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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 102 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders, and therefore members are attending in person in the room as well as remotely by using the Zoom application.

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

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

You may speak in the official language of your choice.

Although this room is equipped with a powerful audio system, feedback events can occur. These can be extremely harmful to the interpreters and can cause serious injuries. The most common cause of sound feedback is an earpiece worn too close to a microphone.

With regard to a speaking list, the clerk will kindly see to it that we have a roster of questions.

Today, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, January 29, 2024, the committee will resume its study of Canada's approach to Africa.

I would like to welcome our distinguished witnesses.

We have with us today, as individuals, Mr. David Black, who is a professor at Dalhousie University, and Mr. Christopher Roberts, who is a fellow with the Canadian Global Affairs Institute.

We're also pleased to have with us the president and chief executive officer of the Canadian Council on Africa, Mr. Nola Kianza.

You will each have five minutes to give your opening remarks. Please do look over at me every once in a while, because I will indicate when you should wrap up as soon as possible, not only when you're giving your opening remarks but also when the members are asking you questions.

I believe we will start with Mr. Black.

Mr. Black, the floors is yours. You have five minutes.

Mr. David Black (Full Professor, Dalhousie University, As an Individual): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to the members of the committee.

This is a great opportunity to participate in this timely and important study. As someone who has spent much of his life thinking about how Canadians have and should engage with African countries and people, I'm happy to see signs of renewed interest in Canada's approach to Africa—not least at this committee.

There are very good reasons that Africa should be the focus of more sustained and strategic policy interest. However, in thinking about the ways this occurs, we should be under no illusions about the degree to which Canada has become more marginal to African interests and actors. This increased marginality is partly due to structural changes in the international domain, but it is also self-inflicted.

Practically, it means that in pursuing renewed engagement with Africa, we are playing catch-up. In this context, we should be modest in our expectations, consistent and consultative in our commitments, comprehensive in our thinking and careful not to make exaggerated claims for the importance of what we are doing.

I say this not to diminish the important ongoing efforts of many Canadians and Africans at both intergovernmental and transsocietal levels to engage in mutually beneficial ways. Indeed, relationships between Canada and Africa are more diverse and more diversified than ever. At the level of official Canadian policy, however, an always limited overall level of commitment has diminished over the past two decades at precisely the same time as many other governments were recognizing Africa's growing economic, security, diplomatic and political importance and undertaking new initiatives to forge deeper and more strategic relationships.

Historically, Canada's involvement in Africa rested on a comparatively broad but disconnected and shallow foundation of international development assistance; periodic and sometimes troubled military and police deployments to multilateral peace operations; commitments to multilateral bodies with large African memberships, including *la Francophonie* and the Commonwealth; and people-to-people links through civil society organizations. Later, these were broadened by the impactful but controversial role of the Canadian extractive sector.

Periodically, however, these more routine points of contact were supplemented by prominent Canadian diplomatic initiatives. Two particularly prominent examples, among many, were the Mulroney government's sustained engagement with the struggle to end apartheid—which we've been reminded of with Prime Minister Mulroney's recent passing—and the Chrétien government's championing of the Africa action plan through what was then the G8 in 2002. These kinds of initiatives were never part of a comprehensive African strategy. We've never had one. However, they occurred often enough to regularly renew the idea that Canada could and should play key roles in issues that matter to Africans.

Since the mid-2000s, however, this intermittent African impulse has largely dissipated, and sustained, high-level interest and engagement with Africa have been notably lacking. In the face of previous Canadian initiatives on the continent, as well as escalating interest from governments elsewhere, this came across as relative indifference. This was true not only in a general sense, but in key bilateral relationships such as that with post-apartheid South Africa.

It is this sense of relatively diminished interest that needs to be confronted in pursuing a renewed approach to Africa.

To be sure, in a time of urgent demands in other parts of the world and scarce resources, a more concerted focus on Africa may seem difficult to justify, although I don't get the sense that I have to justify it to this committee. Engaging with the continent is important for both self-interested and systemic reasons, many of which you have already heard about. I watched your opening session. It was a very useful background.

Africa's potential economic upside is greater than any other global region's, yet its security and humanitarian challenges are more widespread in ways that have systemic impacts and could greatly limit its potential.

Major collective action challenges that we're all affected by, including forced migration, global health and environmental sustainability simply cannot be successfully faced down without African partnerships.

Finally, because of its growing importance as well as its large number of states, Africa is of great and growing international diplomatic importance. Broadly, this places Africa at the fulcrum of growing world order tensions, and I hope we get a chance to talk about those in the course of our conversation. Narrowly, Canada's inability to gain significant support from African governments was important in the failure of our last two campaigns for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council.

- (1540)

Given these incentives to engage, it is entirely appropriate for the government to explore ways of enhancing Canada's involvement in Africa. In doing so, however, it is important that we build on Canada's diverse but unconsolidated connections to develop a more sustained, comprehensive and respectful approach.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor Black.

We'll now go to Mr. Roberts. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Mr. Christopher W. J. Roberts (Fellow, Canadian Global Affairs Institute, As an Individual): Thank you very much to the committee for inviting me to participate in these important deliberations on Canada's approach to Africa.

I received the invitation while I was between airports. I was between Lusaka and Dar es Salaam, so that was perfect timing.

Let me jump into my analysis about how we need to reconceptualize and restructure in order to re-engage with the African continent. Again, this is my personal perspective.

First, we need to reconceptualize. I think David has done a good job of starting that process. Canadians have a difficult time conceptualizing the African continent within a broader foreign, trade, and defence policy framework. That statement for some, though, is meaningless, because it has a simple counter: In any list of international priorities facing the Canadian government, Africa, or any specific country or crisis, can never rise to the level of a core national interest.

However, the question today for all of us here isn't about making the continent a top priority, and it's also not about cutting all ties. As David pointed out, it is about recognizing how these complex global realities we're facing show us that Canada needs to improve its engagement in this particular region of the world for mutual benefits after years of neglect.

As the defence policy update of last week reiterated:

Canada's interests are advanced by an international order that is free, open, stable and governed by the rule of law, and we have a responsibility to Canadians and our like-minded partners and allies to play an integral role in maintaining global stability.

Until we as Canadians understand that most African states are also dependent on—and most African citizens are desirous of—both international and domestic orders governed by the rule of law, we will not understand how best to restructure our engagement.

Additionally, I'm going to briefly outline two extreme interpretations that should not be followed as we look for a more careful engagement.

On the one hand, we will sometimes hear about, as was pointed out, the overly optimistic position that stresses Africa's demographic bulge of youth, all of them tech-savvy. I've heard this just in the last few weeks. This is the future global workforce, while other populations shrink around the world.

We have the African continental free trade area agreement, which is supposed to ignite regional trade. We see that Africa as a region, in the current 2024 estimates, is going to be the fastest-growing region in the world, at anywhere from 3% to 6%. Those are all the good things.

There's also the opposite perspective, the overly pessimistic perspective, that highlights a resurgence of coups, authoritarian drifts and an unending high level of political violence and war from the Sahel through Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique, Sudan, and the Horn of Africa. There are also emerging sovereign debt crises reminiscent of the 1980s.

Those are the positive and negative sides, but what I'm trying to argue here is that we need to acknowledge the following five realities.

First, Canada is a federal constitutional democracy that operates under the rule of law, while most Africans also aspire to political systems underpinned by the rule of law.

Second, Canada is facing productivity challenges and various things at home, but we are still a trade-dependent nation with significant mining and investment abroad, including across the African continent, and commitments shared with Africans to the sustainable development goals.

Third, we are also unique in the west in terms of our relationship with Africa, which is historic, and I can go into that later. We have a unique position compared to all other G7 and NATO countries vis-à-vis Africa.

Fourth, historically, Canada follows American and French foreign policy leads in Africa, but as the last few years have hopefully shown us, that approach is no longer tenable, if it ever was.

Last, we cannot deny that Africa faces more challenges today, given various things that have also gone on over the last few years.

What I'm trying to argue here is that we need to have more nimble policy levers. We need to have more coordinated leadership and diplomatic persistence, backed by knowledge-based decision-making, and not momentary value-signalling, or as Joe Clark, ex-foreign minister, wrote a decade ago, "lectures and leaves".

Restructuring requires leadership, and we could talk about how we actually get leadership to coordinate everything that Canada does, or could do, on the continent.

I've submitted a brief that has more details on my five key points, but I'll provide the key points on immediate actions for re-engagement with the continent.

• (1545)

First, ensure that there is a well-resourced, factual understanding of the history and effects of Canadian policy and engagement with African countries, relevant international organizations, and other actors—

The Chair: Perhaps you can wrap it up in less than 30 seconds, please.

Mr. Christopher W. J. Roberts: Yes, absolutely. That's perfect.

Second, fix a broken visa system for Africans. Nola might talk about that too.

Third, stop taking policy leads in Africa from France, the United States, the U.K. or the EU. We are more relevant when we have our own knowledge and ideas when it comes to the African continent.

Fourth, stop assuming that the interests of one or two Canadian businesses operating in a country represent Canada's national interest in that country.

Last, understand that Canada's diplomatic, development, economic and defence relationships on the continent can have significant effects despite their relatively small size.

I'm happy to talk about any of that as we go on.

Thank you.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Roberts.

We now turn to Mr. Kianza. Mr. Kianza, the floor is yours. You have five minutes.

Mr. Nola Kianza (President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Council on Africa): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. Thank you very much for this opportunity. I feel as if I'm home. I can see faces that have seen us.

The Canadian Council on Africa has been around for over 20 years—22 years, to be exact. We were created for the sole purpose of promoting trade and economic development between the continent of Africa and Canada. My predecessors just spoke on the whole background of Africa, but I'm going to talk just about common sense.

When we talk about Africa, what is Africa? We are talking about a huge market here of 54 countries. We are talking about 1.2 billion people. We know all these statistics, but why should Canada be looking at Africa?

I'm going to be focusing on the business side, the economic side.

One thing I want to raise from the beginning is that when we talk about Canada, we are talking about trying to help. We are doing aid, but let's remember one thing: If our economy is not working in this country, then we are not going to have aid. In Africa, if they don't have the economy working, then there's no sustainability.

The Canadian Council on Africa was created to promote Canadian businesses. We thought there was potentially a market in Africa, a huge market. Of late we have seen that Africa has moved to consolidating its market with a continental free trade agreement, which is going to create, as Chris mentioned, one of the largest markets.

What are we doing in Canada? We are basically sitting here and saying, "Oh, Africa." I'm not coming here to tell you how to help Africa; I'm talking about how we can help Canadian companies to take opportunities to look at the opportunities on that continent.

I just asked, "Why Africa?" and I talked about the size of the market. Why Canada, then? When people look at Canada, they look at the business ethics. They look at Canadians' values. They look at expertise. They look at know-how. They look at our technology. We have done this before. What is agriculture? What is telecommunications? What is infrastructure? We have done these things.

Canada is built on small businesses. I come from working with Canadian manufacturers and exporters, small businesses. That's what built this country. We can communicate well with Africa. This is what Africans have been looking for from Canadians, but what do we go there for? We say, "We can come and help you" or "We have money." They are not asking for money; they are asking for people to come and work with them to build their economies.

This is what I want us to understand: We are not doing this for Africa. The world has changed today. I'm talking about Canadians. How do we help Canadians? The policy we are talking about is to build the economy. When you bring businesses together, everything else works.

Let me say this. Do you know why there is insecurity? Do you know why there are all of these wars? When those young people are not working, what do you think they are going to do? When they are not working, when there are no jobs.... Kids are going to university. We have top universities. Yes, they are studying, but there are no jobs. When there are no jobs, anybody can lure those young people into doing whatever. Then we say, "Oh, we want this security." How are you going to build security?

Here at home, if the economy is not working, we are also going to see that insecurity mounting, so we have to build our companies here in Canada. I'm talking to our companies here.

In business, people need information. They are looking not just for money but also for information. Our government should put their resources into our trade commissioner services, into our department. If you go to an African department, you find two people sitting there, and they cannot give you much information. They need resources. We need better information. We need to find a better way of putting Canadians together so that we can share information. That's what we need.

I think we need Canada to change now.

• (1555)

Africa is looking up to Canada. Do you know what we are looking for from Canada? Where is your expertise? Where is your know-how? We want your values. Even if we have other nations coming, we want Canadians, because we know how you do things.

I want our governments to take leadership. We used to lead when Canada was the voice of reason. When Canadians were walking in the road, people would say, "Look at the Canadians", but now they don't even know where we fit in.

I want to end by saying this: We have a golden opportunity. The African market is there for us. What I am coming to ask you, very simply, is to help me to work with Canadian companies so that we can take them to Africa. Africa needs business. They don't need aid; they need business. That's all they need.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

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

We now open it up to the members for questions.

We'll start off with MP Epp. You have five minutes,

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Those were three excellent testimonies. There is so much here to unpack.

Mr. Black, I will start with you and the big picture.

The U.S. is Canada's most strategic partner across a whole host of things. The statement that came out from the recent G7 meeting in November actually talked about Africa being in seventh place after Ukraine, and I won't take the time to list them all.

Is that where Africa should be, from Canada's position? Given the Indo-Pacific, given the south Caucasus, given Ukraine, given Gaza, where should Africa be in Canada's priority?

Mr. David Black: Well, you would expect me to say it should be much higher up than that.

I think we need to appreciate how pivotal Africa has become. I talked about Africa as a sort of world order ferment fulcrum. It's the place where lots of these global tensions are coming together in quite profound ways. I listened to your meeting last week and was struck by all the references to Russia and China. That concern is really important, but there is much more than that going on. There is a kind of tectonic shift taking place, and I think the plates are meeting in the African context.

It's not so much that Africa stands alone; it is at the centrepiece of these shifting dynamics globally. How we navigate those dynamics is really important to what kind of world we will move into in the coming generation.

Mr. Dave Epp: Who speaks for Africa?

Mr. David Black: One thing we need to be careful about is speaking about Africa as if there's "an" Africa. There's the African Union, of course, and I think Canada took a really important step in establishing a permanent observer mission at the African Union. However, there are multiple Africas, and they are often fractious with each other. They are at very different levels of potential—Chris alluded to this—in that many of them are taking off, while others are caught in a vicious cycle of conflict and poverty.

We need to be able to position ourselves in relation to those multiple Africas. We need to develop a few strategic points of contact in different regions representing different dimensions of those Africas.

Mr. Dave Epp: I asked that question to set up the next one. Should Canada develop a comprehensive African strategy? Is that even in the realm of possibility?

I think of the Mercator map, or whatever, that destroys or distorts Africa's position in the world. We've heard about 25% of the world's youthful population. Mr. Kianza spoke of the potential of the economy. However, is it even possible to develop a comprehensive strategy, or should Canada focus...? Our past successes in engagement with South Africa's apartheid were more narrowly focused when we, in our position in the world, could maybe make a difference.

I'll ask Mr. Roberts if he wants to wade in first on having a very broad strategy or one that is more narrowly defined.

Mr. Christopher W. J. Roberts: Canada needs to have a broad, comprehensive strategy for the continent of Africa. I don't know why that has never happened. We've now done it for the Indo-Pacific and we've done it for other areas of the world. We absolutely need it. I would argue that we need it even more for our relationship with the continent of Africa, because there will never be sustained political leadership on that relationship.

There will be for the United States, and China will always spring up, and the Euro-Atlantic countries. However, without an actual strategy that pulls together the multiple elements of the Canadian government's relationship, working as well with NGOs and business... Without that kind of overarching, coordinating function that maybe stands in place of political leadership, we will end up with more of the same.

• (1600)

Mr. Dave Epp: I hear you from the Canadian perspective, but what about from the African perspective? The AU just published a paper entitled "Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want". By "we", I assume the AU is speaking from its own perspective. I understand pulling our multi-siloed Canadian government approach into a more comprehensive approach, but do we go to all of Africa, or do we go to a subregion?

You mentioned the Indo-Pacific, but that's not all of Asia. I never hear of Thailand, Korea or Australia talking about a North American strategy; it's always more specific.

Do we go broadly pan-African, or do we zero in on a subregion or what we can do to bring expertise to the table?

Mr. Christopher W. J. Roberts: I don't think Canada knows enough to zero in on a subregion, because the continent is huge, and things change. I think we do need to have a presence under a strategy that gives us some opportunities to be relevant when we need to be relevant.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will go next to MP Chatel. You have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel (Pontiac, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the witnesses for being with us today.

Mr. Kianza, you mentioned the importance of forming an economic partnership. I have two questions for you.

First, what do you think are the two most promising sectors in which Canada could amplify its engagement and its economic rela-

tions with the African continent, in particular with the African Union?

Mr. Nola Kianza: Canada is engaged in several key sectors. We are already very strong in the natural resources sector, for example. However, there are other sectors in which we could expand our involvement, such as energy, infrastructure, agriculture, education, engineering and technology. There are so many fields we could work in.

Take Quebec, for example. Quebec has four bureaus in Africa. We have partners like 48° Nord International. It is often small technology firms that go over there to work with their African partners. They are not looking for anything else. They set off and bring only their know-how with them, whether in technology, machinery or other fields.

I will give you another example. We had a conference with the Prime Minister of Burkina Faso, who was accompanied by the ministers responsible for agriculture and livestock. In Africa, almost everything is imported. At the time of the conference, there was discussion about how Burkina Faso was producing a lot of livestock. All it needed was slaughterhouses. We already have that know-how here. What was needed was to explore how we could take our know-how over there.

The same is true for other fields, such as infrastructure and transportation. One example is railways. We already have knowledge that we can take over there. We are also champions in the fields of energy and technology.

Our organization has also signed an agreement with the Toronto International Film Festival. People involved in movie production have invited the Canadian Council on Africa to partner with them. Africans will be invited here to work in partnership with Canadians so the Canadians can show them how to produce their films well, everything they can do in post-production, and the technologies they can use. These people will be arriving in September with an invitation to come and see what we are doing.

These initiatives enable us to showcase Canadian expertise. We have a lot of things to offer when it comes to our know-how and technologies, and, most importantly, our values and our way of doing business. That is what people appreciate about Canadians. There may be others who have more to offer in terms of money, and we may not be able to compete with the Chinese in that regard, for example, but people want to work with Canadians because of how we do things and what we are like. That is what they are looking for from Canadians.

• (1605)

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: A little earlier in this study, we were also talking about the advantage offered by bilingualism and the francophonie. That is an asset for Canadians.

I agree very strongly with you. You cited examples in various sectors. In fact, the sectors you named were also mentioned by other witnesses.

Can you tell us quickly what the three main obstacles are that prevent Canada from doing more when it comes to trade, in your opinion?

Mr. Nola Kianza: First, when it comes to doing business, it is important to define what that involves. In simple terms, we can say that doing business means buying and selling. In order to buy and sell, however, you have to have information. I think the first obstacle is the lack of information. We want to have enough information here about these markets.

The second obstacle relates to how resources are allocated. I talked about that. Our trade commissioners who are on the ground need resources. Everywhere business is being done, there have to be resources there.

What other obstacles are there? Some might say that there is corruption in certain places, but I will not go into that. When people have information, they find a way of doing business and entering those markets.

Mrs. Sophie Chatel: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We go next to Monsieur Perron. You have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for being with us today.

Mr. Kianza, you are off to a good start, so let's keep going together.

I was very pleased to hear you say that Africa does not need aid as much as it needs economic activities, collaboration, co-operation and ways of doing things.

For example, for marketing local products, particularly in agriculture, Canada and Quebec have a supply management system that is extremely effective. In fact, there is a bill being studied in the Senate to make sure that system will never be touched. We hope it will pass.

Do you think that is the kind of thing that should be established?

You mentioned the bureaus that Quebec has. I imagine you are also familiar with the activities of UPA Développement international in the field of co-operation. I would like you to tell us more about that.

Mr. Nola Kianza: That is exactly the kind of policy we would like to have.

I would first like to stress one point, which is the issue of mentality. Africans do not feel that we are partners or that we are even showing any interest in them. It is on that point that we are asking our government to act.

For example, before coming here, I spoke with the chair of our board of directors, Benoît Lasalle, who has been in Africa for a long time. He suggested that I simply tell you that all we need is to let you try to understand.

What we need is precisely to establish organizations like that. Those are the conditions in which partnerships work and we will see companies doing business together.

I quite like the Quebec model. We are a partner of Quebec's ministère des Relations internationales et de la Francophonie and also of Investissement Québec. Why? Because it is essential to be there, on the ground. We have to take our business models, and the things that are key to our success here, over there.

What is of prime importance today for the people there, and even for our Canadian companies, is to feel that the government is behind them and supports them. What do we mean when we talk about support? It means that the government has to have a clear policy that demonstrates its interest.

I will give you an example. We have heard about former prime minister Brian Mulroney and his commitment during the apartheid era. We will hear about Jean Chrétien and his commitment in 2002 to the New Partnership for Africa's Development. He supported Africans and he was there for them. Now, we have been completely erased. Africans do not even know where the Canadian government stands in this regard. In fact, I am not even here to speak from Africans' perspective; I speak from the perspective of Canadian companies, and even they do not know where the Canadian government stands.

Even when we work on development projects, we have no information. I have to go looking to find out who our trade commissioner is on the ground. I have to go looking even to find basic information about what is being done. The information is not being communicated. Why?

Information has to be conveyed. Information has to be given to businesses so they understand our country's involvement. That is what we need.

• (1610)

Mr. Yves Perron: I understand that the first step would be to make information available. That is what you believe is the priority.

What form should it take? Do you have a specific recommendation for the committee on this point?

Mr. Nola Kianza: As my colleague Mr. Roberts said, there needs to be a comprehensive policy on Africa, a policy that is inclusive.

In 2022, I went to Egypt at the invitation of the Egyptian government. Over there, we joked about how Egypt is referred to as part of the Middle East and is differentiated from the rest, when it is actually doing business with Africa. The same is true of Morocco. I stopped a moment to think about that. There we were, already looking at how we could divide up trade, instead of having a comprehensive policy to indicate first that this region is of interest to us.

So that is the first thing to do: We have to say that we are interested.

After indicating our interest, we have to determine what we need to do. We need to have a policy and dedicate resources to it. Our policy has to say clearly that economic development is very important. Certainly we must not abandon development programs, but there has to be economic development alongside them. The policy to be put in place must therefore be very clear.

Mr. Yves Perron: Could you tell us quickly, in 30 seconds, how you see that kind of policy being implemented? Does it require having more bureaux?

How do we deal with rapidly changing political situations? There have been several coups d'état on the continent. How are we to adapt to that? Obviously, we cannot control local politics, but we have to be able to protect the investments made by our businesses.

[English]

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

[Translation]

Mr. Nola Kianza: Agreed.

In connection with an upcoming conference in Egypt about African markets, I made some calls to our embassies, but they told me their budgets had been cut. That is an example. Our embassies and our trade commissioners cannot even function because their budgets have been cut. I spoke with a director general for Africa and she also told me she had no budget. You see, it is not taken seriously. There are not even budgets to help the trade commissioners who are already there. You can see that there is already a problem.

[English]

The Chair: We'll now go to MP McPherson.

You have five minutes.

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

Thank you very much for this interesting conversation, gentlemen.

What I'm hearing from all three of you is that Canada has not been serious about its engagement with the continent of Africa. This is not something that I'm putting just on the shoulders of this current government; this is something that we've seen for a number of different years.

You know, my colleague from the Conservatives asked where we should rank Africa, and I'm quite upset with that framing of it, because I think we can't be picking first, second and third. I don't like the idea of that.

One of my big concerns with the current approach that this government has is that they.... You talked about the need for an overarching policy. Well, in the last 12 months, we've seen it go from a strategy to a framework, and then at the last meeting, we were told that it's now an approach. This is a deeply unserious way to engage with the continent of Africa.

I don't understand it. I don't understand the cuts to ODA. I don't understand all of the things that we're seeing. You are all talking about why we need more investment and more attention in Africa, yet the current government is signalling that we can expect some

serious cuts to Global Affairs Canada in the budget tomorrow. How do we convince the government of the importance of investing in a massive opportunity?

Also, could you speak a little bit about...? Mr. Black, you talked about Africa playing a role in the centre of world tensions. We know that China's in Africa. We know that Putin's in Africa. We're not, and that is so dangerous for global security as well.

We have, as I think we heard last week, 52 peacekeepers in the field right now. That's unacceptable. How do we convince the government that we need to do more? I know it's a tricky question.

Maybe I'll start with you, Mr. Black, and then I can invite your colleagues to comment.

• (1615)

Mr. David Black: There's a larger problem, which is that we need to recapture the sense that what we do matters in the world. If what we do matters in the world, then Africa has to be part of that calculation.

Too much of the time what we've been doing in foreign policy has been about sending signals for domestic political purposes. What we need is a kind of serious engagement with the issues that we are going to have to live with. They're collective action challenges. They're world order challenges.

Africa is at the centre of those calculations. We have the potential, and we have, in the past, periodically played a role as a kind of honest broker between particularly the western world and other parts of the world. That role is badly needed. Too much of the time I see Canadian governments taking a kind of flight to safety, going to places that feel most familiar rather than thinking about what we can do to try to help navigate what is going to be a very bumpy transition, I think, over the next 20 years.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Dr. Roberts, do you have anything you'd like to add to that?

Mr. Christopher W. J. Roberts: I'm not sure how we convince any particular government to do this other than, without a better overall policy, having a bigger bang for the buck even if you don't increase the resources. That's the way. Maybe that's how you sell it, because when you have a policy that says we're going to do X, Y and Z, and there are some guideposts, you don't have to increase the budget, but you might be more effective that way than by taking a shotgun approach or if there's no constituency that's supporting it. For everybody in the room, that would be my case. A strategy focuses resources so that you might be able to be more effective without extra resources.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Basically what you're saying is that we need a road map. We need a map of where we're going instead of one-off decisions.

Mr. Kianza, you spoke about two people stranded somewhere in the bowels of Global Affairs who were responsible for African trade relationships. Can you speak about what more the Canadian government could be doing with regard to that?

Mr. Nola Kianza: Yes. I think there are a number of things that are being done. As I said, the first thing is that we need to better coordinate the information. There are so many things that have been done out there, but they're not filtering through to the people who may need that information. I think the first thing that we need is well-coordinated information.

Number two, we need to have the mindset, and our mindset needs to be refocused. I think we need to recalibrate rather than just look at development, because right now everybody is focused on development when things are shifting.

When we are talking about partnership, partnership is about two people. One key ingredient in a partnership is communication, and with communication, you need to listen. Africans are asking for partnerships in economic development. They want to develop. I think we need to listen a little bit more. I think what the government needs to do is coordinate the information and put the resources into shifting the mindset.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kianza.

We now go to Mr. Fast. You have three minutes for your questions.

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Gentlemen, what I'm hearing from you and what I've heard from our NDP colleague as well is that right now Canada doesn't matter on the global stage and certainly not in Africa. We need to recapture Canada's standing on the global stage to the point where we can make the investments and have the engagement in places like Africa that would make a difference, a real difference.

Mr. Black, I don't want to misquote you, but I believe that you suggested that Africa has an economic upside greater than any other region. Did you say that?

Mr. David Black: Yes. It's economic, but it's also because, frankly, from where African countries have been historically, there is nowhere to go but up. It sounds a little crude, but clearly there is a growing population, and there are very rapid rates of economic growth. There is no other place that faces the same kinds of demographic opportunities that Africa presents. I think there is a tremendous opportunity in the African context.

One other thing, if I could just piggyback on what Chris said earlier.... You go ahead.

• (1620)

Hon. Ed Fast: Yes, I have limited time.

Mr. David Black: Yes, you have the floor.

Hon. Ed Fast: I want to go to Mr. Kianza.

How many trade agreements does Canada presently have with the 54 countries of Africa?

Mr. Nola Kianza: That's a good question, because, as I was saying, sometimes—

Hon. Ed Fast: Are there any?

Mr. Nola Kianza: I think we have a few; I think we have 20.

Hon. Ed Fast: I'm talking about trade agreements, not FIPAs.

Mr. Christopher W. J. Roberts: For free trade agreements, no, we have zero.

Mr. Nola Kianza: No.

Hon. Ed Fast: We have a few investment treaties. How many trade offices do we have in Africa, this place that Mr. Black suggested represents greater opportunity than any other region in the world?

Mr. Nola Kianza: Right now I think we have about 20.

Mr. Christopher W. J. Roberts: How many of those are even TCS officers? We have a lot of locally engaged staff, but the number of actual trade offices that you think are well staffed for that size of a continent is a problem, and I completely agree with Nola.

Hon. Ed Fast: Are we under-resourced?

Mr. Christopher W. J. Roberts: Yes.

Mr. Nola Kianza: We are under-resourced big time. The whole thing.... Just look at the importance of the market. If we thought the market was important, we would put enough resources into it.

Hon. Ed Fast: If you had to identify—

The Chair: I'm afraid you're out of time, Mr. Fast.

Hon. Ed Fast: Already? I apologize.

The Chair: We now go to MP Zuberi. You have three minutes.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

I would like to thank the witnesses for being here today.

[*English*]

I would like to focus on governance.

Mr. Black, you can comment on this.

There will be 13 elections coming up in Africa in 2024, to my knowledge. You said that Canada has played a unique role in the G7 in the past. How do you see us contributing to good governance in Africa as it relates to these 13 countries in 2024, but also in general? Would you like to comment?

Mr. David Black: It's been a much longer issue, of course, well before 2024.

One of the challenges that we're grappling with in relating to African countries is the deep sense of disaffection with the world as it has been constituted. There's a sense of anti-colonial push-back. To some degree, the way that is playing out is a reaction to the form of liberal democracy that was presented to African governments as a conditionality.

Nola talked about the need for dialogue. There needs to be a dialogic approach. It starts now, but carries on well beyond the elections of this period of time, which is not about “We know how to do things, and this is the way things should be done.” It’s about listening, engaging and being open to the possibility that there are other ways of doing democratic political life than the ones we have imagined.

That’s a very roundabout academic answer.

The other thing I would say is that governance is not just about electoral processes but also about administrative processes. That has to do with investment possibilities. It has to do with how we deal with extractive sector challenges. All of those things need to be part of the equation as well.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: Certainly.

This is the committee of foreign affairs and international development. I would suggest that trade, especially, supports foreign affairs and whatnot.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Kianza, can you explain how economic relations support diplomatic relations and build closer relationships between nations?

[*English*]

Can you talk a bit about that, please?

Mr. Nola Kianza: I can definitely talk about that.

The Chair: Answer in no more than 30 seconds, please.

Mr. Nola Kianza: I can talk about that.

The first thing is that we need to regain trust. For somebody to listen to you....

We are talking about elections. Before you even get in to give any advice, you have to gain trust. Right now, Africans feel that we are not even listening to their issues. We keep telling them something and they are telling us something. They are giving us different signals and we are giving them different signals. We cannot even get with them in a room.

We need to start there. Africans want to build their economies. We need to go to the table and say, “We hear you. We are coming to you and we can work together.” By doing that, you can then start suggesting other things, because the other things that we have done before are not quite there.

They don’t want anyone to come and tell them, “This is how democracy should work.” No. They want to know—

• (1625)

The Chair: I’m afraid I’m going to have to cut you off, Mr. Kianza.

We now go to Mr. Perron. You have a minute and a half.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Roberts, you heard my earlier conversation with Mr. Kianza about how serious Canada’s approach is to Africa and about investment. I concluded my questions by addressing the issue of security.

From what I see in the briefing note, you have some expertise in that area.

I do not know how well we even understand what is going on when there are coups d’état or upheavals. That said, how can we be better equipped? First, we have to have a clear understanding of the situations, of course, and we have to be there. Apart from that, what recommendations could the committee make to the government in order to ensure the security of the investments that might be made in Africa?

[*English*]

Mr. Christopher W. J. Roberts: I’m going to have to respond *en anglais*.

Your question to me is still related to what Nola and David have just spoken about, which is that coups are just a form of governance that has gone bad. People have lost faith in the political system, and the youth, who then don’t have jobs, seem to be on the side of the coup. They’re promoting the coup. They want change and they’re willing to support an unconstitutional change of government. That is all then part and parcel of the insecurity that folks are feeling, especially across the Sahel but also in Nigeria and other places.

On this idea that we can separate security from governance and from development, we can’t, and this is why we need a strategy. We can’t silo trade with security and peacekeeping. We need to have a strategy that identifies that these are linked and we need to have a presence that sees that they’re linked.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Roberts.

For the final question, we go to MP McPherson. You have a minute and a half.

Ms. Heather McPherson: It’s a minute and a half.

What I’d like to get to a little bit is I feel like—or certainly, this is the belief—that the African continent, the countries within Africa, have become much better at working cohesively together, much better at having a common vision and working together on that. I don’t think we as a country have responded to that adequately.

What are the implications of a stronger pan-African movement, whether it’s in multilateral fora or whether it’s in our bilateral relationship?

Mr. David Black: I want to partly walk back what I said in one of my first responses about the diversity of Africa and just make the point that Africans have always aspired to think of their position in the world in pan-African terms.

That doesn't mean that they don't have different ideas about what pan-Africanism means, but they have moved much more systematically towards that vision and to operationalizing that vision. That means that they function increasingly as a bloc in a variety of multilateral settings. It makes them much, much less policy takers and much more policy asserters, in terms of global affairs, and we have to get used to that idea. We're not in the position that we were as part of a western bloc that delivered conditionalities to indebted parts of the world. That equation has changed, and they have leverage that they didn't have previously, and they know how to use it.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Mr. Kianza, is there anything you would like to add to that? I know I'm probably out of time.

The Chair: I'm afraid you're out of time, Madam McPherson.

Ms. Heather McPherson: A minute and a half goes fast.

The Chair: At this point, I'd like to thank Mr. Kianza, Professor Black and Mr. Roberts. We're very grateful for your time, your insights and your expertise. Thank you.

We will suspend for approximately five minutes.

• (1625) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1635)

The Chair: Welcome back, everyone. We will move forward with the second hour of testimony today.

We are very grateful to have four witnesses before us. We have Professor Akuffo from the University of the Fraser Valley. We're also very grateful to have Ms. Meg French, from the Stephen Lewis Foundation. .

From The Canada-Africa Chamber of Business, we're grateful to have both Mr. Garreth Bloor, who is the president, and Ms. Paula Caldwell St-Onge, who is chair of the board.

We will start ff with Mr. Akuffo. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Dr. Edward Akuffo (Associate Professor and Head, Department of Political Science, University of the Fraser Valley, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair, for inviting me. I'll be honest and frank in my comments.

Let me begin by congratulating the committee for this important study on Canada's approach to Africa. It is a clear sign of renewed commitment towards the continent.

Mr. Chair, Canada is at least two decades behind when it comes to deepening its engagement on the African continent. Nevertheless, it is still a pivotal moment for security and economic transformation in the region. I hope that this study will help Canada to build on past strengths, regain its position as a moral power and deepen engagements in the region.

In that light, I wish to recommend at the outset that Canada needs to develop a comprehensive and coherent Africa strategy. This strategy should position Canada as a key security, development and diplomatic partner of Africa. The strategy must be the springboard for Canada to punch above its weight, as it used to do on specific issues on the African continent.

The overriding principles of the strategy should be mutual respect, reciprocity and non-indifference to Africa's agency and its growing geopolitical and geo-economic space. To be sustainable, a Canada-Africa strategy must be resilient and adaptable, and a truly multi-party product that is resistant to changes of government. To be effective, the strategy must synergize security, development and diplomatic efforts.

I offer these specific recommendations.

One, the proposed Canada-Africa economic co-operation strategy must be an integral part of a comprehensive and coherent Africa strategy.

On security, Canada must lead efforts to strengthen EU-NATO inter-regional security co-operation and build the capacity of African peacekeeping training centres of excellence, which it helped to establish in the early 2000s.

On diplomacy, Canada must increase the number of its embassies in African states and establish permanent missions in the regional economic communities to give effectiveness and visibility to Canada's engagement in the region.

On development, Canada must establish innovative [*Inaudible—Editor*] programs modelled after the defunct Canada fund for Africa and the Canada investment fund for Africa to help build capacity of African and Canadian partners.

An essential component—this is my last recommendation—of a Canada-Africa strategy must be a special fund to foster educational partnerships between Canadian and African universities with a goal of producing policy-relevant research to sustain the strategy into the future.

Mr. Chair, the African continent has always been a space for geopolitical and geo-economic competition. Despite significant development and security challenges, including hybrid threats, Africa is projected to be the fastest-growing regional economy in 2024.

The African Union regional economic communities and member states are undertaking major policy reforms to strengthen democratic governance, peace and security, and economic development through institutions like the African peace and security architecture and the African continental free trade area. These reinforce African agency and its potential as a major powerhouse in the future.

In fact, Canada's own economic interest is growing, particularly in mining and merchandise trade, which are valued at \$37 billion and \$16.2 billion respectively in 2023, yet for the most part, the region has never been a foreign policy priority of Canadian governments, as Africa is widely perceived as poor and conflict-ridden.

I strongly believe that Canada must shift from this foreign policy behaviour. To be sure, Canada has a moral identity in Africa, as it lacks colonial baggage and is not perceived as belligerent. This soft power uniquely positions Canada as a potentially attractive major player in the region.

Canada's engagement must reflect a 21st century Africa. Thus, Canada should, for the first time, craft a comprehensive and coherent Africa strategy to build mutually beneficial partnerships with African actors and secure Canadian interests into the future.

Mr. Chair, if it pleases the committee, I would be happy to submit a detailed brief of my presentation.

Thank you very much.

● (1640)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Professor Akuffo.

We will now go to Ms. French, who is from the Stephen Lewis Foundation.

You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Ms. Meg French (Executive Director, Stephen Lewis Foundation): Thank you very much. I'm really pleased to be here today.

When the Stephen Lewis Foundation was founded in 2003, there were two million people who were dying of AIDS-related illnesses every year in sub-Saharan Africa, most of them in their twenties, thirties and forties. In the face of that devastation, groups of community members were mobilizing to provide care, support and dignity to people in their final days of life and to support children and families affected by these deaths.

Despite their extensive, exhausting and vital work, these groups and organizations had minimal access to any of the HIV funding that was starting to flow globally.

Stephen Lewis and his daughter Ilana Landsberg-Lewis started the SLF to mobilize funds to support these community-led organizations, and 21 years later, we continue to champion the expertise of communities and the power of civil society across Africa.

While the HIV epidemic has changed significantly in those 21 years, the fact remains that the structure of the international HIV response, and international aid more broadly, has not changed substantially. Donor countries, including Canada, and the organizations that are based in them, continue to hold the power and maintain control over the resources. If you take only one thing from my remarks today, I hope it is this: We need a transformation in the way that Canada relates to Africa in our international co-operation and in broader diplomacy and trade, one that centres on the needs and priorities of communities in addressing poverty reduction, economic growth and the realization of human rights.

First, let's look at Canada's aid.

At the OECD DAC, the development assistance committee, Canada has been vocal in its support for enabling civil society and for addressing the closing of civic spaces, but we haven't seen sufficient action from Canada with regard to investing in robust civil society organizations in Africa. In fiscal year 2022-23, a total of about \$4.1 billion in Canadian international assistance was allocat-

ed through bilateral and multilateral spending for all African countries and for regional initiatives. By comparison, \$5.4 billion went to Ukraine alone that year. In order to ensure we are a true partner to African countries and their people, Canada needs to significantly increase this number by growing the overall international assistance envelope.

I also want to focus here on the need for Canada to make sure that significantly more of the aid allocated for Africa actually makes it to civil society organizations and movements to support their priorities. Canada's international assistance continues to reinforce a colonial relationship with the African continent. Even though we may not have been a colonizer, we practise colonial practices in our aid. Canada must move away from top-down approaches to international assistance to one in which community-led organizations, like the SLF's partners, have access to flexible long-term core funding.

This will require a whole-of-government approach. Changes need to be made within Treasury Board and Global Affairs Canada to ensure that Canadian international assistance is not wasted on layers of bureaucracy whose very purpose is purportedly to reduce misspending. The truth is that layers of bureaucracy and fiscal risk aversion mean tax dollars are tied up in red tape or in paying for program management by international NGOs and multilaterals, rather than facilitating the work of local civil society organizations that have the expertise, the relationships and the experience needed to realize goals in health, economic empowerment and human rights.

Second, the increases to and improvements in Canada's international assistance must be accompanied by Canada's leadership in human rights and public health in multilateral and bilateral spaces. Canada needs to be more outspoken and show leadership in its actions to protect public health and to stop human rights violations.

As an example of Canada's failure, one can look at Canada's long history of blocking or misusing the WTO's TRIPS agreement, from CAMR to COVID-19, which has cost the lives of far too many African people.

Another example that is front of mind for me today is the draconian anti-homosexuality act in Uganda, which Canada has not adequately stood up against, and the recently passed anti-LGBTQI bill in Ghana.

We must ensure Canadian international assistance funding is not going to groups promoting rights violations in other countries, and, more than that, we need a whole-of-government response to human rights crises. How are diplomacy, trade and aid working together to protect rights and to ensure that civil society organizations in Africa are well resourced to respond to emergencies and hold governments to account? Where is the red tape that prevents Canada from acting when action is needed, and how can we remove that red tape? Where is the political will, across parties, to stand up and speak out for what is right?

Finally, I can't talk about Canada's relationship to Africa without talking about the disproportionate and devastating impact of climate change on African nations and communities and on the lives and livelihoods of African people.

In 2022, the UN reported, "Scientists have long noted that countries in Africa have contributed the least to greenhouse gas emissions, yet climate change threatens to expose up to 118 million of the poorest Africans to droughts, floods and extreme heat by 2030."

• (1645)

The SLF's community partners are already grappling with significant impacts of climate change. We have been hearing from partner after partner on the need to shift limited funding away from health programming towards climate change adaptation so that their community members can survive droughts and floods. Canada must step up, in both significantly reducing our contributions to climate change and in committing new international assistance dollars toward climate change preparedness, mitigation and adaptation in African communities—supporting solutions designed by Africans for their communities.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. French.

We go now to The Canada-Africa Chamber of Business.

I understand that Mr. Bloor will providing opening remarks. You have five minutes.

Ms. Paula Caldwell St-Onge (Chair of the Board, The Canada-Africa Chamber of Business): First, as chair of The Canada-Africa Chamber of Business, I'd like to thank you, Mr. Chair, for inviting us to speak.

I will pass it on over to Garreth.

Mr. Garreth Bloor (President, The Canada-Africa Chamber of Business): Thank you very much, Chair.

In my experience, Canada is a partner of choice to African markets. It's not based simply on what we do or can do; importantly, it's on who we are as a country. With competing budget priorities, it is therefore important for me to highlight that our success need not necessarily be dependent on large sums of public money but on consistent trade and investment engagement.

I do believe that key to our approach in African markets and the continent is a continued policy dialogue with the African Union. We are the only G7 country not to have yet planned an in-country African summit. Our chamber members often remind us of this,

noting that countries like Russia, China and Saudi Arabia, among others, do host Africa summits.

African countries are once again outpacing the projected global average in economic terms. It is the second-fastest growing region after Asia, with vast open space for agricultural potential and natural resource development, to name but two important sectors where Canada can dramatically increase its trade diversification. On the latter, several of Canada's natural resource companies have achieved enormous success in bringing clean technologies for both climate change and environmental concerns to the forefront. I think that's a template of what is possible across a range of industries, including in the context of net-zero supply chains and critical minerals and those specific commitments. As the founder of Alibaba put it just a few years ago, "Today's Africa is the China of 20 years ago!"

Canada's free trade successes are a model for a continent committed to this endeavour as a key to prosperity. We often hear from Africans and those at the African Union a great keenness for Canadian expertise to continue in supporting implementation of the African continental free trade agreement. Canada's continued and hopefully increasing support is I think powerful. Our former board chair, Sebastian Spio-Garbrah, currently is our special envoy to Ghana in this regard at the African Union secretariat on free trade. Furthermore, I think Canada has to be better at communicating the great bilateral work already undertaken that's focused on economic development.

In turn, Canada will be able to enjoy the benefits of an equal relationship in strengthening the rule of law and the standards to which many have committed, which will decrease the risk to our Canadian companies. Canada's private sector can play a key role in the economic development that is crucial to the overall agenda and is vital to Canada's trade diversification strategy. I believe the success of regional economic integration to date within Africa demonstrates the African commitment to intra-African regional trade.

It's important, I think, to get the often already budgeted basics right if we are to sustain the incredible goodwill that we've heard about from the African continent. On visa processing times, I think we want deeper ties with Africa, but it's vital that we ensure that Africans can visit Canada, especially in the context of important conferences and fora. Therefore, I think it would be good to see reasonable processing times and perhaps a formal mechanism to facilitate larger delegations coming to legitimate events in Canada within these shorter time frames.

Many of our members talk proudly about team Canada. I think companies need to know that the government has an awareness of African markets and that indeed it's serious toward the African continent as part of our trade diversification strategy. I know that many of us would like to see an aspiration for a team Canada mandate similar to what we've seen in the Indo-Pacific.

Our organization is entirely funded by private sponsors in Canada as well as in African markets. Though we don't have any full-time staff, as we remedy this situation we're thankful for our trade commissioner service as well as our ambassadors and our high commissioners, who participate as we deliver events across the continent. Not all of the important markets are covered. It wouldn't hurt for there to be increased resources with the trade commissioner service to support organizations that are asked to deliver programs.

Our mission to accelerate Canada-Africa trade and investment is achieved through world-class networking and information-sharing events, which we do through conferences and business-to-business networking and by sharing insights for strategies and policies that bring together public and private sector thinkers and leaders. Next month, for example, we're in Washington, D.C., to focus on Canada-U.S. collaboration in working with African partners, especially in areas like critical minerals, within the context of our G7 commitments.

It is my great pleasure to be here with each one of you today, together with the chair of our board, and I look forward to taking your questions.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1650)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bloor.

We now go to the members for questions.

For the first round each member has four minutes. When you are responding, if you look up to me and I'm signalling you, it means you really have to wrap it up within 15 seconds.

The first member asking questions, as I understand it, is Mr. Fast. You have four minutes.

Hon. Ed Fast: Thank you very much to all of our witnesses here.

Mr. Bloor, I was intrigued by your comment that Canada's trade successes—I'm assuming you're referring to our past trade successes—could form a template for how we engage in Africa. Can you expand on that a bit?

Dr. Edward Akuffo: Canada certainly has a large number of free trade agreements globally, and I think that is something that is really admired in a free-trading country, which is what we are. It's in that context that in conversations at the African Union that I alluded to, there's a great interest in having Canadian expertise participate in the ongoing implementation of the African continental free trade area. I think that goes to the notion of Canada as a trusted partner and an honest arbiter, to use phrases previously noted. That's the specific context: It's our global success at free trade agreements to date.

• (1655)

Hon. Ed Fast: To follow up on that, South Africa is a significant power broker in the region and a highly protectionist country. It's a challenge to negotiate with South Africa, and certainly it's been my experience at the World Trade Organization to see the BRICS countries—like Brazil, China, Russia and South Africa—often block consensus on trade liberalization. It can be quite frustrating.

My question to you is this: To what degree does South Africa actually drive policy within the African Union, especially when it comes to trade?

Dr. Edward Akuffo: Because I'm not inside the African Union but have more of a business perspective, I can speak to the feedback that we receive at our fora.

Increasingly we're seeing a number of other African countries rise to the fore, and we see that sometimes the dominance at the African Union of one particular country may reflect the fact that the leadership of the AU or the chairmanship at that time is allocated to a specific country. However, I think that we're hearing an increasingly wider range of voices at the African Union, and a lot of that is concurrent with the proportion of economic activity in that particular country.

In terms of the goodwill towards Canada as a whole, one big thing I detect is that an appreciation and a respect for the African ambition for a single market over time, a recognition of that as an aspiration, is very powerful in demonstrating that Canada not only seeks to engage trade continuously with one or two major countries that often have been historically dominant but in fact has a view that is consistent with a pan-Africanist vision for a single African market. I add that point as well, if I may.

Hon. Ed Fast: Are you suggesting that Canada's focus should be on positioning itself to negotiate a broader trade agreement, a pan-African trade agreement, as opposed to a whole bunch of bilaterals?

Dr. Edward Akuffo: I think we would do well to respect... I think there's nothing wrong with that, but that's a long-term play, because I think right now the African Union, and certainly African leaders, are keen to have that technological and technical exchange. We saw that in some of the contributions from Canada to the development of the African continental free trade area.

We got the signatories, and now I think its implementation is key, but I think a stated aspiration towards that end would probably be received very well on the African continent.

Hon. Ed Fast: The other concern is security of investment. When Canadians make investments in Africa, they want to make sure those investments are secure, and there's a bit of a challenge. We see that now percolating in Mali, where Barrick, a good Canadian gold company, is concerned about what Russian interference in that country could mean for its investment there.

Do you have any comments?

Dr. Edward Akuffo: Yes. I would say that in many areas where you see instability, there's often a lot going on that's a bit of a proxy, which is quite good to go down into. This doesn't speak to this particular case, but we've encountered mining communities where we speak to a local Canadian company that says, "Look, we weren't actually affected by this transition, because the community in which we operate is very happy with what's going on."

A lot of the conflict or the issues around who takes over is a proxy for much bigger challenges around governance and who has access to resources. That's where I think the points on a strategy are so clear, because the institutional aspect has to be inherent in a strategy and concurrent with economic development.

The Chair: Thank you. We really appreciate it, Mr. Bloor.

We next go to MP Damoff. You have four minutes.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): I have to tell you, Chair, that four minutes is not very long.

Ms. French, I'm going to start with you. I attended a UN AIDS breakfast at the beginning of March, and they expressed really serious concerns about the situation in Africa right now. Progress on AIDS was being made, and now they're starting to see that backslide, particularly for women and girls.

I'm wondering if you're seeing that and if you can maybe speak to the situation today and looking forward with respect to dealing with AIDS in Africa.

• (1700)

Ms. Meg French: Sure.

Clearly there's been huge progress. I think what we're seeing now is the impact of human rights abuses and gender inequalities on marginalized groups. You see, for instance, that rates of HIV and new infections among adolescent girls and young women are quite high. They're three times higher than are rates for their male peers, for instance. You see that rates of HIV among what are called "key populations"—men who have sex with men, sex workers, trans women, people in prison and intravenous drug users—are much, much higher than they are among the general population because the discrimination and the fear of accessing health care put them increasingly at risk. Essentially, there are laws that stop them from doing that.

The real need is for us to continue to put investment into communities, because we know that community-led organizations and responses to HIV have been what has really helped drive the reach throughout the communities. We saw that in COVID. We saw that the experience those groups had in responding to HIV allowed

community groups to reach out to people who weren't accessing the more mainstream health care system during COVID as well. It's a really important investment.

It's also important that we not backslide on that investment, because while people are not dying at the same rate, there are still millions of people living with HIV who have to stay on treatment. If you are on treatment, that can help prevent further spread of the disease, and that is how we're eventually going to end AIDS.

We cannot take our foot off the pedal in terms of the progress that has been made. We cannot end continued investment, continued support to governments and to community-led organizations in order to be able to reach people who are at risk of HIV or those who are currently on treatment. We're not done the work that needs to be done as a global community and we have to continue to keep that investment going.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you.

I've only about a minute left, but I want to ask you about climate change as well, because the continent of Africa has contributed the least to climate change but it is being impacted the most. That came up in a conversation I had recently as well. These countries are being expected to put in as much as other countries for the infrastructure.

Maybe you can elaborate a little bit more on how a country like Canada can support the infrastructure that's needed to deal with climate change.

Ms. Meg French: People rely on the agriculture industry as well as small-scale agriculture for their food or for their income on the continent. They are hugely affected by climate change. I think supporting alternative ways of farming and the technology and the know-how to do that, whether we're talking about small-scale or large-scale agriculture, is important.

It's also important to be prepared for droughts or for floods. In talking to our partners, we learn that people are often displaced as a result. The rolling impact of that is that then people can't access the health care they need and they can't access the education they need, and they're at continued risk as well.

The Chair: Thank you.

We next go to Monsieur Perron.

You have four minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for being with us and giving us their time today.

Mr. Akuffo, I am going to address you first. I found your opening remarks very interesting. You talked about having a coherent and comprehensive strategy. You also talked about a peacekeeping centre. We do have a lot of questions about security. There has also been discussion about having more embassies and regional bureaus.

We have to rely on the evidence, however: The previous witnesses made some harsh observations about Canada's level of investment in Africa, as compared to the investments it makes in other regions of the world.

If we had to establish priorities, what should we start with to improve the situation?

[English]

Dr. Edward Akuffo: The question is for me. Okay, sure. I'm sorry. I did not catch the first part of the question.

I think our priority or our investment in Canada should actually attach on these three areas that I mentioned: security, development and diplomacy. My answer to your question is that we have to go in and see the synergies of these three things. We can't just focus on, say, investment in the economic sector, such as mining, because the sustainability of our mining investment is going to largely depend on the security or stability of African states. Therefore, it also has to do with how we engage on these states moving forward, meaning that our investment depends both on security and on how we engage on the African continent diplomatically.

My answer to your question is that we need to have a holistic approach towards to the continent and clearly articulate our interests in these three areas of security, development and diplomacy.

• (1705)

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you.

Mr. Bloor, I saw you nodding your head while I was asking my question and while Mr. Akuffo was answering it. Would you like to comment on this subject?

Ms. Paula Caldwell St-Onge: If I may, I would like to answer the question to add to what Mr. Akuffo said.

The question was how we can address what we are calling the synergy between trade, diplomacy and development. The cornerstone of any investment is of course always said to be security. That is the base. That is what we see in the other countries of the world. After that, we really look at the synergy between development and international trade. You can have a lot of development programs aimed at countries' economic development, as Africans are asking us for, but that will also contribute to security and to establishing a structure in which Canadian companies that want lower risks will be comfortable going to explore the markets in Africa.

So it really has to be considered as stages, as Mr. Akuffo said.

Mr. Yves Perron: So the base is security.

Ms. Paula Caldwell St-Onge: Yes.

Mr. Yves Perron: For the first stage, do you have specific recommendations? You can always send them to us in writing, if you do not have time to give them to us now.

Ms. Paula Caldwell St-Onge: Certainly, we can send you details in writing later.

I would say that we really have to focus on Canada's strengths, among which are financial technologies, green technologies, agriculture, education and the mining industry. We first have to look at where our strengths lie, and then look at the fields where Africa wants to establish partnerships with us. At present, we can focus on certain places.

In fact, that is one recommendation I would make. We cannot be everywhere in Africa. We do not have the resources to do that, nor do we have the programs to help our companies go and explore the markets in Africa. We do not have enough programs that offer that opportunity.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

We next go to MP Cannings.

Welcome. It's good to have you back, MP Cannings.

You have four minutes.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Thank you.

Four minutes is indeed not a long time compared with other committees, but I'll try to adapt.

I'm going to start with Ms. French.

I was just in Kenya and Rwanda a couple of weeks ago, where we met with many refugees, migrants, some of whom have been living in refugee camps for over 30 years. We have a situation in Sudan, South Sudan, Chad and Somalia of people being trapped in a spiral of deteriorating food security, violence and displacement. This growing crisis has strong gender impacts, with women and girls facing increased risk of gender-based violence.

How can Canada get at this? How can Canada help address those links between food insecurity and sexual and gender-based violence?

Ms. Meg French: I think the question should be asked to the people themselves. Ultimately, communities know what they need. Most of the time what they're lacking are the resources to do the work they need to do or to address the issues that are facing them, the biggest challenges for them.

As Canada, we invest a lot of money in large international NGOs and multilateral organizations. We make it very difficult for any Canadian assistance to get on the ground to community organizations that can respond quickly, know what the challenges are, know who the players are, know what the culture is and what the history is. They could be responding, but they simply don't have the resources to do it and so they can't have the impact they could have.

• (1710)

Mr. Richard Cannings: Okay, thanks.

Professor Akuffo, you bought up the situation that Canada doesn't seem to take its diplomatic role in Africa seriously or that it should be.... We heard rumblings about this from various people in Kenya and Rwanda as well. Other countries have a full slate of embassies across the African continent, but Canada does not.

We have played a serious role there in the past. Why don't we do this seriously? Can you comment on why Canada hasn't stepped up to the plate and what we should be doing?

Dr. Edward Akuffo: Part of the reason that Canada has not been doing this has to do with how we entirely shifted our focus to Afghanistan in the early 2010s. If you recall, 2002 was the very first time that Canada invited African leaders to the Kananaskis conference under former prime minister Chrétien.

That was the momentum that Canada was building. In fact, we were able to leverage a lot of diplomatic.... We scored a lot of diplomatic points at that time. For example, African leaders supported the establishment of the International Criminal Court, the responsibility to protect and the Kimberley processing certification scheme, which deals with conflict diamonds, but then we stepped back. That is why I said that we actually lost that diplomatic momentum. It was because of stepping back out of these things.

I think Canada was among the first countries to establish observer status at the African Union when it was transformed from the Organization of African Unity in 2002, but it took us up to about 2020 or so before we established a permanent mission there. That is how much momentum we lost over two decades.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to the second round, with three minutes each.

We'll start off with MP Abouttaif.

Mr. Ziad Abouttaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Thank you, Chair, and thanks to the witnesses.

Ms. Caldwell St-Onge, you represent two worlds—Global Affairs on one side and the Africa Business Council on the other side. It seems like your background in business is quite deep.

Countries like China found a way to get to Africa and do business, and they've been very successful. Would you be able to tell us if there is a way for Canada, based on your experience in both worlds?

Ms. Paula Caldwell St-Onge: I'm retired. I'm not speaking on behalf of Global Affairs, Mr. Chair.

China, as everyone knows, is in the long game. They've been there before anybody else. They've been there for 30 or 35 years. It's always about getting in the game early. We were in the game, as Dr. Akuffo said, and now we just have to get back to it.

How do we do it? I think this committee and other committees may have very good recommendations on working with governments but also on working with the private sector and businesses. Our companies are very keen to go to Africa. There are countries that have the security that they can go to in Africa that pair up very

well with our Canadian strengths. It's a matter of having enough support for those companies to go to Africa, look around and see if there are possibilities there.

Mr. Ziad Abouttaif: We need to start somewhere. I have a background in international business too. I've done business in that part of the world. North Africa seems to be a perfect place to start—Egypt, for example, and others like Tunisia and so forth.

Where can we really start to penetrate the market? We know this is good for us, but we can't cover 54 countries. It's a big region of 1.2 billion people. Where do we start? Where would be a good case study for us to start doing some real work in Africa?

• (1715)

Ms. Paula Caldwell St-Onge: I can name a few countries that have approached us that really want to do business. We just had something in Kenya—

Mr. Ziad Abouttaif: Would you be able to name those countries?

Ms. Paula Caldwell St-Onge: Yes.

There is Kenya that approached us. We had a business conference there. We went to the D.R.C., where we have Canadian mining interests as well as other interests in the southern part of the country. We were in South Africa. Obviously it's always a starting point, because there we have investments into Canada from South Africa. We have Ghana, as we have heard. We have Côte d'Ivoire. There are many countries that our Canadian business—

Mr. Ziad Abouttaif: Are we taking those requests seriously? Do you believe that we are?

Ms. Paula Caldwell St-Onge: Yes, we are. They're our members, so we support them, and we have had business conferences. We're now going to have our fourth business conference in September in Zimbabwe, and it's a private sector response. That's who funds us.

We also have Morocco, so that's of interest. The Business Council of Canada will be going to Nigeria a little later on. They mentioned in their report on Africa why we should be going to Africa—Egypt, North Africa—and we have Morocco as a strong member. We've been looking at—

The Chair: You are out of time, Ms. St-Onge.

We next go to Dr. Fry. You have three minutes.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair. You can't go very far with three minutes.

They've been very excellent panels, the first one and now this one.

I think we need to shift how we look at Africa. We thought we knew what Africa was about; it was always poverty and aid, etc. Now I'm listening to you suggesting that there are three areas that we should invest in. I think one of them is economic development, obviously, with job creation, know-how and expertise. I think we all buy that.

Another thing that I have a question about is health. You are the only person who has spoken about health infrastructure. If people aren't healthy, they can't work. If they don't have an education, as you said earlier on, Mr. Akuffo, then they can't work. It's not simply a one-size-fits-all of just looking at trade or just looking at economic development. We need to look at a broader picture that includes healthy people, educated people, trained people who are able to work.

I have a question.

I buy into all that, and everyone has spoken about that. What I want to ask is this. We talk about 54 nations in Africa. Is the African Union the place to start? Europe is made up of 57 and more nations, and we've dealt with the European Union. Is the African Union the pivot that we need to start working in to create some kind of synergy among African countries? That's what I wanted to ask about, because Africa is very diverse and very disparate in many ways.

You talk about wealthy North Africa. You talk about other countries that are doing well—South Africa, Kenya, etc.—but there are other countries where there's the issue of democratic institutions and where corruption is rife. How do you build things in those countries? How do we deal with those things? Is the African Union the place we go, or do we have to deal with countries on a case-by-case basis? Then we don't have an African strategy; we have individual bilateral strategies.

I just want to get some answers, because it's quite difficult and complex.

Please go ahead, Mr. Akuffo.

Dr. Edward Akuffo: I think that Canada should have a three-level diplomatic engagement with the African continent: with African states, with regional economic communities, and with the African Union.

In my presentation, I've highlighted that Canada needs to establish a permanent diplomatic missions in other regional economic communities. There are regional economic communities in five areas of Africa: east Africa, west Africa, central Africa, north Africa and southern Africa. We need to engage them diplomatically. We also need to expand the number of missions that we have. Currently we have 17 in 54 African countries. I think that is significantly low.

We need to strengthen the relationship with the AU as well.

Thank you so very much.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Thank you.

Mr. Bloor—

The Chair: Thank you. I'm afraid you are out of time, Dr. Fry.

We next go to Mr. Perron. You have a minute and a half.

● (1720)

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Without further ado, I am going to continue along the same line. Ms. Caldwell St-Onge, I would like to hear your opinion on the re-

gional question. When you were asked the question earlier, you mentioned Kenya, among other countries. How is it that the European Union is at work there while we are not?

How should we proceed? Often, we wonder whether we should approach things by region or by country. I think we have to start with a particular case, which would serve as an example elsewhere.

I would like to hear your opinion on that.

Ms. Paula Caldwell St-Onge: It is up to the government to choose the country and decide how it will proceed.

I would like to come back to something that Mr. Akuffo said about regional economic communities, or RECs. We see RECs that work very well together. Kenya is a member of the East African Community, whose member countries offer more security, for the most part, which means that companies want to go to that region. There is also the Southern African Development Community, a region at the tip of Africa. There are also regions where regional discussions could be held. I strongly agree with that. There are regions where it is already working. I am thinking, for example, of intra-African trade in the East Africa region. It would be very much worth considering there.

As well, in the case of some countries, people come to see us directly at the Canada-Africa Chamber of Business to ask us to find companies that would go to where they are.

Mr. Yves Perron: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: For the last question, we'll go to MP Cannings.

You have a minute and a half.

Mr. Richard Cannings: I'll turn to Ms. French again.

You mentioned that Canada should be investing more in bottom-up projects rather than top-down ones. Whenever I go with Canadian groups travelling abroad and speaking to embassies, we're often shown Canadian projects that are just that type, especially with women's groups, community groups and small enterprises. Is that the kind of thing we should be doing more of?

We also hear that we should be doubling our international aid budget overall. Is that the kind of thing you'd like to see expanded?

Ms. Meg French: I will question one term you used, which is "Canadian projects".

That term is indicative of the kind of aid relationship that we have had with the continent. These shouldn't be "our" projects.

We currently have a system that requires Canadian organizations to decide what needs to happen in a community, and then they hire community groups to implement the projects that the Canadian organizations have designed. That's required of us as Canadian charities. That's just starting to shift. However, through Global Affairs Canada, that's still the process that's in place.

That means that these are not African solutions to African problems; they're the solutions of people sitting in Toronto or Ottawa who come up with these solutions or use experiences from other countries.

Yes, absolutely, we need to be investing more in local grassroots community-led work, but that work needs to be led by those organizations, with the support of Canadian organizations, in true partnership.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

If I could ask one last question of Professor Akuffo, you mentioned that Canada has to bolster its diplomatic presence in Africa. Can you give us a sense of the diplomatic footprint that we currently have in Africa?

Dr. Edward Akuffo: Currently, our diplomatic footprint is really quite shallow, in my view. I think we have 17 missions and five trade missions on the African continent. Then we have the permanent mission at the African Union.

Mr. Chair, one of the things I think we usually miss out on when it comes to Canada's relationship with Africa is regional economic communities. They are the building blocks of the African Union. In fact, you can't leave the middle and go to the top alone.

That is why I would like to strongly recommend that Canada look at expanding its Canada-African Union high-level dialogue to include the regional economic communities and, most importantly, establish permanent commissions there, because they are the building blocks.

Finally, when it comes to peace and security, there is the African Standby Force, which deploys for peacekeeping operations in the regional economic communities. They deploy the forces. We need to really see it from that angle.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you for that kind and gracious response.

At this point, allow me to thank you all.

Ms. French, Professor Akuffo, Ms. Caldwell St-Onge and Mr. Bloor, we're very grateful for your expertise and guidance. Thank you.

We'll suspend and allow the witnesses to leave.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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