

Minister
of Foreign Affairs



Ministre
des Affaires étrangères

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0G2

September 16, 2024

Mr. Ali Ehsassi, M.P.
Chair
Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0G6

Dear Mr. Ehsassi,

I am pleased to respond on behalf of the Government of Canada to the twenty-fifth report of the House Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development (FAAE) entitled *Strengthening Canada's Diplomatic Capacity in an Increasingly Turbulent Age*, presented to the House April 29th, 2024. The Government has carefully reviewed the committee's report and appreciates the opportunity to respond.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank the Committee for its acknowledgement of the importance of Canada's foreign service and the crucial role our diplomats play around the world in managing Canada's international relations and services to Canadians. The Government of Canada appreciates the work done by the committee, under your leadership, in conducting rigorous research and in its clear and balanced articulation of the issues found in this report. I was pleased to appear before the committee on February 7th of this year to contribute to this important study. Alongside the recent report of the Senate AEFA Committee's report, *More than a Vocation: Canada's Need for a 21st Century Foreign Service*, the House FAAE Committee's work has been of considerable value in informing the work being undertaken to modernize Global Affairs Canada (GAC) and ensure that it is "fit for purpose" - namely, to meet Canadians' long-term diplomatic needs.

In addition to supporting my work as minister of Foreign Affairs, it is important to note that the department also supports the important work done by my colleagues, the Honourable Mary Ng who serves as the Minister of Export Promotion, International Trade and Economic Development, as well as the Honourable Ahmed Hussen, who serves as Minister of International Development. Collectively, we are responsible for advancing Canada's international relations, including developing and implementing foreign policy; fostering the development of international law, international trade and commerce; providing international assistance; providing consular services for Canadians; and overseeing the Government of Canada's global network of missions abroad.

The environment in which Global Affairs Canada operates is increasingly complex and volatile. Our world is marked by geopolitical turbulence, unpredictability, and uncertainty. For nearly eight decades, the world has been well-served by a common set of rules, built on the promise that stability leads to

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prosperity, which have formed the basis of global cooperation. This rules-based system has kept us safe – but as the tectonic plates of international relations are shifting, the system is fracturing. We find ourselves, in the midst of an international security crisis, facing increasingly complex, modern challenges – climate change; deepened inequality, irregular migration, disruptive technologies; and political polarization – including the rise of extremist and populist movements even here in Canada, just to name a few. This is a test we cannot fail; the security and prosperity that Canadians have benefited from for decades are at risk. Canada must rise to meet and overcome these complex, generational challenges.

The world is experiencing rapid technological change, overlapping global crises, a return of great power competition, and increasing transnational threats. Both economic and political power are shifting away from Canada and our traditional allies. Multilateralism is increasingly questioned – especially from the Global South, who question whether the rules reflect their reality and benefit their people and whether current institutions meet their needs and make fair decisions. It is also increasingly threatened by bad actors who seek to reshape this system. They cannot be allowed to act with impunity.

This is why, as I outlined last fall to the Economic Club of Canada and the Montreal Council on Foreign Relations, Canada's foreign policy will be guided by two key principles. The first is to vigorously defend Canada's sovereignty. Our national interest requires it, and our national security depends on it. We must stand firm, defend the rules-based system and the institutions that have kept us safe, and work with our allies to bolster global security. The second is pragmatic diplomacy. We need to engage and work with countries of different perspectives to prevent international conflict. An empty chair policy does not serve Canadians. We will do so while ensuring that we do not compromise our values or our interests.

Global Affairs Canada is increasingly being asked to respond to situations and events that are without precedent using tools, structures and processes designed for a different time. Faced with similar pressures, many of Canada's allies and partners are re-investing in their diplomatic capacity. As a department, GAC must be strategic, influential, agile and responsive. One that can effectively articulate, coordinate and deliver a full global agenda. One that is open and connected to the people we serve – Canadians – and to the world. This requires a modern, 21st-century department, capable of anticipating, analyzing, understanding, and managing emerging foreign policy issues, that is able to draw on the breadth and depth of expertise and international experience available in Canada and abroad. To do this, our workforce – composed of civil servants and diplomats who are not just our eyes and ears on the ground, but the heart and soul of our diplomacy, at mission and HQ – must be skilled, diverse, bilingual, healthy well-equipped, and committed to excellence.

We welcome the committee's report on strengthening Canada's diplomatic capacity, which is well aligned both with GAC's *Future of Diplomacy: Transforming Global Affairs Canada* discussion paper, released in June 2023, and the subsequent *Transformation Implementation Plan (TIP)*, launched in September 2023. The evergreen TIP outlines an ambitious agenda and lays out how the department will sequence and prioritize its transformation efforts at a time when the Government of Canada is refocusing its spending. The plan is organized along 5 pillars: Organizational Culture, People, Global Presence, Policy, and Processes & Tools.

I am pleased to report that we have made good progress in the first year across all of these pillars, with almost all activities on track and some completed already. Key milestones so far have included:

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Renewing Canada's foreign service: To address the first order need to invest in a more diverse and equipped foreign service, GAC has qualified over 200 foreign service officers in the last year, streamlined its overseas assignment process, launched a new GAC-wide talent management program, and implemented new timelines for the Head of Mission selection process, launching it 6 months earlier to allow more time for accreditation and language training.

Becoming more open and connected to Canadians and the world: GAC has launched the Open Insights Hub, an open policy function for GAC to engage external partners and policy experts across Canada and around the world. Early activities have focused on issues like the war in Ukraine and trade and development assistance with Africa.

Building greater coherence on issues of national interest, including crosscutting challenges like critical minerals and climate change. In November, GAC appointed a new senior official for Cyber, Digital and Emerging Technology to coordinate across GAC's toolset, with other government departments and with allies and partners internationally on these issues.

Reducing red tape: To re-focus GAC's workforce on the highest value work, concerted efforts to reduce red tape are beginning to bear fruit, in areas like accommodations, IT tools, travel planning, financial management, briefings and, on-boarding new recruits.

Strengthening crisis management: GAC is reviewing the department's crisis management capacities and approaches to strengthen GAC's response to overlapping crises that require whole-of-government collaboration and that unfold amidst growing geopolitical challenges.

Addressing organizational culture: GAC has launched the North Star statement that sets out GAC's values. Additionally, GAC recently published its second annual report on wrongdoing and misconduct to increase the confidence of staff that the organization is behind them.

Modernizing the department's structure and governance: GAC's new organizational structure and governance was announced in April 2024. These reforms have been designed to drive key transformation objectives, including building a more people-centred, agile, and efficient organization that manages its global footprint strategically. These changes will come into effect in late summer 2024.

The department has made major strides in the last year, but much remains to be done to ensure GAC can meet the demands of this era. Budget 2024, entitled *Fairness for Every Generation*, is allocating \$159.1 million over five years, starting this fiscal year, towards key transformation initiatives, including renewing the foreign service, supporting Locally Engaged Staff, ensuring IM/IT systems integrity, and supporting Canada's mission to the United Nations in New York. Recognizing that additional resources may be required to fully deliver on the envisioned transformation, GAC will also continue to strive to efficiently allocate existing departmental resources. Now is the time to act to equip ourselves to meet the challenges we know are on the horizon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Joly', with a stylized flourish at the end.

The Honourable Mélanie Joly, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Foreign Affairs