witnesses in different places that extended families are not able to get to Canada safely. Some of them have made it to Pakistan, and they are unable, for example, to get their visa or their exit visa. Those are always the reasons, it seems, as to why they cannot get to Canada safely.

What work is being done, on a diplomatic level, for Canada to work with the Pakistani government to help Afghans get to Canada safely?

Mr. Paul Thoppil: Mr. Chair, we have been working actively on the ground, through our diplomatic mission in Pakistan with the Pakistani officials and ministers, in terms of trying to have recognition of safe passage documents that have been provided to Afghans in order to cross such border crossings as the Torkham border gate. They have been very helpful throughout the crisis, at the height of the crisis acknowledging acceptance of certain documents, but as time has evolved, they have been a little bit more limiting in that.

Quite frankly, they have been very helpful to the extent that they can, given their large burden of hosting three million and not necessarily...acknowledging their concerns of being a draw for more.

• (2000)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Are you still able to do that work now? Are you still able to work with them and continue to bring Afghans to Canada?

Mr. Paul Thoppil: Quite frankly, given limited air routes out, there is an intermittent flow that happens through the Torkham border crossing gate between Afghanistan and Pakistan. As we acknowledge the 10,000 Afghans who came into our country...last week, since the fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban a lot of that traffic has come through the border. That is based on active discussions through officials as well as through ministerial discussions.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Is it possible to make arrangements for Canada to have evacuation flights leaving Pakistan to Canada?

Mr. Paul Thoppil: At this juncture, the Taliban do not support charter flights for the evacuation of Afghans. They want their Kabul airport to resume normally scheduled commercial airline traffic. Therefore, there are limits to what like-minded countries, including Canada, can do in order to initiate evacuation charter flights.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: What about evacuation charter flights from neighbouring countries?

Mr. Paul Thoppil: Where significant numbers have accumulated in terms of approved Afghans to be able to come to Canada, IRCC, to my knowledge, has been organizing passage for the Afghans to come. Again, I would acknowledge the 10,000 milestone that was achieved last week.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: If Afghans were able to get from Afghanistan to, let's say, Pakistan.... I know of 300 families—former Afghan interpreters' extended family members—who are trying to get to safety and are unable to do so because IRCC has not processed their application. But other witnesses at this committee have said, "Leave that to us. We will get to a third country ourselves. We'll figure out how to do it."

If that were to happen, where IRCC actually processes the applications and provides them with the necessary documentation, would your department be able to bring in evacuation flights to bring them out to Canada safely?

Mr. Paul Thoppil: I believe IRCC has the requisite authorities on its own in order to entertain that response back to Afghans who have been processed to come to Canada.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Canada is providing documentation to Ukrainians urgently. Can we not do the same for Afghans?

The Chair: Mr. Thoppil, you have 10 seconds.

Mr. Paul Thoppil: I think that's a question that's best addressed to IRCC. Unfortunately, it's not within Global Affairs Canada's purview. I'm sorry.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Kwan. That was right on time.

We will now begin our second round. It will be Mr. Hallan for five minutes, Mr. El-Khoury for five minutes, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for two and a half minutes and Madam Kwan for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Hallan, go ahead, please. You have five minutes.

• (2005)

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses.

My first question is for Mr. Salewicz and Mr. Hill. Were either of your departments ever contacted by the government or briefed before August 2021 about Kabul or anything about Afghanistan falling?

The Chair: Go first, Mr. Salewicz, and then Mr. Hill can respond.

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: I think I'll turn this question over to Mr. Thoppil. I'm on the humanitarian side. I'm not aware of that information.

The Chair: Honourable member, are you okay with that?

Mr. Thoppil, go ahead, please.

Mr. Paul Thoppil: As the minister said correctly, there was active monitoring through our Five Eyes partners and our people on the ground on what was transpiring, through daily reporting, in order to understand both the fragility of the situation—

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Respectfully, Mr. Thoppil, I'm talking about before August 2021. Was your department ever briefed on Kabul falling?

Mr. Paul Thoppil: As I said, prior to the fall of Kabul, and over the years preceding it, we were doing daily sitreps on the situation on the ground.

The Chair: Let's go through the chair if we can. Thank you.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Mr. Chair, this is through you to Mr. Thoppil. Again, in the year before August 2021—within that year, between August 2020 and August 2021—was your department ever briefed that Kabul was going to fall? What was that conversation like and when did that happen?

Mr. Paul Thoppil: Mr. Chair, as I said, we were doing active situation reporting over the course of that year that the—

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Okay. I don't feel like I'm getting an answer on this one at all. Thank you.

Ms. Loten, you mentioned that it was a situation that happened immediately. It happened so quickly and it was rapid. According to the UNHCR, which testified to this committee, they briefed the government as early as January 2021 that Kabul was going to fall.

Was your department ever made aware between January and August 2021 of anything about Kabul falling?

Ms. Jennifer Loten: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Unfortunately, this is an area that I would prefer to direct to the geographic. From a counterterrorism perspective, we were not focused on the status of any governments and we were not focused on the particular plight of Kabul as much as the pattern of Daesh and al Qaeda in the region.

I would prefer this question be directed toward the foreign policy and the geographic.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Ms. Loten, does your department engage with or coordinate with IRCC at any level?

Ms. Jennifer Loten: IRCC is a key stakeholder and partner and interlocutor for Stephen Salewicz's section of the department, which does humanitarian assistance. We don't use the international Red Cross as an intelligence connection at all. That would not be appropriate.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Whoever this can be directed to is with IRCC.

What is the current concern with not being able to get the Afghan interpreters here? We hear that the minister of immigration has made some insensitive comments about security threats. What's currently holding back some of the interpreters from getting here?

The Chair: Madame Loten, do you want to answer that?

Ms. Jennifer Loten: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

As far as the screening procedures and Afghans coming to Canada are concerned, those questions.... I apologize that my answer appears to be evasive. It's not my intention at all.

Those are questions that need to be directed to IRCC, which has the lead on the screening procedures for entering into Canada.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Mr. Thoppil, through you, Mr. Chair, it would seem that the interpreters who were here last week on a hunger strike have been asking for some of the stuff that Ms. Kwan brought up. The process is taking way too long for them, compared to what's happening with Ukraine.

Can you explain a bit why there is a difference?

The Chair: Mr. Thoppil, you have 20 seconds to respond.

Mr. Paul Thoppil: Thanks. Mr. Chair, I believe that that question is, unfortunately, best answered by IRCC, because they have the mandate related to the passage of Afghans.

• (2010)

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

Now we'll proceed to Mr. El-Khoury for five minutes.

Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I welcome the guests and witnesses.

My first question is for Mr. Salewicz.

Mr. Salewicz, do you think Canada has options for action other than humanitarian assistance provided through contributions to the UN?

[*English*]

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: I certainly don't want to leave the impression that the only partner we work with on the humanitarian front is the UN. We do have a variety of other partners with whom we engage. We do support the International Committee of the Red Cross, which is a key partner in Afghanistan for supporting medical relief operations. They are currently supporting, if I'm not mistaken, over 90 health facilities right now in Afghanistan. We also work with a number of NGOs. We work with an American NGO named International Medical Corps, which is also responsible for delivering humanitarian assistance on the health front.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: My second question is for Mr. Thoppil.

Mr. Thoppil, based on how you view the financial situation in Afghanistan, how could Canada stimulate the region's economy to bring more stability there, without formally recognizing the Taliban regime?

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Thoppil: At this point, Canada does not recognize the Taliban diplomatically. They are officially recognized as a terrorist entity. We also have significant concerns, as the minister has described, about their treatment of women and girls, and, as mentioned, with regard to their inability for education. Therefore, it's very hard for us to recognize them, going forward.

We do understand that stability, economically, is very important. That is why we are very cognizant of the impacts of the people on the ground, and, therefore, the actions we are taking are ones of humanitarian assistance as Canada's contributions to provide some financial stability in the interim.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: My next question is for anyone who wants to answer it.

A number of Canadian NGOs have emphasized the limited flexibility. What would you recommend to remedy the fact that Canada must turn to the UN to ensure solid and concrete humanitarian assistance?

[*English*]

The Chair: I would ask the officials to raise the hand signals so I know which one will answer.

I'll go to Mr. Thoppil in the meantime.

Mr. Paul Thoppil: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

That is a question best addressed by Stephen, and then Jennifer.

The Chair: Mr. Salewicz, go ahead, please.

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: Thank you, Chair.

I think the minister was clear in saying that there are a number of different avenues that are being explored in terms of how to address the legal situation. Those are the ones that we have to continue to work on, that offer the.... The legislative system, right now, or the law in place, precludes Canadian NGOs from being active. So that is probably the best solution.

The Chair: Ms. Loten, you have 15 seconds to respond.

● (2015)

Ms. Jennifer Loten: I want simply to add that we continue to live in full respect of the Canadian law that is currently in place, and we are providing as much support as we possibly can to the people of Afghanistan through appropriate channels, managed in the international community.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. El-Khoury. Your time is up.

Now we'll go to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

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

My question is for Mr. Thoppil.

Mr. Thoppil, I will quote the Minister of International Development:

Millions of people in Afghanistan need urgent aid and I will do my best to give them the help they need. I remain committed to helping the Afghan people, and I will work with experienced partners and NGOs to see what more Canada can do to help the Afghan people.

Mr. Thoppil, has your department provided an opinion on amending the Criminal Code, as per NGOs' calls?

Mr. Paul Thoppil: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for his question.

I think the minister has already answered it.

[*English*]

We are looking at options in terms of how we address the constraints, while honouring the law in the interim.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I apologize for interrupting you, Mr. Thoppil, but the minister did not answer my question.

Here is my question for you. Has your department provided an opinion on amending the Criminal Code?

I don't want to know whether you are evaluating the options, I want to know whether an opinion has been provided by your department.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Thoppil, do you want to answer that?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Thoppil: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for this clarification.

[*English*]

We continue to look at options to understand what the best way forward is.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: So if I understand correctly, your department has not provided an opinion on amending the Criminal Code to help NGOs.

Is that indeed what you are saying, yes or no?

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Thoppil: It's a very complex situation. That's why it takes time to unpack what the considerations are—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I'm sorry, Mr. Thoppil, but—

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, let the assistant deputy minister finish, then I'll come back to you. I'll give you a few seconds extra.

Mr. Thoppil, did you want to add something?

Mr. Paul Thoppil: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to continue with my response.

There are various regimes in other countries. There are different pathways in terms of how to establish a mechanism, as Deputy Minister MacLennan said, to be able have a full tool kit within the Canadian government to respond to the current crisis in Afghanistan as well as other crises that may unfold globally in the years ahead.

That's what we are currently looking at.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Mr. Thoppil, I see that you want my time to run out.

My question is simple. Have you provided an opinion on amending the Criminal Code, yes or no?

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe. Your time is up.

Now we'll go to Madam Kwan for two and a half minutes. Please go ahead.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

I'm interested in that question, too.

Mr. Thoppil, is it yes or no?

The Chair: Mr. Thoppil, do you have the question or do you want Madam Kwan to repeat the question?

Mr. Paul Thoppil: I need to repeat the answer, unfortunately, which is there is still work being done by the civil service among many departments in order to formulate the best advice to the government.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you. I don't mean to be rude. I have limited time. I don't need to hear the same answer over again. I want to move to another area, then.

We just heard from the ADM that it's up to the Minister of Immigration to make the decision about evacuation flights in Pakistan, including determining whether or not to waive documentation requirements. When that was put to the minister, he then referred it back to other ministries, such as foreign affairs and others.

We have a situation where everybody is saying it's someone else's responsibility. A retired major, as a witness, said that someone has to take the lead to get Afghans safely to Canada.

Mr. Thoppil, could you advise if you have an opinion on who should be taking the lead? Is it immigration?

Mr. Paul Thoppil: IRCC has the mandate in terms of responsibilities for immigration into our country.

Thank you.

• (2020)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

Well then, I will ask [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

On the next one, I'd like to ask this question. Witnesses last week talked about needing to take a feminist approach and in particular for Canada to reach out to and work together with France, Germany and Sweden to step in where feminist foreign policy is required in this global situation.

Mr. Thoppil, is the ministry doing any work in reaching out to these other countries to take the lead and play a leadership role in taking a feminist approach to addressing the crisis in Afghanistan?

The Chair: Mr. Thoppil, you have 10 seconds.

Mr. Paul Thoppil: We are reaching out to like-minded countries. We have a senior official for Afghanistan based in Doha who works with like-minded countries, particularly those that share our policy of a feminist foreign policy in terms of condemning the Taliban for the actions they are taking with regard to the infringement of women's and girls' rights, and we continue to engage in a collective vis-à-vis the Taliban to inform them to stop these actions—

The Chair: Thank you. I'm sorry to interrupt, Mr. Thoppil. Time is up.

I'm going to go to Mr. Hallan and Madam Zahid.

You both will have four minutes each in this round.

Mr. Hallan, go ahead, please, for four minutes.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Salewicz, according to Ms. Loten, one of your key stakeholders is IRCC. Was there any coordination between your unit and IRCC prior to August 2021?

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: Mr. Chair, I'm sorry to interrupt. I think there's a misunderstanding. IRCC is my partner. I work with them in terms of the UNHCR mandate, but we don't share information on countries' specific situations like this.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Okay, Mr. Salewicz, what kind of coordination did your unit have in Afghanistan prior to August 2021? Was there any relief going there for the refugee crisis?

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: Indeed, we've been active in Afghanistan for decades, responding to the humanitarian needs. We were responding prior to the Taliban takeover and subsequently scaled up our response.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Mr. Salewicz, can you please table what kinds of supports were given before August 2021 by month to Afghanistan?

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: I can send you that, indeed.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: You could table that to this committee, please.

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: I have it by year, but I don't have it by month.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Can you break it down by month, please, prior to August 2021 and for afterwards up until now?

The Chair: Mr. Hallan, please go through the Chair and respectfully, because the officials are here. I'm not that particular, but I appreciate the respect.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Respectfully, Mr. Chair, through you, can Mr. Salewicz please table month to month the documents about supports to Afghanistan through his unit for, let's say, January 2021 up until February 2022?

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Mr. Chair, through you to Ms. Loten, you mentioned that your department was tracking ISIS and al Qaeda, but was anything being done to track Taliban prior to August 2021?

Ms. Jennifer Loten: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Yes, we tried to maintain vigilance of a range of terrorist and violent extremist organizations worldwide, not just in Central Asia and the Middle East but also in North America, Europe and other parts of the world.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: But, again, just the Taliban itself because you did not mention.... Through you, Mr. Chair, Ms. Loten did not mention the Taliban in her response when I asked previously.

Was Ms. Loten tracking the Taliban as well, her department, and if so, was there more concern or less concern about the Taliban compared to al Qaeda and ISIS?

Ms. Jennifer Loten: It's an interesting question, and I am going to answer it to the best of my ability. As we track the Taliban, from my perspective and from my position, we're looking at it from a policy perspective, and we're engaging across a range of multilateral platforms with Five Eyes partners and others in ways to engage, control and protect against the threat that terrorism represents worldwide.

There are also partners that work from an intelligence perspective that gather the kind of information that I think you're seeking.

The other part of my unit looks at the drug trade, for example, and we did spend a tremendous amount of time looking at the finances behind the Taliban, the opioids trade and how the organization functions and works.

The other thing we look at is the relationship between the Taliban, al Qaeda, ISIS-K and other organizations. We've now moved to an environment where we're looking at Daesh and ISIS and how they're reaching into different parts of Africa and developing networks there. Now we're looking at them as an organization that isn't territorially focused but is operating as a broad international network, and it's a very different ball game.

• (2025)

The Chair: Mr. Hallan, your time is up.

Now I will go to Madame Zahid for four minutes.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you, Chair.

Thanks to the officials for all the work they do.

My first question is with regard to the humanitarian aid, which is flowing out of the money announced for Afghanistan. Is all the money directed toward individuals living in Afghanistan, or is any money being directed to humanitarian aid for people who are in a third country?

Many Afghans have fled to Pakistan, Tajikistan or Qatar. Countries such as Pakistan are not in a situation to make sure that the basic necessities of life are available. Is there any effort being made to make sure that humanitarian aid gets to those people?

The Chair: Honourable member, is there a particular person who you want—

Mrs. Salma Zahid: No. It's for whoever can answer it.

The Chair: Mr. Salewicz, go ahead please.

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Indeed, this is an important issue for us. We recognize the burden placed on regional countries and the needs of Afghan refugees who have fled the country.

So far this year, we have provided \$8.4 million to programming outside of Afghanistan, in countries in the region. As I've mentioned previously, those funds are flowing through the WFP and the UNHCR for their programming in those countries.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Through you, Chair, my next question is with regard to the humanitarian aid that is reaching people in Afghanistan.

What efforts are being made by Canada to make sure that humanitarian aid reaches those households that are women only? There are many. We have heard testimony in our last few meetings that there are many households which are only women-led. It is very difficult for them to get out of the house, based on the situation.

What effort is being made to make sure that the humanitarian aid reaches women and young girls?

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: Indeed, the focus of our humanitarian assistance is always, first and foremost, trying to reach the most vulnerable. With that in mind, female-headed households in Afghanistan are extremely vulnerable.

There are concerns about access for women, given the changes to the laws in Afghanistan. We know that these challenges of ensuring equitable access are felt pretty significantly by women and girls. Our partners work tirelessly to respond to this. They are challenged by the Taliban daily in accessing women and girls, but they have a number of things that they put in place to try to make things work. They have female humanitarian staff present all the time to assist and try to open the door, so to speak, for assistance. They create gender-segregated distribution sites for women and girls. They scale up services through mobile teams for health care, for instance, so that women and girls don't have to travel to access them.

They are putting in place different programs, but the needs are immense, and they are challenged to meet all of those needs.

The Chair: You have 10 seconds, Madam Zahid.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Give a quick answer, please. When Canada announced matching funds, what response did we get to that from Canadians?

• (2030)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Zahid. Your time is up.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you.

The Chair: Now, on behalf of all members of Parliament on the committee, I would like to thank the assistant deputy minister for Asia Pacific, Mr. Thoppil; director general of international crime and terrorism, Madam Jennifer Loten; director general of international humanitarian assistance, Stephen Salewicz; and executive director and senior general counsel, Patrick Hill.

Thank you for your input into the committee. I appreciate your time and efforts. The very best to you on behalf of the committee.

Thank you to all of the members for being respectful of the time. The meeting is now adjourned.

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