



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 007

Thursday, February 17, 2022

Chair: Mr. Sven Spengemann



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• (1540)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.)): Welcome to the seventh meeting of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Pursuant to the motion adopted on January 31, the committee is meeting to discuss the current situation in Ethiopia.

[English]

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

For members participating in person, please keep in mind the Board of Internal Economy's guidelines for mask use and health protocols.

[Translation]

Please note that screenshots or taking photos of your screen is not permitted.

[English]

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name.

[Translation]

When you have the floor, speak slowly and clearly. When you aren't speaking, please mute your microphone.

[English]

As a reminder, all comments by members and witnesses should be directed through the chair.

For housekeeping, I will remind members, and inform our panel as well, that I will be using a very analogue reminder to indicate that 30 seconds remain in your speaking or testimony time. When you see the yellow card, please try to wrap up the discussion so we can go to the next member or intervenor.

[Translation]

I would now like to welcome our witnesses.

[English]

We have with us this afternoon, from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, Tarik Khan, the acting assistant deputy minister for the sub-Saharan Africa branch.

[Translation]

We'll also be meeting with Hilary Childs-Adams, special advisor for Ethiopia, Sub-Saharan Africa Branch.

[English]

We also have Stephen Salewicz, director general, international humanitarian assistance; and Gwyn Kutz, director general of the peace and stabilization operations program.

I've been advised that Acting ADM Khan will be making the opening remarks of five minutes.

Sir, I will give you the floor, and we will then go to questions by members. Please go ahead.

Mr. Tarik Khan (Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Sub-Saharan Africa Branch, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good afternoon, members of the committee.

[Translation]

Good afternoon. It's my pleasure to speak to you today.

Since my predecessor appeared before this committee in March 2021, Canada's response to the deteriorating humanitarian crisis and conflict in Ethiopia has continued to be proactive and constructive.

However, this crisis is ongoing and it continues to have major human rights and humanitarian impacts on the civilian population of Ethiopia.

[English]

In the last year, the armed conflict in Ethiopia has intensified dramatically. This has led to a significant increase in humanitarian needs in northern Ethiopia, with more than nine million people requiring assistance. In the province of Tigray itself, these needs have reached catastrophic levels.

Human rights violations and abuses continue to be perpetrated by all parties. Inter-ethnic tensions have deepened, and Eritrean forces remain within Ethiopia. We hear this from independent eyewitnesses and media reporting, as well as from Canadians who have friends and family in the affected states.

Global Affairs Canada continues to prioritize the safety, security and provision of consular services to Canadians. Over the course of the conflict, we have pursued three objectives: one, seeking the cessation of hostilities and supporting efforts towards a political resolution; two, calling for immediate and unimpeded humanitarian access and the protection of civilians in Tigray and other conflict-affected areas; and three, calling for the perpetrators of human rights violations and abuses to be held accountable.

Canada's sustained political and diplomatic engagement over the past year has helped build momentum for peace.

Prime Minister Trudeau has spoken to Prime Minister Abiy four times since November 2021, calling on him to engage meaningfully in mediation, facilitate humanitarian access and ensure accountability for human rights violations. Foreign Minister Joly spoke with her Ethiopian counterpart, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mekonnen, in November 2021, calling for immediate humanitarian access, and reiterating Canada's support for the joint investigative report on human rights violations, conducted by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission.

The Prime Minister and the ministers have spoken with a range of international leaders and foreign ministers to galvanize international action.

This intensive political engagement has been matched by our diplomatic engagement on the ground in Ethiopia. Our ambassador to Ethiopia meets regularly with human rights organizations, local organizations, local governments and the Government of Ethiopia to advance the three objectives I've outlined.

We continue to use all possible levers to promote and support mediation, a first step towards a durable peace. Canada is funding the mediation efforts of African Union High Representative Obasanjo and we stand ready to provide additional support.

[Translation]

There are some signs of progress. In recent weeks, both the government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front, or TPLF, appear more open to mediation efforts. The government has released some political prisoners. There has been a reduction in armed hostilities. A national dialogue process has started. The mediation track is key to securing an end to the conflict.

Our diplomatic representatives have also made it clear that the blockade of humanitarian assistance is unconscionable and that it must stop. They highlighted the need to protect civilians in Ethiopia with parties to the conflict and at the United Nations.

[English]

The department has also worked actively to promote and protect human rights in Ethiopia, including to ensure accountability for human rights violations and abuses, such as sexual and gender-based violence. The department provided over \$600,000 to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to support its joint investigation with the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission on human rights violations in Tigray.

We ensure that none of our development assistance is directed to the Government of Ethiopia nor to any of the other parties to the

conflict. We have also successfully advocated with the boards of international financial institutions to ensure that they apply greater scrutiny to all of their projects in Ethiopia and to ensure that development assistance does not benefit the parties to this conflict.

Looking ahead, Canada will support conflict prevention and resolution as well as the role of women as peace-builders. We will ensure that our future assistance reflects the nexus of humanitarian, development and peace and security investment that Ethiopia so badly needs.

Canada will continue to work with our African country partners and our like-minded country partners to seek a solution to this multi-dimensional conflict that threatens the security of Ethiopia and its neighbours.

I would now be pleased to address any questions you might have.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Khan, thank you very much.

We will now go to rounds of questions by members. Round one consists of four segments of six minutes each. Leading us off this afternoon will be Mr. Chong.

The floor is yours for six minutes.

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

Thank you to officials from Foreign Affairs for appearing in front of us today. I'd like to start by asking the officials whether or not they have engaged the Forum of Federations. The reason I ask is that the Forum of Federations is a Canadian organization that the federal government funds. I believe it's been involved in Ethiopia in the past. In the opening remarks one of the three objectives of the government is to seek the cessation of hostilities and support efforts toward a political resolution. I'm wondering if non-governmental organizations like the Forum of Federations has been engaged to that end.

● (1545)

Mr. Tarik Khan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Would you like me to answer that question right now?

Hon. Michael Chong: Yes, that would be great.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Khan. There's no need to revert back to the chair. Members have the ability to manage their discussions for the time that's allotted to them.

Thank you very much. Please go ahead.

Mr. Tarik Khan: Very good. Thank you.

The Forum of Federations is an important partner of Global Affairs Canada, and of course we recognize the work they do in supporting federalism in their assistance to a number of different countries around the world. We do currently have, I believe, a development project with the Forum of Federations and we are in close contact with that organization.

Hon. Michael Chong: Is that NGO actively engaging with the Department of Foreign Affairs to provide ideas and suggestions as to how a political solution can be found to the crisis in Ethiopia?

Mr. Tarik Khan: Thank you.

The project that we currently have has of course experienced some delays due to the situation on the ground in Ethiopia. It's a project that is valued at \$8.5 million. It is due to end in 2023. We have an ongoing conversation with them about the ability to support the work they do in the current environment. I would just reiterate that it is difficult for them to do their work in the current context.

Hon. Michael Chong: The Biden administration executed an executive order in September of last year authorizing the Secretary of State to impose sanctions on certain individuals with respect to human rights violations in Ethiopia. Last November Secretary of State Blinken announced the U.S. was imposing sanctions on six individuals associated with the Eritrean government and ruling party. Has the Government of Canada considered imposing sanctions related to the conflict in Ethiopia?

Mr. Tarik Khan: Sanctions remain a very important tool that can be used in situations like this. We have not applied sanctions; however, it is still one tool that is always on the table for consideration. We have deployed other diplomatic and political tools to put pressure on the Government of Ethiopia, and of course, we have raised all of the issues related to human rights violations and accountability for those violations amongst all of the actors and parties to the conflict.

In light of the current openness that we are seeing towards potentially some peace and some dialogue by the parties, this is of course a tool that would be considered in light of that current context. We do recognize that the U.S. has imposed those sanctions on the Eritrean individuals mentioned and one entity. As I said, the sanctions option remains something that we consistently analyze and do consider in terms of timing.

Hon. Michael Chong: I have a very quick question.

Has the Government of Canada made any representations to the Government of Eritrea with respect to their armed forces' involvement in the conflict in Tigray?

Mr. Tarik Khan: Yes, we have. We have spoken directly to the Government of Ethiopia and the diplomatic representatives, expressing our serious concern about the presence of Eritrean troops in Ethiopia.

This has been stated on a number of occasions.

Hon. Michael Chong: It has been widely reported that the Ethiopian government has acquired drones from a number of countries, including Turkey. In the past, Canada has issued export permits for the export of drone technology to Turkey.

Is the government aware of any reports that some of the Canadian-manufactured drone systems have found their way into the Ethiopian conflict?

• (1550)

Mr. Tarik Khan: We have no ability to confirm at this stage whether any Canadian parts were used in those drones. We cannot either confirm or deny that. It's a difficult thing for us to assess at this stage.

Export permits for such optical systems to Turkey were suspended in October 2020, and then cancelled in April 2021. Turkey did not export a significant amount of arms, including drones, to Ethiopia until a military agreement was signed later, in August 2021.

Hon. Michael Chong: Does Canada support a no-fly zone over portions of Ethiopia, as some have proposed?

Mr. Tarik Khan: For that question, I will turn to my colleague Mrs. Hilary Childs-Adams. She can respond to that one.

Mrs. Hilary Childs-Adams (Special Advisor for Ethiopia, Sub-Saharan Africa Branch, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): This is not something that has been widely discussed in multilateral fora. It is something that was called for by the Tigrayan forces. We continue to keep in very close contact and coordination with our like-minded allies on this. That has not come to a decision or a vote anywhere.

The Chair: Mr. Chong, thanks very much.

We will now go to our next intervenor.

It's MP Ehsassi for six minutes, please.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the representatives from GAC for providing us this briefing.

As I understand it, over the past 48 hours, the state of emergency has been lifted in Ethiopia. Could you provide us with some information as to what that was in response to? What were the initiatives that were under way in encouraging the Ethiopian government to do so? How significant a step could that be?

Mr. Tarik Khan: They declared a state of emergency on Tuesday, November 2, and then, as you indicated, it was lifted on February 15.

We believe this is a significant event in that it could provide greater access for humanitarian actors. We see it as a promising sign of the Government of Ethiopia's intention to make progress on this issue. We also believe this will also help enable swifter investigations for those Ethiopian and foreign citizens who are currently under detention and that it will potentially enable the prompt release of those who were not charged. It is a very promising sign.

I'll ask my colleague Mrs. Hilary Childs-Adams if she wants to add to that.

Mrs. Hilary Childs-Adams: Thank you.

I would just say that we are hopeful, now that the state of emergency has been lifted—and has been lifted three months early—that the situation will improve in terms of humanitarian access, as my colleague said. It will also allow people to depart Tigray who had wanted to do so, but were unable to during the state of emergency.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you for that.

It is good to hear that some promising steps are occurring. However, as I understand it, the World Health Organization has indicated that there is still a de facto blockade.

What are some of the diplomatic initiatives under way to ensure that there will be no more blockades and that humanitarian assistance can make it to northern Ethiopia? I believe it's mostly there.

Mr. Tarik Khan: We are aware that there has been some loosening of the blockade that is now permitting UN humanitarian assistance services and UNHAS flights into Tigray. That is also a promising sign. We only provide funding to our humanitarian partners who have significance in working in these kind of challenging situations.

We have raised the issue of humanitarian access on multiple occasions. These include the calls between our Prime Minister and Prime Minister Abiy, as I mentioned. That's happened four times since last November. We've raised this concern with the high representative of the African Union, Obasanjo. We've raised it in calls with the Prime Minister to President Biden in January, as well as to the UN Secretary General in December.

If there is one thing that has been consistent in all of Canada's political and diplomatic representations on the crisis in Ethiopia, it has been that call to lift the humanitarian blockade and to improve humanitarian access. As we mentioned, hopefully there will be some lifting of that and an improvement in access with the lifting of the state of emergency.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you very much for that.

As I understand it, our focus has always been on providing funding so that we can gather evidence as to human rights violations that are going on throughout the country. Just recently a complaint was filed with the African Union human rights commission. In your estimation, how promising a development is that?

• (1555)

Mr. Tarik Khan: I think engagement of the African Union on the issue of human rights violations is critical. It's been made clear to us by many of the African countries in the region, as well as by the Government of Ethiopia, that this is an African issue and they expect to seek African solutions.

Of course, we contribute to the African Union and to many of the organs of the African Union. We hope that will [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] in what has been filed with the African Union commission. I'm not aware of this particular complaint that's been filed, but there is, obviously, an important coherence as well with the work of the AU high representative for peace. The ability for Africans to file a complaint within their own institutions is a very promising sign as well.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Completely—but I'm not too certain as to the capacity of the human rights commission of the African Union.

That being said, as I understand it, we have provided financial assistance through the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and to the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission. They are gathering evidence as to wholesale human rights violations. What is the purpose of that? What comes out of that particular process?

Mr. Tarik Khan: The work of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission is really critical in terms of the ability for the international community to receive an independent investigative report on the extent of human rights in the country. As we all know, there's been real difficulty in accessing certain areas of the country. There is a strong propaganda war going on in terms of all the parties to the conflict and the kind of information they release about rights violations that have been perpetrated. There are all kinds of risks and the potential for misinformation, or fake news, related to human rights violations.

The ability of the UN's OHCHR, which we consider to be one of the most important organizations within the UN system, to go in and investigate independently is really critical. For it to do so in partnership with an Ethiopian organization, the human rights commission, is also equally important.

When we funded that report—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Tarik Khan: I just wanted to say that the results of that report are essentially what informs so much of the diplomatic engagement and political engagement around the situation in Ethiopia. This is our core source of information.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ehsassi.

Mr. Bergeron, you have six minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Mr. Khan, you said earlier that African leaders have emphasized the importance of finding an African solution to the conflict in Ethiopia. A meeting of African heads of state was held on February 5 and 6 at the African Union Summit. The summit was held in the Ethiopian capital.

Are there any comments, conclusions, proposals or typically African solutions to help us resolve the conflict?

Mr. Tarik Khan: Thank you for the question.

At the African Union Summit, which took place a few days ago, the new chairperson was also introduced. Every year, a different person holds the position of chairperson.

Chairperson Macky Sall from Senegal outlined his priorities. These include conflict resolution and peace and security. Although they didn't focus on the situation in Ethiopia, it's certainly one crisis that the organization must address. I think that it will be interesting to see what role the union will play.

The role of high representative Obasanjo is now key to the institution and to mediation efforts in Ethiopia.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you for this response, which sheds light on the fact that the Africans want an African solution, but didn't address this issue much at the latest summit, from what I understand.

I want to focus on the three goals that we're pursuing in this conflict: "seeking the cessation of hostilities and supporting efforts toward a political resolution"; "calling for immediate and unimpeded humanitarian access and the protection of civilians in Tigray and other conflict-affected areas"; and "calling for the perpetrators of human rights violations and abuses to be held accountable."

You noted that the Prime Minister spoke four times with his counterpart, Abiy Ahmed, and that the Minister of Foreign Affairs spoke once with her counterpart. At that time, the efforts to facilitate humanitarian aid and to bring perpetrators of crimes and abuses to justice were discussed.

How would you assess the progress to date on each of these three goals?

• (1600)

Mr. Tarik Khan: Thank you for the question.

I think that the progress has been slow and insufficient. We haven't seen much progress, especially in the three areas that I referred to.

That said, there has been some very recent progress. The possibility of mediation and a national dialogue among the parties to the conflict in Ethiopia is a little more promising. The fact that the government lifted the state of emergency in the country is also promising in terms of access to humanitarian aid and the issue of arbitrary detentions in recent months. I'm speaking with cautious optimism. I think that the parties to the conflict have reached a certain level of fatigue.

After, or as a result of, all the diplomatic and political actions, the government of Ethiopia clearly believes that its reputation is at risk. This country has portrayed itself as very progressive and as a leader among African countries. It's now facing a humanitarian crisis, an economic downturn and a conflict that seemingly can't be resolved without a national dialogue and mediation.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Last June, Ms. Gould, who was the Minister of International Development at the time, announced \$7 million, from what I understood, to help organizations on the ground deliver humanitarian aid.

However, according to the World Food Programme, no convoy has reached the Tigray region since mid-December 2021.

My question is very simple. Does it seem as though the \$7 million to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid has been helpful or has it been wasted?

Mr. Tarik Khan: Thank you.

This is a significant question in terms of our humanitarian aid and its delivery. I'll just say that, in 2021, we committed \$43 million to address humanitarian needs in crisis-affected areas of Ethiopia.

I'll turn to my colleague, Mr. Salewicz, who can talk about the different projects and the \$7 million that you referred to.

The Chair: Please keep it short.

[*English*]

Mr. Stephen Salewicz (Director General, International Humanitarian Assistance, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for the question.

Indeed, as Mr. Khan has indicated, the government provided \$43 million in humanitarian assistance last year. We provide this money very flexibly to our partners. There are a number of humanitarian crises going on in Ethiopia beyond Tigray. There's a drought, inter-communal conflicts and refugee crises, so our funds are for the totality of that response. It's provided very flexibly to our partners so that they can respond as the operational context allows. When there's a blockage in Tigray, they can shift to other parts of the country and respond to the many needs that exist there.

• (1605)

The Chair: We'll have to leave it there in the interest of time.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Bergeron.

[*English*]

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

Please go ahead.

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

I want to thank all of the witnesses today for sharing this information with us. I think this is one of the most pressing issues that this committee will be looking at. We have seen just horrific things in the Tigray region.

I do want to very quickly touch back on the question that Monsieur Bergeron had just asked.

When you talk about the funding for the Tigray region that the Canadian government has provided, I understand the need for flexibility, but we need to make sure that some of that aid was getting to the Tigray region. It sounds like that is not a stipulation.

Do we know for sure that any of those dollars have gotten to the Tigray region, which is the region that we know has been blockaded and does not have access to the medical supplies, the fuel and the food that is required? I just want to make sure that I'm understanding that correctly.

Could you clarify that for me please?

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the question.

Indeed Tigray is an important part of the equation for us in terms of the humanitarian response. As I indicated, the needs span the whole country. There's a long-running humanitarian crisis there.

As Mr. Khan has indicated, humanitarian access is the critical concern. No one is denying that the challenges exist. Indeed, OCHA has indicated that only 10% of the convoys or supplies that are required have gotten through since July. Our money is available for the response, but it can only support a response when it's possible.

We support WFP, which provides food to Tigray. We support OCHA, which has projects going on inside. I could go through some of those projects if you like.

Indeed, our money is directed to Tigray as well. I can definitely confirm that.

Ms. Heather McPherson: We're hearing that that aid is not getting to the region and that it is a very desperate situation.

I want to revisit the idea that some humanitarian and human rights challenges are happening in that area. Amnesty International has reported the widespread use of sexual, gender-based violence as a weapon of war. The former minister of women, children and youth of Ethiopia resigned from her cabinet position because it was being used as a weapon of war. We have seen drone attacks on a school that was housing internally displaced people.

These attacks on human rights are quite dire. UNICEF has said that thousands of children have been separated from their parents. I'm very concerned about the human rights implications and our failure, I guess, to be as vocal as we need to be against those.

I'd like some comment on that, please.

Mr. Tarik Khan: I can respond to that question.

The human rights situation you have outlined is indeed the same that we see and hear on the ground in Ethiopia. There are serious violations perpetrated by all parties to the conflict. I think we have been very vocal in all of our diplomatic and political engagements. We have been reminding of the importance of respect for human rights and calling for accountability for human rights. We've done this in a number of places at the Human Rights Council. We have done it in a number of the calls that we've made to the leader and foreign minister level. We raise this issue regularly with all of the normative bodies that deal with human rights.

On the question of whether those human rights violations continue, unfortunately there is not a satisfactory answer to that. The sense is that violations do continue.

You mentioned sexual and gender-based violence. It is a serious concern to us that this has been used as a weapon of war by all parties. We are intending to—

Ms. Heather McPherson: You say “by all parties”. My understanding of it is that it's quite clearly being used more on the side of the Ethiopian government. Is that not your understanding?

Mr. Tarik Khan: Our understanding is that all parties have perpetrated serious human rights violations. These were also revealed in the OHCHR Ethiopian Human Rights Commission report. It did make that allegation of all of them.

I think we do need to have that independent investigative reporting on all of them.

I just wanted to add that we are going to be providing funding for new projects that will help at least the victims of SGBV in some specific contexts in Ethiopia.

• (1610)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Obviously, I think we can all agree that preventing victims of that is the first priority.

Mr. Tarik Khan: Yes.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I spoke to retired Lieutenant-General Roméo Dallaire. I had some real questions for him on the use of child soldiers and how you can see—obviously he has great experience in this—if a genocide is coming and if a genocide is being perpetrated against a people. As he is an expert and a Canadian hero, frankly, I wanted to get his perspective. He spoke about the weaponization of children and how that is a clear indication that a genocide may be taking place.

Have you seen indications of this? Have you heard reports of this? Can you comment on the weaponization of children as child soldiers?

Mr. Tarik Khan: We have heard reports of the use of children and minors as conflict actors. We still have to receive concrete evidence, but we have heard reports of this.

I would also say, to the question of genocide, that it is something that the global community is concerned about. The human rights reporting that was done by OHCHR and the EHRC did not make any allegations of genocide, and have we not heard those from any of the other bodies that have been investigating human rights violations, either.

That is not to say that atrocity crimes or war crimes have not been committed, but we have not seen evidence meeting the threshold of genocide yet.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. McPherson and Mr. Khan.

Before we move on to the second round of questions, I want to remind you quickly that the speaking time has been carefully negotiated. The round of questions is five minutes or two and a half minutes. I would appreciate it if you could continue to stick to the time limits.

[English]

With that, we will go to our first intervenor in round two.

Mr. Genuis, the floor is yours for five minutes.

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

We've had great questions so far and I'm glad one of the government members raised the lifting of the emergency order. It's generally positive from a human rights perspective when we see the lifting of an emergency order.

I want to refer back to the issue of the American position and how it relates to Canada's position. Would you say that Canada's position on the conflict is the same as or different from the Biden administration's position?

Mr. Tarik Khan: Thank you. That's a very interesting question.

We have a very strong alignment with the U.S. on the situation in Ethiopia. Due to the size of our economy and our engagement with them, we have different tools at our disposal and a different impact that we can have in our engagement on the issue, but I would say there generally is a fairly strong alignment between us and the U.S. We communicate regularly with them on the situation in Ethiopia and how best to align ourselves.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: We have different tools, but the same view of the conflict.

Mr. Tarik Khan: We generally have a very common view of the conflict, yes.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay.

Secretary of State Blinken said in November of last year:

The conflict in Ethiopia must come to an end. Peace negotiations should begin immediately without precondition in pursuit of a ceasefire.

I haven't heard anything like that formulation come from our government, but would you say it is Canada's position that peace negotiations should begin immediately and without precondition?

Mr. Tarik Khan: Absolutely. In all of our interventions at the political level, we have been calling for a mediated solution. There is, of course, a national dialogue that the Government of Ethiopia has been intending to undertake, and we support that as well.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I would just say there is a distinction between saying that there should be a mediated solution and saying that parties should immediately begin negotiations without precondition. I've heard your answer on that, so it's been well clarified.

My colleague referred to the U.S. having imposed sanctions. Canada has not. We've heard in the context of various situations around the world the importance and value of like-minded allies co-

ordinating sanctions for maximal impact. We're still a sovereign nation and should make our own decisions, but we know that there is value in coordination when it can happen.

Why did Canada choose not to coordinate with the U.S. in this case?

Mr. Tarik Khan: This question is one that I would say is open, because the possibility of the use of sanctions is always a potential tool for us. My answer to the question is to say that we assess the timing of sanctions, the impact of sanctions, the impact they will have on the civilian population and the impact they could have on civilians, along with other efforts that are being made at the time and that we could be making at the same time. The decision was [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] take to impose sanctions in line and along with the U.S. at this time.

● (1615)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I understand that you're saying there's a possibility of sanctions being imposed in the future, but we clearly chose not to coordinate. We clearly chose not to do so at the same time and in collaboration.

What we've done in the past in the case of sanctions is, maybe, we sanctioned some officials and they sanctioned others in order to minimize the negative impact on our country while getting the maximum impact on the regime. However, to say the U.S. sanctioned and Canada did not suggests we made a choice not to coordinate.

Can you shed any further light on why we chose not to apply sanctions in coordination with our partners?

Mr. Tarik Khan: I can only say that we are aware. When we communicate with our partners and when they share information with us related to sanctions, we do take careful consideration as to whether our joining those would have an impact. In this case, the U.S. individual sanctions were on Eritrean individuals, of course, and one Eritrean institution. We did not make the decision to join those sanctions.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

Is Canada engaged in the case of Dawit Isaak, the longest detained journalist in the world, who's in Eritrea? How is Canada engaged on that?

Mr. Tarik Khan: I'll turn to my colleague, Ms. Hilary Childs-Adams, if she has any information on this.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Could you respond to the committee in writing, then. I know it's maybe a little bit off the main topic, and I don't want to put you on the spot, but it would be great to read about any work that Canada is doing with respect to that case.

I wanted to ask you one more question in the time I have. Canada's ambassador to Ethiopia last year met with the Ethiopian Minister of Mining and Petroleum, Takele Uma Banti. He tweeted a photo of that meeting, and that tweet was subsequently deleted. Why delete a tweet about a meeting with a government minister?

Mr. Tarik Khan: I'm not aware of the deleting of that tweet, but I'll certainly take a look and find out. I have no knowledge of that.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you. I'd appreciate if you could report back in writing to the committee on that issue as well.

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Genuis. That's your time, right on the mark.

We will now go to our next intervenor, Dr. Fry, please, for five minutes.

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

I want to thank the GAC officials for their really clear and succinct answers. It's really good to see this. It helps us to kind of dig through all the multiplicity of things going on.

I just wanted to ask a question. You talked about your partners, and then you obviously talked about the African Union. Are there other partners? Who are your other partners? Are there nation states?

Mr. Tarik Khan: Obviously, the U.K. is an important partner. The EU is an important partner in our coordination with like minds. We mentioned the President of Kenya, an important partner for us in communication and the role that these elders within the African political community can play in influencing results on the ground.

We mentioned the former head of the state of Nigeria. The African Union high representatives are an important partner. I would say the Nordics are also important partners for us in the situation in Ethiopia. We are like-minded, so this enables us to work with these organizations. The UN itself is an important partner vis-à-vis both monitoring and response.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Yes, I understand the UN to be your partner. Is every one of your partners in agreement that we must find an African solution to this problem?

Mr. Tarik Khan: I think there is generally a consensus that an African solution is one that will probably be more acceptable to most parties to the conflict.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Thank you.

You know, immediately after the conflict in the region arose, Eritrea became involved. I'll be very quick here because I have a couple of other questions to ask you. What is the historic reason, and why would Eritrea suddenly get itself involved in something that has nothing to do with Eritrea?

Mr. Tarik Khan: There is a long history related to the ethnic origins of the conflict in Ethiopia. Eritrea was part of Ethiopia until it achieved its independence. It used to be the province just north of Tigray. There's obviously, from what we can gather, communication and coordination between the Government of Ethiopia and the Government of Eritrea, enabling it to enter the war.

When the Tigray People's Liberation Front led the Government of Ethiopia, that was when the war took place. Now, of course, Er-

itrea is an ally, if you will, of the Government of Ethiopia. It's a simple story, but it's a story that has roots that go back to ethnicity and conflict over the last 20 years.

• (1620)

Hon. Hedy Fry: I understand.

Can you tell me how this conflict is impacting neighbouring countries such as Somalia and Sudan. Is it increasing regional conflicts? What is going on? Are they picking sides? I just need to know what's happening in that region.

Thank you.

Mr. Tarik Khan: This was obviously one of our major concerns and one in which we're like-minded, to the extent to which this conflict could spread to the broader Horn of Africa.

There are two factors that I would say are regional in nature and of significant concern to us. First, as you mentioned, the presence of Eritrean troops in Ethiopia is a destabilizing factor. It is an international issue that we should all be concerned about.

Second is the outflow of Ethiopian refugees to Sudan, and their ability to accommodate and receive those refugees. We understand that there are about 60,000 of them now in Sudan, so I would say that's the other regional or neighbouring-country dimension that is of concern to us.

Hon. Hedy Fry: What about Somalia?

Mr. Tarik Khan: For Somalia it is less so. Somalia is of course dealing with its own internal conflict and destabilization by groups such as Al-Shabab, but we do not see a direct link between what's going on in Tigray, for example, and Somalia.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Apart from the African Union interventions and looking for solutions, do you see these other countries working individually to try to find a peaceful resolution and to get a negotiated settlement because of the impact it could have on them? Do you know of such movements going on?

Mr. Tarik Khan: Do you mean of countries such as Somalia and neighbouring countries?

Hon. Hedy Fry: Yes, Somalia, Sudan, etc. You've talked about other countries' senior officials getting involved in those countries, but what's going on in that immediate region? I'd like a quick answer. I only have 30 seconds left.

Mr. Tarik Khan: We do not see signs that those neighbouring countries are seeking to play a significant role in resolving the conflict. We have not seen that.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks very much, Dr. Fry. You are slightly under. Sticking to the time frame is much appreciated.

[*Translation*]

I'll now give the floor to Mr. Bergeron for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to address the issue of the financial assistance provided specifically to ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid in Tigray. As Ms. McPherson said, I understand that we want to keep our overall envelope flexible to meet the many needs throughout Ethiopia. However, the fact remains that, according to the World Food Programme, 40% of Tigrayans are suffering from an extreme lack of food after 15 months of conflict. In three conflict-affected areas in the north, over nine million people need food aid. This is the highest number to date.

This brings me back to my question. What mechanism have we implemented to ensure that this \$7 million can actually be used to get a portion of the \$43 million to the people of Tigray, as well as to the Afar and Amhara areas.

If I'm told that this aid is being provided in other parts of Ethiopia, that's fine. No one can argue with a good thing. However, the real issue is whether the \$7 million has actually helped to deliver aid to the people of Tigray, in particular.

Mr. Tarik Khan: Thank you for your question.

I'll briefly respond to the last question.

I would add that Kenya is also a neighbouring country that has many interests in the Horn of Africa.

I'll now ask my colleague, Mr. Salewicz, to answer your other question regarding humanitarian aid.

[*English*]

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: Indeed, the situation in Tigray and northern Ethiopia is severe, from a humanitarian context. I agree with the premise that aid needs to get in, and I can assure you that we do this through our partners. The WFP, for instance, is providing food assistance and we fund WFP. UNICEF is providing water and sanitation assistance and we're funding UNICEF as well. We fund a variety of organizations that are responding to sexual and gender-based violence and providing psychosocial assistance and protection for victims of sexual and gender-based violence. These are all projects that are ongoing.

My point is to emphasize that it's a multi-dimensional crisis. I can assure you that the funding we provide flows through our partners and into Tigray, facing many of the obstacles we've already identified.

• (1625)

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

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Bergeron.

[*English*]

Ms. McPherson, go ahead, for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

This is such an interesting conversation and I have so many questions to ask. Unfortunately, two and a half minutes is not very long.

Genocide expert Dr. Mukesh Kapila has described what's happening in Tigray as a genocide. I know that our experts today have said that others have not declared that to be the case, but is the Canadian government undertaking a law and fact-based review regarding the events that are unfolding in Tigray to determine if the atrocities, the systematic gender-based violence, the humanitarian blockade and the arbitrary arrest of Tigrayans constitute genocide or acts of genocide?

Mr. Tarik Khan: I'm pleased to return to that question of genocide.

There is broad consensus among the international community that serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law are taking place in Tigray and other conflict-affected areas. But, as I said, there is not a confirmation of genocide.

We continue to rely on the findings of the OHCHR and the EHRC. We understand that the OHCHR will be undertaking more work and, of course, they will be looking for any risk or sign of genocide, as well as incidents of SGBV, in their analysis.

This is the primary body that we have confidence in and who we turn to for the investigative work.

Ms. Heather McPherson: We will be depending on them for that investigative work. There will not be any investigations or any facts-based review by our own the Canadian government.

Mr. Tarik Khan: Our ambassador and diplomatic staff on the ground in Addis Ababa are very active. They travel and meet regularly with regional governments, the Government of Ethiopia, as well as civil society and of course with local NGOs. This gives them a chance to listen and to hear if there are signs of those kinds of human rights violations. Of course, they hear plenty about SGBV.

I would say that, in terms of an independent, impartial investigation, the organization best placed to get the access and to actually conduct the assessment is the OHCHR.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I believe that is my time.

The Chair: You still have 30 seconds if you want to get in a very quick question and answer.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you. I would like just a little bit of information.

I have heard reports that journalists have been attacked. There have been arrests of journalists and media. I'd love some information or any clarity you could provide on that, please.

The Chair: Please just give a quick answer and we can follow up, potentially, in a subsequent round.

Mr. Tarik Khan: Thank you.

I'll turn to my colleague, Mrs. Hilary Childs-Adams, to respond on the detention of journalists.

Mrs. Hilary Childs-Adams: Thank you.

We continue to follow very closely any reports of journalists being arrested. The government controls the news coming out of Ethiopia on the conflict very tightly. Their messaging is what we hear. However, that's what an embassy on the ground is for. They continue to monitor the situation closely.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you very much, Ms. McPherson.

The floor now goes to Mr. Aboultaif for five minutes, please.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the department for such detailed views and feedback on this topic.

As you know, the various ongoing conflicts in Ethiopia seem to be exacerbated by interference from outside interests.

Mr. Khan, you mentioned that we are aligned with the United States in our position on the Ethiopian conflict. What is the Canadian government doing to speak to representatives from Turkey, Iran, United Arab Emirates and China regarding their provision of military support to their combatants?

Mr. Tarik Khan: China and Russia have made their positions very clear. They called for non-interference in what they see as Ethiopia's internal affairs.

The ability for us to have a conversation with Russian and Chinese counterparts—and similarly with Turkey and the UAE—is quite limited. I would say that we clearly discourage the interventions in the region by any of these countries, as this would exacerbate tensions or escalate hostilities.

• (1630)

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: The answer is no, basically. I can understand that maybe the talks with China and Russia are different—and Iran.

I'm keen to understand the talks with Turkey and the United Arab Emirates, since we do have some relations right there. It's obvious that there are so many hands in the Ethiopian conflict that are supporting the dynamic where the neighbouring countries.... You know, everybody is kind of involved in this pool. It would be nice if we could see Canadian diplomatic attention on these areas to stop feeding the combatants and the people fighting on the ground.

I have another question. Ethiopia is an old country, but democracy is relatively new there. What has the Government of Canada done to assist the transition from a Marxist, one-party system to a fully functioning democracy? There's a lot of talk about this right now. If we can assist this country in working to settle the conflict, I think part of the deal has to be that it has democracy. What is the Government of Canada doing in that regard?

Mr. Tarik Khan: We have a number of projects that support governance and inclusive governance in Ethiopia. I think we recognized from very early days, in the earlier conflict of Ethiopia and it's rise and progress in recent years, that having more inclusive governance is key as a federal state and a state with multiple ethnic-

ities to the progress of the country. We have provided funding and a couple of projects, and we can certainly provide information to the committee on projects that we've done to support governance. We do see that as an important way forward.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: That is part of the \$43-million assistance, correct?

Mr. Tarik Khan: No, that is different. The \$43 million is international humanitarian assistance. However, our bilateral development assistance has gone to organizations that support governance and inclusive governance in Ethiopia.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: How is the Government of Ethiopia with Prime Minister Abiy reacting to this initiative in having that assistance in moving the country from being, for a long time, under a Marxist regime to being more democratic? It's a recipe to probably assist in changing the conflict or maybe in settling the conflict further.

Mr. Tarik Khan: There's a strong commitment by the Government of Ethiopia to make progress and reform in the area of economic governance in particular. At the same time, I think the conflict that has arisen now, which is an inter-ethnic conflict, has raised lots of questions about the actual effectiveness of Ethiopia's federalist state and federalism in Ethiopia. There will need to be a thorough revisiting of that through the national dialogue process they're going to start, and of course we stand ready to support those efforts.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Do you think Ethiopia's model will look like that of Somalia, for example?

Mr. Tarik Khan: I think Ethiopia is a long way from becoming a Somalia. It still has relatively strong state institutions and a fairly strong centralized government, but it does have ethnic division in the country and polarization. I think we cannot see it becoming a Somalia in the early stages. It is also still relatively strong economically.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Aboultaif. Thank you, Mr. Khan.

We will now go to Mr. Sarai for five minutes, please.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair, and thank you to our guests, the departmental officials.

On November 8, 2021, Minister Joly, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, spoke with President Faki of the African Union Commission to discuss the rapidly deteriorating situation in Ethiopia. During their conversation, they discussed the importance of working towards a political solution and an inclusive national dialogue to bring the conflict to a peaceful resolution.

Can you speak to the work being done to develop a political solution for the best interests of the region? What would this political solution look like?

• (1635)

Mr. Tarik Khan: The shape of a political solution is going to be for Ethiopia, the Government of Ethiopia and the parties to the conflict to determine. However, I will say that a political solution obviously has to begin with cessation of hostilities. There has to be a ceasefire and an end to armed conflicts and attacks. It has to address the issue of arbitrary detention and there has to be a release of those who have been arbitrarily or unfairly detained. It also has to address human rights violations with human rights accountability. If we think, for example, of the extent of human rights violations that have been committed given the size to the conflict, there will be have to be some agreement on how those human rights violations are going to be addressed moving forward.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Can you speak about the government's work with the African Union? Can you speak to the African Union's commission of inquiry on human rights violations in Tigray, on that note?

Mr. Tarik Khan: I'll turn to my colleague Ms. Hilary Childs-Adams to comment on that.

Mrs. Hilary Childs-Adams: The complaint to the African Union has been laid but it has not yet been heard, so we're following very closely to see what happens when there is a hearing into that complaint. In the meantime, we are focusing very much on the implementation of the joint report between the UN and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, and also on the upcoming investigation, which the UN will be leading, into the continued human rights violations in Ethiopia.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: At the moment, Ethiopia is host to over 800,000 refugees, mostly from South Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea and Sudan, who rely heavily on international assistance to survive.

How has the humanitarian crisis and conflict in northern Ethiopia impacted the international community's ability to provide assistance to the refugees from those countries?

Mr. Tarik Khan: In response to these other crises, I will turn to my colleague, Mr. Salewicz, regarding the humanitarian response to communities outside of the conflict.

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: Indeed, as I mentioned previously, we do take a whole-of-Ethiopia approach in responding to humanitarian needs. We have specific programming that targets the needs of refugees.

For instance, in the Gambella region we support a number of NGOs—Concern is included in there as well as HelpAge—to respond to the needs of refugees. We also support UNHCR, which has a mandate to support the refugee response as well.

I would say that the international response continues. It is significant, and the focus remains on supporting those 800,000 that are primarily in the east and the southwest of the country.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: How much time do I have, Chair?

The Chair: You have just over a minute, Mr. Sarai.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: I apologize if this has been asked before. In 2021, I think, Canada provided \$43 million to address humanitarian needs in Ethiopia, including the needs arising from the conflict in the Tigray region.

Can you speak to how that \$43 million has been allocated and what impact it has had on the ground.

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: We covered this somewhat earlier, but maybe it will give me a chance to talk a bit more specifically about some of the results we're seeing from the support we have provided.

Indeed, \$43 million has gone to respond to the crises across Ethiopia. In Tigray specifically and in northern Ethiopia, our funding has gone, for instance, to support the needs of the conflict-affected population in Tigray. The WFP provided food assistance to 877 000 people between mid October and February 2. In Amhara, food assistance was also provided to one million people between January 31 and February 6, so we see a robust response happening there.

Through other programming we have with the country, with OCHA and their country-based pooled fund, we have seen support going for emergency shelter repair; for life saving health and gender-based-violence programming; for nutrition programming to help respond to the needs of children; as well as support for health care through our ICRC programming to—

• (1640)

The Chair: Mr. Salewicz, I apologize, but I will have to stop you there in the interest of time. Maybe there will be a chance to follow up, but thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Sarai.

We will go straight into our third round of questions.

Again, leading us off with a five-minutes round is Mr. Morantz.

Go ahead, please.

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Mr. Genuis is going to take my round. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, the floor is yours.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Mr. Morantz.

I want to follow up on this issue of accountability for human rights abuses. I would like to hear a little bit more concretely about what steps the Canadian government is taking to hold those individuals who are responsible for human rights abuses accountable for their actions.

Mr. Tarik Khan: Thank you for the question.

The first thing I would say is that it is really critical for us to corroborate and have adequate evidence regarding individual actions and individual violations perpetrated by individuals. For that, we rely on independent investigations such as the OHCHR and EHRC work.

We co-sponsored two resolutions on the situation in Tigray at the Human Rights Council, and we later supported the EU's call for a special human rights council session in December.

With the U.S., we have also co-led demarches of Eritrea and Ethiopian authorities on conflict-related sexual violence, both in Ethiopia as well as in the capitals of Sudan and Eritrea.

Our view is that as soon as we have adequate evidence of violations by individuals, we take an assessment, and we look at the extent to which we can respond to those individual instances or whether it makes more sense for us to invest in some of the collective responses that are going to take place in those countries. For example, we are also calling upon Ethiopia itself to investigate human rights abuses and to take responsibility as a government, as a state party to the conflict, for those abuses.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Do you think it's realistic that Ethiopia itself will hold accountable those who were responsible for human rights abuses?

Mr. Tarik Khan: That's an excellent question. I think time will tell. Obviously, we have concerns about whether Ethiopia will live up to that expectation of the international community, something that we're all calling for, but time will tell. I think the next few months will be critical in terms of both resolution as well as accountability.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

Based on the evidence you have right now, are you willing to legally define any of the crimes that have taken place? I note you haven't called it a genocide in response to questioning from my colleague. Would you use terminology like "crimes against humanity", for example? Can we say based on the evidence that we have, in your view, that certain definable international crimes have been committed?

Mr. Tarik Khan: From the reporting that we have read from the OHCHR HRC report, it is clear that atrocity crimes may have taken place—and atrocity crimes include war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Sorry to interrupt, but I do note that there's a bit of an equivocation there, because the words you used were "it is clear that atrocity crimes may have taken place". Would you say it is clear that atrocity crimes have been committed, or atrocity crimes may have been committed in the government's view?

Mr. Tarik Khan: Our view is they may have been committed. There are, of course, allegations of those crimes, but we need to see confirmation and adequate investigation beyond the—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Sorry, I want to be clear about the government's position. It sounds like you're not prepared to say that atrocity crimes have definitely been committed—at least at this stage.

Mr. Tarik Khan: We would look to a competent international court to make that determination.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Under these various international human rights treaties, Canada has responsibilities as a party. We can't defer to international bodies fully, because we are committed to upholding certain human rights obligations as a signatory to those agreements, and we have powers ourselves through sanctions and other means to hold individuals accountable for those actions. Absent some international determination, would Canada be prepared to come to its own conclusions and act on those conclusions with respect to atrocity crimes?

Mr. Tarik Khan: For something as serious as atrocity crimes, it is really critical for us to have an independent and competent body investigating and making that determination for us.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Do we not have the capacity to have competent bodies that are able to proceed in the absence of coordinated international action, though? This seems to me to be a fundamental legal problem around human rights, which is that we are party to agreements that oblige us to take certain action in response to certain events, yet we always try to defer and say that we're only responsible if somebody else determines that a crime has been committed. Irwin Cotler has told the Subcommittee on International Human Rights very eloquently in past cases that the fact that we are a state party to these agreements means that we have obligations, regardless of what external international bodies do or do not determine, or are or are not able to determine. Would you agree with that?

• (1645)

Mr. Tarik Khan: I think the key is that the investigative work that takes place to make that determination requires access. For us to independently make that investigation, we would need access to both victims and evidence, and in that case, it's usually international bodies such as the UN that can get that kind of access to—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Then it just becomes too easy for states to shut this out.

The Chair: I'm sorry, but we'll have to leave it there. It's very likely that you'll have an occasion to follow up in the next round, so we'll leave it there and put a bracket around that until you have a chance to speak again.

[*Translation*]

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

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Outremont, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for their insightful comments.

Mr. Khan, I have several questions for you. You spoke about the significant humanitarian aid that Canada has provided to Ethiopia since the start of the conflict. I want to speak briefly about our announcement on June 18, 2021. Canada has provided an additional \$7 million in humanitarian aid. Could you tell us where that money was allocated?

Based on your responses, I gather that some of the funding has been for food security, health care and victims of sexual violence.

Can you provide information on the \$7 million?

Mr. Tarik Khan: Thank you.

My colleague, Mr. Salewicz, can answer your question.

[*English*]

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: Indeed, those resources were directed to our partners that were active in the conflict zone. Part of those resources went to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which manages a pooled fund. They use these resources for a series of projects they deliver in this context.

I would point to some of the types of projects they were able to deliver. They provided a series of projects that responded to nutrition requirements in Amhara and Afar, as well as in Tigray. These are critical projects to respond to the food insecurity that we're all well aware of.

Speaking of food insecurity, indeed the WFP has indicated that over the course of the last year and a half during the conflict, we've seen the food insecurity numbers jump from 0.4 million members of the population to over 4.6 million people in need. Indeed, the food situation is dire, and the resources that were provided were specifically to help respond to those food needs.

I've mentioned WFP in addition as a key partner in the international response, and our support contributed to WFP's response. There have been convoys that have been able to get through. They've been very modest, and I think we all agree that not enough has been done on this front.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: I hate to interrupt you, Mr. Salewicz. I do have a few more questions.

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: Sure, please do.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Other than food security, can you list the other things? Perhaps you would prefer to respond in writing with a complete list.

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: Sure, we can do that. I'd say that we provided funding to WFP, to ICRC, to OHCHR, which manages a common fund of country-based pooled funds that financed 116 projects last year alone. We contribute to these activities. They're widespread.

We'll give you a written response.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

I have another question.

I hesitate to describe your presentation. However, I gather that you expressed some reservations that the conflict was behind us, despite some encouraging signs, such as the lifting of the state of emergency.

I want to point out that I've seen several reports of ongoing raids in the Afar area. One report from just 10 hours ago, if I'm not mistaken, states that a shell crashed into houses in the Afar area and that six children were reported missing.

Can you tell us what you're hearing from your contacts on the ground right now?

• (1650)

Mr. Tarik Khan: Thank you for your question.

I'll ask my colleague, Ms. Childs-Adams, to answer this very specific question.

[*English*]

Mrs. Hilary Childs-Adams: We're extremely concerned about ongoing clashes in northern Ethiopia. We're finding that although the Tigrayan forces withdrew pretty much to their own region, there are ongoing clashes in the Afar region neighbouring Tigray, where there are attempts made to control certain road routes and where humanitarian aid has been stopped.

We are extremely concerned that what is coming out of there in the way of news is really what is approved by the government mostly, so we will continue to engage with the government and the parties. Our ambassador visited the Afar region recently to get their perspective.

The Chair: Ms. Childs-Adams, I apologize, but we'll have to leave it there in the interest of time. There will potentially be a chance to follow up.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Ms. Bendayan.

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

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Salewicz, thank you for your response to Ms. Bendayan. It answers the question that I asked twice.

I wanted to know what assurance we had that food reached Tigray, given that the World Food Programme believed that very little had reached Tigray, at least since mid-December. I'm pleased to hear that some of the Canadian aid made it.

I also wanted to ask about the monitoring mechanisms in place to ensure that the \$7 million in humanitarian aid was achieving results. From what I can see, there are mechanisms.

In a November 2021 article in *Foreign Affairs* magazine, university professors Yohannes Woldemariam and Nic Cheeseman reported that Ethiopia is home to over 80 different ethnic groups, and that successive Ethiopian leaders have fuelled tensions among the ethnicities and regions. Each leader governed in a way that gave at least one community a reason to feel wronged.

The writers added that, more recently, social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have facilitated the spread of hate speech and helped fuel the atrocities.

Above all, and in my opinion this is the most significant part, the writers examine the ability of the Ethiopian state to survive these ethnic conflicts and the latest conflict that we're currently witnessing.

Does the Canadian government share the concerns expressed by professors Wodemariam and Cheeseman about the fragility of the Ethiopian state?

Mr. Tarik Khan: Thank you for this question.

I'll make a few general comments first. I'll then ask my colleague, Gwyn Kutz, to speak about our efforts to support peace-building in Ethiopia.

The Chair: Mr. Khan, sorry to interrupt you, but I'll ask you to keep your answer short.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Are the six minutes up already, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Your speaking time is two and a half minutes, Mr. Bergeron.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: We haven't come back to the other round.

Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Tarik Khan: We certainly share this concern about the fragility of the Ethiopian state. Of course, these incitements to violence, propaganda and use of armed groups will further weaken the country.

We have the same concerns as the writers.

• (1655)

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: We'll come back to this.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Ms. McPherson, you have two and a half minutes.

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

I'd like to thank the witnesses. I have some questions.

People on this committee will know that I'm very interested in Canadian mining and the impacts of Canadian mining companies around the world. We have heard some alarming reports that there have been Canadian mining companies looking for licences to operate in the Tigray region.

Can you provide any information on the status of Canadian mining companies that are hoping to operate in Tigray, and whether any licences have been offered?

Mr. Tarik Khan: I don't have any information in front of me regarding any mining licences that have been granted in Tigray. Our understanding is that this has not taken place. We do not offer any trade commissioner services or assistance to mining companies in

terms of activity in northern Ethiopia. We have no awareness of that at this stage.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Would it be possible to provide any written submissions afterward, if there is additional information that you can share that you may not have on hand?

The next question I'd like to ask is around a comment that you made earlier in your intervention about women, including women in the peacekeeping process, and women at the negotiation tables. This is very important to me. We know that there is a much higher chance of success when women are present for any sort of ceasefire resolution.

How is that being done? How is Canada working on that? I would appreciate some feedback, please.

Mr. Tarik Khan: As you know, "Women, peace and security" is a key part of our government's international policy agenda.

To answer the question, I will turn to my colleague Gwyn Kutz, our DG for Peace and Stabilization.

Ms. Gwyn Kutz (Director General, Peace and Stabilization Operations Program, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you for raising the topic, because we truly do believe that the full engagement of women across the peace spectrum in prevention, during conflict management and in post-conflict state-building is absolutely essential to a resilient peaceful society.

My area is very much concerned about building peace at the community level. You've heard of the efforts at the diplomatic and state levels, but we believe that peace-building activities at the community level are also a fundamental part of a resilient peace in a country that has as many complex differences between ethnic groups as a country like Ethiopia has. We are supporting organizations that work with community organizations and women peace-builders to build bridges across inter-ethnic lines and countries. We have a project that builds an international network of women peace-builders in the region so that experiences can be shared, solidarity can be built and women will have a voice at different levels of the peace-building process.

The Chair: Thank you so much, and thank you, Ms. McPherson.

We will now go to Mr. Chong, please, for five minutes.

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

South Africa and Australia have used truth and reconciliation commissions to reconcile differences after a national conflict or a national difficulty. The former Conservative government established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission here in Canada, and previous governments in Canada have been instrumental in establishing truth and reconciliation commissions abroad, such as the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning of paramilitary weapons as part of the Northern Ireland peace process, which was co-chaired by former chief of the defence staff John de Chastelain.

Has the Canadian government done any work to advance a truth and reconciliation commission in Ethiopia?

Mr. Tarik Khan: I don't think the parties to the conflict are there yet. It's clear that some kind of an approach towards cessation of hostilities will be important first. The ability of the parties to get around the table for some kind of a mediated solution will be critical first. I think there is indeed, and always is, an importance and a clear value in truth and reconciliation work, preserving historic memory and hearing the experience of victims, and also then ensuring that there's no repetition of human rights violations and those kinds of crimes.

I take your point, and it's a very important point. Hopefully this is something that [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] conflict will eventually get to.

• (1700)

Hon. Michael Chong: I have a question about the region more broadly. The border between Ethiopia and Sudan has long been peacefully contested. Is there any evidence of hostility or the movement of military forces on the part of Sudan toward the border region?

Mr. Tarik Khan: I'll turn to my colleague Ms. Hilary Childs-Adams to respond to that question on borders.

Mrs. Hilary Childs-Adams: Yes, there have been reports to that effect. Sudanese government representatives or military—it's unclear exactly who—moved into that area and it has strengthened some of the towns in southern Sudan joining it. Agriculturally it's incredibly fertile. A number of Ethiopian farmers who were displaced from that area had farmed it successfully for a very long time. We hope this dispute will be resolved. It's very important for food security in both countries.

Hon. Michael Chong: Is there any evidence that Egypt is getting involved in the bilateral issues between Ethiopia and Sudan?

Mrs. Hilary Childs-Adams: Egypt has not taken much of a stance publicly on what is happening in Ethiopia. Egypt has very strong interests at stake because of the Nile River and because of the GERD. Ethiopia and Sudan share similar concerns about reaching an agreement with Ethiopia on the management of the water flows, but we have not seen direct interference by Egypt in this conflict.

Hon. Michael Chong: In other words, it's safe to say that the stance, the position, of Egypt has not changed with respect to the region in light of the conflict that has been unfolding in Ethiopia.

Mrs. Hilary Childs-Adams: If you're talking about the broader region beyond Ethiopia, Egypt has bilateral relations with all of the states in the Horn of Africa and has definite interests there of its own. However, in terms of Ethiopia, there hasn't been an actual change in position. They're very much staying out of it and respecting Ethiopian sovereignty by all appearances. We hope that it will be possible for them to reach a negotiated solution on the Nile River in the future.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have no further questions.

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

We will now go to Mr. Oliphant, for five minutes, please.

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to be building on Ms. McPherson and Mr. Chong's line of questioning. Actually, they both stole my questions, which is a good sign. On the first one, if Ms. McPherson wants to join this round, I'm very happy to give some of my time to her.

I want to go back to the issue of women and the role of women in peace-building, and our particular penchant to try to figure that out. Let's maybe dig a little further into the theoretical of how we're going to do it. Are there some practical ways we are going to be engaging as Canadians in helping African women—and it may be women in Ethiopia or women in Africa from outside Ethiopia—engage in this peace-building process?

Mr. Tarik Khan: I'll turn to my colleague Ms. Kutz in a second. I can say that from a policy point of view, we see women in peace and security—in both peace-building and in conflict prevention—at the community level and in national processes of peace-building and mediation as critical.

As you know, we have a Canadian ambassador for women, peace and security, Ms. Jacqueline O'Neill, so this is something we certainly see as not just valuable but essential. We support all the work done internationally on women, peace and security, including UN Resolution 1325. We believe that a lot can be done in this specific instance, given what it takes to bring a community together, to prevent conflict before it arises and to build confidence and peace at the local level. When that breaks down, the violence really occurs.

Let me turn to my colleague Ms. Kutz to say some more.

• (1705)

Ms. Gwyn Kutz: Since the conflict has worsened over the course of this past year, we have scoped out and approved new projects that are specifically designed to help women prepare for and participate in the national dialogue, which we see as a very important element in reducing inter-ethnic conflict around the country. We have projects that are helping communities deal with conflict analysis and with propeace activity-building. We are working with implementing partners to provide capacity-building and alliance-building and to support networking opportunities for Ethiopian women's groups, with representation from a wide range of communities and backgrounds.

We are working to build, from the community level, the capacity to engage fully in the national dialogue. We of course also call for countries that are looking to recover from conflict to fully engage women in their peace agreement processes. Moreover, we stand ready to support the mediating efforts by providing gender experts to ensure that the voices of women, considerations of women and participation of women are brought to the fore.

We work for advocacy—

Hon. Robert Oliphant: I just want to interrupt.

Ms. McPherson, do you want to jump in there? I know you're following this.

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

The only thing I would add is to urge the government to ensure that gender provisions are in fact part of any peace agreement that is agreed upon. I'm sure the experts have thought of that.

Thank you for the time, though.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Following on Mr. Chong's questions about the region, and Dr. Fry's as well, I note Sudan is obviously in political turmoil and may have refugees to deal with if the border becomes porous. Somalia, Eritrea...none of these are countries have a lot of political stability at the present time.

Are there any thoughts about what Canada could do to strengthen regional stability? You have half a minute.

Mr. Tarik Khan: Thank you. That's an excellent question.

As we know, the conflict has had devastating impacts on Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia. The UNHCR and our other humanitarian agencies are working to meet the needs of those Eritrean refugees in addition to those of Ethiopians affected by the conflict. We work, of course, to advocate an implementation of a global compact on refugees and the achievement of comprehensive refugee responses for these protracted refugee situations that we see in the region. Of course, that includes Somali refugees as well.

As we go forward, I think the first step is of course being able to stem the flow of refugees out of countries like Ethiopia and out of a protracted conflict. Indeed, the persistence of protracted refugee situations in the neighbouring countries is an issue, particularly for Sudan, so I think this is something that we will definitely need to take account of, and not just in humanitarian assistance, because that's short-term assistance. We do look at development projects that use what we call "durable solutions", in the language of refugee response. Durable solutions are the kinds of investments that can go into communities that have been long-time refugees, and it helps them integrate both economically as well as socially into the communities in the countries and places where they might be choosing to stay.

The Chair: Mr. Khan, I'm sorry. We'll have to leave it there just in the interests of time. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Oliphant.

We will go into our fourth round.

The floor goes to Mr. Genuis for five minutes, please.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: I'm taking this round, I believe. Mr. Genuis is not—

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Aboultaif. Please go ahead.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: You're okay, Garnett?

Thank you, Chair.

Reports suggest that the Government of Ethiopia is going to have a problem restoring peace, prosperity and security if it does not address the attachment with the OLF, which is the Marxist party, and also the OLA, which is the Oromo Liberation Army. To that, the government will not be trusted by other parties in order to be able to restore peace, security and prosperity.

In your opinion, Mr. Khan, how long will it take the Amhara and Afar governments to trust the Abiy government in order to bring peace, prosperity and security back to Ethiopia?

• (1710)

Mr. Tarik Khan: Thank you for that excellent question. I think you hit right on it. What it will be incumbent upon the Ethiopian government to do is to restore confidence. You cannot have peace, prosperity and economic development with a centre and its regions without having their confidence and their trust.

There are a few things that the Government of Ethiopia is going to need to do to restore that confidence.

One is fulfilling the work of that national dialogue commission. That dialogue commission was particularly about rebuilding federalism in Ethiopia and the rights of those ethnic regional states.

It's also about the release of political prisoners from those regions. You mentioned Oromia in particular.

Of course, it's also about lifting the state of emergency, which leaves them in a state of constant terror and fear of arbitrary detention.

That last bit has just now been lifted, so there are some promising signs, but really, the first true confidence-building measure is what we see now, and we will need to see more, and those groups you mentioned will need more confidence-building measures like the other ones I mentioned.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: There was some pressure coming from the U.S. government in that regard in releasing some of the prisoners, although there were also questions about the political nature and history of some of these prisoners. Was Canada part of that same direction to assist in pushing for that process further, again, to regain the trust needed? That's the most fundamental issue on the table right now to ensure the country is going to start dealing with other problems that are arising all over the place.

Mr. Tarik Khan: We argued consistently in all of our political *démarches* and our diplomatic engagement for the release of political prisoners, particularly those held arbitrarily and without charge under the emergency act. I can say absolutely that we were part of that overall thrust by the international community in calling for that to take place.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: What would you call the most significant Canadian request to the government, to Dr. Abiy, in accelerating the process to make sure that the crisis can be contained so that other fallout will be controlled and no further damage can happen to the society, to the people, to the women, children and everyone there?

Mr. Tarik Khan: The Government of Canada's requests to the Government of Ethiopia have clearly been in the areas of the three objectives I mentioned: ending the humanitarian blockade, making public signs of movement toward a mediated political solution, and then ensuring accountability for human rights violations.

I think progress has been made. We've seen steps taken toward a potential political solution, the first step being lifting the state of emergency and a toning down of the rhetoric. The rhetoric was very bad between these parties to the conflict some months ago. It has become much better.

Now we are potentially seeing the first signs that humanitarian aid may be able to flow better with the lifting of the state of emergency.

I think these are all areas that still need to have pressure, which we cannot let up on.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you.

The Chair: Thanks very much, Mr. Aboultaif, and Mr. Khan.

We will now go to Mr. Ehsassi for five minutes.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Mr. Khan, I have a couple of quick questions.

I want to follow up what one of the other members asked about Eritrea. Can you explain what Eritrea hopes to gain by getting engaged in the Ethiopian civil war? In your opinion, is it the fact that they have alliances within Ethiopia, or is it because at some point they would have irredentist claims to Ethiopia?

Mr. Tarik Khan: It's difficult to speculate what their intentions are, but let's remember that Ethiopia and Eritrea signed a historic peace agreement, which means that there is obviously some sense of obligation and relationship and collaboration between the two governments in Addis Ababa and Asmara.

It would be difficult for me to speculate beyond what we're hearing. There's obviously some kind of ethnic alliance between the Eritrean people and the Amaran people; I think that's public knowledge. However, I can't speculate beyond what their intentions will be, other than what I just said.

• (1715)

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: You were reinforcing for us how important it is that countries in the region take the initiative and work something out that is acceptable to all the parties to the civil war. Of the various countries that have been engaged in the continent, which ones are most promising and in your opinion would merit greater Canadian support?

Mr. Tarik Khan: I mentioned the support that we provide to using a high representative for Ethiopia, former president of Nigeria, Obasanjo. I think that's critical. I think it's critical that we continue to support the work of the African Union in seeking an African solution that is led by an African institution.

The other country that is very important to remember is Kenya. Kenya's leader is a respected leader, and Kenya has a stake, as I mentioned, in being a country that borders the Horn of Africa countries and is affected by instability in those countries. Those are the two that I would single out: the AU as an institution and then Kenya as a country.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you very much.

That's it, Mr. Chair. I think I have 20 seconds.

The Chair: You still have two minutes, if you wish to pass some time to one of your colleagues. If they have a question, they're welcome to come in. If not, that may give some extra time to Mr. Bergeron and Madam McPherson.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Do either one of you...?

Monsieur Bergeron.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Mr. Ehsassi.

Mr. Ehsassi, I must say that you're redeeming Mr. Oliphant. I was just about to say that I took offence at the fact that he didn't offer me some of his time. By giving me a few more seconds, you're redeeming the government party. I really appreciate that. It's very nice of you.

I want to talk about the study published in *Foreign Affairs* by professors Woldemariam and Cheeseman. Specifically, I want to address the issue of Facebook and Twitter facilitating the spread of hate speech and helping to fuel the atrocities.

I think that this is a very serious concern. As you may know, this committee has looked at and continues to monitor the situation on the border between Ukraine and Russia. We've discussed the fact that, even in countries such as Canada, we aren't immune to propaganda, including through social media.

I want to know your response to this part of the study, which suggests that social media may have contributed to heightened tensions in Ethiopia today.

Mr. Tarik Khan: Thank you for this comment and for your insightful observation.

Our Prime Minister raised the issue of hate speech in his discussion with Prime Minister Abiy. Anything that involves the weaponization of hate speech is very concerning. This is also the case for propaganda, misinformation, and all the tactics used by a number of countries or communities in conflict. It's a concern in Ethiopia as well. Facebook and other social media are being used to spread falsehoods and unsubstantiated stories.

This type of tactic could be used in Ethiopia to foster hatred among parties in conflict and ethnic communities. This issue, which raises serious concerns, was discussed directly with the Prime Minister of Ethiopia.

• (1720)

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Mr. Khan.

I want to address the issue of the \$7 million for aid delivery on the ground. I'd like to thank your colleague, Mr. Salewicz, for his response regarding this matter. That said, could you explain who is monitoring this, given that the embassy staff has been withdrawn? Who is reporting on the status of the aid, the quantity, the amount, and so on?

Could you tell us who can provide this accountability for the Canadian government, given that the embassy staff is no longer on site?

Mr. Tarik Khan: I'll talk about the presence of our staff on the ground in Ethiopia. I'll then turn the floor over to my colleague, Mr. Salewicz, so that he can talk about monitoring and accountability when it comes to our humanitarian aid.

First, I want to make it clear that our entire staff wasn't withdrawn from the embassy in Addis Ababa. Only non-essential diplomats and families were withdrawn. This happened in November and December, when there were concerns that the Tigrayan forces, the TPLF, were getting very close to the capital.

At the end of December, we reviewed the situation and concluded that it was safe enough for the staff and their families to return. That said, our ambassador and a very small team remained at the embassy in Addis Ababa and did all the necessary monitoring.

I'll now let my colleague, Mr. Salewicz, talk about accountability in relation to humanitarian aid.

The Chair: Mr. Khan, sorry to interrupt you, but your time is up. [English]

We will now turn the floor over to Ms. McPherson and will give her an extra minute as well, just in the interest of fairness.

Please go ahead.

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

For my final round of questions, I would like to ask about the COVID response. Of course, we know that Africa in general has very low levels of vaccination. There is very low access to vaccination. I think we've heard from the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Centre that Ethiopia has less than 1.5%. This is, of course, massively compounded by its being a conflict area.

I'm just wondering, first of all, what the impacts of COVID have been in Ethiopia and whether Canada is doing anything to make

sure that vaccinations are getting to Ethiopia, particularly the Tigray region. Is there anything you can share on that front?

Mr. Tarik Khan: First of all, I would say there is a lack of adequate reporting on COVID-related case needs in the conflict-affected areas of Ethiopia. We do not get that information.

Our understanding is that recorded rates of COVID are low, but again in a place where half of the medical infrastructure has been destroyed, it's unlikely that an infected person is going to be able to reach a medical facility and get treatment. The short answer is that we don't know the extent to which COVID is impacting the region, but I think we can assume that it may be the least of their worries given the other health and medical risks caused by lack of humanitarian access.

Regarding the overall response to COVID in areas requiring humanitarian assistance, I'll turn to my colleague, Mr. Salewicz, in case he has anything to add on that.

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: One thing I'd add is that a humanitarian buffer has been set up through international mechanisms to respond in humanitarian crises. There is a focus within the COVAX facility to direct resources to humanitarian contexts, but I don't have any further information on the situation in Ethiopia.

Ms. Heather McPherson: So you don't know if vaccinations have been delivered through COVAX to Ethiopia or how much Canada has contributed to that. Do you have any insight on whether or not Canada has contributed anything in terms of PPE or supply chain or any of those things that will help get vaccinations into the arms of folks in addition to the actual vaccinations?

• (1725)

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: I think from our side we'll have to get that information back to you in written format. I don't have it at my fingertips.

Ms. Heather McPherson: If you could provide that, it would be very helpful.

I have one last question on COVAX and vaccinations. We've heard some worrying reports that Canada may be using vaccinations to calculate official development assistance. Do you happen to know if that's going to be the case? Will Canada be using vaccinations as part of the calculation to our ODA levels?

Mr. Tarik Khan: I cannot respond to that question directly, but we can certainly get a response to the committee. Typically, when we support vaccination campaigns and vaccination initiatives as part of overall health programming, it is ODA [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

Ms. Heather McPherson: Of course, with COVID-19 it is a much different scenario. We have heard these reports that as high as \$7 per dose would be considered as ODA. This would be really problematic as we try to recover globally from the impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable populations.

I look forward to the written response. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that final question.

Thank you to our witnesses.

Colleagues, we're very close to the end of our scheduled time with our panel today. I would propose, if the committee agrees, that I thank them collectively on our behalf for their service and for their testimony.

We have what I hope are three small points of housekeeping that I hope to discuss with you very shortly so that we can land as close to 5:30 p.m. as possible. It's a Thursday night, and some members may have to travel tonight. I know there are weather challenges.

With the committee's agreement, I will thank the witnesses very much on our behalf.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for your service and for your presentations.

[*English*]

Questions can be answered in writing, as already suggested by members. I'll let you disconnect while the rest of us stay on for a minute or two, maybe a bit more, to discuss a few points of business.

Thank you so much.

Mr. Tarik Khan: Thank you.

The Chair: Colleagues, I have three items that I'll list in the order of how easy I think they are to answer.

The first item is a set of three budgets that were distributed to you last Friday concerning the vaccine equity study, the Taiwan Strait briefing and the appearance of two ministers on mandate letters.

Is there any opposition to approving the budgets as they've been circulated?

(Motion agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Madam Clerk, we've approved those budgets.

Second, as a point of information, we have an opportunity to have an informal meeting with Kelly Clements, the deputy high commissioner of the UNHCR. She is available on March 2 from 12:30 to 2 p.m. We have set this up as an informal meeting. Participation is not mandatory. It would be an open meeting for those members who wish to attend.

For those of you who will attend, please let us know. We will circulate the information in terms of how to connect. It will be a Zoom meeting that would allow anybody to gain access to the conversation, should they wish to. Again, that's on March 2 from 12:30 to 2 p.m.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, can you clarify whether that would be any member of the public or any member of Parliament or—

The Chair: It would be any member of our committee.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay.

The Chair: She has requested a meeting with our committee, but we've done it informally just to make sure members can attend if their schedules allow.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Mr. Chair, could I just make a suggestion?

On that, she's extremely influential in human rights areas as well as in relation to refugees. I'm wondering if we could include the members of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights who are not part of this committee and formally invite them. You might even consider talking to the chair of the immigration committee, as she may be meeting with the immigration committee informally as well.

I tend to think that if we have four or five of us here, we'll be doing well. People are so busy. If we considered opening it up to those two groups, it may be a good conversation.

The Chair: It's an excellent point, Mr. Oliphant.

I'm not aware of whether she has reached out to those committees as well or whether she would prefer to have separate meetings with separate committees. If not, that's certainly something we would encourage to make sure we maximize and leverage the time we have with her.

Mr. Bergeron.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Chair, first, I agree completely with Mr. Oliphant's comment.

Second, I know that we've already been sent the information. However, I assume that you'll confirm the time for us, so that we can let the clerk know whether we'll be there.

• (1730)

The Chair: Yes, absolutely, I will. Thank you.

[*English*]

Finally, colleagues, the clerk has received confirmation that Ministers Joly and Sajjan are available to appear before the committee on March 3. The clerk is currently working out the details with the department, and as a result of these appearances, I would propose that the first meeting on vaccine equity be shifted to February 28.

I think there was interest on the part of the committee to start this study before the March recess. The briefing on the situation in Xinjiang will then shift to after the break weeks in March.

Are there any views on this?

Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, did you say Ministers Joly and Sajjan are both to appear on the 3rd? That's not what the committee had requested. We had requested to hear from each minister for a period of two hours separately.

The Chair: Understood.

I'm just receiving information that they are both available on the 3rd.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I see. Okay.

The Chair: Of course, it's in the hands of the committee to act on that information.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay.

I'll defer to Marty.

I am underlining that it's important that we hear from each minister separately for two hours.

The Chair: Madam Clerk, on the logistics of this, is there anything you wish to add at the moment?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Erica Pereira): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The department has confirmed that Minister Joly would be available for the first hour and Minister Sajjan for the second hour. I did put out the request as instructed by the committee, and that is what was given back to me.

The Chair: Okay.

Is there any other discussion on this?

Mr. Morantz, go ahead, please.

Mr. Marty Morantz: It was the agreement of the committee that we wanted to meet for two hours.

Can we get back to them? Are we stuck with this or how does this work?

The Chair: Procedurally, Madam Clerk, I believe it's the will of the committee to respond to this information and to make other preferences known. There is also a coordination task that has to happen and it's usually done through the office of the clerk.

Procedurally, what options are at the committee's disposal?

The Clerk: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

If the committee wishes, I can certainly go back to the department.

Procedurally, there is nothing that the committee can do to compel a minister to appear. We are largely at the mercy of their schedule.

Mr. Marty Morantz: I think you should get back to them and re-express the committee's desire to have each of them separately for two hours and see if they can make time available in their busy schedules.

The Chair: Okay.

Thank you, Mr. Morantz.

Are there any other comments from members?

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would say that the precedent has been, often, to have the two ministers at the same meeting. In HUMA, you can have as many as five or six ministers in two hours, so I don't think it's unreasonable. I don't think there's consensus necessarily that we want to push that.

If the clerk would go back and say that the committee is interested in having each of them for two hours, we can do that, but I am quite happy to have each of them for one hour, which would be normal. Often, for estimates you have a minister for one hour and officials for the second hour. I have been doing this for nine years, and it is normal procedure to have a minister for one hour followed by officials for any given visit. Having a minister for two hours is highly unusual.

I would say that this is within the norms of how parliamentary committees have worked over the last nine years that I've been involved with them.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Oliphant.

I'm not sure if there are other hands from the room.

I have Mr. Genuis, whose hand is raised virtually.

Are there any interventions from the floor and the room in addition to Mr. Oliphant's?

Okay.

Mr. Genuis, go ahead, please.

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

Respectfully, I would say that the parliamentary secretary naturally has more access to the ministers than other members of the committee do, but the preference to have the ministers for two hours each was expressed clearly, especially by those of us who don't have the same access he does.

This has been the past practice of this committee and it certainly has been the practice of this committee for as long as I've been a member of it. I think this reflects the fact that foreign affairs and international development are critically important and distinct areas, and each of them, given the breadth of issues we're dealing with on the table, requires a fulsome examination.

This was the agreement of the committee previously. There was no objection when this issue was previously raised. It was already agreed to by the committee.

My suggestion would be that we continue to advance what was the unanimous position of the committee as was agreed upon at the time. Again, that aligns with past practice.

I don't think we need to remake the decision, because we already made that decision previously. We continue to be of that mind, and want to see that continue to go forward.

● (1735)

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, thank you.

Just for guidance, the committee then potentially faces the question of whether they would want to reject the availability of one hour altogether or ask for a second hour. It's clear what the committee decided in the form of its previous motion, but let's hear from Dr. Fry and then Mr. Bergeron.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Thank you, Chair.

We've heard from the clerk that we do not have any instruments or tools to compel a minister to come at a particular time or for two hours. I like to believe that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. I think we should send back a letter saying that we would really prefer—the committee unanimously would prefer—two hours with each minister, but if it's not possible, I think a bird in the hand is going to be something we should go with, which is one hour with the minister and one hour with the bureaucrats of that minister in two separate meetings.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Fry.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bergeron, you have the floor. Then it will be Mr. Ehsassi's turn.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: On that note, Mr. Chair, I think that the proposal is quite reasonable. It's a matter of approaching the ministers again and reminding them of what the committee wanted, and then making adjustments based on their response. I think that the ministers are showing signs of openness, but it isn't enough for us. It's a matter of expressing it to them and seeing how they respond, quite simply.

That said, I understand that this may not be customary, at least not in the Ottawa Parliament. I sat in a parliament where ministers appeared before committees much more often and for longer periods in some cases. I still have some difficulty adjusting to this practice, in Ottawa, where ministers aren't available to parliamentarians. I understand that we must ultimately defer to their schedule. However, I think that it's only fair that we let them know what we wanted in the first place and adjust accordingly.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bergeron.

Mr. Ehsassi, you have the floor.

[*English*]

I have Mr. Ehsassi, please.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have several observations.

First of all, I want to thank the clerk for having conveyed that message to the two ministers.

My concern is that if there were to be any insistence, either we will not hear from those ministers or, if we do, given how incredibly busy they are, that it will not be for several months.

My sense would be that we're best off just proceeding with this and, as Mr. Oliphant said, devoting the second hour to their staff, who can be just as useful in providing us the necessary information—the departmental officials.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Aboultaif.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you, Chair.

I think it will be beneficial to send in the request made by the committee based on the agreement, which was for two ministers to appear separately for two hours each. If that's correct, I think it would be normal to go back and say, "We've requested, based on the wish of the committee, having each one of you separately for two hours and we hope that you will reconsider."

I think that would be a fair ask. We're not going to put them in any tough position. I'm sure they're both generous. The committee has a lot of questions. It's an opportunity to have both ministers on both fronts. That would be great, I think, and very beneficial for what the committee does and for the report that's going to come out after that.

I think, Chair, that you can go back and say that, based on the first request. I think it would be nice to go back and remind them about what we've requested. Hopefully, they will respond positively.

Thank you.

The Chair: Members, thank you very much for your views.

I think that with respect to tonight and the next step, if you agree, we could do that. We could just go back to the ministers without a signal of insistence or compulsion, which we cannot do, but to just let ministers know what the committee decided, and then receive the reaction and engage in further discussions through the office of the clerk and me to make sure that members will have time with the ministers and the officials as well.

Is that agreeable?

• (1740)

Mr. Marty Morantz: I'm good with that, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Is there any opposition to that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: That seems unanimous as the next step, even though it may not answer the question fully.

Thank you for that guidance tonight.

Travel safely.

We stand adjourned until our next meeting.

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