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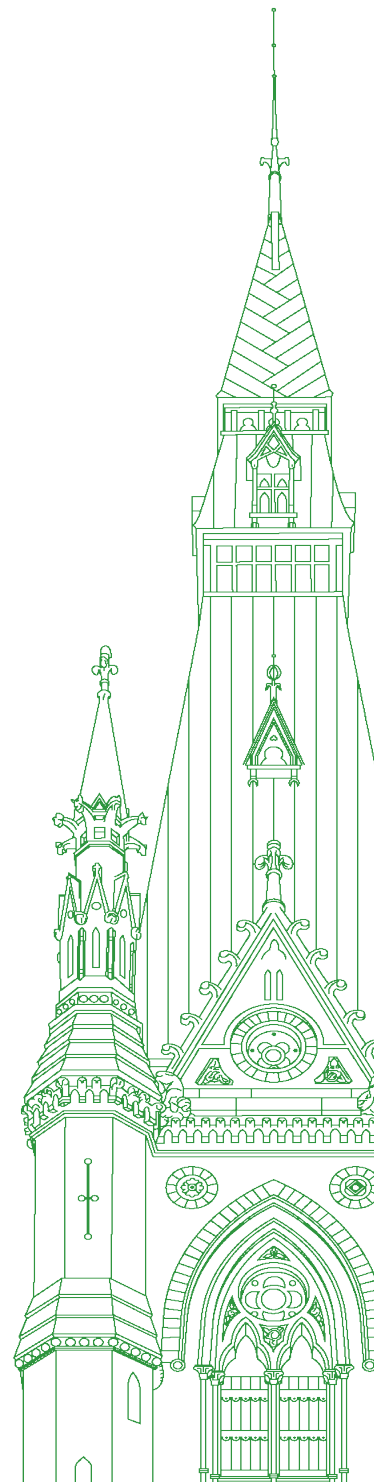
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Chair: Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury

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• (1005)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting No. 39 of the House of Commons Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

[Translation]

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

[English]

For members in the room who wish to speak, please raise your hand. For members on Zoom, please use the “raise hand” function. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can, and we appreciate your patience and understanding in this regard.

[Translation]

Before I begin, I want to note that the subject of the first part of today's meeting is the unlawful transfer of Ukrainian children to Russia. Some of the discussions may be difficult for the viewers, the members and the staff of the subcommittee. If you feel distressed or if you need help, please consult the clerk for information on the support services available through the House of Commons administration.

[English]

Now, please join me in welcoming the first witness appearing this morning, Mr. Andriy Kostin, prosecutor general of Ukraine.

Mr. Kostin, welcome to Canada, and welcome to this subcommittee on human rights. Thank you for agreeing to appear today. You will have a maximum of five minutes for your remarks, after which we will move into questions with members of the subcommittee. I will let you know when you have one minute left.

Mr. Kostin, the floor is yours for five minutes. Please, go ahead.

Mr. Andriy Kostin (Prosecutor General, Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine): Good morning, Chair El-Khoury and distinguished members of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to appear before you today and to unmask the war crimes and other atrocities that Russia

is committing against Ukrainian children. We're equally glad for being given an opportunity to submit a brief paper on that matter.

At the outset, I wish to convey my sincere gratefulness to Canada, its government and people, for your unwavering and continuous support of Ukraine. The issue of our bilateral co-operation and partnership was widely discussed at yesterday's event in Toronto entitled “United for Justice Conference: War Crimes against Ukrainian Children”. The event hosted prominent Canadian and international experts, and Ministers Joly and Virani.

Sadly, as we speak, Russia continues to commit heinous acts as a distinct feature of Russian military and political doctrine and a modus operandi of the Russian armed forces and their proxies. The forced deportation and transfer of Ukrainian children is one of the atrocious consequences of Russia's aggression—an ill-fated practice implemented from the early days of the occupation of parts of Ukrainian territories in 2014.

What does Russia do? It forcibly displaces, completely removes and separates children from their parents, immediate family and the settings in which they have initially been reared.

The top political leadership of the Russian Federation is the mastermind of this large-scale policy implemented under the pretext of security and health concerns or for vacation purposes. In Russia, Ukrainian children are stripped of their Ukrainian citizenship and put up for adoption with Russian families via online advertised adoption websites. It's not a mere allegation but an openly publicized practice that is supported and even co-perpetrated by the Russian officials who are supposed to protect children's rights and freedoms.

The first two arrest warrants issued by the International Criminal Court for President Putin and the so-called child commissioner, Maria Lvova-Belova, for the forced deportation of children are testaments of such practices.

Imagine children, mere toddlers, who become a trump card in the hands of Russia, not knowing or remembering their true identity, whereabouts, families or relatives. We're talking about thousands of children being taken to Russia in a specific manner.

Children in occupied territories are gathered and transferred to assigned centres under the pretext of evacuation for unsubstantiated security reasons. Within days, children are moved via auto or rail transit to border regions of the Russian Federation where they are distributed to child care institutions in various regions of the Russian Federation. Relevant Russian authorities assign a guardian from among the employees of the administration of the child care institutions in order to launch the adoption procedures along with the change of citizenship and the transfer of deported children to Russian families.

While placed in the centres in the occupied territories, border regions of Russia or the child care institutions in Russia, Ukrainian children have restricted freedom of movement, meaning they are unable to leave the place, and they have a lack of contact with family members or relatives. Another practice relates to the transfer of Ukrainian children to occupied Crimea or various regions of the Russian Federation in the so-called recreation camps, some as far as Siberia and the east Pacific coast. Many facilities refuse to release them, citing invented so-called safety concerns.

As of today, we have information about more than 19,000 Ukrainian children being forcibly transferred to temporarily occupied territories and deported to Russia as we continue to trace and gather information about each and every child. So far only 387 children have been returned.

Apart from the ICC, this practice has been labelled and recognized as a war crime by the United Nations inquiry commission for Ukraine, the OSCE fact-finding mission and regional organizations like the Council of Europe.

Unfortunately, the crimes against Ukrainian children are neither random nor spontaneous. They are part of the Kremlin's widespread and systematic policy against the Ukrainian civilian population. Therefore, in our understanding, this practice constitutes a crime against humanity and could even amount to the crime of genocide through the forcible transfer of children. Russia does not stop with deportation and adoption processes. The grown-up Ukrainian children are forced to undergo so-called re-education into Russian. For teenage boys, this often includes militarization programs.

• (1010)

Last year a U.S. State Department-supported program depicted a network of 43 re-education camps in the Conflict Observatory report. Children are indoctrinated into the Kremlin's vision of nation, culture, history and society. It is part of Russia's planned policy aimed at smearing Ukrainian identity by robbing us of our children. A new four-day-old report has disclosed the involvement of the Government of Belarus in over 2,400 deported Ukrainian children undergoing political and military training in Dubrava and 12 other facilities in Belarus.

This is not new. Since 2014 the Russification policy has been heavily implemented in occupied territories through so-called re-education programs. Imagine the grotesque sight of children dressed in military-type uniforms glorifying the war through a Kremlin-distorted view of historical facts.

As the prosecutor general of Ukraine, my task is to secure full accountability for these heinous crimes on a national level while al-

so fostering extensive use of international justice mechanisms. As the primary duty-bearer, we extensively investigate international crimes against children, including forced deportation and transfer cases. We're grateful to our partners for their unwavering support to the prosecution. We equally commend the office of the prosecutor of the ICC for their rigorous efforts, determination and steadfast progress in investigating.

More needs to be done by all of us. First, we need to implement effective modalities to counter this ill-fated practice. One such effort would be to include individuals and entities involved in or associated with the forced transfer and deportation of Ukrainian children into the sanctions regime.

• (1015)

The Chair: Excuse me. We have a problem with translation.

All right. You can continue now.

Mr. Andriy Kostin: Second, we need to secure the safe and unimpeded return of Ukrainian children to their families, guardians and homes through meaningful and mobilized assistance. We hope to see Canada at the forefront of this initiative as co-leader of point four of Ukraine's peace formula.

Third, we need to continue the effective investigation and prosecution of each and every individual perpetrator, denying them any opportunity for safe haven.

We're happy to see Canada standing with us and exploring such avenues in the name of Ukrainian children.

Thank you for your attention.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kostin. Thank you for your good and excellent comments.

We'll now go to questions from the members of the committee. Every member will have seven minutes to speak.

I would like to start by inviting Mr. Genuis to speak.

Mr. Genuis, you have the floor for seven minutes.

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

Thank you, Prosecutor General Kostin, for being with our committee today. I think you and all of us will have seen the announcement, which I think was yesterday, from Minister Joly about a network on this. I think it speaks to the important cross-party work that's been done at this committee and in general on these horrific human rights abuses that are happening in Ukraine.

Of course, our primary focus today is on the issue of the abduction of children, but I did want to invite you to share with the committee some other issues on atrocities that have been committed by Russian invaders. We've heard reports of systematic sexual violence as well; of torture being used routinely; of even minors being victims of sexual violence and torture; and of horrific contexts, frankly, in which this has happened, with family members being forced to watch and things like that.

I wonder if you can share with us an update on both the torture and the sexual violence being used by the occupying regime.

Mr. Andriy Kostin: Thank you for your question.

As you rightly mentioned, Russia is committing all types of existing war crimes against Ukraine and Ukrainians. Conflict-related sexual violence is one of the most brutal war crimes committed by Russia. This is not an incidental case. These are not cases related to a specific military unit that, as we say, had gone crazy. We have seen it as a pattern on the occupied territories.

We had the first findings in the first months of the war and after that all the world saw the atrocities committed in Bucha and in other cities near Kyiv and the mass atrocities committed by Russians there. That was in February and March last year. Then after the liberation of the Kharkiv region, we saw the same crimes committed by other military units and in later months of the ongoing war and occupation. After we liberated Kherson in November we saw the same types of crimes committed there, so it means that committing crimes against civilians, including children, is a policy of persecution of Ukrainians that is supported at a very high level of military and political leadership in Russia.

We are investigating these chains of command. Coming back to conflict-related sexual violence, at the moment we are investigating 252 acts of sexual violence in the time of war, including those involving 151 women as victims of sexual violence, 95 men and 13 children. We have already identified 37 suspects. We have indicted 22 of them in Ukrainian courts, in my office, and we have already two persons convicted by Ukrainian courts for committing sexual violence against Ukrainian victims.

• (1020)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you for sharing that very chilling information with us.

I just want to follow up on the issue of the chain of command as it relates to these atrocities on the Russian side. What kind of evidence are you finding of coordination and of direction? Do you think it's a matter of the higher-ups tolerating and creating a permissive environment for this abuse, or do you think there is clear direction, the intentional telling of Russian soldiers to commit these kinds of crimes?

Mr. Andriy Kostin: We have evidence of both, but if we look at the mapping of crimes committed on the occupied territories against civilians, we understand that once again there is a systematic policy of persecution, because the crimes committed against civilians during occupation mostly were aimed at breaking the will of Ukrainian people. These crimes were committed to show others, to threaten them and to keep them silent and, as we say, to put them on their knees.

That's why the commission of such crimes is so, I would say, systematic, and we have a diversity of crimes committed against the civilian population.

I can give several examples. We work with survivors in the region of Bucha, for example. During the occupation, in one case there was a father walking down the street with his teenage son to get humanitarian aid from the city council where volunteers had gathered it. They were stopped by two Russian servicemen and were put on the ground. The father was killed intentionally in the presence of his son. The servicemen also fired shots around the son who was lying there, just to threaten him with being killed.

In a different case in the same place, they entered a private building where a family—wife, husband and her father—were living. They tried to convince these people that they came, for instance, to “liberate” them, and when Ukrainians, our people, started to say they didn't need any liberation and to just go away and leave them alone, they killed the man, the husband, in the presence of his wife. Then twice they pointed a gun at her and imitated killing her. Only after her father asked them to leave them alone did they escape from this building. They waited until Bucha was liberated by the Ukrainian army to come back and to bury the body of her husband.

We have a big variety of such cases. I can tell you about a lot of them, but it's important, as evidence, to point out that in one small town they committed different types of crimes, just to terrorize the local population.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Genuis. Your time is up.

Now I would like to invite Mr. Ehsassi.

Mr. Ehsassi, you have the floor for seven minutes.

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

Mr. Prosecutor General, it's a great honour to have you here. Thank you for being with us.

I've had the opportunity, over the course of the past year and half, to be in Ukraine twice. I've always made an effort to meet with your officials, who, in my opinion, are doing a magnificent job of gathering evidence, cataloguing that evidence and building cases against the Russian troops who are in Ukraine.

I am wondering if you could first tell us, at a very macro level, all of the significant work that your office is doing in cataloguing the criminal activities of Russians in Ukraine.

Mr. Andriy Kostin: Thank you for the question.

Of course, they are investigating 110,000 war crimes. This is the figure we have fixed on at the moment. We all understand that the real number is much higher, because we have no access to the temporary occupied territories. Coming back to investigate such a great number of war crimes means that we need to organize our work in a proper manner.

For that, we have created a special unit, which is the war crimes department, at the central level. We have trained all of our prosecutors and investigators from two investigative authorities, which are the National Police and the state Security Service. We also created specializations in specific war crimes, so we have a conflict-related sexual violence unit, a special unit that investigates war crimes against children, a special unit that investigates war crimes against the environment and a special unit that investigates cyber-attacks that are committed by Russia as war crimes, which is quite unique in the investigation and prosecution of such crimes. I also created special units of war crime prosecutors in nine regions that are close to the front line or were affected by the temporary occupation. We have passed through the substantial training of all prosecutors and investigators in these regions.

We also created strategic documents. The most important is the strategy for the investigation and prosecution of international crimes for 2023 to 2025, which gives us an opportunity to legally and structurally categorize the war crimes that we are investigating and prosecuting and to prioritize them, because it is impossible to do everything at one moment. Now we have a specific document that is a signal to all prosecutors and investigators for how we prioritize cases. Of course, cases where civilians were killed, wounded, raped, ill-treated, humiliated or illegally detained and, of course, all cases where children are affected as victims and survivors are our priority.

In order to mitigate the issues of the workload, we also transfer some cases from one region to another region in Ukraine because it has more possibilities.

In addition to working with all war crimes and in addition to these special units, we also have two groups of prosecutors who investigate the crimes of aggression—the leadership crimes, which preceded the commission of all other war crimes—and crimes of genocide. This is more our mapping on the national level.

The other layer of our web of accountability, as we call it, is our work with the international judicial mechanisms. First and foremost, it's our co-operation with the ICC and the team of Karim Khan. You know, the ICC has launched—not only opened but really launched—its field office in Kyiv. It's the biggest field office outside of The Hague in the history of the ICC. It's about the sustainability of our co-operation with the ICC.

Our prosecutors are working on a daily basis with the ICC. We've created task forces. We also have priorities in our investigations. I cannot give you details for the sake of the independence of the investigations. However, our work is very structured with the ICC.

We also work with all existing international mechanisms, like the UN inquiry commission, the OSCE fact-finding missions and all other UN mechanisms on preventing torture and combatting sexual violence. We have great support. The biggest issue is our full transparency. We are ready to co-operate. We are ready to share all evidence and information. This is a very strong position of our government: to be open to sharing all existing information.

The third layer is our co-operation with our international partners. There are more than 20 countries that opened national investi-

gations with regard to war crimes committed in Ukraine, including Canada. We have created a joint investigation team with countries that are close to Ukraine and that are where a lot of refugees are located. These refugees can deliver evidence statements, video footage and other evidence of the war crimes that they have been victims or witnesses of. Our joint investigation team comprises Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, Slovakia and Romania. It simplifies the exchange of evidence.

• (1025)

We also, as I mentioned, coordinate the efforts of independent investigations of other countries. On that, for the level of the Eurojust in The Hague, we have created a specific, unique instrument that has been fully operational since November. It's called CISED, the core international crimes evidence database.

Why we did it, together with the help of the Euro commission, was because millions of Ukrainians are located in different countries. They can approach police and prosecutors in these countries and give statements and give evidence. In order for this evidence not to be lost as one piece of a big case, we created a database where national investigative authorities of other countries can include information about this evidence. We have an agreement among all of us that we will exchange this evidence in a very speedy manner.

We are expecting the first indictments of Russian perpetrators by other jurisdictions. This will be a very important signal to Russia that there will be no safe havens, because national investigations are ongoing and we're sharing information from our side with the other national investigation authorities.

I'm ready also to transfer cases from Ukraine where, for instance, nationals of the other countries were affected by the aggressive war of Russia. To transfer cases it will help us of course. It will reduce our workload a little bit, but once again it will be a very important signal that the world is standing with us to pursue justice for all victims and survivors of this war. Of course, the last element of our accountability web is the creation of a special tribunal for the crime of aggression.

We are grateful to Canada for both supporting the core group of countries that are now preparing the legal modalities of such a tribunal, as well as supporting the ICC, which is very important. I always say, if you're helping the ICC, you're helping Ukraine.

• (1030)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ehsassi. Your time is up.

[*Translation*]

I now invite Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe to take the floor for seven minutes.

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

Prosecutor General, welcome to the subcommittee.

Based on your experience and your knowledge of the file, can you tell us whether independent organizations have access to these children to check what happens after they have been transferred to Russia? Are these children completely out of reach?

[English]

Mr. Andriy Kostin: I'm sorry, but that was not properly translated. Could you kindly repeat that?

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Can independent organizations check what happens to the children when they are transferred to Russia? Do they have access to those children when they are on Russian soil?

[English]

Mr. Andriy Kostin: This is actually a big problem, because Russia does not co-operate with international organizations and with international mechanisms, even while being part of these international organizations and mechanisms. I always say that Russia uses any possibility in its favour—all existing international mechanisms, like the right to veto in the Security Council of the UN. However, Russia does not co-operate with the other institutions, in accordance with international law, where Russia is a part of them and where it has specific obligations.

We use different avenues to try to verify this information. One of the avenues is the International Committee of the Red Cross. This is difficult work and they have.... I would not say “access”, but they have partial communication with Russian authorities. From time to time Russia can verify some information, even though we are not sure if this information, if verified by Russia, is actual information. This is because, coming back to the children and the detention centres and so-called camps where they are located, Russia is moving these children from time to time among different camps. Even if they give this information it may not be valid.

However, in general Russia does not co-operate with international mechanisms and institutions, which really creates a problem.

For this purpose, we co-operate with different NGOs and civil society organizations that are both national—I mean national Ukrainian—and international, because they use OSCE resources in order to try to find out where our children are located. If we have this information, then of course we raise the awareness on the world level and then, in some cases, Russia starts to return our children back home.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you. That is exactly why I asked you that question. That is pretty major.

In your presentation, you talked about the change in children's behaviour when they return to their families.

Children have come here with a great deal of courage to testify before us at the subcommittee.

How systematic is this change in behaviour among children who have been transferred to Russia and who end up returning to their families in Ukraine?

[English]

Mr. Andriy Kostin: This is a sensitive issue. I cannot give you the full picture of all the children who were returned back home. We are treating them very sensitively and, for the matter of justice, we also enhanced our communication with children. We changed our approaches and techniques. We are usually limited to one interrogation or one communication with the children, because we can't retraumatize them. It happened that it would be two times, but we usually instruct our investigators and prosecutors to limit it to one investigation.

We have special green rooms that are called Barnahus, where children, especially very young children, communicate with psychologists. The prosecutor is in another room supervising this, so they do not meet with a prosecutor. Our legislation, which has improved, made it possible.

As a prosecutor general, we don't try to go into such deep detail in each and every case to find out how the perception of Ukrainian children who returned back home has changed. If the child is ready to talk about this, we accept this information, but it's impossible to press them by trying to ask. It's mostly what children are ready to tell us—this we fix. This is very important because, with the changing of this approach, we took standards from the International Criminal Court to apply to our work with children. These standards are very high.

If you allow me, I will finish.

It's very important for children to take part in pursuing justice and to be at the table. If they're ready, their voices as victims and witnesses of war crimes are extremely important. We engage them to speak, and we use specific techniques for them to speak freely. This is very important. The children will be at the table of justice at all times with all other institutions for their voices to be heard.

● (1035)

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you.

How much evidence do you have that the Wagner Group is involved, or has been involved, in the transfer of these children? Is there any evidence?

[English]

Mr. Andriy Kostin: We need to check this information, because the Wagner Group mainly commits two types of illegal activity. One is that they fight as a part of the Russian armed forces. Second, they were among those who were the most brutal in terrorizing the civilian population.

We can check this information for the purpose of giving you exact answers and provide you with a written statement, if you wish.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: You talked about people who are at the top of the pyramid and are involved in transfers. However, there are also officials at the federal, regional and even local levels who may not be sanctioned at the moment, either by the Americans or by other countries.

How important would it be to standardize the sanctions, not only for senior officials but also for small local officials? Could this help us fight the scourge of the transfer of Ukrainian children to Russia?

[English]

Mr. Andriy Kostin: This is very important. We are very supportive of using this instrument while we are collecting enough evidence to indict them. During this time, we share this information to sanction them, because sanctioning them on the medium level should deter others from committing these crimes.

What Russia did is that they adopted specific legislation, and many of these people think that they're just executing the order. They don't understand that they are committing war crimes. Sanctioning them and making their lives more difficult for committing these crimes, prior to our getting enough evidence so that we can indict them in a criminal case, is very important to deter the commission of such crimes in the future.

Thank you.

● (1040)

The Chair: Now I would like to invite Mr. Angus to take the floor for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Thank you so much, Chair.

Thank you so much, Prosecutor General Kostin, for being here.

This is a very difficult conversation. We have seen a pattern of war crimes committed by Russia, with the targeting of Ukrainian cultural symbols and mass sexual violence in the battlefield areas like Kharkiv and Kherson. We've seen torture. We've seen the murder of civilians. However, this question of forcibly taking the children moves us into a whole other realm, because it is about the destroying of families and the destroying of identity.

One of the legal definitions of genocide is the forceful taking of children. Just to have it on the record here for the Canadian people, you've identified 19,000 forced deportations. You've identified children who were being put up for adoption illegally. You've stated that teenagers were being forced into military training.

How systematic is this? What does this pattern tell us about Russia's attempt to destroy Ukrainian identity and Ukrainian families?

Mr. Andriy Kostin: This is a pattern used by Russia to destroy Ukraine as a nation, because kidnapping our children on such a massive scale is an attempt to steal our future, the future of our nation.

The first arrest warrant, as we mentioned already, is for Putin, who is at the top of this systematic practice, with explicit evidence that this is a part of Russian genocidal policies against Ukraine and Ukrainians.

You are absolutely right to mention that, first, the transfer of children from one group to another is in itself a part of the crime of genocide. We also have witnessed not only this element of genocide, but also another one: the incitement to commit genocide. We have already two convictions in Ukrainian courts against Russian propagandists, including one who publicly called for the killing of Ukrainian children—sinking them in the river.

With this, the other propagandist, Gasparyan, who is now also convicted by the Ukrainian courts, is the author of the so-called term “denazification”, which they used against us. He's one of the leaders of this incitement to genocidal policies. Of course, when this is systematic, from the incitement to the commission of the element of genocide, it's explicit evidence that the genocidal intent of the Russian Federation to erase, to eliminate, Ukraine as a nation is in fact present.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you for that.

I have a two-part question.

First, in order to deal with international war crimes, it's important to be able to name and identify, so we've identified Vladimir Putin as a major war criminal, obviously, and Madam Lvova-Belova, the so-called children's minister. How much work has been done to identify the enablers, the functionaries, the low-level people who are engaged in the forcible taking of children and who have an obligation to protect those children? Are we able to start naming them and issuing warrants in the international arena?

As well, for the 19,000 forcibly deported children, do we have good records on where we think they may be, who they and their families are? What is the connection in terms of the importance of having that information?

Mr. Andriy Kostin: This is extremely important information in order to make it possible to prosecute and punish everyone who is involved in the commission of this crime and, second, to have information on where our children are in order to return them home.

Accountability in itself is not enough to return our children back home. It's an important element of pressure, I would say, on Russian authorities to start to return our children, but it's not enough. That's why we are calling for the creation of an international mechanism on how to return our children, where Canada is one of the leaders, together with Ukraine, and uniting the other nations that are ready to help us.

Coming back to your first question, of course we have investigations, as already mentioned, where we know those who are involved in the commission of this crime, the abduction of our children, on the higher and medium levels, and the regional level. Once we have this information, we need to share it in order to sanction them, as I mentioned, while we are continuing our investigations. For the names we identify, we're sharing this information in order to sanction them prior to indicting them. On the international level, of course, we are going on with helping the ICC investigate these cases, wider and broader, and I hope we will all see results of this investigation in the future.

● (1045)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you.

I want to go to a more sensitive area in terms of support for the families. Canada has its own dark history of forcibly taking children from the indigenous communities. Children were taken as a government policy. I represent many families who have gone through that. The trauma is multi-generational. We're still picking up the pieces for policies that were enacted 20, 30 or 40 years ago.

I know that we're talking about children who are at risk now. What are the supports in place for the families? Do you have the resources necessary, given the war and everything else, to support the families? This will have long-term implications for protecting the families and protecting those children.

Mr. Andriy Kostin: Thank you very much for this question. You have really raised a sensitive issue. Our policy at the government level is to ensure support to all victims and survivors of this war. A large number of the victims and survivors of this war are definitely the relatives and the parents of the kids who are kidnapped. They are already victims of this war.

This war was unprovoked and unjustified. We lived in our country peacefully. We were attacked by Russia. A substantial part of our economy and industry was destroyed by Russia. In order to run the country and to ensure that all victims of this war have proper social security and support from the government, we need such support on a long-standing basis from our friends and allies.

In terms of helping Ukrainians who are now affected by this war, it's not just helping our government to run the country in a time of war. It's not only helping us to close the deficit in our budget. It's completely humanitarian in nature. These people can receive social security payments and protection only with help from those in the international community who stand with Ukraine.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Canada can help—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Angus. I'm sorry. The time is up.

Since our time is restricted, every member will have only two and a half minutes.

Madam Vandenberg, you have the floor for two and a half minutes, please.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you. I was going to share my time, but with two minutes, I'm not sure we'll have time for that.

I did want to start by telling you, and all those who are with you, that Canada is absolutely behind you. The work you are doing will go such a long way toward making sure there is no impunity, which is so vitally important in order to really have peace with justice when this is over. Thank you for what you're doing.

I do have a concern here. You mentioned, for instance, that there is a pretext here. Russia is saying that this is for evacuation and that this is for the children's protection. These are arguments that they would continue to make, particularly in tribunals and courts. How can you document enough to be able to show that it's systematic and that these are not individual crimes? Will you be able to show that there is a deliberate, systematic, purposeful reason for doing these crimes?

Mr. Andriy Kostin: I will give you an example. For instance, when we liberated the Kharkiv region, we started to interact with families whose children were transferred to Russia. They were pressed by occupation authorities to sign something, like a power of attorney, with a blank for the person who would be somehow accompanying their children. They didn't even know where their children were transferred. We have a lot of such cases. We have docu-

mented all of them. This is only one example of how they were treated.

From the point of view of international humanitarian law, they should unconditionally return all Ukrainian citizens, including children, back to Ukraine. They have a lot of instruments. There are international organizations. There are third countries. Via different UN institutions, we have sent this signal many times. If they're pretending to evacuate Ukrainian children, then just release them and return them home. If you're not ready to do it directly to Ukraine, do it through other countries or with the help of international organizations.

But they don't want to do it. Only with international pressure have they been doing it from time to time. It's not enough.

• (1050)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Vandenberg.

Mr. Genuis, you have the floor for two and a half minutes, please.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Chair.

I have two follow-up comments initially. I strongly share the contention that the evidence you've provided and the other evidence we've heard demonstrate that the Russian regime is committing genocide as part of their invasion of Ukraine. The House of Commons made that determination early on, and I think it's one worth reinforcing now, strengthened by the evidentiary record you provided. The international legal definition of genocide makes it very clear.

The second comment I want to make is that I think the conclusion we should draw from your testimony is that it's not only about the need to support organizations that are pursuing justice in these particular cases but to redouble our commitment to supporting Ukrainian victory. There can be no justice without Ukrainian victory.

This testimony underlines the high stakes. We're not just talking about the abstract question of territory or where a border is. We're talking about how, when you have occupation, people are being stolen. The horrific atrocities the people have to live under if they are in Russian-occupied parts of Ukraine underline why, rightly, there is no desire to compromise on the core principles of territorial integrity.

I asked about sexual violence as well as torture during my initial question. I wonder if you can follow up on the issue of torture, specifically the treatment of detainees.

In the context of child abduction, we've heard testimony that I think would amount to descriptions of torture of children who have been abducted. I wonder if you could speak more broadly to the use of torture by the occupying forces.

The Chair: Answer in one minute, please.

Mr. Andriy Kostin: Torture is, once again, systematic. We are investigating thousands of cases of torture, even in the Kherson region, which we liberated.

With all of the evidence, we have identified at least 11 torture chambers, which are places of illegal detention where all possible ways of torture were used against Ukrainian civilians.

Torture is a mass practice that is used against our prisoners of war while they are under Russian control. When they are released, they give us evidence of the torture and ill treatment that was committed against them during their presence in Russia.

Torture is a weapon of war used by Russia. It definitely is part of their policy of persecution. Once again, all these elements of genocidal intent, of course, give us certainty that Russia is committing the crime of genocide.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Two minutes is not a lot of time, especially when we have a witness as exceptional as you, Prosecutor General.

In fact, Mr. Kostin, you have the highest level of knowledge on this file. I'll give you my two minutes to add anything you didn't get a chance to say.

The floor is yours, Prosecutor General.

[*English*]

Mr. Andriy Kostin: I think that this war of aggression has showed all the world that the system of international humanitarian law, of international law and order, needs to be improved in order to prevent the commission of such crimes in Ukraine, in Europe and in other parts of the world in the 21st century. In order to make it possible, we need to combine our efforts to fill in the gaps in the system of international humanitarian law.

One of these gaps is the mechanism of how to return illegally transferred, illegally kidnapped children and civilians. We also have evidence of at least 16,000 adult civilians who are illegally detained in Russia. There are not enough mechanisms to return them back home. International humanitarian law does not provide the procedure of the exchange of civilians.

I'm sorry to use this cynical wording, but that's why, I think, combining our efforts to create such mechanisms and to make United Nations' mechanisms more efficient and more workable.... We need to be united for this. We need to combine politicians and lawyers in the sphere of international humanitarian law to create such mechanisms.

Once again, we will do our job as prosecutors, my team, the team of Karim Khan and our colleagues in other countries, but it's not enough to ensure that all the children will be returned back home.

It's our obligation. I think it's our joint obligation to do it, to manage to create such mechanisms and to execute these mechanisms to return our children back home.

This will prevent commission of such crimes in other places of the world.

• (1055)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kostin.

Now I would like to invite Mr. Angus to take the floor for two and a half minutes, please.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Thank you so much, Chair.

We've been witnessing unprecedented levels of violence and trauma inflicted on the Ukrainian people and also the incredible resilience and defiance of Ukraine. Canada is just a middle power, but we have a strong emotional link to the Ukrainian people.

What steps do you think Canada needs to take to ensure we are there in the long term, whether it's on humanitarian, on reconstruction or on ensuring that international law is utilized to its full extent so that the perpetrators of these crimes know that, no matter how long it takes, they will not walk away free and the international community will hold them to account? What role can Canada play in helping that?

Mr. Andriy Kostin: In order to ensure that Ukraine and the Ukrainian people will live in peace, we need to win this war, and winning this war means defeat to Russia. This is not only for Ukraine and Ukrainians. Once again, this is in order to restore international law and order. You can see that when war is aggressive, when war is ongoing, we are facing new hot spots on the global map, and we're afraid that we all will see more if Ukraine does not defeat Russia as soon as possible.

All elements of support, starting from military support and financial support to humanitarian support, political support and support in our quest for justice and accountability, should be sustainable, because it's not only for Ukraine. It's for all of you.

It costs a lot to reach our victory. Ukrainians, our great soldiers and officers, are paying with their blood. Ukrainian civilians are paying with their blood. Many nations who help us are paying their part of the costs, but it's usually the military and financial parts. We believe that as soon as we get everything we need for the victory, it will cost all of you less—if we receive what we need as soon as possible. If we receive it later, then it will cost you more. Every new conflict on the global map will cost all of us more.

In helping us to win as soon as possible, please don't forget that we are also saving the lives of our soldiers and our civilians, and we are saving the lives of those Ukrainians who are still under occupation and are still victims of the Russian regime. Do not only stand with us, but win this war with us. We are committed to fight. Please help us to win this war as soon as possible.

• (1100)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kostin. Of course, sooner is better than later, especially in a case like this.

[Translation]

Thank you for your testimony and for participating in the study on the unlawful transfer of Ukrainian children to Russia. We appreciate your taking the time to meet with us and share your expertise on this very important topic.

If you have anything further to submit to the subcommittee, please contact the clerk.

[English]

Now I will briefly suspend this meeting so that we can welcome the next panel of witnesses for the study of international disability-inclusive education.

Thank you.

• (1100) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1115)

The Chair: I call this meeting to order.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses and members.

To facilitate the participation of visually impaired participants at today's session, I would ask all members and witnesses to identify themselves each time they begin speaking.

[Translation]

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by videoconference, click on the microphone icon to activate your microphone and please mute yourself when you are not speaking.

[English]

Regarding interpretation for those on Zoom, you have the choice, at the bottom of your screen, of floor, English or French. Those in the room can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

In accordance with the committee's routine motion concerning connection tests for witnesses, I am informing the committee that all witnesses have completed their required connection tests in advance of the meeting.

It is my pleasure to welcome the second panel of witnesses who have joined us this morning as we begin our study of international disability-inclusive education.

From Education Cannot Wait, we have Yasmine Sherif, executive director, and Maha Khochen, program specialist, inclusive education and disability inclusion. From Global Campaign for Education-United States, we have Jennifer Rigg, executive director. From Inclusion International, we have Diane Richler, co-chair, catalyst for inclusive education, and Mónica Cortés, co-chair, catalyst for inclusive education. From Special Olympics International, we have Timothy Shriver, chairman, board of direction; and we have Gail Hamamoto, chief executive officer of Special Olympics Canada. From the United Nations Children's Fund, we have Robert Jenkins, global director, education and adolescent development.

We'll begin with Ms. Yasmine Sherif.

[Translation]

You have a maximum of five minutes to make your presentation, after which we will go to questions from subcommittee members.

I will let you know when you have a minute left.

[English]

Thank you for agreeing to appear today.

Ms. Sherif, the floor is yours for five minutes, please.

Ms. Yasmine Sherif (Executive Director, Education Cannot Wait): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development of the House of Commons for having us here today with our colleagues and friends in the education sector.

It is a very important consultation, and I am glad to be here, together with my colleague, Maha Khochen. We can also respond to any questions. Maha will be the expert on any additional questions.

First of all, I would like to thank Canada as a founding member of Education Cannot Wait.

The ultimate question is, what is Education Cannot Wait? We are a global fund for education in emergencies and protracted crises. We are situated in the United Nations, and we work across the UN system. We are hosted by UNICEF, but work with all UN agencies. We work very closely with civil society organizations—Jennifer Rigg, of course, represents the global coalition—and together with education ministers, the private sector and strategic donor governments.

Canada was one of the founders of Education Cannot Wait at the World Humanitarian Summit and has also contributed generously. At our high-level financing conference earlier this year in Geneva, Switzerland, Canada pledged an additional \$87 million over four years to Education Cannot Wait in our strategic plan for 2023-26.

The funding we received for the coming four years is targeting 20 million crisis-affected children, especially girls and adolescent girls who live in countries that are very hard to reach, fragile and affected by crisis- and climate-induced disasters and refugees. Canada has played an instrumental role in most of our interventions, but I would highlight also that additional contributions have been made to our investment in Bangladesh for the Rohingya refugees—to refugees and host communities, where we are reaching more than 350,000 children and adolescents.

When it comes to disability inclusion in education in emergencies, our approach is fully aligned with Global Affairs Canada's commitment to disability-inclusive education in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. We also welcome the global leadership that Canada showed during the G7 in Charlevoix, where, again, the Charlevoix declaration stated that girls with disabilities are especially marginalized and require particular attention.

What are we doing?

First of all, before going into Education Cannot Wait's work in the global south, let me mention that the World Health Organization estimates that 16% of the world population is experiencing significant disability. This is very interesting. Please remember this: 80% of them are in the global south, and many of them live exactly and precisely in emergency and protracted crisis situations.

Education Cannot Wait is a global fund that looks for learning outcomes and equality and also to make everyone work together, coordinated and jointly, rather than in silos, which has enabled us to successfully reach nine million children and adolescents in the hardest-hit parts of the world with a quality education. We address emergency response first, as well as long-term development investments.

We are committed to reaching 10% of children with disabilities. We have increased our budgetary allocation to reach children with disabilities to at least 5% of every program. You can see the kind of work we do with local organizations in Iraq and Colombia, to mention just a few. So far, we have reached over 100,000 children, who then receive Braille typewriters, sign language interpretation, long canes and infrastructure that will enable them to go to school. There is action, and there are results.

I have four seconds left. I will thank you once more.

Thank you very much.

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Sherif.

Now I would like to invite Ms. Jennifer Rigg to take the floor for five minutes, please.

Ms. Jennifer Rigg (Executive Director, Global Campaign for Education-United States): Thank you to all esteemed members of the subcommittee, distinguished witnesses and everyone joining us today in person and online.

My name is Jennifer Rigg, and I serve as the executive director of the GCE-US. It's a coalition of over 80 national and community-based organizations, international groups, teachers' unions, student and youth groups, parent associations, organizations of persons with disabilities, academic institutions, faith-based groups and advocates dedicated to ensuring quality, inclusive, universal education for all.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you and to support this subcommittee's important study of international disability-inclusive education, including intellectual and developmental disabilities.

We are a broader part of the Global Campaign for Education, which is a network active in over 100 countries. Especially in Canada, we are so grateful to collaborate closely with the Canadian international education policy working group, sometimes known as CIEPWG.

I join the conversation today as a person who has lived as well as professional experience in disability-inclusive education and human rights for all persons with disabilities, of all kinds, globally. I live with a visual disability and physical disabilities affecting my hands and wrists, for example. I am also the parent of children with dyslexia, dysgraphia and ADHD, and an aunt of students with autism.

My mother worked at a centre for independent living when I was younger, advocating for the Americans with Disabilities Act. I grew up in an advocacy and human rights environment, where my family helped fight for me to overcome challenges and stigma, and we continue doing so for others.

Please consider how you, your family, friends, networks and the global community are all affected by the full diversity of disabilities. Imagine you were born with a disability in a country such as Sudan, without a birth certificate, therefore making it even more challenging to access school and support systems, without early learning supports and with no access to inclusive education.

We strongly believe that every learner can thrive in any education system, with a twin-track approach to education that promotes system-wide transformation to improve the quality of inclusive education for all, while also providing targeted support to learners with disabilities.

You heard some of the statistics from Yasmine. We know that children and youth with disabilities are often marginalized and not given the chance to contribute within an inclusive school setting or all of the important economic and community aspects that can be unlocked after graduating from school. For example, at the primary level, completion rates for children with disabilities are 15 to 18 points below their peers, according to "The Price of Exclusion: Disability and Education", and that's for the students who are lucky enough to make it into school.

In addition to completion rates, changing the perception of children with disabilities in and out of schools is very important. Often, the adults and people around children with disabilities might consider them unable to learn, even with accommodations and supports, and they may be kept out of school.

Securing and advancing the rights of children and youth—importantly, including persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities—are crucial to creating a brighter future for students of all identities. For example, school systems that support teachers and students, with foundational learning taught inclusively, create an environment where it is easier for all students to learn successfully.

With IDA, IDDC and GCE, we urge everyone to join the “Disability Inclusive Education: A Call to Action to Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education”, which has already been endorsed by over 220 organizations and global leaders, including ECW, Inclusion International, Special Olympics, UNICEF and organizations joining this wonderful session today. For your consideration in your recommendations, we highly recommend this call to action, and we have shared it in full.

It is possible to achieve international disability-inclusive education for all in our lifetimes. However, far more still needs to be done to realize the right to quality, inclusive education for all.

I am hopeful that this subcommittee and global leaders will advocate for international disability-inclusive education, including for intellectual and developmental disabilities. We would like to especially extend our gratitude to MP Mike Lake and to all of you for your global leadership, continued collaboration and commitment to ensuring inclusive education for all students.

Thank you very much.

• (1125)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Rigg.

Now I would like to invite Ms. Diane Richler from Inclusion International to take the floor for five minutes, please.

Ms. Diane Richler (Co-Chair, Catalyst for Inclusive Education, Inclusion International): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Members of the committee, thank you for undertaking a study of international disability-inclusive education, including that with respect to intellectual and developmental disabilities. I would especially like to thank the Honourable Mike Lake for introducing this critical issue into the parliamentary agenda. I would also like to thank Ms. Vandenberg, who was one of the few people at the UN-organized pre-summit for the Transforming Education Summit in Paris last year to raise the issue of inclusion within education. I also want to express my thanks to my member of Parliament, the Honourable Carolyn Bennett, who was one of the first members of this House to advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities.

I'm pleased to be here today representing Inclusion International, the global federation of associations of persons with intellectual disabilities and their families, with over 200 national members in over 115 countries. I'm joined virtually by Mónica Cortés from Bogotá, Colombia, who, with me, co-chairs Inclusion International's catalyst for inclusive education program, which assists our members in promoting inclusive education.

Mónica, will you say a few words?

• (1130)

Ms. Mónica Cortés (Co-Chair, Catalyst for Inclusive Education, Inclusion International): Thank you very much, Diane.

I appreciate the opportunity to talk with you today and to share our experience in Colombia. As members of Inclusion International, we have been promoting inclusive education for more than 15 years, providing tools to families, teachers and decision-makers so they can have a shared vision of what inclusive education means for people with intellectual disabilities.

We know the transformative power of inclusive education when our children can be recognized and valued by other students without disabilities and by the community in which they live and develop. Only then will they have real networks in the future to live in the community with sufficient social capital to make them part of it and to provide them with the necessary support.

The goal of inclusive education, as stated in SDG 4, led us to participate in an initiative funded by Education Cannot Wait to ensure education for students who live at risk of prolonged emergencies, such as migrant children, victims of armed conflict, and girls and women victims of gender-based violence, among whom are people with disabilities. We are learning that inclusive education is a gender issue. When children with disabilities are left out of education, their mothers cannot participate in the labour market. In conflict and crisis, education is often the only place where girls and women can be included.

Colombia is committed to having a unique, inclusive education system that recognizes the importance of giving a place to each student, valuing their individual differences and providing the necessary supports and adjustments.

Countries that have ratified the CRPD and committed to closing gaps in access to inclusive education for students with disabilities must invest resources in cultural transformation to break down barriers that still exist for under-represented groups such as students with intellectual disabilities and those with high support needs, a high proportion of whom remain out of school.

Finally, from my experience as a mother with a son who has an intellectual disability and knowing other persons who are adults today, I can say that we see the favourable impact that inclusive education has on the lives of persons with intellectual disabilities and their families. They can transition to training programs and employment and enjoy a full life in the community.

Thank you very much.

Diane, I'll turn it back to you.

Ms. Diane Richler: Thank you, Mónica.

Inclusion International has been pleased with the increased global support for inclusive education, such as in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was ratified by Canada in 2012, the commitment to inclusive education in the sustainable development goals and the conclusion of the United Nations Transforming Education Summit.

However, despite these international commitments, Inclusion International has found that mainstream development projects fail to include people with intellectual disabilities and, in many cases, promote segregation and other human rights violations. Data available through the OECD demonstrates that people with intellectual disabilities are excluded from nearly all projects funded through official development assistance. I believe the clerk has shared with you a link to a study we did that shows the very low investment by OECD members in education that includes learners with disabilities. Within OECD country investments, 42% of the education programming is not compatible with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Similarly, a review of investments by the Global Partnership for Education found that most investments in the education of learners with disabilities were for learners with physical or sensory disabilities and most were for segregated programs. Many attempts to increase participation in education for learners with disabilities—or for girls, for refugees, for minorities, for LGBTQ+ children and youth—focus on barriers for specific groups. Inclusion International argues that what is needed is a—

The Chair: Ms. Richler, could you wrap it up, please?

● (1135)

Ms. Diane Richler: What is needed is a transformation of education systems to provide higher-quality education for all.

One of our specific recommendations is that Global Affairs Canada do a systemic review, such as we've seen done in other countries, of all activities related to inclusive education internationally, bilateral investments, activities by staff of Global Affairs Canada and in our various missions, as well as participation in multilateral institutions such as Education Cannot Wait, UNICEF and the World Bank.

I'd be happy to answer questions afterwards. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Richler.

Now I would like to invite Mr. Timothy Shriver to take the floor for five minutes, please.

Mr. Timothy Shriver (Chairman, Board of Directions, Special Olympics): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It's an honour to address this committee together with my fellow witnesses. I represent the Special Olympics' international movement. I'm happy to be joined here by Gail Hamamoto, who represents our work in the great country of Canada. Like many of you on this call, I represent what I consider to be—and what I think, factually, can be supported to be—the most overlooked, excluded and even humiliated population in the world.

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities are in every country, every ethnicity, every geography and every community. However, today, despite their presence in our families and in our communities all over the world, they're still more likely to be institutionalized, more likely not to go to school at all, more likely to die young from neglect and injustice in health care systems, and less likely than virtually any other group to have a job, have friends, have a home or have a full and complete life.

Let me be very clear. The problem is not the disability. The problem is not intellectual and developmental disability. The problem is fear, neglect, indifference and oversight. The problem is us. The problem is urgent, and the problem is now.

Notwithstanding the very important comments that have been made, notwithstanding the passage of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, notwithstanding the passage and adoption of the millennium development goals and now the sustainable development goals, notwithstanding the proclamations and the funding mechanisms that exist, which are represented, in part, by many of us in this room and by people beyond this room, we have a crisis—an enduring, lasting, neglected crisis.

This has not been addressed well by any of the institutions, including my own, around the world. I don't point the finger at anyone in this room. I point the finger at all of us for the state of the situation we have now, where the estimates are that anywhere from 50% to 80% of children with intellectual development disabilities don't go to school at all.

How can we sit here and pretend that we're making progress? We are not making progress. We are not responding to the demands of these goals. We are not fulfilling the letter of the law that has been adopted by countries like Canada and over a hundred others around the world. We have fallen short on all these fronts. Fear remains in charge of the policy-making and funding mechanisms that could be addressed to the needs of people with intellectual disabilities.

I don't mean to be sounding a discordant note, but I want to sound an urgent one. Business as usual is not getting the job done. It's resulting in persistent injustice and neglect, shorter lives and the impoverishment of women and families and children with intellectual disabilities. Our movement, the Special Olympics movement, has been in this business, one way or another, for over 50 years. We have a fairly simple formula for addressing these challenges. We invite people to meet each other in a context of ability—not disability. We invite people to celebrate the gifts and the values of each and every person. We invite people to adopt an attitude of universal dignity. We call this formula an inclusive mindset. It has travelled very well in Canada.

I'll mention, going back over 50 years, Red Foster. More recently, there's Kim Samuel, a distinguished Canadian, and now you see Gail on the phone here. There are 41,000 athletes in the country of Canada who participate in these community-based activities, and every year there are 17,000 volunteers.

Here's my pitch: It is time for bold action. Young people are asking us for bold action all over the world. This is an area where we can respond. People who are more conservative ask us for a refreshing of our values, of our commitment to human decency and human personal responsibility. This is a chance for us to do just that. The SDGs want us to do it. The CRPD wants us to do it. Today, the Special Olympics movement is promoting social inclusion in over 28,000 schools around the world in 150 countries.

We need to do more. We want to reach 150,000 schools, but we can't do it alone. We can't do it with nickels and dimes. We need significant investment from foreign development agencies, from multilateral organizations, from foundations. We stand here poised to work with you, to work with all the members of the committee and, of course, the distinguished member of Parliament, Mike Lake, and others who are leading these discussions, to supercharge these efforts so that we don't have this same conversation a year from now or two years or five years from now and report such disappointing numbers as I reported today.

• (1140)

Our movement, Unified Champion Schools, can help bridge the gap and teach children how to play together. They will learn together and they will grow up and live together. Everybody wins. This is not just a program for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This is a call to action for all children. No child who learns and grows excluding other children has an adequate education.

This is in the interest of all of our children.

I yield it back to you, Mr. Chair. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now I would like to invite, from the United Nations Children's Fund, Mr. Robert Jenkins to take the floor for five minutes, please.

Mr. Robert Jenkins (Global Director, Education and Adolescent Development, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My comments will build on those of my fellow witnesses.

I want to thank you, Chair, the committee members and my fellow witnesses, but I also want to thank Canadians. Being a Canadian myself and having served in the United Nations for 30 years... I've lived outside of Canada for a long time. I've continually been in various postings all over the world. I've come across Canadians working on inclusive education who are very passionate about it. I think it's deep in our core of being Canadian. As evidenced also on the global stage through the Charlevoix work, there are many different examples of the government and senior decision-makers, all the way down to community-based workers, advancing this important agenda.

I fully agree with fellow witnesses that there's far more to be done. I think where I can add value, being from UNICEF—which is the largest education wing of the United Nations, now working in 140 countries today on this issue—is that we have learned what works. Let me build on the earlier comments by offering the committee some ideas.

First is that we recognize how important it is that inclusive education is part of the transformation of education systems. Education systems around the world currently need to be transformed. We all recognize the global learning crisis. Kids are not learning what they need to throughout the system, and children with disabilities are particularly marginalized. When reaching children with disabilities proactively, it needs to be embedded in that transformation process.

What does that look like? When you're at a national level in a given country and you're planning how to improve an education system with the government, all actors—including the Canadian government, Canadian NGOs and the UN system, with much support from Canada—undertake a prioritization exercise and embed the very important issue of promoting inclusive education, of bridging children with disabilities back into the school system, at the heart of that transformation.

As Tim Shriver mentioned, the indicators are clear and all committee members will be aware that children all around the world with disabilities are marginalized in education systems, so by bridging them back in and by undertaking system changes to enable that to happen, we can transform the system as a whole. All children benefit. There have been some amazing examples around the world with Canada's support and leadership, and the UN and others, through which that transformation has happened.

It also starts with data. This is understanding where those children are in a given country, what barriers they are facing and how those barriers can be overcome. We need to engage with children and youth across the board in the transformation process, but include children with disabilities at the heart of that consultation and process so that we understand what needs to be done and then move forward collectively.

Second, it's absolutely critical that capacity is built throughout an education system, starting from the ministry through to local authorities, principals, teachers, etc., in order to welcome all children back into schools, to enable children to meet children where they are in their learning and their needs and to enable them to be successful in an inclusive way.

It's also critical to address the social norms that Mr. Shriver and others were talking about. We need to recognize that children with disabilities face barriers within schools, but also within homes and within communities. We need to recognize the importance of proactively bridging and hold ourselves all accountable for bridging them back to enable them to realize their full potential.

The bottom line is that Canada is a global leader in education and has been for decades. I've witnessed it myself on the ground. I witness it now in this global role I play.

I encourage you to continue to lead in this area. Count on UNICEF's whole support to translate the goodwill of Canadians into action on the ground to realize the right of every child to an education, including children with disabilities.

It's much appreciated. It's back to you, Chair.

• (1145)

The Chair: Thank you.

I would like to thank all the witnesses for the good comments we have heard. Now we will move to a period of questions from the members of the committee.

I would like to have the attention of the members of the committee. Please remember to identify yourselves each time you begin speaking, and please clearly state to whom your question is directed.

I would like now, for the first round, to invite Mr. Mike Lake to take the floor for five minutes.

The floor is yours, Mr. Lake.

Hon. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Wetaskiwin, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's Mike Lake speaking, as you mentioned, Chair. My question, with a statement first, is for Tim. I have a son who is a Special Olympics athlete. We are very thankful for the program.

I pulled up your uncle's speech from 1962, when he talked about going to the moon. He said:

We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we're willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win....

If you just remove the phrase “go to the moon” and put in “include every child”, it reads very well. We choose to include every child and do the other things not because they are easy but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone and one we intend to win.

You talked about the fact that when we include kids with intellectual developmental disabilities, everybody wins. Personally, I think we can get to the place where every single child is included in education before the end of the decade—every single child. To what extent, if we grasp this concept, if we grasp this idea of reaching the truly hardest to reach in the world through education, can we reach every child along the way and accomplish many of the other goals that we're trying to accomplish at a global level that desperately need to come together right now?

Mr. Timothy Shriver: This is Tim Shriver in response to Mr. Lake.

Thank you for a beautiful analogy. I suppose that's the right way to put it.

This is not easy. If it had been easy, it would have been done already. We wouldn't be here having this hearing. We wouldn't be talking about neglected children, abused children, lonely children, institutionalized children and forgotten children, but the reality is that we are, and it will take 20, 30, 40.... I don't know how many scientists, engineers and scholars were required to put a human being on the moon in the 1960s, but my suspicion is that just in NASA it was 50,000 or 60,000 people—don't quote me on that—and it's going to take the same thing here.

We have to wake up. I know you know this. We have to wake up to the enormity of the challenge and the responsibility that comes with proclaiming that we're going to try to meet it. I mean, it's an embarrassment. I frankly find myself embarrassed in meetings like

this as a professional in this field. As I said before, I'm embarrassed by my own organization.

Yes, we're going to have to do it, and it's going to be hard. This is going to take a significant shift. I hope Canada leads it. I've knocked on doors. Maybe you can hear in my voice a certain frustration that has been built up over the years. I am frustrated. I'm tired of hearing parents tell me there's nowhere for their kids to go. I'm tired of hearing parents tell me they have no friends for their child. I'm tired of it. I thought when I was in my twenties and thirties that we would solve these problems. We haven't even come close to putting the necessary effort behind it.

Couldn't Canada, on the heels of this important hearing, make a commitment to investing some significant resources out of its global development and foreign assistance budgets for these children?

You help every child in the world when you help our children. We help every school system in the world when we implement universal design. We help every teacher in the world when we educate them to be able to be an “includer” in the classroom. Pedagogy is improved. Access to building is improved. Instructional outcomes improve. Climate improves. Behaviour problems go down. Mental health problems are reduced.

It's not just our kids that we're fighting for here. It's all children. We know this as educators. My background is in education. We know that when we include every child, every child wins. It's not just the child who is locked out, the child in a segregated classroom, in a segregated school or, for that matter, in a segregated institution. It's not just those children who benefit. Every child benefits. We're robbing not just children with intellectual developmental disabilities. We're robbing all children of the chance to actually have trust, faith and belief in themselves that they're going to grow up in a world where everybody has a chance, which is what they want.

It's going to be hard, Mr. Lake, but I would very much trust in your judgment, your zeal and your leadership to marshal the kind of coalition and the kind of resource commitment that we need now, not to continue to talk but to implement a much more aggressive plan of action.

Thank you.

● (1150)

Hon. Mike Lake: Diane, do you have any comments to add? I almost just want to tee you up to ask you if you want to....

I will do that. I'll tee you up. Go.

Ms. Diane Richler: Thank you.

This is Diane Richler. I fully support everything that Tim Shriver said. Speaking from my personal experience, my first exposure to inclusive education was when my kids were in elementary school. The first inclusive classes were starting in Toronto. When I went to see those classes, they were the kinds of classes that I wanted for my kids. They were active. Kids were working together. The teacher wasn't at the front of the room telling everybody to be quiet. The teacher paid attention to the individual needs of all of the kids.

Ten years later, my godson was diagnosed with autism. He went through inclusive education in British Columbia from preschool through to high school. There's no question that having him in the school, having the teachers learn the kinds of things that Tim Shriver mentioned, improved education not just for him but for all of the students in the school.

What concerns me is that we've made progress—and I'll turn to Canada now with some progress, such as including the word “disability” in the Charlevoix declaration and including it elsewhere—but it doesn't go down. There are platitudes. Excuse me, but it's easy to say the word “inclusion”.

What this means is really looking at investments and stopping to look at what the barriers are for this kind of kid and what the barriers are for another kind of kid, etc. What does the school have to look like? What are all the elements that have to be in an education system to make sure that nobody's left out? All too often, when there's a focus on one group of excluded kids, barriers are built up for others. We've seen that for kids with intellectual disabilities. That's a real concern with the way that some of Canada's feminist international assistance policy has been implemented.

Too often there's been a lack of focus on the fact that children have multiple identities. Girls aren't just girls. There are indigenous girls. There are girls with disabilities. There are LGBTQ girls. We need to be building systems for everybody. Unfortunately, I don't think that we're building enough into the international programming that Canada is involved in to make sure that those issues are raised everywhere that Canada has a voice to talk about education.

• (1155)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Richler.

Now I would like to invite Madam Vandenberg to take the floor for seven minutes.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Thank you very much.

I want to thank all of our witnesses for what I think is going to be a vitally important study on something that isn't always given the front of mind.

I'm reminded of 10 or 12 years ago when I was at the launch of the UN Women's approximately 650-page report on the state of the world's women. Somebody in the audience put up their hand and said, “Why, in 650 pages, is there no mention of disabilities?” The head of UN Women, who was there to answer, thought for a moment and then said that it was because nobody who was on the team that was researching and writing the report had disabilities.

This is the importance of being at the table, of having the voices there. As we all know, this is something that people are not opposed to. We've seen all of these conventions, but it is not front of mind if it doesn't have a presence.

I'd like to pick up on the last question, Ms. Richler. You talked about the idea of inclusion in terms of not having segregation. Often, when you look at rights, it is seen as a right to education but not necessarily in the same space, in the same room.

Ms. Sherif, you talked about refugee education. We know that, in many countries, it's very hard to have refugees integrated into na-

tional school systems. They're separate. Then, of course, with disabilities, there's a separation there again.

I'll remark on what Mr. Shriver said, on the word he chose: that this is a “humiliated” population. That is a very powerful word. I think it is linked to this idea of separation and segregation.

Then, of course, there was Mr. Jenkins on transforming the entire system. I think that's what this is all about: really transforming entire education systems and how we think about education.

My question is specifically this: Why is it important that children are included within one, single education system and not given separate systems? Why is that important, not just for education but for the development of the child?

I'll go in the order that you spoke originally. I'll give the rest of the time for each of you to answer. Please leave enough time so that everybody has a chance to respond to it in the same order that you did your introductory remarks.

Thank you.

The Chair: I believe Ms. Sherif would like to say something.

Ms. Sherif, the floor is yours.

Ms. Yasmine Sherif: Very quickly, I think it's great to be in this company, and I also would like to commend Mike Lake for bringing us all together, because I know how hard he works to put this as one of the top priorities.

I want to emphasize why it's so important.

First of all, 80% of children and adolescents who are struggling with other abilities, because they don't get the support they need through education, are in the global south. Because we are working with Canada as our major partner—one of our major partners—for children in those conflict and crisis countries in the global south, I'd really appeal to the committee to pay attention to the majority of the 80% who, besides being marginalized, are stigmatized because of their other abilities or disabilities or are, in addition, suffering from climate disaster issues or armed conflict. If we cannot cater to this 80%, who are in the most difficult circumstances on the globe, it will eventually impact all of us—not the least our consciences.

I also would like to thank Canada for commissioning a study to see how you can strengthen the system, but I again would appeal to you and ask that you bear in mind for all of us that many of my colleagues who are investing all the time in those children, all of the stigmatized, are left with absolutely nothing to cater to their disability needs. This would require more financing for us to be able to do that work together with you as Canada.

I just wanted to make that point, but it's great to be with all of you, because we all share the same passion and determination to bring them out there and not keep them behind, to actually bring them out to be the shining stars they are.

Let me conclude by saying that I prefer to call them “other abilities” and children with other abilities. I was in South America recently. In Colombia, I met a little girl who was born without limbs or arms. She had learned how to paint with her mouth. I had never seen such beautiful paintings and such skill to do this by holding the pencil in her mouth. I think we need to lift them up as stars who deserve to be put right at the forefront, but we need to invest in them financially.

Thank you.

● (1200)

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: I just have a few minutes, so I'll ask each witness to take just 30 seconds.

Thank you.

Ms. Jennifer Rigg: Thank you so much. I'm Jennifer Rigg with GCE-US. I will attempt to say a lot in this quick 30 seconds.

It's a fantastic question. The call to action that I referenced quickly has three key points that help us get to how to actually make these recommendations.

First, we must make sure that we're setting medium- to long-term targets to ensure all learners with disabilities are reached in all education programs, not in a segregated way and not with just one special school, but in a way that really honours and reaches the full diversity of the types of disabilities and that really, as Diane was saying, gets to the specific needs of each learner.

Also, it's ensuring that, for all education programs and grants and funding—increased funding, as Tim Shriver and others have emphasized, is so vital—they mainstream disability-inclusive criteria and targets.

The Chair: Can you wrap it up, please?

Ms. Jennifer Rigg: Thank you. The key is to move beyond pilots and get to full scale in making sure that we fully support all children and youth in a way that will then also help all of society.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, please.

Ms. Diane Richler: This is Diane Richler. I'm going to make two quick points and turn it over to Mónica.

The first is that inclusion is in the law. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities general comment number four clearly spells it out: inclusion, inclusion, inclusion—not separate schools.

Second, Tim Shriver made the point of how many children with disabilities are out of school. There isn't enough money to build separate schools and train separate staff, so if we think that we're going to do this, we're going to have to do this together.

Mónica, do you want to add to that?

The Chair: Please add quickly. The time is up.

Ms. Mónica Cortés: Yes, here in Colombia we have a unique system in which all the children can go without separate schools. Of course, as Jennifer said, we are working to include and to work

for this minority group of students and immigrants who are in the different emergencies and disasters.

It's necessary to show that the principles of inclusive education are better for all, as Mr. Shriver said. If we have a unique school, we can show that all benefit who are there, the whole community benefits, and that it's necessary to do. We need to have a better education system for all and to try to be better and to work together to achieve a really inclusive education for all. It's necessary.

The Chair: Thank you.

For other members, please go ahead but do so quickly because time is really up.

Mr. Shriver, do you also want to add something quickly?

Mr. Timothy Shriver: It's been said. I think it's the time for action. I know there are studies planned. I would just point out the politics here. Let's remember. I know we're gathering in a political environment. There are people on this panel who are identified as Conservatives or Liberals or centrists or progressives. This is not a political issue. We have to be mindful of the fact that, because it is not a political issue, it sometimes slips from the political agenda. I would just remind us—and I'll go back to Mr. Lake's comments—that this is going to take a Herculean effort because no one is going to get advantaged.

That's what our constituents want. They want to see people across the aisle working together. They want to see us co-operating around common values. Let's make this a political issue in the best sense by showing what politics can do when people work together.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

● (1205)

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm sorry, but we have exceeded our time by a couple of minutes.

[*Translation*]

I now invite Denis Trudel to take the floor for seven minutes.

Mr. Trudel, go ahead.

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for being here today. I think this study is really important and interesting.

I would like to focus on the services provided to francophone children.

We already know that, in Canada, access to education for francophone children is problematic. I spoke with the representatives of the Alliance des femmes de la francophonie canadienne who were here on the Hill a month ago. They told me that, in Saskatchewan, children had to travel 300 kilometres to go to school, and that's not talking about children with disabilities or specific problems. For francophone children with specific problems, access to services is quite a challenge, I think.

I'd like you to talk about that.

Mr. Jenkins, I'll start with you. I would like to know if this situation already exists in the world.

Does it require a specific approach in developing countries, for example, in Africa?

Is it more difficult for francophone children to have access to inclusive education or specialized services than it is for children who speak other languages?

I'd like to start with you, Mr. Jenkins.

[English]

Mr. Robert Jenkins: Thanks for the question.

I can speak to the importance of national education systems of-fering younger children, in particular, instruction in their mother tongue. The evidence is very clear. Children learn better and more effectively in their mother tongue. They can transition over time in later years. That is something that UNICEF engages on with governments all over the world. It supports programming to enable children to learn in the language that is spoken at home.

The second thing, to go back to inclusive education for children with disabilities—and I'm trying not to make this a political issue—as a politician, when I'm articulating the importance, there are two very simple arguments that I think have resonated in many countries.

One is that inclusive education systems are just more effective. They are more effective at reaching children with disabilities and enabling them to realize their rights. They are also more effective in terms of learning outcomes for children already in school.

Let's just be clear: Inclusive education systems are more effective and provide better education for all children.

Second, in terms of efficiency and economic return, there is a huge return on investment in enabling marginalized children, including children with disabilities, to realize their right to education. The return on that investment is very significant. This just also makes sense from an efficiency and effectiveness point of view.

To go back to the original question from his excellency, that includes also enabling children to learn in their mother tongue. It just makes sense.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel: That's interesting. I actually wanted to ask you about that, Mr. Jenkins.

Children clearly learn better in their mother tongue, but when you don't have access to those services, what do you do? Is in-

creased funding needed to enable these children to receive services in their mother tongue?

[English]

Mr. Robert Jenkins: Where UNICEF works in 135 program countries, as they're called, or low- or middle-income countries, we do invest in strengthening the capacity of teachers and in hiring local teachers from the area to provide learning materials in a variety of languages, depending on the location, to enable children to learn in their mother tongue and then transition over time.

It is very challenging in some countries when you're dealing with 45 to 50 languages, but, indeed, it's absolutely critical for us to continue to strive for younger children, in particular, to learn in their mother tongue around the world.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel: I would like to ask Ms. Richler more or less the same questions.

Have you noticed, in Canada, a difference in access to care and services for children living with these problems in the country's francophone communities?

• (1210)

Ms. Diane Richler: If it's okay with you, I will answer in English.

[English]

I think there has been a real shift in Canada in providing services for learners with disabilities, particularly intellectual disabilities, in French. I want to point to New Brunswick as an example. It is recognized universally. It has been cited by UNESCO, by the OECD and by others as having one of the most progressive inclusive education systems in the world, and that's true. It has two separate systems: the English system and the French system. They are both providing supports to learners with disabilities.

To follow up on what you said, Canada has, because of that, some of the best francophone experts in inclusive education. We're not taking advantage of them. We're not letting them share their expertise, neither the experts from Quebec nor the experts from New Brunswick, with other francophone countries around the world. Unfortunately, there are other French-speaking countries that are more active in that area but are not as progressive in the area of inclusive education.

I see that as a real opening for Canada to play a special role in terms of promoting education for French-speaking children with disabilities, based on our expertise in Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel: I'm glad to hear that in New Brunswick there are world-class experts looking at these issues, but does that extend to the rest of Canada?

Do you still see a difference in services and access to care for children who have these kinds of problems elsewhere in Canada, especially for francophone children?

[English]

Ms. Diane Richler: This is Diane Richler again.

I'm sorry I can't cite specific examples, but I would be very happy to follow up and to provide information to the committee on what's happening in other communities in Saskatchewan and in Alberta where there are inclusive systems.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel: That would be very nice, and I would very much appreciate it.

Thank you very much, Ms. Richler.

Ms. Diane Richler: You're welcome.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Trudel.

[*English*]

Now I would like to invite Ms. McPherson to take the floor for seven minutes, please.

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

Thank you to all of our witnesses for their testimony today. I particularly appreciate the comment that the work we do in the committee and the work you're all doing to promote inclusive education is good not just for children who require that inclusiveness but good for education systems and good for all children. I think that's really important.

I also think there is something to be said about how it becomes such better education. My son has ADHD. I have a private member's bill on ADHD that talks about making sure that the teachers and the doctors have the training to identify and treat ADHD, because we know that if it is treated and dealt with, there are some real positives, and there is an extraordinary cost if it is not. For me, I see that echoed around the world as we look at inclusive education.

Now, one of the things that I will disagree on a bit with our witnesses is that this is not a political issue. I'm sorry to say that it is a political issue, because what we are looking for here is increased funding. We're looking for increased funding to be able to do the work that Canada should be doing.

At the moment, our official development assistance is set at 0.3% of GNI. That is insufficient. We have a political party in this country that ran the last election on a 25% cut to ODA. These things cost money. We need to contribute to them. It is money up front. It is money that we need to spend now so that we don't pay a thousand times more later on, at a later date. From my perspective, I'm sorry, but this is political.

I appreciate what we heard, which is that there is a systemic review that is needed. One of the things I'd like to ask Mr. Jenkins is, how do we ensure that our ODA is better spent? Knowing that we have limited dollars, knowing that we need to have a systemic review of where that is going, do we need to tie strings...? Do we need to look at things like our multilateral organizations and demand data from them? We've heard today that there is insufficient data. Is this something that could be done to make sure that our ODA is being spent appropriately?

I'll start with you, Mr. Jenkins, if I could.

Mr. Robert Jenkins: Thank you very much for the question. It's great.

There are some very clear metrics we can use that we can engage on with best practices of development actors and development assistance to ensure they meet the minimum standards. Ideally, Canada would of course aspire to being greater than that, but on the minimum standards on ensuring their assistance, Canada's government assistance overseas is leveraged to the extent possible to promote inclusive education.

On the point you just raised, Ms. McPherson—and others—we're happy to provide those, and again, not only can it be related to Canadian assistance but by adhering to those benchmarks and promoting those benchmarks across other development actors, we can move the needle significantly. That's what I would encourage you to do, and we can.... It links to data. It links to including throughout this transformation of education systems basically how you can maximize those interventions to ensure children with disabilities are included.

I just want to flag one thing. If we don't do it, we also run the risk of doing harm, if you like. By providing assistance and enabling some children to learn and not others, you are running the risk of exacerbating disparities. It is absolutely critical that when intervening, let's say, particularly in humanitarian assistance, where you have large numbers of kids who require assistance in learning, we need to reach the most marginalized and work backwards. By doing so, that enables all children to benefit.

• (1215)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Ms. Richler, could I ask you the same question, please?

The Chair: I'm sorry, Ms. McPherson. I believe Ms. Sherif would also like to add something.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Yes, certainly, Ms. Sherif. Would you like to start?

Ms. Yasmine Sherif: Thank you very much.

I think the strategic donor partners such as Canada are critically important, because what is missing for us to do this work jointly is the funding and a model where UNICEF is heavily invested, along with UNESCO, the World Food Programme and many civil society organizations working with refugees or with Plan Canada International and Save the Children. When you bring everyone to work together, you are more cost-effective, and if you have a board that meets with this group or this pooled funding mechanism on a regular basis, you have direct insight into what we are doing 24-7.

It's a new way of working, of working through global funds where everyone gets their share of the development and ODA money that is invested, but you also have a direct oversight as a donor, a contributing country.

I speak on behalf of Education Cannot Wait, and we are very keen to make sure that UNICEF gets the lion's share, but just as much, we do need civil society. Jennifer Rigg can also testify to that. We all have to work together to be cost-effective and more speedy and achieve sustainability and transparency.

Ms. Diane Richler: Thank you. It's Diane Richler again.

There is no question that the cutbacks in ODA have had a very negative effect. There has been a real narrowing of focus by the Government of Canada in terms of the issues that are being supported and the places that are being supported. Mónica and I are here representing an organization with members in over 100 countries, and they don't see Canada. This is an area where, as I said before, we have leaders. We have fantastic expertise to share, but we're not taking advantage of it.

I guess the other thing to say in terms of the positive side of it, yes, being a political issue is that the Prime Minister is now a member of what is called the group of friends of the sustainable development goals. However, when we see Canada's interventions at international fora on the SDGs, we don't hear about education, and we don't hear about disability. There are plans being made now for what is going to follow up on the sustainable development goals, and right now, even education is not on the agenda and disability even less so. One of the things that Canada could do right now while these negotiations are going on in New York is make sure that education is seen as a global priority for ODA, which it is not, and that persons with disabilities and their inclusion are seen not as a way of spending more money but as a way of enriching what happens and making sure that the quality of education is better.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thanks, Ms. McPherson.

Now we will go to the second round. I would like to invite Ms. Damoff to take the floor for five minutes, please.

The floor is yours.

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

I want to focus my question on international education, particularly in countries where it's difficult for young people to get an education. If you look at countries that are currently in a conflict, that have refugee camps, or a country like Afghanistan where girls can't access education, let alone any of these young people who have either a physical or an intellectual disability.... How do we reach those kids where accessing education is difficult to begin with, let alone living with a disability and being even below the bottom of the list?

Maybe UNICEF and Global Campaign for Education could comment on that one.

• (1220)

Mr. Robert Jenkins: I'll be brief. I really appreciate the emphasis on children living in humanitarian settings and through conflicts.

First of all, education needs to be seen as a life-saving intervention. It needs to be at the heart of humanitarian assistance. That continues to be a debate that we are losing. Currently, if you look at global humanitarian resources, you will see that 3% is allocated to enabling kids to learn, and that's a problem. That needs to increase. Yasmine Sherif from Education Cannot Wait, we at UNICEF and many others are championing the importance of enabling kids to learn.

Having served in Jordan for five years as the head of UNICEF just before this posting, I will say that, when you see a seven-year-old or an eight-year-old fleeing conflict come across the border.... They're eight, nine or 10 years old and their first need is that they want to continue to learn. They want to continue on a pathway.

Enabling learning also enables us to provide psychosocial support, mental health and a whole wide range of assistance, which is also then proving critical.

Now, when you have children facing multiple challenges to realizing their right to education, which is particularly the case in humanitarian settings—like I come back to—it is absolutely critical that the learning we provide to or enable for children is inclusive of every child. Enabling all children to be reached, including children with disabilities, also then breaks open the entire learning process, meeting children where they are in their learning journeys, where they are in their physical journeys, where they are with their psychosocial needs, etc.

The starting point is that every child in a humanitarian setting needs to be able to learn. It's at the centre of humanitarian assistance, and the international community, with Canada's leadership, will.... The innovative approaches that we now have—technology-enabled and others—to realize this vision are right at our fingertips. It just now requires us to take this goodwill and translate it into action, and that includes resources.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I have only a couple of minutes left.

Mr. Shriver, I'm the very proud member of Parliament for Dr. Frank Hayden. I also have the Dr. Frank J. Hayden Secondary School in my riding. Most Canadians don't realize that he did research on people living with intellectual disabilities and why they were excluded from sport. He came up with the idea in 1967 of the Canada Games and couldn't get the agencies that were looking after those living with a disability to participate. It was Eunice Kennedy Shriver who became aware of Dr. Frank's research, and it sparked the Special Olympics.

I'm very proud of Dr. Hayden. We don't recognize him, as Canadians, nearly as much as we should.

I have only a minute left, but I wonder if you could talk about the importance of sport for those living with an intellectual disability, because the Special Olympics take place around the world. All you have to do is throw in a soccer ball. It doesn't have to be expensive.

How does sport tie into the ability to get those people into education?

Mr. Timothy Shriver: Thank you for the question, and thank you for recognizing Dr. Hayden. I think I met him when I was four, so I've known him pretty much my whole life. His track record is extraordinary.

The short answer here is that developmentally, play, sport and games are a critical teaching tool. We teach social skills through sport and play. We teach cognitive skills, speech and language, relationship skills and emotional self-regulation. A lot of these things are not really taught scientifically through sport and play, but we know that teachers know how to do this, and we have found in our research, even with children we have [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

• (1225)

The Chair: We will pause. You won't lose any time. We'll wait for it to settle down.

Is your connection okay?

Mr. Timothy Shriver: I think so. Can you hear me?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Timothy Shriver: Let me just close. I'm sorry I got cut off.

I think the main point we found through our research is that children can learn extraordinary amounts. There is a huge amount of cognitive and even neurological development that comes from gross motor and fine motor sports, recreation, training and play. We see this throughout the life cycle, actually. As one doctor said to me, "The greatest drug never discovered is exercise."

As a learning tool, as a teaching tool and, particularly, if I can emphasize this, as a social inclusion tool...we're talking about inclusion, but there is often a lot of emphasis in the inclusion space around physical proximity and putting children in the same room together. It's very important—I don't mean to underestimate it—but it does not achieve social inclusion. It doesn't create relationships. For that, you have to have children both with and without intellectual and developmental challenges learning how to interact. Sport is what does it.

We found...and this is not because we're so proud of ourselves. We found it to be the most effective tool for strengthening the social cohesion that children experience in school and, therefore, for contributing to the development overall of stronger relationships, a stronger sense of self-regulation, stronger problem-solving and decision-making tools and the like.

I hope that's helpful.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Shriver.

Thank you, Ms. Damoff.

Now I would like to invite Mr. Lake to take the floor for five minutes, please.

Hon. Mike Lake: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll start by responding to my NDP colleague's political comments earlier by just pointing out that we are spending vastly more money than we've ever spent as a federal government, and we're achieving crisis-level results in this area, despite all of that spending. In the past, when we faced an economic crisis of this magnitude, the result down the road, in the mid-nineties to the early 2000s, was a 32% cut in programming and funding for health care, social services and education, and the lowest levels of international development spending in our history. I think it was about 0.21% of ODA at the time, because of the economic crisis a generation earlier.

We care about the sustainability of whatever programs we put in place.

Today, we're talking about a crisis. We're raising the alarm together and I think, as a Parliament, despite our political differences, we have agreed and voted unanimously that this is an area that we

need to take action on. We've come together as a committee here because of that.

I want to direct my questions this round to Jennifer Rigg, and I want to talk about outcomes and action. I want to ask about a call to action from the Transforming Education Summit on disability and inclusive education.

Could you highlight some of the numbers to highlight what the situation is right now in that crisis situation? I believe it's 240 million children around the world living with a disability. What are the outcomes like for those children right now?

Ms. Jennifer Rigg: Thank you, Honourable MP Mike Lake. That's absolutely right. The estimate is 240 million. However, your colleague previously asked about the data. We're grateful to UNICEF, ECW and others on this call who are working night and day to improve that, but much more needs to be done, not just multilaterally but in each of the programs and communities. For example, how many times do we actually know how many kids with disabilities are being reached through a specific program and how many are not being reached? What are those barriers that are still leaving them out and leaving them behind?

Then, from a funding standpoint, how much funding are we really making sure is going to a particular program or for disability-inclusive education? We do know that what gets funded is indeed what gets prioritized and accomplished. As a community, we've done research through the call to action to identify the need for, at a very minimum, 5% of funding to be going to this important area, but that twin-track approach that we talked about earlier really indicates that it should be more—at least as a starting point. From an accountability standpoint, Canada and others have been an active part of the Global Disability Summit as well as what you just wonderfully mentioned with the UN Transforming Education Summit. These are opportunities to self-report, and we also encourage everyone to increase and really make sure that all of our work is fully accountable.

We have a relatively new disability marker in the OECD DAC system. Let's make sure that it is indeed being used in conjunction with education, starting for kids right from birth onward. Thank you so much.

• (1230)

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

Hon. Mike Lake: The report is only two pages long, and then there are a whole bunch of pictures of logos of supporters, so it's great to see so much support signing on to the report.

This is shocking to me. It says that compared to children without disabilities, children with disabilities were 49% more likely to have never attended school, and 42% were less likely to have foundational reading and numeracy skills.

Mr. Jenkins, with the minute that I have left in my time for this round, I'm wondering what commitment UNICEF can make to taking action today, in the short term, to help resolve that problem.

Mr. Robert Jenkins: Mike, thanks for your continued leadership on this and thanks for continuing to engage so directly with UNICEF and advocating with us. The bottom line is that we need to leverage our existing 144 offices. We spend about \$1.6 billion or so in education a year. We need to leverage that to maximize its impact on inclusive education, and that comes back to our earlier discussions around ensuring that all of UNICEF's programs adhere to that standard. Again, we can punch above our weight by crowding in others to work in a similar way. We look forward to continuing to work with you on that journey.

Le président: Thank you, Mr. Lake.

[Translation]

I now invite Mr. Trudel to take the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Denis Trudel: Ms. Sherif, I know that you have programs in many countries, including Madagascar, Ethiopia, Nigeria, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Have you noticed a difference between the services provided to children with disabilities—francophones and anglophones, for example—and those provided to other ethnic groups in those countries?

[English]

The Chair: Go ahead, please.

A voice: I think she's not here.

The Chair: Yes, but Ms. Khochen should take the place of Ms. Sherif.

Ms. Khochen, the floor is yours. If you want the member to repeat the question, we won't cut your time.

Dr. Maha Khochen: The member is asking about the experiences that we encountered in different countries, in terms of francophones, and how the language is taught in different countries, if I've understood correctly.

We know that in each country we go to and in each country we work in, we find examples of successful inclusive practices. We do see those successful practices. We see some children getting an education who have never been in an educational environment before. Up until now, the examples we have are scattered. There are examples of successes. First, we really need to understand what would make these experiences successful, and also what would help us to build and capitalize on these successes.

We strongly believe that inclusion is not only about bringing children into the environment and not only providing them with support in languages. We really need to be looking at the holistic needs of the child. We need to be looking at what the individual child will need and tailor the support based on their individual needs.

There was talk about the majority of the support going to those with visible disabilities, but we know that only 5% of children with disabilities in emergency and protracted crises receive an education. We can speculate that even those with visible disabilities are not all included in education.

The way forward for us is to be thinking about the systemic barriers, because discrimination still happens. Stigma is widespread. We need to be thinking about the systematic changes that we need to bring about to the educational environment, so it can become a welcoming environment for all, regardless of differences, types of difficulties, severity or the differences that may exist among the children.

• (1235)

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel: Thank you.

I want to look at this issue holistically. The question is for everyone.

I would invite Mr. Jenkins to answer first on the situation of children with disabilities, particularly in war-torn countries. Let's talk about Ukraine, about Afghanistan, where it has been difficult. We could even talk about Gaza, where the situation is extremely difficult for children. We see it and it is intolerable.

Do we know anything about access to education for children with intellectual or other disabilities? We already know that access in Gaza is complicated.

If you have any data on those specific situations, Mr. Jenkins or another witness, I would like to know what it is.

[English]

Mr. Robert Jenkins: UNICEF allocates about 60% of its education resources to children living in humanitarian settings, in a humanitarian context. That's come up in the four years I've been in this job. It's mainly because there are increasing humanitarian situations, unfortunately. We're now at about 60% of our global education resources.

To answer your question, it depends on each context, but the reality is that the challenges children face are compounded or become exponential. If I am living in a poor area, if I get affected by a flood, if I am disabled, if I'm a girl of adolescent age and if I live in a poor household, those challenges exponentially interplay. It goes from not only being challenging... It's not 50% of children. It goes to a 1% chance that those children can attend school or continue their learning.

The bottom line is that children with disabilities living in humanitarian crises are exponentially disadvantaged, because not only is living in a crisis a challenge, but they are disabled. Unfortunately, despite our best efforts as a humanitarian community, we continue to collectively fail those children in the vast majority of contexts. This comes back to my strong recommendation. When responding to a crisis, start with the children most affected, the most marginalized, and work backwards. That will benefit all children.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jenkins and Monsieur Trudel.

I now invite Ms. McPherson to take the floor for five minutes, please.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much for the testimony.

Mr. Jenkins, I'm going to ask this one of you, because you were just answering my colleague with regard to that intersectionality of impacts and how they compound.

Working from those who are most impacted, I agree with Mr. Trudel. We are seeing a situation in the world right now where the conflicts in Gaza are disproportionately hurting children. We know that the population in Palestine is over 50% children. Afghanistan has that particular complexity of the impacts on women and girls. I can only imagine the impacts on women and girls who are trying to access inclusive education in Ukraine, a situation where we are also looking at conflict.

I wanted to give you another moment to talk a little bit about the compoundedness of the impacts and perhaps layer on how we have not recovered from some of those impacts with what has happened with COVID over the last several years. Could you talk about that a little bit for me, Mr. Jenkins?

Mr. Robert Jenkins: I thought I was off the hook for a second, but I appreciate the question. Thank you so much.

I really appreciate the committee's interest in reaching the most marginalized, your commitment to reaching children with disabilities and also recognizing that children with disabilities in humanitarian settings are particularly marginalized. I greatly appreciate it. It's refreshing.

Often with children living in humanitarian settings, conflicts, etc., their learning needs are lower in the priority, as I mentioned. I think it's a great role for Canada to play, and I really appreciate the interest.

As a bit of a scary statistic, for 10-year olds living in low- and middle-income countries, 70% of those 10-year olds cannot read, and many have been in school for years. We have a global learning crisis, full stop. Disabled children are particularly marginalized, as we've recognized. We come back to all the points that have been made by all of the committee members here in the discussion about the importance of inclusive systems being better for all children, and more efficient and more effective.

Then we come to a fragile context or humanitarian context. There are the ones you mentioned: Ukraine, currently in Gaza, Afghanistan etc. Indeed, you'll see, basically, education paused or children dropping out of the system and never coming back. That is what we're seeing in Afghanistan now.

It is incredibly expensive to enable children to catch up and return back.... It's the same in Canada—the dropout program, etc. It's absolutely critical that we all do our best to continue to enable the child to learn despite the challenging situations they're in.

We saw that in COVID, as you mentioned, with school closures. Obviously, the longer the school was closed, the greater the impact it had on all children, but particularly on marginalized children around the world. The disparities increased dramatically during that very challenging global time, and that's the case now where the crises have hit. Many of the countries I've worked in were often in humanitarian settings. It's the marginalized children who are disproportionately affected by crises. Disparities increase significantly, making it very challenging to bridge those kids who are already

facing barriers back into school to continue on their learning journey.

That's absolutely a key message on the children with disabilities.

• (1240)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

A further question to that is this: How do we balance that need to provide fast response in humanitarian crises? Some of these things happen very quickly. We want to get support to the places it's needed. How do we balance that with the long-term development contributions that make the likelihood of conflict and adverse humanitarian issues less likely? How do we balance the development with the humanitarian when we're looking at inclusion for children? As you said, speed is the issue here.

Again, I'll ask that to Mr. Jenkins.

Mr. Robert Jenkins: It's not a balance actually, it's a win-win. It's how we intervene.

When kids are coming across into Jordan from Syria—I was responding as the head of UNICEF there—the way we intervene and enable children to continue their learning can be inclusive, and that's a win for all children. It can be done in a way also that improves the quality of education for all children. It's something we do in many humanitarian settings. When refugee children and inclusive children come to a school, by supporting the school as a whole, improving all infrastructure, improving the teaching practices of all teachers—it's an overall inclusive environment—everyone wins.

It's leveraging that humanitarian assistance to be transformative. That's even just things straight in the classroom. If a teacher is able to reach children with disabilities, they're able to reach children of all abilities and all learning is better. It's an easy example of how you can leverage the short-term humanitarian systems in ways that transform the education system for all.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Mr. Chair, how much time do I have?

The Chair: Time is up.

We will go to the third round for three minutes each. We will start with Ms. Damoff please.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Mr. Jenkins, one of the things that I've seen is where the children themselves don't have a disability but the parent does. The child is thrust at a very young age into caring for a parent who is living with a disability. For example, it could be a land mine that has resulted in mom as a single caregiver looking out for a family, and all of a sudden the children are no longer able to go to school. We want all kids in school, and these aren't ones who are living with a disability themselves, but they are impacted by disability in the household. In certain countries it would be more prevalent than others. I'm just wondering if you have any thoughts on reaching those kids.

• (1245)

Mr. Robert Jenkins: We talk about reaching the whole child and it's not easy. I worked in the education system. I'm passionate about the education sector. I'm all about learning, but I increasingly am recognizing that we can only get so far if we're just looking at the school. The child has to bridge themselves into the classroom. We need to look at the whole child, where the child lives and the overall support needs of the child and their family, and provide comprehensive support in order for this to be effective. That includes social protection systems more broadly.

While I'm speaking about this kind of approach to whole needs, it also links to engagement. I think it's absolutely critical that communities are bridged into the school system, and there's a partnership between families, parents, teachers at schools. We see that all over the world, and that will help to address this very important question that you're raising on particularly disadvantaged and marginalized families. If the school is seen as the centre of the community as a whole in partnership with all parents, if it itself is inclusive, then children will also be encouraged and the education will be inclusive.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I will go to Anita for the rest of my time. You have a minute.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Thank you very much.

I would like to pick up on the issue of data collection, but I can't remember which witness—it might have been you, Mr. Shriver—said that 50% to 80% of these children are not in school. That's a big broad number, 50% to 80%. It's not very specific. Is that indicative of the fact that we really aren't systematically collecting this kind of data and information across the board? What can we do better?

I will turn that to Mr. Shriver.

Mr. Timothy Shriver: The data collection is very poor. It's better than it was 10 years ago. We know more national programs are collecting more data. We're starting to see some data on disability and these kinds of things, but these are broad estimates. I have a default towards action. I think we could spend another five or 10 years improving the data systems, and we should have some effort to improve the data systems because, otherwise, how are we going to know if we're successful or not? I think we all agree here that whether we measure or not we have plenty of work to do. I want to accept the friendly amendment from Ms. McPherson about this being political. I accept the idea and welcome the idea that this could become a source of political debate and contention, not because it creates tension or division, or winners or losers, but because it creates urgency and importance. That's my thing.

Mr. Lake asked, what can we do? What we need in most of these countries right now is trained teachers. We need a massive investment starting today. When I go knocking on the doors of education ministers, which I've done through our coalition that we're forming, a special coalition for inclusive education, I'm asking governments to put up money for inclusion, train the teachers, empower young people, empower families, allow for both sports and academic work to be done in schools, and commit to goals. We can do this. I would be happy to support the development of a medium-range plan on

data collection and data improvement, but let's not be distracted from action.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Shriver. Your time is up.

Now I would like to invite Mr. Lake to take the floor for three minutes please.

Hon. Mike Lake: Three minutes will be tough. I just want to start by thanking all of the witnesses for coming. You're all friends and I look forward to the follow-up conversations from here.

I'm going to focus this question to Yasmine specifically, who is probably taking a deep breath right now wondering what I'm going to do. On the point of action, I'm just curious about what kind of commitment ECW would make right now at this point in time, November 21, 2023, to action specifically on disability-inclusive education. What commitment would Education Cannot Wait be prepared to make right now?

The Chair: Ms. Khochen, can you take the question please?

Dr. Maha Khochen: Yes, of course.

Thanks, Mr. Lake, for your question.

I think Education Cannot Wait has already made a strong commitment by targeting 10% of children with disabilities across the different funding windows we have. We already committed by signing the TES call to action on disability inclusion to ensure that our investments include mainstream disability inclusion, and that every single fund or investment also includes targeted interventions to include persons with disabilities.

It's important to keep our commitment and also to encourage others to commit to reaching persons with disabilities—mainly governments in countries where we work. If we don't look at governments, and invite and encourage them to sign the TES call to action, we will not move the needle on disability inclusion.

It's very important for us to also work hand in hand with governments, local organizations and other United Nations agencies, and to ensure there are sustainable efforts to mainstream disability inclusion, so it remains for the long term.

I hope I answered your question.

• (1250)

Hon. Mike Lake: I have a quick follow-up for Robert on that same question.

I believe in rapid incrementalism. I believe in the idea that we can take small steps quickly and create large action.

Robert, what small steps would you suggest governments might take in the next week or month to create some momentum towards meaningful action on this issue?

The Chair: I'll give you one minute to answer.

Mr. Robert Jenkins: There are three things, I think.

As we plan for 2024 around the world, in all UNICEF country offices right now, we are having the conversation about what can be done immediately in this country. There's an input part to this. What different inputs can be provided? There's training teachers, providing specific materials such as digital, accessible textbooks, etc.

I think there's a process part to this, Mike. Are disabled children involved in the conversation? Are they participating? Are organizations working on this issue at the table? They need to be. There's a process part we can do right away.

Then, there are ultimately results. Are you measuring results for disabled children? How do they compare to other children? Are we doing all we can to make sure children with disabilities have the same chance of realizing their right to education that others do?

I think we can work on all three levels—inputs, process and, ultimately, results—right away.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jenkins.

[Translation]

I now invite Mr. Trudel to take the floor for three minutes.

Mr. Denis Trudel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This is an extremely broad and interesting topic.

I have a related question for Ms. Richler.

In my riding, there is a resource called “L'appart à moi”—my own apartment. It is a resource for adults with autism or intellectual disabilities that includes nine apartments for independent adults and a place to cook group meals and engage in activities.

Tenants of these apartments work in a place called “Les cuisiniers différents”—different cooks. Most of them prepare meals for underprivileged schools.

The adults who live there are extraordinary. They are a little more privileged than all people with autism or those living with a disability.

I even invited them to Parliament, and they came to watch question period, among other things.

This is not in the area of education, but it is still in the area of inclusion.

Of course, the waiting list to access this kind of adult resource is as long as your arm. There is a shortage, and that is a major challenge.

My question is more generally about the funding of this type of resource. How can we, in our society, promote inclusion? What can we do, as a country, to ensure that there are as few exclusions as possible, that we integrate these people and that they feel a part of society?

[English]

Ms. Diane Richler: I am Diane Richler responding.

[Translation]

Thank you very much.

[English]

I guess there are a couple of things. First of all, in Canada, the new disability benefit is going to make a difference for families. That's something very important, and Rob Jenkins made reference earlier to work that UNICEF is doing around social protection. In the same way that human rights are indivisible, the rights of people with disabilities are indivisible. I think it's really critical to look at the investments in social protection. Right now, most countries don't take into account the extra costs of disability. Whether they are issues that were raised by Ms. Damoff in terms of children who have to help care for parents, whether it's the need for prosthetic devices that aren't covered or whether it's the need for special materials, there are extra costs and some of the work that UNICEF is doing will help.

I'm going to take advantage of the floor for just one second to mention something related to an earlier question of yours. In francophone countries—this is may be a delicate thing to say because I know this is on the record—many of the francophone resource people come from countries that have a much more rigid approach to education. Canada does not. The approach to inclusion in Quebec, New Brunswick and elsewhere in Canada has a lot to offer internationally.

One problem we've seen as Inclusion International is that, when the francophone resource people come from countries that have a very rigid program, where kids are streamed at a very early age and where kids with disabilities are separated from their peers who don't have a disability, it sets the pattern. That's how the people in those countries are trained.

Again, Canada can change that if we play a role. Right now, we're not there, so other people are taking the lead and we're not influencing francophone countries.

● (1255)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Richler and Ms. McPherson.

Thank you for your testimony and for your participation in the study on international disability-inclusive education.

[English]

Ms. Heather McPherson: Mr. Chair, that was Mr. Trudel.

The Chair: I'm sorry. I invite you, with honour, to take the floor for three minutes please, Ms. McPherson.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I have a very quick question for you on some of the testimony you provided earlier, Ms. Richler. You talked about the SDGs, and we know they are universal. We know that Canada has signed onto them. As you mentioned, the Prime Minister has taken an extra interest in those.

Do you know, in either of the two voluntary national reviews Canada has undertaken, if education inclusion, or even people living with disabilities, has been mentioned in those voluntary national reviews?

Ms. Diane Richler: Related to that is the Transforming Education Summit that was held last year. Canada did not place emphasis on that. It's not something that's been paid attention to. There's been a lot of attention to gender, but unfortunately, despite the Charlevoix declaration mentioning the word "inclusive", that hasn't translated into looking at those individual specific situations. We have a long way to go.

Unfortunately, even in the review of the SDGs, or the monitoring of the SDGs that is being done by UNESCO, there are no indicators that are the common indicators used to look at evaluating the SDG 4 that focuses on education. Even though there are indicators over-all in the SDG 4 that deal with disability, when it comes to the ones that countries are paying attention to—there are 15 of them—they don't deal with disability.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Because they are universal, we are not meeting those targets in Canada either. That's also something that I think is key. This is not just a global issue. This is something that is supposed to....

Ms. Diane Richler: It is a domestic issue.

Ms. Heather McPherson: One would think, too, the universality would mean that, even if it wasn't the indicator within goal 4, there should be other indicators included throughout the other 16 goals as well.

Ms. Diane Richler: They are not.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

That might be, for example, a good recommendation for this study.

Ms. Diane Richler: That would be an excellent recommendation.

Ms. Heather McPherson: There's one thing I want to just get a little bit more insight on, and perhaps I would start with Ms. Rigg on this.

Ms. Rigg, we talked about making sure that our ODA is spent effectively and is spent properly and sufficiently, I suppose we could say. Could you talk a little bit about the need for collecting data and the need for tying strings to that development to ensure that it does have that inclusive component?

Ms. Jennifer Rigg: In terms of tying strings, I would love to discuss this further. It would be great as the subcommittee considers their recommendations. For example, I look at what has worked on other types of inclusion that are really critical. We still have a way to go on gender, for example, but we have found that bilateral and

multilateral institutions have found it critical to ensure that gender-transformative and disability-inclusive education is embedded within those structures.

Maha is an amazing example of an expert within ECW on disability-inclusive education, yet we also need to make sure that there are those types of people with those resources within every education cluster that's responding on the humanitarian front and across that whole continuum that you and Mr. Jenkins discussed of humanitarianism through to development in a holistic way to really reach children.

Yes, like Mr. Shriver and others mentioned, data must be improved while we are acting and accelerating action. It's not something we should wait for. We should not let perfect be the enemy of the good, so to speak. Like Ms. Richler just said, it's absolutely critical that the current SDG process and whatever may come next, which is, indeed, being negotiated by member-state governments right now, have a very strong voice by member-state governments—as the governments of Canada and then Namibia are leading that process for the pact for the future—to make sure that disability-inclusive education is front and centre and that children and youth with disabilities are not just there once for one consultation but really there fully with policy-makers throughout the whole process.

Thank you.

• (1300)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. McPherson. I'm sorry for not recognizing you.

[*Translation*]

Witnesses, thank you for your testimony and for participating in our study on international disability-inclusive education. We appreciate your taking the time to meet with us and to share your expertise on this important topic.

If you have any additional information to submit to the subcommittee, I would ask you to send it to the clerk.

[*English*]

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank all of the witnesses for their participation and for giving their time to be with us to explain and to give their points of view regarding this important issue that we are studying.

Is it the will of the committee to adjourn the meeting?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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