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Chair: Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal



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• (1835)

[*English*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 11 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 a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of November 25, 2021. I would like to remind those present in the 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, in order to remain healthy and safe.

Should any technical challenges arise, please advise me. We may need to suspend the meeting for a few minutes, in order to ensure that all members are able to participate fully.

I will briefly go over committee business before we go to the minister. For the meeting on May 9, the Minister of National Defence is scheduled. For the meeting on May 16, we will begin in camera for drafting instructions. The analysts will be providing a detailed outline for consideration prior to the meeting. Nothing is in stone until the committee considers and adopts the report, but, given our limited time on May 16, it is my hope that the document can help focus our discussions. Following the drafting instructions, we will resume in public on May 16 for two panels of witnesses of 45 minutes each. Then, on May 30 and June 6, we will consider the draft report. That will enable us to complete our work in time for presentation in the House on June 8.

If there are no questions from the members, I will proceed to the witnesses.

I would like to welcome, on behalf of all committee members, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Honourable Mélanie Joly. Accompanying the minister are associate deputy minister of Foreign Affairs, Cindy Termorshuizen; acting assistant deputy minister, consular, security and emergency management, Julie Sunday; and assistant deputy minister, Asia, Paul Thoppil. Joining us online are assistant deputy minister, international security and political director, Heidi Hulan; and assistant deputy minister, global issues and development, Peter MacDougall.

I understand, Minister, that you will be joining us for the first hour and that your officials will be with us for the second hour. Is that correct?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs): Sukh, you're always right.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

I would like to thank the minister and her associates, and to give the floor to the minister for five minutes for opening remarks.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

Good evening, respected colleagues.

I am pleased to be joining you today.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee to speak to the terrible situation in Afghanistan.

The Afghan people have endured decades of conflicts and instability, and it would be hard to overstate the difficulties they have been dealing with since the Taliban took power.

Although I was not the Minister of Foreign Affairs when Kabul fell, I can tell you that my predecessor and all members of government, including our public servants at Global Affairs Canada, invested tremendous efforts in an extremely difficult situation to evacuate Canadian citizens, permanent residents and their families, as well as Afghans.

Those efforts continue to this day. My colleague Minister Sean Fraser talked to you about this in detail when he appeared last week. By the way, I would like to commend him on his hard work in this very important file.

[*English*]

I will start with the evacuation. The period leading up to the fall of Kabul last summer was a time of growing insecurity and uncertainty. By mid-July, a full month before the evacuation, all remaining allied military and intelligence assets in Afghanistan were confined to Kabul. Canada's embassy staff were also preparing for the prospect of a temporary closure of our mission in Kabul, as the Taliban moved towards the capital.

I want to underline the complexity and challenges of this task and the work that our foreign service, immigration and Canadian Armed Forces personnel undertook to make it possible. In July and into August, Canada implemented an immigration program for Afghans who were most at risk and undertook a large-scale evacuation.

We want to thank Afghanistan's neighbouring countries, such as Pakistan, Kuwait, the UAE and Qatar, for their support in welcoming the refugees. We remain in close contact with allies and partners in the region to help get as many people out as possible.

● (1840)

[*Translation*]

While recognizing the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, our government committed to resettle at least 40,000 Afghan refugees through special immigration measures. Interest in those programs has been unprecedented. So far, we have welcomed over 12,000 Afghan refugees, and more flights are arriving every week.

You have heard from witnesses who appeared before your committee that it is not easy to get people out of Afghanistan. Among the most difficult obstacles to overcome are the inability to find safe, secure and reliable ways to leave the country, the lack of stability in the country and exit requirements that are constantly changing at checkpoints and international crossings. We are working with local partners and neighbouring countries to overcome those obstacles and find solutions for Afghans who want to come to Canada.

[*English*]

Before the fall of Kabul, Afghanistan's humanitarian situation was among the world's worst. The Taliban takeover has only worsened the situation. It threatens to wipe away decades of progress. Afghanistan is today on the brink of universal poverty. We are particularly concerned about the growing food insecurity throughout the country and the backsliding of women's and girls' rights. My colleague, Minister Sajjan, is working hard to ensure that Canada is supporting humanitarian partners who are providing life-saving assistance in Afghanistan.

So far this year, Canada has committed more than \$143 million in humanitarian assistance to help people in Afghanistan and Afghans in neighbouring countries. We'll continue to call on the Taliban to ensure that aid workers, including women, have unimpeded access to those in need.

I now want to speak to an issue that is very close to my heart.

While we continue to press the Taliban to respect international humanitarian law and human rights, particularly the rights of women and targeted communities, we have seen a significant step backwards in recent months. The situation that Afghans are facing, and particularly these vulnerable groups, is absolutely terrible. We're deeply concerned by the growing reports of violence and human rights abuses. Civilians, journalists, human rights defenders, government employees and former members of the Afghanistan National Defense and Security Forces are also being targeted.

We continue to call on the Taliban to honour its promise of amnesty. I cannot overstate our condemnation of the Taliban's decision to reverse their commitment on allowing all girls to return to school at the secondary level. Because of their actions, prospects for a better life are being denied to girls. Access to education is a human right to which every woman and every girl is entitled. Canada has been an advocate for a coordinated effort by the international community to pressure the Taliban to uphold human rights.

We're also exploring how to concretely continue our support to Afghan women and Afghan human rights defenders.

I've talked to David Sproule, our special envoy to Afghanistan. I've raised this matter with my counterparts across the globe, including Tony Blinken of the United States, many times, but also to the European Union, Germany, the Netherlands, Indonesia, Qatar, the UAE, Kuwait, Egypt, Pakistan, Norway, Finland and Sweden. My deputy minister has also travelled to Pakistan, Qatar and Kuwait.

Obviously we've raised this, as a country, at the UN. In this area, Canada welcomes the strong human rights mandate of the UN mission to Afghanistan, following the Security Council's renewal of the mission on March 17. We also welcomed the appointment of Richard Bennett as the UN special rapporteur on human rights in Afghanistan.

The Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan has had profound implications for regional stability and for global security. The Taliban is a listed—

The Chair: Could you please wrap up? Thank you.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Yes, of course.

We know that the Taliban is a listed terrorist entity under Canadian law. Because of this, coupled with a security situation on the ground that is difficult, we have no longer a footprint in Afghanistan. I know that you will have questions for me on this very issue, and of course, I'm pleased to answer them.

Thank you so much.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Now we will proceed to the honourable members for the first round. Starting the round is Honourable Chong. Please go ahead for six minutes.

● (1845)

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister, for appearing.

I have a quick request, a quick question and then some more substantive questions. Officials from your department said they would provide us with a written answer about when Canadian officials last made representations to the Chinese officials about Huseyin Cilil. We did receive a written answer, but it wasn't an answer to the question. I'm wondering if the officials wouldn't mind following up with a written answer to us on this issue, because it's important for constituents.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: It's not linked to the committee, but yes, of course we'll provide that information.

Hon. Michael Chong: I just wanted to follow up for the foreign affairs committee.

I know this is tangentially related, but do you have an update as to when the Indo-Pacific strategy will be completed?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Are you acting as a member of the foreign affairs committee right now or the committee on Afghanistan?

Hon. Michael Chong: Afghanistan is arguably—

Hon. Mélanie Joly: But it's okay, Michael. I'll answer the question.

Yes, we're working on the Indo-Pacific strategy. Paul is working day and night on this—but you have to work more, Paul.

Yes, we will obviously present an Indo-Pacific strategy. That's one of the reasons we, together with others, went to the Indo-Pacific. I was in Indonesia and Vietnam.

Hon. Michael Chong: Do you have any sense of timing? Is it weeks, months, six months from now?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I'm an impatient person in general.

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay. Thank you, Minister.

I have a question regarding the National Resistance Front. Have you met recently with representatives from the front? What, if anything, is the Government of Canada doing to provide moral or material support to them? Have there been discussions with allies regarding the National Resistance Front in Afghanistan?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I know my department has been in contact with the National Resistance Front. I have not met with them personally, but we know they do important work.

At the same time, David Sproule has been also very much apprised of the issue. He is our special envoy to Afghanistan. That's good news, because he had an interim posting, and we recently announced that he would be permanent in his position, because obviously we're very concerned about what's going on in Afghanistan. He's still based out of Doha, but we want to make sure he continues to do his work.

Hon. Michael Chong: The government is broadly supportive of this organization. Is that a safe...?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: We are in contact with them.

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay, so the government's in contact with them, but doesn't have a formal position—

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Not yet....

Hon. Michael Chong: —on them.

Okay. Thank you. I appreciate that answer.

I'd like to raise an issue that was brought to the attention of this committee recently. There are about 40 signatories to a submission that we received. These were locally engaged staff on the ground in Afghanistan. They were given severance payments and pensions for the work they had done for Canada, but when they filed their 2021 taxes, they were hit with taxes as if they were Canadian residents.

It seems to me there's a question of fairness here, because the work they had done was in Kabul and in Afghanistan and not here in Canada, and the work was done before they were permanent residents of Canada, and residents of Canada for the purposes of the Income Tax Act. While the Canada Revenue Agency may be follow-

ing the letter of the law, it doesn't seem to be consistent with the spirit of our commitment to Afghans who had a significant and enduring connection to Canada.

I'm wondering if you are working with your colleagues to seek a resolution to this matter.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I was made aware of this situation recently, and yes, we are looking into it, because obviously we want to make sure there's a level of fairness that is being met when dealing with this issue. I also will follow up with my deputy minister on this issue.

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay.

This is more of an open-ended question. This is your last appearance in front of our committee before we go into drafting instructions to report back to the House as they have ordered us. We would like to include recommendations in that report to assist future governments in the execution of their role.

What advice could you give to this committee about what we could have done better in evacuating Afghans from Afghanistan last August, particularly Afghans who have an enduring and significant connection to Canada? It seems to me that some of our allies did a better job than we did. We evacuated some 3,500 Afghans by the end of the August. If I look at the United Kingdom, they evacuated 11,000 people. NATO allies, particularly the U.S., evacuated over 70,000 people.

What lessons can we learn from this that we could include in our recommendations to assist future governments?

● (1850)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Your question is definitely valuable, Michael, because the goal of this committee is to do better in a difficult situation, to be able to provide recommendations and to always do better in difficult situations.

I would say not only Canada, but also the world and, particularly, NATO allies, took note of what happened in Afghanistan when dealing with other issues, including Ukraine.

That being said, you have to compare oranges with oranges. As you well know, Canada left Afghanistan in 2014. We didn't have a very strong military presence on the ground, which was obviously different from the Americans and other NATO countries. That limited our capacity to get people out. That being said, we were able to work with some of these like-minded countries to get people out, while our presence was already limited.

Of course, hindsight is 20/20. At the time—and I was not minister—

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

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I can continue to answer.

The Chair: It's a big stop at seven minutes.

Now we'll proceed to Madam Damoff for six minutes. Please, go ahead.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Minister, thank you so much for being here today. You touched on this briefly in your remarks, but I wondered if you could just expand a bit.

One of the things that has troubled me deeply, which Canadians are not talking about, is what's happening to women and girls in Afghanistan. I don't know that Canadians are even aware of what's happening to girls. Schools are being closed. Women can't travel without a male escort. Secondary schools were closed. I'm not sure if they've reopened or not, but the curriculum has been changed to a focus on religion, rather than academics.

What is Canada doing to speak out about this, Minister? Will these actions of the Taliban make it more challenging not only for Canada, but for other countries to engage with them?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Thank you Pam. That's a really good question.

Obviously, one thing that Canada from can be proud of is the fact that for two decades, and with successive governments, we were able to help educate women and girls in Afghanistan. This was a priority. The backsliding of women's and girls' rights is extremely preoccupying. When I say "extremely preoccupying", it's that we're indeed seeing that they don't have access to secondary-level school.

Pam, you also mentioned the question of free movement. They are extremely limited in their movements. They are also being restricted in terms of their dress and the type of clothing they can wear. We know that they cannot have access—I mentioned free movement—without a male escort. These are just examples.

It was part of the amnesty negotiation conditions at the time, whereby women's and girls' rights needed to be respected. Ethnic communities needed to be respected. Overall human rights needed to be respected, which included the fact that public protests could be respected. Now we're seeing people being arrested and detained. Also, it was clear in the amnesty negotiation that there would be no retaliation against the people who were part of the former regime, but we've seen that more than 500 have been killed since the beginning in August.

Clearly, the situation in Afghanistan is even worse now than it was in August. Obviously, one of the biggest tragedies is what is going on with women and girls, but the overall human rights issue is a problem.

Now, what are we doing? We are raising it directly. Every time David Sproule, our special envoy, meets with the Taliban along with other ambassadors and special envoys, they raise it. We've obviously raised it at the UN and with many multilateral organizations. I've raised it bilaterally with many other countries, particularly the EU.

• (1855)

Ms. Pam Damoff: Minister, can I ask about that? You've raised it numerous times. I know that, like myself, you're very passionate about this issue.

Could you raise it more here at home? I think if Canadians actually knew what was going on, they would be as outraged as we are. I think they're just not aware of how far things have gone backwards since August.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I will do that, Pam. Thank you for asking the question.

I hope the journalists watching us right now will actually raise it as well.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I agree. Thank you.

You mentioned David Sproule. I wonder if you could expand on his role and on what he is doing on the ground for Canada and with our partners.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: David is actually representing Canada, but he is based out of Doha. Many of the special representatives are based in Qatar right now because no country in the world has recognized the Taliban as a legitimate government.

Many of our like-minded partners are there. Along with countries such as Australia, Norway, the U.K., and even the U.S., our special envoys have been meeting in groups with the foreign minister from Afghanistan when he comes to Qatar. It is our way to engage without recognizing the legitimacy of the Taliban government. For us, recognizing the Taliban regime is a red line that we don't want to cross.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I have four seconds left, so I'll just leave it there.

Thank you so much, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Damoff.

We will move to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for six minutes.

Please, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

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

Minister, thank you very much for joining us today and for giving us some of your precious time for this very important study. We are extremely appreciative.

You said earlier that the Taliban is a listed terrorist entity and that, for this reason, Canadian non-government organizations, or NGOs, were struggling to do their work on the ground in Afghanistan.

According to the United Nations, or UN, Security Council resolution 2615, humanitarian assistance and other activities for meeting the essential needs of people in Afghanistan are not a violation of the sanctions regime targeting the Taliban and intended to freeze their assets.

Is Canada implementing UN's resolution 2615 in the Canadian context?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: There is definitely an issue with the way the Criminal Code is being interpreted, as that limits the humanitarian assistance Canada can provide in Afghanistan. Of course, everything was developed when the events of September 11 took place, when the reality was completely different.

We are now in a situation where any form of indirect assistance, including the payment of humanitarian organizations' taxes, for instance, would be a violation of the Criminal Code. So I am very interested in finding out what solutions the committee will come up with and what recommendations will be made.

• (1900)

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Why is Canada one of the only countries that has not quickly changed its approach when it knows what is happening, it is familiar with the Canadian Criminal Code and the situation of NGOs, and considering that those organizations have been asking for this for a long time?

I even moved a motion for unanimous consent in the House of Commons. Your party is the only one that voted against the motion, Minister. It is difficult for us to understand this decision because NGOs are asking us for this. They were actually very disappointed by the Liberal vote.

We would like to know when your government will do something about this issue with the Criminal Code. Right now, we are not seeing or hearing anything, and nothing is happening.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: That is why the work of parliamentarians here is so important. So thank you for raising the issue. I think that any kind of recommendation from the committee on this matter will be relevant because Canada must play a humanitarian role.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Why does the government need to wait for a committee to make a recommendation when it knows about the problem?

You yourself brought it up. So why are you waiting for a recommendation from the committee? Everyone agrees that this makes no sense.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: We will be happy to work with other parties on the matter, and I am open to solutions.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I am very happy to hear you say that. I am also happy that journalists are listening, as you said, because your party voted against the motion that was proposed.

I will share with you an email from an NGO that would prefer to remain anonymous, understandably. I received this email yesterday, and it made me a little sad. This may put a bit more pressure on the government.

The email's authors say that failing to implement resolution 2615 in the Canadian context considerably limits the work they can do because they cannot invest any government money in Afghanistan if they do not get an extension of the contractual agreement they previously had. Had the government implemented that resolution or done anything at all to read down section 80.03 of the Criminal Code, it would have been able to provide them with funding to do their work in Afghanistan.

The email continues in the same vein for several paragraphs. People from the NGO are distressed. You have said how much

Afghans were suffering. Afghans are suffering because the government is unable to modernize the Criminal Code to reflect the current situation.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: There are various aspects to your comment.

First, we have provided assistance to the NGOs working in Afghanistan. I already said that \$145 million was provided.

Second, we are ready to receive from the committee any recommendations and solutions it wants to propose. However, a line must not be crossed, which is essentially the recognition of the Taliban's legitimacy as a government.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I don't think NGOs are complaining for no reason.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I think we can talk and find solutions. It would be my pleasure to work with you, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, and with the Bloc Québécois, of course.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: It would be my pleasure. You know how quickly I answer my telephone when you call me.

Mr. Thoppil, you were at the meeting of April 4, 2022, and I asked you a question you did not answer. When I looked over the list of guests for this evening, I was very happy to see that I would have an opportunity to put the question to you again.

I asked you whether your department had provided a legal opinion on amending the Criminal Code, as requested by NGOs.

This is very simple. If a legal opinion was provided, you can answer me with a yes, and if no legal opinion was provided, you can answer me with a no.

I yield the floor to you, Mr. Thoppil.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: It will be my pleasure to answer for my colleague.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, if you have recommendations on the issue, it will be my pleasure to continue the discussion with you and take note of the Bloc Québécois' position.

If the Bloc Québécois essentially says it is prepared to amend the Criminal Code so that the Taliban regime would not be recognized and if it finds a mechanism to do so, I am ready to discuss it with you.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I have understood.

The question was about whether a legal opinion was provided by the department.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Generally speaking, I can tell you that we respect our legal opinions. However, as this is related to security issues for the cabinet, my colleague cannot answer this question specifically.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: How is national security affected by whether or not a legal opinion has been provided?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Ultimately, the most important thing to know right now is whether we can help Canada change things on the ground in Afghanistan.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Has a legal opinion been provided or not?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Any opinion sent to the minister is necessarily secret, as my colleague knows very well.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I hope the journalists are listening to this.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister.

[English]

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

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

Please go ahead.

• (1905)

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

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

Has your office received any legal briefings from Justice on how Canada can ensure those doing humanitarian aid work are not going to be deemed to be in violation of Canada's anti-terrorism law?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: You're essentially asking questions similar to what Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe asked me in French, Jenny.

My answer would be similar to what I said in French, which is that if it's the position of the NDP, in the context of this committee, regarding the fact that there should be an amendment to the Criminal Code, which doesn't have an impact on—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you, Madam Minister—

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I'm sorry. I just want to finish my answer—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'm sorry. I'm going to interrupt.

Mr. Chair, I'm just going to interrupt for a minute. I don't need to get the answer in English, because I heard it through translation, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: No, Mr. Chair. I will finish my answer.

The Chair: Could I take a moment, please?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: It is my time, so I would like to actually ask questions—

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I will just finish my answer—

The Chair: Please—

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Yes, please go ahead, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I'm sorry. From now on, I would ask all honourable members to go through the chair so that I can control this better. I would love to give time for the minister to respond. If a member has to interrupt, then they should come through the chair and let me be respectful of the time.

Please go ahead, Madam Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I just want to get clarification with you, then. I asked the minister a question which was basically a yes-or-no answer. I don't need the minister to tell me in English what she said in French, because we have fantastic interpreters who are doing that job. I am wearing my headpiece and I can understand the answer.

I'm actually seeking an answer, not a repeat of the answer. If I could direct the minister to answer the question, Mr. Chair—

Mr. Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, please.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Chair, I think the issue here is just that the member asked a similar question and the minister was giving a similar response. I think that if the member didn't want a similar answer she shouldn't have asked a similar question. I also think it's important to be cordial. Literally three seconds into the minister's response, the minister was interrupted. I just don't think that's respectful.

Chair, I just think that the minister should be given at least a few moments to respond to the question, basically, before the member jumps in, whether it's through you or otherwise.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair, that really wasn't a point of order, though.

I would appreciate actually an answer. It was a different question.

The Chair: Madam Kwan, let's stop it here.

Madam Kwan, if you could give me a few seconds now, as you know, I have always been respectful. I've never intervened when you've had direct conversation, but for the sake of argument, let's talk through the chair, and then I will make a decision.

Even if the minister takes a few seconds longer, I will make sure, Madam Kwan, that your time has been compensated. I have stopped the watch, okay?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you to the minister as well for understanding.

Madam Kwan, please go ahead.

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

I'm just looking for a yes-or-no answer from the minister, but not an explanation and a repeat of what she already said.

The Chair: Thank you.

Minister, do you want to respond?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: My answer is, if it's the NDP position that the Taliban regime should not be recognized in the Criminal Code, or if it's the position of the NDP that the Taliban regime should be recognized by the...mentioned in the Criminal Code, but at the same time that there's a mechanism for humanitarian aid, I would love to know it, so I'm looking forward to working with her.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Go ahead, Madame Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I would urge the minister to read Hansard, then, because I'm on record with respect to what my suggestion is in dealing with this issue.

Can the minister advise if she or her office have been offered any assistance by allied countries with biometric collection?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Thank you, Jenny. That's a really good question, because I've reached out to many countries to find ways to be able to have safe passage in Afghanistan, including the EU directly and Germany. Also, obviously, we had conversations with Qatar, UAE and Pakistan.

The issue is definitely the question of biometrics and making sure that the security of the biometric facility is ensured.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: My question was: Has the minister or the minister's office been offered this assistance by allied countries, yes or no?

• (1910)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: We've reached out proactively, and I have reached out proactively.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Is the minister saying that she and her office have not been offered assistance by allied countries for biometrics collection?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I've had many conversations with many countries, including Pakistan, UAE and Qatar on this, like I mentioned. Our goal has always been to make sure that biometrics could be done and could be done safely, and we wanted to work particularly with NATO allies on this issue.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: It's been brought to my attention that the ministry, GAC, has been offered by allied countries to do biometric collections for Canada in their offices or in mobile offices. That was back in January, to my understanding, and yet, to date, this has not been taken up. Why not?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: We have clear security concerns that, because of the fact that there are terrorism groups in Afghanistan and in the region, any form of presence can be targeted, and therefore there's a security issue.

That's been the challenge of the Government of Canada, Jenny. It's how we can make sure that there are biometrics and people brought to Canada, and meanwhile, not create a security issue for Canadian diplomats on site.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: It sounds to me that the minister is saying that allied countries are not capable of doing biometrics, which is concerning.

A group of 35 lawyers, Shajjan & Associates, was hired by the ministry of Justice to represent the embassy and many Canadian departments with interests in Afghanistan. They worked for the embassy for nine years. They all applied for the special immigration measures. GAC gave them a verbal confirmation that they would be provided an invitation to apply, but, to date, no invitation has arrived.

I wrote to the minister about this, both this minister and the minister of Immigration.

Does the minister keep track of the cases referred to IRCC for processing?

The Chair: You have thirty-five seconds.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Definitely. I work with my colleague Sean Fraser. Obviously I've seen your emails, and I've answered all of them with great pleasure. At the same time, it is important for us to follow up, and this is definitely something that IRCC is in charge of.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I raised that with the Minister of Immigration, who seemed surprised and said, "Oh, I haven't heard that". Of course, I have a list of these individuals who have applied, and it has gone nowhere. I did receive responses from the minister acknowledging receipt of these letters, but no real response.

It would be great for the officials to table any documentation to the committee to show that they have, in fact, followed up with IRCC, what the expectations are, and what will happen with GAC with these individuals who are being left behind.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madame Kwan.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: We will do so. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we'll go to the second round. I will start with my own member here. We have 17 minutes, and five minutes go to Madame Findlay.

Please go ahead.

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

Through you to the minister, it's our understanding that no arrangements were made with any of our allies to assist with the IRCC mission either before or after the fall of Kabul. Why is that?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Before the fall of Kabul, I would not have known. I am not aware. After the fall of Kabul, until my appointment, I have no information in that regard.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Why did Canada leave Afghanistan two days before all of our allies, who were still actively evacuating people from within the country?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: As mentioned, I was not privy to that information. I know my colleagues, Mr. Garneau, Mr. Mendicino and Mr. Sajjan, were working 24-7 on this at the time.

I think that Heidi Hulan, who is on Zoom, could provide some information on the intelligence that we had at the time.

The Chair: Madam Findlay, do you want Heidi Hulan to respond?

• (1915)

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Sure, if she has a quick answer.

The Chair: Okay.

Please, go ahead.

Ms. Heidi Hulan (Assistant Deputy Minister and Political Director, International Security and Political Affairs, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): I can't speak to the question of two days before. I believe that we have some of our colleagues from—

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Thank you very much. If you can't answer, never mind.

My next question is, during the fall of Kabul, Ukraine sent a C-130 and took out of Afghanistan one flight full of people who qualified for a special immigration measures and brought them to their country for safe passage to Canada. Ukraine then stopped, because Canada would not make the commitment to get them from that country.

Why did Canada not make arrangements to continue in this fashion with Ukraine?

Why are there Afghan families who would qualify under the SIMs still left in Ukraine?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Different countries took different measures. What we did was work with the Americans, but also with Pakistan. At this point, we are at 12,000 refugees who have come to Canada.

I must say, because I've had many conversations about this issue over the last weeks and months, we're one of the countries that has received the most Afghan refugees. Every time I raise the issue, from my conversations with Blinken to Baerbock in Germany, to Borrell at the EU, or even Truss in the U.K., they recognize the leadership of Canada in welcoming 40,000 refugees. This is clearly not the case in these different countries.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: We appreciate those efforts. The problem is that a lot of those were already out of the country before the fall of Kabul. In this committee, we are trying to understand what happened around the time of the evacuation and since.

In Ukraine, Afghans who were evacuated were not offered any accommodation. In Pakistan, accommodations were only offered to a select group. They are hard to access through IOM.

Why has Canada still not addressed the accommodation issue that is plaguing this response?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: We have had several conversations with Pakistan. My deputy minister went to Pakistan. Pakistan decided to take in Afghan refugees without any form of papers—undocumented refugees—until November. Afterward, they decided to change the course of their approach. They decided to ask for these documents, which has been a challenge, because passport issuance in Afghanistan has been an issue.

We've been working with the Pakistani government. Again, two days ago, another chartered flight of 336 Afghan refugees arrived in Canada. We will continue that. We will continue to engage with other countries that have Afghan refugees within their own jurisdictions.

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: I have 10 seconds.

Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Findlay.

Thank you, of course, to my own member.

Now, we'll go to Mr. El-Khoury for five minutes. Please, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

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

Minister, thank you for joining us. I can tell you that all Canadians are extremely appreciative of your work. We are seeing you travel from country to country to help the people who need it and to project Canada's image internationally at the same time.

What do you think the food challenges in Afghanistan are?

I want to focus on that country's food insecurity.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: The situation in Afghanistan is terrible. It is worse than it was in August, as I said a bit earlier in my answers. Poverty is rampant there. It is exacerbated by a bad government, which is doing a poor job of taking care of its population and is not recognized by any country in the world. Afghanistan is in breach of a number of international law obligations and certainly human rights obligations. So it is very difficult to deliver international assistance to the country.

That said, we have provided \$145 million to a variety of UN organizations, including those related to food, such as the World Food Programme and UNICEF, which provides assistance for children. We are also working with a number of other organizations.

However, I would like to come back to questions asked by our NDP colleague Ms. Kwan and our Bloc Québécois colleague Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe about the fact that the Taliban is considered a terrorist entity under the Criminal Code. I want to mention that this is a major concern for the government because it limits NGOs' ability to provide assistance directly on the ground. This is a personal concern for me, and I would really like to know what the committee's recommendations are.

It would help the Afghan people if we were able to depoliticize the issue and have a non-partisan approach.

• (1920)

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: You say that our special envoy to Afghanistan, David Sproule, is doing amazing work.

Do you think that, if an agreement was reached with the Taliban representatives, they would respect their commitments or are we wasting time negotiating with them?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: The Taliban absolutely do not respect their commitments.

Our special envoy was supposed to obtain a commitment from the Taliban in the meetings held in Doha with Afghanistan's "minister of foreign affairs". I am using quotation marks here because we do not recognize his legitimacy. The few bilateral meetings that were held pertained only to the consular services requested by Canadian citizens. That is the kind of commitment Mr. Sproule has managed to obtain.

We are also generally in contact with UN Special Rapporteur, Robert Bennett, our ambassador to the UN, Bob Rae and our Department of Foreign Affairs officials.

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: How would you describe Canada's coordination efforts with the international community concerning the situation in Afghanistan, from September to today?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: A lot of effort has been made. However, not all of it has led to solutions, and that is the problem. I am being very honest with you.

The Taliban do not respect their amnesty. So the burden certainly falls on their shoulders rather than the shoulders of countries like Canada.

I understand the impatience and the frustration of committee members, who have been considering the situation for a while. I share that frustration as minister. However, you should know that the situation in Afghanistan is a problem for all the countries of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or NATO, and for many countries around the world.

Just recently, I was in Indonesia with Mr. Thoppil, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs talked about her concern over the situation in Afghanistan because it is creating instability in the region.

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: For you, as a woman, Minister—

[English]

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

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 am a person who doesn't often give up, so I want to come back to the question I asked you before, Minister. It is difficult for me to understand, as some are talking about ministerial privilege, while others are talking about national security.

I am actually under the impression that this is about politics. You don't want to answer the question because, if you tell us that an opinion was provided, you must tell us what it consisted of and, if you tell us that an opinion was not provided, we have to tell you that you are not taking the matter seriously.

You don't want to answer the question for political reasons, isn't that right?

• (1925)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, I think we are really getting into the details. At the end of the day, what is important is to find common ground together so that we can provide humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan. That is the question the committee is asking and the question I would like to be able to answer.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: The question I am asking you is not complicated. Has the department provided a legal opinion?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: The idea is to determine whether or not we can send money and whether the Criminal Code is problematic.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: We can talk to each other.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I think this is the question the committee is asking, and I look forward to hearing your answer because I look forward to finding solutions with you.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: It's not complicated, Minister.

Government departments produce legal opinions by the hundreds. If the opinion has not been produced, it means that you have not asked for it and that your department has not done the work. For weeks, we have been asking that, at the very least, a legal opinion be requested and produced. If you tell me that no legal opinion has been produced, that means that you are not doing your job. If you say that, yes, a legal opinion has been produced, we would like to know what it says.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I can assure you that I am still doing my job, as you say.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: So a legal opinion has been produced.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: My objective here is to ensure that Canada's interests are protected and that we can improve the situation on the ground. I think and I hope that we can work together because it is indeed difficult to provide humanitarian aid in Afghanistan right now.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: You don't even have to wait for the committee's recommendations. We could do it right now, if you want to save time. Make your choice.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: My aim is not to save time. My aim is to depoliticize the issue so that there can be broad unanimity on it. If we can work together, if you can talk to the Conservatives, if you can work with the NDP, we will find a good solution.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: If you wanted unanimity, you could have just voted for the unanimous consent motion that I put forward. The Liberals were the only ones who did not vote for it.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I look forward to continuing this conversation with you.

[English]

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

We will go to the last honourable member for two and a half minutes.

Madam Kwan, please go ahead.

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

I'd like to just follow up on the last question.

Could the minister advise what action she will take to ensure that GAC will refer people who have applied to Canada but still not heard from IRCC...that they will receive an invitation and in fact receive the information before the quota, the number of the allocations, runs out?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: We will make sure to follow up with IRCC. GAC has definitely been the bridge between the people who have applied at the beginning...and then they're processed through IRCC. We know that a lot can be done and must be done, and that's what we'll do.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'm very concerned. With each passing day, people's lives are at risk, because they're in hiding.

I know that some applications were submitted eight months ago. They have been GAC approved, in terms of the referral, and are sitting on IRCC's desk somewhere collecting dust. I hope the minister will motivate IRCC to get the job done. Otherwise, it makes you look bad, which is not I think what they want to do.

On a different question, with respect to Pakistan—because part of the issue is Pakistan not moving forward with the recognition of documentation—could the minister advise what work she has been engaged in with Pakistan to ensure that the accepted documentation, such as single-journey travel documents from Canada...so people can exit Afghanistan?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Well, I think you've heard it from my colleague, Sean Fraser, who wants to make sure that biometrics are made. This is clearly an issue, because we obviously want to make sure that Canada's security is protected.

To go back to your former question, because I didn't fully answer, you asked me whether we received offers of biometric services from allied countries. I want to let you that's not the case.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: That's interesting.

With respect to allied countries, and for Pakistan to recognize our documentation, will the minister ask allied countries if they will collect biometrics on behalf of Canada, or operate on the ground, seeing as they have boots on the ground to do mobile offices?

● (1930)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: That's exactly what I was trying to do with the EU and Germany. We thought that was something that could be done. At the same time, we're still in conversations. I hope this will continue to move in the right direction. I must say that the security situation is such that it is difficult for us, and it is difficult for the EU and Germany. I won't talk for them and put words in their mouths, but this is a collective problem. It's not only a Canadian issue.

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

Now, on behalf of the committee members I want to thank the honourable minister for her appearance. Ms. Joly, thank you. The very best to you.

Now we will suspend for a few minutes to allow the minister to intermingle with the members and leave. We'll continue with the officials shortly. Thank you.

● (1930)

(Pause)

● (1930)

The Chair: We are now going to proceed with the round of questions.

I would request, honourable members, if you are asking a question to a particular person, please name them so that the honourable official can respond accordingly.

We will start with Mr. Garnett Genuis for six minutes.

Please go ahead.

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

Thank you to the officials for being here. It's an honour for me to be subbing at this committee.

I serve as the point person for international development for our caucus. I want to focus my questions on that issue, picking up on some of what's been already discussed.

I really appreciate the challenges here. We have a very dire humanitarian situation. We want to do all we can to make sure resources don't end up in the hands of the Taliban. At the same time, I think, Canadian organizations, Canadians individually, and all of us here feel the imperative to see what we can do and if we can do more to help people who are in a really challenging situation.

I think one of the problems is that we have legal constraints that apply to Canadian organizations that may not apply to international organizations that we are funding. It seems to me that in these kinds of situations, Canadian organizations have constraints that relate to the possibility that any of their resources will end up in the hands of hostile actors. Large, multilateral organizations that taxpayers are also funding are not subject to the same constraints.

I'd just like to hear a bit more from officials about what they think can be done specifically to remove the impediments that we're hearing about from stakeholders that make it harder for them to confront this really dire humanitarian situation. I'm sure you're hearing about it as well.

The Chair: Go ahead, please, officials—whoever wants to take it.

Ms. Cindy Termorshuizen (Associate Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): I'm happy to start.

It's a really important question. I think like all of the members of this committee, we're really seized by the seriousness of the humanitarian situation on the ground, and it is growing worse. I'm glad you asked the question.

Our preoccupation is getting aid and support, particularly humanitarian assistance, to Afghanistan in a way that complies with the Criminal Code. I know that all of the members are very familiar with that issue.

I should also mention that four multilateral organizations that are operating in Afghanistan and using funds that we supply also work very hard to ensure that funding does not go to the Taliban, through taxation, for instance, that Canada has provided.

Maybe I'll turn the floor to Peter MacDougall, who is our assistant deputy minister responsible for this area to follow up further.

• (1935)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I would like to hear from him in a moment.

Can I just clarify this? I think it's important that people hear what you said. Although UN organizations may, we hope, do their best to not see money end up in the hands of the Taliban, at the end of the day those Criminal Code provisions that do apply to Canadian organizations do not apply to them. Is that correct?

Ms. Cindy Termorshuizen: What we do as the Government of Canada is work with those organizations to design our contributions so that Canadian funding does not go, for instance, to taxation to the Taliban. We are stringent upon ourselves, because the Criminal Code does apply to Canadian officials who write those agreements. It's incumbent upon us, even working with multilateral organizations, to ensure that we are compliant with the Criminal Code.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Right, so it applies to you and it influences the way you engage, but it does not apply to them insofar as if we're providing funding for core funding and things and they're using it at their discretion or—

Ms. Cindy Termorshuizen: That's right. It applies to Government of Canada officials.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: All right. Thank you.

I'd love to hear from the other gentlemen on this as well.

Ms. Cindy Termorshuizen: Peter, it's over to you.

Mr. Peter MacDougall (Assistant Deputy Minister, Global Issues and Development, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Yes, we have taken a number of mitigation measures.

Just to clarify, we're working primarily with UN institutions, as well as the International Committee of the Red Cross. We use a variety of [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Our guest's microphone is not working properly and it is difficult for the interpreters to do their job. Since we know that they are working very hard, I would like us to help them.

[*English*]

The Chair: We'll check.

Madam Clerk, could you check?

I have stopped the watch, Mr. Genuis.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Miriam Burke): Could you suspend for a moment, please, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: The meeting is suspended for two minutes.

• (1935)

(Pause)

• (1935)

The Chair: Let me call the meeting back to order.

Mr. Genuis, go ahead for two minutes please.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: For the witness, I wonder if you can clarify if you think the current Criminal Code provisions as they apply are clear, or if they are challenging to understand and navigate. My sense from civil society is that it's the provisions themselves, but it's also the sense of “if you put a foot wrong, then you're violating the Criminal Code”, which is obviously very serious.

How can you help private organizations that are operating in this space to really understand how to navigate within the circumstances?

• (1940)

Ms. Cindy Termorshuizen: Peter is really the expert on this, but I'll do my best to channel him.

I think that our civil society organizations clearly want to do their job and do it well. I know that we have conversations with many of our civil society organizations to explain to them as best we can the situation and the Criminal Code provisions.

This is obviously a really difficult area. I really can't say much more about how they interpret it and the challenges they're facing, but we know that they have come to us and have spoken to us about them. I have spoken with some of these organizations myself. We know that it's a difficult reality for them.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Yes. Maybe I would just invite some of the civil society organizations to submit briefs to this committee to inform us of their ongoing work.

I hope that you'll continue to look for options in terms of clarity around that legislation: how to make it work and work well, and possible changes to the legislation or clearer information. It's a huge problem, and I don't think we're where we need to be in terms of actually getting the support to people in this dire situation.

Thanks.

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

Ms. Cindy Termorshuizen: Yes, and we are definitely looking at options.

The Chair: Okay. We appreciate that.

Now we'll go to Mr. Baker for six minutes.

Please go ahead.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our officials for being with us today, in person and virtually, and for your service to our country on the issues related to Afghanistan and otherwise.

I'd like to ask you about the food shortage in Afghanistan. The minister, in response to one of my colleagues from the opposition, spoke a bit to this issue.

What I'm concerned about in particular—I want to build on what the minister was talking about—is that there are concerns that Russia's invasion of Ukraine could spark a global food shortage, in part because many countries in Africa and the Middle East rely on Ukrainian food exports, particularly wheat, but other food exports as well. Also, of course, the World Food Programme is reporting that since the Taliban has taken over Afghanistan, 50% of Afghans as it is are not receiving enough food.

How do you see Russia's invasion of Ukraine impacting countries around the globe in terms of the food supply, and specifically Afghanistan?

Ms. Cindy Termorshuizen: We still can't access Mr. MacDougall, is that correct?

I'm happy to respond to the question.

I think you've raised a very good point in terms of the serious impacts we are beginning to see as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

As all of the members know, both Russia and Ukraine are important food providers. Russia is also a major provider of fertilizers, so the impact is likely to be very significant. Some countries are much more dependent on exports of food items from Russia and Ukraine than others. In various countries in the Middle East in particular, we see a very heavy reliance on those exports. Lebanon, some countries in North Africa and some countries in South Asia are very heavily dependent.

This is a real concern. Minister Joly and many of our senior officials in the department have been working very closely with allies to look at what we can do to address this to make sure that there is as good a food supply as possible. We're looking at providing extra supports to some of these countries that are particularly affected.

With respect to Afghanistan, I am not sure what the percentage of dependence is that they have on, for instance, wheat from Ukraine. As Minister Joly mentioned, the food security situation in Afghanistan was already quite serious prior to the takeover by the Taliban in August last year. There was a lot of concern with respect to a drought. Those conditions—the impact of climate change and an ongoing food security situation—continue.

All that is to say the Government of Canada is intensely engaged with other countries around the world and with international organizations, particularly within the UN system, to look at anything we can do to ensure that those impacts are mitigated.

● (1945)

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you.

Just to build on your answer, what are some of the things Canada is doing and what are some of the potential measures out there to

address the potential for global food shortages or even famines related specifically to Russia's invasion of Ukraine?

I'm concerned about the impact on Afghanistan, but I presume that the impact on Afghanistan will be similarly felt in other countries. What are some of the measures...? You can't suddenly just supply... Are there food reserves that can be tapped? How does that work? What can be done?

Ms. Cindy Termorshuizen: As I mentioned, we're working very closely with the World Food Programme and with other UN institutions looking at how we can ensure that supply chains remain resilient.

We're also identifying those countries that are particularly vulnerable because some countries are much more vulnerable than others. Some countries are dependent on Ukraine for 70% to 80% of their wheat and clearly they will not be getting that amount of input this year. We're really working with those countries to identify where those gaps are and what we can do to assist in filling those, and ensuring that the World Food Programme and other organizations are able to work effectively in those places.

A lot of international coordination is ongoing.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you.

I don't think I'm going to have time for another question, Chair, so I cede the rest of my time.

The Chair: Thank you. You still have 40 seconds, but if that's the case—

Mr. Yvan Baker: I'll just take this opportunity to thank our officials for being here and for all of their work both in Afghanistan and on issues around the world.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Baker.

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

Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you very much to the witnesses who are with us this evening. We are grateful for their time and for the answers they provide. These are extremely important for the upcoming draft of the committee's report and recommendations.

Ms. Termorshuizen, if I ask you the same question I asked the Minister, I imagine I might get the same answer.

Am I wrong?

[*English*]

Ms. Cindy Termorshuizen: I think that's probably correct.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you.

In recent weeks, the Islamic State has claimed responsibility for a number of attacks that targeted members of Afghanistan's Shiite minority, particularly the Hazaras.

There is a Hazara community here in Canada that is putting on a lot of pressure and doing a tremendous job. We have to help the Hazaras who are over there now. We are being asked to recognize them as a persecuted group, and so far that has not been done.

Do you know what is holding us back from recognizing the Hazaras as a persecuted group?

[*English*]

Ms. Cindy Termorshuizen: Maybe I'll start with that question and then pass the floor to my colleague Paul Thoppil. My colleague Heidi Hulan can also speak on the security situation.

We've also noted with real concern the growing number of attacks. As you've rightly pointed out, a lot of them have been targeted towards minority groups, like the Hazara—

• (1950)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I'm sorry to interrupt, but I haven't had access to interpretation since you started speaking, Ms. Termorshuizen.

Mr. Chair, can we start from the beginning without me losing time?

[*English*]

The Chair: Sure. I will give you 20 seconds extra.

Ms. Cindy Termorshuizen: Like you pointed out, we have noted the growing number of attacks by the Islamic State Khorasan Province, in particular. Some of those attacks have been claimed by them. Some, we think, have been perpetrated by them. Many of them, as you point out, were targeted against minority groups, particularly the Hazara, but not only the Hazara.

It is definitely an issue we are noticing an uptick on. Even just this weekend, in advance of Eid, over 50 people were killed in a mosque in Kabul. It is a very serious matter.

Maybe I can pass the floor to Paul Thoppil.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: The question is mainly about recognizing persecuted groups.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you can hear from Mr. Thoppil for a few seconds.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Of course, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Assistant Deputy Minister, please go ahead.

Mr. Paul Thoppil (Assistant Deputy Minister, Asia Pacific, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Mr. Chair, thank you for the question.

We are in discussions with our international law colleagues at the ministry with regard to that. It's taking some time just to get the jurisprudence in terms of the way forward, but it is definitely top of mind. We have been tracking for some time the persecution impact,

particularly on the Hazara community but, quite frankly as my colleague has noted, broadly ethnic communities at large in Afghanistan. While the Hazaras have been the most noteworthy, it's not just them.

That's why David Sproule, together with like-minded special envoys, has been trying to encourage the Taliban to foster a way forward on inclusive governance that respects what is a country that is significantly diverse in terms of ethnicities, notwithstanding the fact that the Taliban, based on its Pashtun background, is the dominant. As we've seen through the ages, there are more than just Pashtuns in this country.

For a sustainable country going forward, we need a way forward for governance whereby all the ethnic minorities see themselves as part of that governance decision-making. That's what we are advocating for through the UN, through David and together, as the minister said, with many other countries.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Do I have any time left, Mr. Chair?

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead. You have two minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Perfect.

I just want to point out that this is really a very important request from the Hazara community here in the country. There should be a follow-up.

Ms. Termorshuizen, has your department received lists of people taken in by refugee networks led by Canadian organizations?

[*English*]

Ms. Cindy Termorshuizen: Maybe I'll pass that question over to Paul Thoppil.

Mr. Paul Thoppil: As the minister noted, since the fall of Kabul in that very fluid situation, Global Affairs stepped up to be a focal point in what was a dramatic increase in the volume of inquiries. We have received over one million inquiries through our intake mailbox, with more coming in still to this day.

What we have is a due diligence protocol within the department that triages them and ensures that the bona fides of that request related to whether they have a significant and/or enduring relationship to the Government of Canada under the special immigration measures has been achieved. Once we have done that assessment, we turn it over to IRCC for processing.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you.

Canada has a policy on international aid that is, by and large, very feminist. I think that's where the emphasis lies. In fact, the United States announced the cancellation of talks with the Taliban in Doha at the end of March because of the ban on girls' education in schools.

What are we currently doing about the feminist component of international aid in Afghanistan?

What is the department doing, what is Canada doing in this regard?

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. Your time is up.

Please answer briefly, Ms. Termorshuizen.

• (1955)

Ms. Cindy Termorshuizen: As the minister said, this is something we're engaged intensively in with allies, and with the Taliban through our representative in Doha. I would also say that we're working very hard with humanitarian partners to ensure that our humanitarian assistance is actually getting to the most vulnerable, including some of the minorities you mentioned, but also women and girls.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you.

[English]

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

I will now go to Madame Kwan for six minutes.

Please go ahead.

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

In Mr. Thoppil's last appearance at this committee, he indicated that things were going well with Pakistan, in terms of bringing Afghans to safety. Then things changed and evolved, but were still kind of going.

Can officials clarify for me whether Pakistan is now refusing to recognize Canada's documents, including the single journey travel document or letter of acceptance from IRCC and G number, which was something they had done previously?

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Thoppil.

Mr. Paul Thoppil: Mr. Chair, we have no defined sustainable protocol with Pakistan at this juncture. It's ad hoc-ish.

What we're trying to do, through our head of mission in Islamabad, is engage constantly with the Government of Pakistan to see whether they would re-engage in a sustainable protocol at the Torkham border gate and allow single travel documents to be accepted. This is a concern for Pakistan right now, in part because they had, as you know, millions of refugees already, pre-fall. They stopped in November, as the minister said, because they are worried about continuing to be a draw for those who have received documentation from Canada or like-minded countries...for more Afghans to come over their border.

That's why, from Pakistan's perspective, it's a challenging situation—responding to many countries' requests to accept documentation from Afghans who would like to cross the border.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: When was the last discussion GAC had with Pakistan on this issue?

Mr. Paul Thoppil: As the minister said, the deputy minister went to have high-level bilateral consultations in the late fall, whereby these issues were put forward. I can't tell you, at this juncture, when our high commissioner last had an interaction with the Pakistan government, but Global Affairs headquarters has charged her to make these types of issues the top priority.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: If officials could table documentation with this committee advising us on when that last conversation took place and when they expect the next conversation will continue the discussion, that would be much appreciated. Just give us a sort of progress update, if you will, since November, because I hope that work has been done since November. It sounds as if it has, but getting that update would be much appreciated.

Mr. Paul Thoppil: We would be pleased to do so.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you so much.

Similarly, on the question of biometrics and allied countries, the minister indicated that there's been ongoing discussion with respect to that.

When was the last discussion with allied countries regarding them assisting Canada in collecting biometrics in Afghanistan or operating mobile offices?

Ms. Cindy Termorshuizen: Perhaps I'll start and then pass the floor to Paul.

I think it's fair to say that we probably have conversations about biometrics on a weekly basis. As the minister said, the issue of biometric collection, particularly inside Afghanistan, is a real challenge. We can collect biometrics in other countries, which we're doing in Pakistan, but the inside-Afghanistan piece is really difficult. None of our allies has cracked this nut because, as the minister said, the ability to collect biometrics in Afghanistan securely, given the security situation some of your colleagues have noted, is challenging.

Let me pass the floor to Paul.

Mr. Paul Thoppil: Mr. Chair, reach-outs were happening with the EU and Germany in January or February, through what are almost weekly conversations with like-minded...to take a pulse on what is happening on the ground and where there may perhaps be movements others have discovered. As my colleagues have suggested, we're trying to find a way forward because we all desire.... Whether it's Canada's 40,000 commitment or certain countries that still have former locally engaged staff trapped in the country, we're all trying to find a way forward to extract them from what are very challenging circumstances.

• (2000)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Has utilizing ex-military to collect biometrics been considered?

Mr. Paul Thoppil: Mr. Chair, I think the issue becomes what is Canada's duty of care to any party, whether it's ex-military or not, based on the security situation on the ground. That still has to be triaged. Whether it's Government of Canada personnel or it's through some sort of arrangement, that legal obligation of duty of care still rests on the Government of Canada, from a legal exposure perspective. That is one issue.

The other issue is, how do you move forward in a way that also respects the Criminal Code? There needs to be a legal review of that undertaking, I think, hypothetically.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Just raising—

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

We'll go to the second round now, and we'll start with Mr. Ruff for five minutes.

Please go ahead.

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

I'll start by going back to some of the testimony we heard throughout this committee, and that I've heard first-hand going back to the evacuation, about the lack of coordination between Global Affairs Canada, IRCC and DND during the evacuation.

My question to the officials is, how would you assess the efficiency and effectiveness of interdepartmental coordination and communication during the evacuation?

Ms. Cindy Termorshuizen: I'd be happy to start, and then I'll ask my colleague Julie Sunday to jump in. Both of us were very much engaged during the actual evacuation period.

There are maybe two points that I would make. One is that the collaboration between National Defence, IRCC and Global Affairs Canada was excellent. We had at Global Affairs Canada, embedded in our emergency watch and response centre, officials from National Defence, CAF individuals were there, and IRCC. We had an integrated team.

The challenge really was the situation on the ground. It was utterly chaotic. We all saw the images of the airport, which was the only way to get out. Being able to effectively conduct an evacuation in such a difficult situation was really the issue, rather than the collaboration between departments.

I'll maybe ask Julie if she wants to add anything.

Ms. Julie Sunday (Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Consular, Security and Emergency Management, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): I would add very quickly that we met daily, and of course in the emergency watch and response centre, where we had our teams, we had IRCC and DND embedded with us.

The week of the evacuation was a huge operation. On the 25th, for example, we had almost 250 staff surged in there to support the evacuation. That week was, as my colleague mentioned, very chaotic, but we also were in a context where the security situation at HKIA, in Kabul, was deteriorating rapidly. Of course, there was the attack on the 26th at the gate of the airport, so—

Mr. Alex Ruff: Thank you for that. I appreciate your opinion on how it was. It does contradict very much what we heard first-hand from many of the military personnel on the ground, including former colleagues of mine.

Previous large-scale evacuations utilized a lead department or a lead minister. Why wasn't there a lead department or minister assigned in this case for this evacuation?

Ms. Cindy Termorshuizen: What I can say with respect to ministerial engagement is particularly around Global Affairs Canada's minister's engagement. I have to say that I and Mr. Thoppil, Ms. Sunday, as well as other Government of Canada officials, briefed the minister at the time, Minister Garneau, on a daily basis. We had a four corners meeting with the Privy Council Office and other departments on a daily basis. There was intensive coordination between departments, and engaging ministers and the centre, throughout that period.

● (2005)

Mr. Alex Ruff: I appreciate that there was coordination going on. It unfortunately doesn't seem to fall out with the necessary coordination from everything that we've heard on the ground.

It's been successful in the past—if we look at Syria—when a lead department is put forward. In your opinion, what department should have been the lead during the evacuation?

Ms. Cindy Termorshuizen: Maybe I could just make a point about the comparison with Syria. I think one of the issues that helped us enormously in the Syrian situation was that all of the individuals we were trying to bring to Canada were already outside of Syria. It wasn't the kind of context that existed in Afghanistan.

I think the member is absolutely correct to say that it was chaotic on the ground. Even with coordination back in Ottawa, trying to do things effectively on the ground was really challenging. That is a very fair point to make with respect to the context around the airport in those days of the evacuation.

The Chair: You have 15 seconds.

Mr. Alex Ruff: Thanks, Chair.

That didn't really answer the question. I want to know which department should be the lead.

My final question—and I'll accept that they can submit it in writing afterwards, Chair—is this. Has a lessons learned exercise or after-action review been conducted by Global Affairs Canada? If so, will it be made public? If not, when will it be done?

Ms. Cindy Termorshuizen: Maybe I can go back to the last question the member asked. In terms of a lead department, Global Affairs Canada does have the lead for international consular situations and emergencies like this. There is a lead established under Canadian law.

In terms of lessons learned, we always do lessons learned on large consular and other emergencies of this nature.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ruff.

We'll go to Mr. Sidhu.

Go ahead for five minutes, please.

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

First off, I'd like to thank our wonderful team from Global Affairs Canada for your incredibly hard work and for joining us tonight. It's not easy work, and the added number of variables and challenges make your job even harder. I just want to say thank you for that.

Our committee has heard about the difficulties that Afghans have faced fleeing Afghanistan and making their way to neighbouring countries before coming to Canada. As you are aware, Pakistan has welcomed a significant number of refugees. There are always humanitarian concerns with refugees fleeing areas of conflict.

Just the other day, 336 Afghan newcomers arrived at the Toronto airport from Pakistan. I was at the airport earlier, a few weeks ago, with Minister Fraser to welcome over 300 Afghan refugees from another neighbouring country.

Can you speak to the work Canada is doing with Pakistan and other countries bordering Afghanistan to ensure that Afghans are able to leave?

Ms. Cindy Termorshuizen: Sure. I'll start and then pass it once again to Mr. Thoppil.

As Minister Joly mentioned, there has been an enormous amount of engagement with neighbouring countries. Of course, Pakistan has played a particular role because of the long border between the two countries and the fact that there are a fair number of flights that go between the two countries as well.

Paul, could I ask you to respond in more depth?

Mr. Paul Thoppil: It's a really good question. Notwithstanding a previous response whereby we don't have protocols in place now, we do need to commend the Government of Pakistan for what it did in terms of response during that very pivotal time after the fall of Kabul until November. They acquiesced to our advocacy in terms of what we could provide and identified lists of vulnerable individuals who we knew were going to be crossing the border and then having them ensure that their border guards were apprised of those lists and making sure that those documents were recognized in order to cross over. A significant deployment of personnel went into our High Commission in Islamabad in order to then go with the next up, once they had crossed the border, in terms of them proceeding with biometric screening and, once the processing of those individuals was assured, arranging charter flights, which is why there are now over 12,000 individuals from various parts coming through into Canada.

It's been a significant lift.

• (2010)

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: Yes.

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Chair, the bells have started ringing. I suggest that we sit until 8:30 p.m. That still gives us an additional 10 minutes to get to votes.

I ask that you seek the consent of the committee to sit until 8:30 p.m.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Chong. That is an excellent suggestion.

I hope I have the unanimous consent of the committee?

Okay, thank you. We'll continue and finish this round.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Deputy Minister Thoppil, can you share with the committee the multilateral work that is being done with Canada's allies to support the people of Afghanistan? We did touch upon Pakistan, but just generally in the region...

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

As the minister noted in her remarks, there have been significant reach-outs beyond Pakistan. Qatar comes first to mind, because they played a pivotal role in staging, aircraft and logistical supports during that time, as well as Kuwait for the air bridge that the CAF had put into place. I think we also need to acknowledge that there have been myriad pathways for Afghans who have found their way out regardless of whether they had the right documentation. We have been trying to ensure that these countries are apprised of Canada's commitment to return them and ensuring that there is time for our embassies to engage with these individuals, to go through the screening and the application processing and, therefore, once approved, to then organize those charters beyond just Pakistan but from the different countries where Afghans have found themselves and have been trying to find a way forward if they have met the application process requirements in order to come here.

That has resulted in not just those countries in the region, but many countries where Afghans have been, beyond essentially the Persian Gulf... That also has been further supplemented by the intelligence conversations that we have been having with our like-minded allies, who all have the same challenges going forward.

So it really has been an international diplomatic engagement that has been beyond the norm in order to share information and to understand what is succeeding and what is not working, and adjusting advocacy methods as we engage with a multitude of countries to ensure safe passage where possible.

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

I will go to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for two and a half minutes.

Please go ahead.

[Translation]

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

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the witnesses for being with us this evening. I think that this is the last time I will address them today.

Ms. Termorshuizen, you alluded to the Syrian crisis in 2015. During that crisis, Canada Border Services Agency officers collected the biometric data of Syrians arriving on Canadian soil. Through their union, the officers confirmed that this was indeed the case.

Why did we allow the collection of biometrics from Syrians on Canadian soil during the 2015 crisis, and not from Afghans during the 2021 crisis, or even from Ukrainians during the 2022 crisis?

What is the basis for this disparity?

[English]

Ms. Cindy Termorshuizen: I'm afraid I wasn't involved in the details of the Syria effort at the time. I'm not quite sure how the biometrics were done at that point, so I can't speak to that, I'm afraid. If the other officials on the line can, they'd be most welcome to jump in.

The Chair: Do any of the officials want to respond, please?

Ms. Cindy Termorshuizen: Just so that you're aware, Mr. Chair, the comparison I was making was in terms of the safe passage issue.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I understood the difference, but I was just establishing a link that way.

This may be a shortfall at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, or IRCC, as well as at Global Affairs Canada, or GAC, but there doesn't seem to be an emergency mechanism that these two departments can call upon during an international conflict such as the ones currently taking place in Ukraine and Afghanistan, or during a natural disaster. The devastating earthquake in Haiti comes to mind.

Would you be supportive of us implementing a contingency process that IRCC and GAC could use during an international crisis?

This would allow you to exercise some form of leverage. It would be a bit like the Emergency Measures Act, but it would apply to international crises or conflicts.

In your opinion, could this be a worthwhile solution?

• (2015)

[English]

Ms. Cindy Termorshuizen: I guess what I would say, Mr. Chair, and I'll ask my—

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

Ms. Cindy Termorshuizen: What I would say is that we actually have a mechanism like that already. We have an emergency watch and response centre set up at Global Affairs Canada, and this is the point where we coordinate the response to international emergencies. We stand up an emergency response team when a major crisis happens and we bring in the partner departments that we need to—

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: This would not apply to IRCC, but only to Global Affairs Canada.

Is this correct?

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, thank you very much for your time.

[Translation]

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

Thank you, everyone.

[English]

The Chair: We'll go to Madam Kwan for two and a half minutes.

Please go ahead.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

I'd like to clarify with the officials what documentation I'm looking for. Specifically, I'd like to get the officials to table how many GAC-referred people were submitted to IRCC and how many of those have been issued a G number that they are aware of, and how many have arrived in Canada.

As well, I'd like the officials to submit to us how many do not have a G number among those people referred to IRCC—among the GAC referrals—and when the first and last referral were made to IRCC from GAC.

Also, could the officials advise us as to whether or not women athletes have applied to GAC for referrals, and if GAC has made any of those referrals to IRCC?

The Chair: Thank you.

I will go to the associate deputy minister. Please respond.

Ms. Cindy Termorshuizen: I'll pass the floor to Mr. Thoppil, if you don't mind, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Sure. No problem.

Mr. Thoppil, go ahead please.

Mr. Paul Thoppil: Mr. Chair, we would be very pleased to provide answers to all of those questions.

Just based on data that I have in front of me, just to be helpful to respond to the member's questions, I would note that it's a fluid situation and that the numbers of Afghans coming here are always increasing nicely—perhaps not as fast as we would all like, for sure. But recently, we had—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'm sorry, I don't mean to interrupt you. I'm just running out of time and I've got one more question. If I could get that information submitted to the committee through the clerk, that would be great, as we could then share it with everyone.

I would like to ask very quickly if, in the ongoing work on this file, GAC is still accepting referrals at this point in time, and would you support having IRCC expand the referral groups to, let's say, Amnesty International?

The Chair: You have 13 seconds.

Mr. Paul Thoppil: Mr. Chair, as I may have said, we are still receiving inquiries every day through our GAC intake box. But the answer to the question is really the prerogative of the minister of IRCC, and it's that minister who really should be here to respond to that question.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Madam Findlay for five minutes.

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Chair, I think Madam Findlay passed her time on to me.

Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay: Yes, I did.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and Madam Findlay.

I have a question about agriculture. I think it's safe to say that the largest humanitarian crisis in the world today is in Afghanistan. Mr. Baker was talking about the impact of the war in Ukraine, one of the world's great breadbaskets, on global food production and on the situation in Afghanistan.

Canada is one of the great food or breadbaskets of the world. Half of our global food production, many argue, comes from natural gas through the Haber-Bosch process, which produces the synthetic nitrogen that has allowed for significant increase in crop yields in recent decades.

A lot of the fertilizer we use in Ontario is Russian fertilizer produced through natural gas. The department is responsible for the tariffs that were recently announced, the sanctions on Russian fertilizer, of 35%. This is causing a lot of Ontario's farmers to raise alarm bells about the spring crop going into the ground. Many of these farmers purchased the fertilizer last year before the war in Ukraine broke out and they are asking the Canadian government to waive the implementation of the tariff on nitrogen fertilizers that were purchased before March of this year in particular.

I have two questions. First, are there plans by the department to waive the tariffs on fertilizer purchased before March of this year? That is an urgent question considering that spring planting is taking place as we speak. Secondly, what is the government doing to ensure that going forward, we have a replacement for synthetic nitrogen fertilizer from sources other than Russia?

The Chair: Okay, go ahead please, for five minutes.

• (2020)

The Chair: Officials, please go ahead.

Ms. Cindy Termorshuizen: Mr. Chair, I'm afraid that this is probably more in the purview of the Minister of Agriculture. This is not my area of expertise.

I apologize. I don't have the answers to those questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Honourable member Mr. Chong, go ahead.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to flag this as a concern. We seem to be seized, at the top line, about the potential food shortages that we could be looking at

this fall, but we don't seem to be reacting to farmers on the ground in this country, who, through provincial and national organizations, are raising alarm bells about the huge tariffs being imposed on nitrogen fertilizer.

This is directly impacting farmers as we speak. The land is drying out. Wheat, soybean and corn crops are going in. Farmers are making decisions, as we speak, about what to do. The price of fertilizer, if it's 35% higher, particularly for purchases they made before the war started, will have a direct impact on how much they apply and how much yield they're going to get. Compound that with the fact that only about 20% of the corn crop in northern Ukraine has been planted and we could be looking at an intersection of a number of issues here that could have pretty devastating consequences for the people of Afghanistan and for people in other developing countries later on this year.

I have two questions concerning the process under the special immigration measures, or SIM. What is the process for someone to receive a referral from Global Affairs for the SIM program? Perhaps you could quickly describe that. What are the criteria for the referral to the SIM program? How are applications for referral assessed?

The Chair: You have 45 seconds, please, to respond.

Mr. Paul Thoppil: Thank you, Chair.

I believe I may have responded to that earlier, whereby we're trying to be very much consistent, given that significant volume, as I had articulated earlier, of over one million inquiries. They're not all the same. The challenge is to go through the duplicates, but then go through trying to track what are individual bona fides and what are linked to others in terms of a family dynamic.

Then we go through the identification through records that we may have, based on what we have available at HQ and what may have come back from our mission in Kabul, and then, from DND's perspective, what records they have in terms of former military interpreters. From our perspective, for the GAC ones, we then ensure that we do that check related to the criteria reference. Do they pass the test of the significant or enduring relationship to the Government of Canada—employee, former employee, contractors or so on?

Once we have enough information to validate that...that's only when we go over. It's a very methodical one. We're being very consistent. The challenge is that it does take time. It's very manual.

• (2025)

The Chair: Thank you very much, MP Chong. Your time is up.

Now we'll go to the last honourable member.

Mr. El-Khoury, go ahead, please, for five minutes.

[Translation]

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

Thank you to the witnesses. We're very pleased to have them here.

Ms. Hulan, an analysis of past situations published by the International Peace Institute shows that sanctions can have unintended consequences. For instance, transactions may be delayed or curtailed because of administrative and legal complexities, or because financial institutions and companies want to avoid taking risks in the context of a sanctions regime.

What details can you share with us on this subject?

[English]

The Chair: Assistant deputy minister, please go ahead.

Ms. Heidi Hulan: Thank you very much.

Could I just clarify that the honourable member is referring to the sanctions that are currently ongoing in Afghanistan?

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: Absolutely.

Ms. Heidi Hulan: Okay. Thank you. Ukraine was mentioned earlier.

Mr. Chair, we are always concerned about unintended consequences of sanctions. I think that is fair to say. There is no doubt that in Afghanistan, sanctions on the Taliban, which remains a listed entity under the Canadian Criminal Code and also under UN sanctions, two sets of sanctions that are applied by Canada but that relate to one another as well, are having an impact on not only on business but also individuals and the ability to travel into the country and to deliver humanitarian assistance.

That is why we are working so hard with the organizations that we are supporting, as my colleague Peter MacDougall would have spoken about, in terms of our ongoing humanitarian assistance, to find mitigation measures to make sure that our support can continue to get into that country. Those mitigation measures can include contractual provisions and various forms of assurances and operational arrangements. In some cases, Canada's funding can support ongoing activities of those organizations outside of Afghanistan to free up extra money for them to use inside Afghanistan. Those are some of the mitigation measures that we have put in place.

Mr. Chairman, the reality is that although sanctions in Afghanistan are having a very serious effect, the Taliban has taken over as the de facto government of the country. It remains a terrorist group under Canadian legislation. Those sanctions remain in place and remain very important.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: My second question is for Ms. Termorshuizen as well as Ms. Sunday.

In our humanitarian efforts, what do you see as the main challenges in getting funding to Afghan beneficiaries?

In your opinion, what more can you or Canada do to improve the status of women in that country?

[English]

The Chair: You have one minute to respond.

Ms. Cindy Termorshuizen: Mr. Chair, it's a very good question.

We are certainly working very hard to ensure that the funds that do go into Afghanistan from Canada through other organizations get to the people who need them. As we have spoken about before, the organizations that we work with—UN organizations, the WFP, UNICEF—are organizations that have a lot of experience working in difficult areas like Afghanistan. They are very practised at ensuring that those funds get to where they need to go. They also have very important relationships on the ground that enable them to get to the right people.

I should also say that even though the security situation is not good in Afghanistan, some of our UN partners actually have easier access in some parts of the country than they did prior to the August takeover of Kabul by the Taliban. So there is access to some of these places, and we continue to work very hard to ensure that our funding and our humanitarian assistance go to the most vulnerable.

● (2030)

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

On behalf of the committee members, I would like to thank the respected officials who have been here today for their input to this committee. I won't mention your names again because of the time constraints, but we do appreciate your work for Canada. The very best to all of you.

On behalf of the committee, I would also like to thank the support staff, the interpreters, the analysts and, of course, the clerk of the committee.

We can go back to our voting.

The meeting is adjourned.

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