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Chair

The Honourable Maxime Bernier

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● (1105)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Hon. Maxime Bernier (Beauce, CPC)): Good morning everyone. I would now like to call the 16th meeting of the Standing Committee on National Defence to order. In accordance with Standing Order 108, we continue our examination of the role of Canadian soldiers in international peace operations after 2011.

[*English*]

We have the pleasure of having with us Ms. Mia Vukojevic, from Oxfam Canada.

I want to thank you for being with us. You have the floor for five to ten minutes, and after that the members will be able to have a discussion with you. Thank you very much for being with us this morning.

Ms. Mia Vukojevic (Manager, Humanitarian Programs, Humanitarian Unit, Oxfam Canada): Good morning, everybody. I would like to thank the committee for inviting me and Oxfam to come to talk to you today.

As you know, Oxfam has many years of experience in working in conflict situations alongside international peace operations and missions, as well as alongside the Canadian military in conflict and in disasters. Just some of the examples are Sri Lanka post-tsunami, for disasters; Pakistan, after the earthquake in 2005; Haiti now; but also the big conflicts in the Balkans, and so on.

I currently work as the manager of humanitarian programs for Oxfam Canada. I have 20 years of experience in humanitarian work. I started doing it in the country I originally came from, Croatia, where I witnessed the work of the Canadian military in 1992-93 to 1995.

I hope my presence here will be valuable to the topic you're looking into, but I think it's important that I state that my presentation and my opinions are coming from a particular perspective, which is the perspective of a humanitarian development organization and the issues we are looking into. My presentation, and probably the answers I'll be able to give to your questions, will be closely related to my experiences.

In the introductory statement, I would like to address basically two issues, which are provision of humanitarian assistance by military in general and by the Canadian military, and protection of civilians in conflict.

It will not come as a surprise to you that Oxfam Canada as a humanitarian NGO believes that the military, including the Canadian military, should have a limited role in provision of humanitarian assistance outside Canada.

We believe the Canadian military should be engaging in providing humanitarian assistance only as a matter of last resort, and that's because that's how it is defined in international humanitarian law, because of differences in the missions that militaries have, because of cost efficiency—because there are huge differences in how costly humanitarian assistance provided by military organizations is—effectiveness, understanding of local culture, and so on.

I will not stay longer on any of these. If you have questions about them, I'm happy to provide examples and elaborate.

I think Canadian military should be engaging in providing humanitarian assistance by using its unique capability strategically. When I say this, I mean such things as that, instead of providing parcels to displaced people, the Canadian military has capacities that no other civilian organization has, such as heavy lifting, infrastructure repairs, logistical capacities, and so on; that provision of humanitarian assistance by Canadian military should be done with clear humanitarian direction and in coordination with other humanitarian actors, rather than on its own; and that it should be time-limited. As soon as civilian actors, primarily and preferably the local government, are able to provide humanitarian assistance, the Canadian military should reduce its engagement. This should also stand the case for international humanitarian agencies, of course.

As I said, I think Canada should develop its logistical lift, search and rescue, and similar capacities to supplement capacities of Canadian NGOs and other Canadian government departments and in such a way maximize Canada's contribution to humanitarian efforts around the world in the most cost-efficient and effective way.

On protection, as a humanitarian organization Oxfam believes that all civilian men and women caught in humanitarian crises, regardless whether it is a conflict or humanitarian disaster, should be assured both assistance and protection. Those are two axes of humanitarianism globally: assistance and protection regardless of who they are, regardless of their political belief, what side they are on in conflict, and so on—as long as they're civilians.

Protection of civilians, however, has been an area that has been eluding the diplomatic missions, the international community in general, UN peacekeeping missions, humanitarian organizations—everybody. We have not performed really well in terms of providing protection of civilians historically.

To this day, while assistance is being provided now with reasonable speed and quality, protection is still a major issue. Just look at the Democratic Republic of Congo, camps in Darfur, Haiti, and so on.

Traditional peacekeeping operations, for example, up until the late nineties didn't even have protection of civilians in their mandate. Only starting in 1999 have most of them had protection of civilians as a part of their mandate. But even when they do, there are all sorts of caveats to it in terms of what they can do and the different terms they use to limit it and restrict it.

The traditional peacekeeping missions with a UN mandate are still highly improvised, basically tools for conflict management. We do it when we don't know what else to do and when it seems as though it may work. But then we don't provide sufficient resources, tools, and skills for people who are doing peacekeeping operations, and then—especially for them—in terms of protecting civilians in those operations.

The UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations has made efforts to improve, to provide better tools, more clarity, sufficient resources, etc. While progress has been made, there is still a long way to go. Ultimately, United Nations peacekeeping operations still represent a uniquely legitimate international mechanism for protection of all civilians in a polarized world. While they're not perfect, Oxfam believes they're still the best we have.

We believe that UN peace operations that focus on the protection of civilians should be considered as an option for engagement of the Canadian military after 2011, and I would like to stress "United Nations peace operations" in that regard.

Peacekeeping can still be a vital tool, one among many, alongside diplomacy, pressure, sanctions, assistance, and so on, for making sure that civilians are safe in conflict. To be effective in this, Canadian soldiers will need to be sent to the right places at the right time with the right missions and the right tools, and they'll have to work closely with humanitarians and local communities, each bringing its distinct competencies.

As UN peace operations require further rethinking and reinvestment, and the UN is currently undergoing the process of doing so—I'm not sure whether you're aware of the "New Horizon" project that the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations is undertaking—the Government of Canada should engage with this process to ensure that the system has improved by the end of 2011.

We believe that with Canada's history in peacekeeping and its reputation internationally as an impartial and credible player in all sorts of conflict, Canada can influence the current process whereby the United Nations is trying to reform the way they do peacekeeping operations and make them more effective, more efficient, more strategic, and so on, so that the Canadian military can then be engaged with fewer failed operations.

We believe that the focus on protection of civilians will enable the Canadian military to focus on its distinct competencies and get away from competing with humanitarian agencies in distributing food and water. Rather, it will complement what civilian agencies are able to do in terms of protection of civilians—but that's very limited—and it could be playing on its strengths in that regard.

I would just like to end by saying that my first contact with the Canadian military was in September 1993 in Croatia, in Medak Pocket. I'm not sure how many of you know of that operation. I went in there as an interpreter for the European Union, to where Canadians, in spite of the terrible mission given to them by the United Nations—a lack of resources, inappropriate tools, an inappropriate decision-making mechanism and everything, were able to do the right thing and try to protect civilians.

These are the kinds of examples in which I think we can make a huge difference.

Thank you.

I think I'm on the wrong channel. I'm hearing French from it; I apologize—also for not speaking French. I take being an immigrant and a new Canadian as an excuse. I'm working on it.

● (1110)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

The first question will be in English by Mr. Wilfert.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome. Many of us here are accused of being on the wrong channel from time to time, so don't feel too bad.

In the report *For a Safer Tomorrow: Protecting civilians in a multipolar world*, Oxfam highlights particularly the 2005 UN world summit dealing with the issue of responsibility to protect civilians. Can you comment, from that summit five years ago and the issue of conflict management, on how you see Canada playing a constructive role in terms of better coordinating both the NGO component and the military component to live up to the summit goals of 2005?

● (1115)

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: For me there are two questions there. One is about responsibility to protect in general, as an international tool that we all have. Then there's the question about how Canada can better coordinate the humanitarian assistance in its military efforts.

For Oxfam the responsibility to protect was a valuable tool that should have been taken more seriously by the United Nations and by at least some of the main governmental contributors. The main value we see in it is that it doesn't look just at any of the individual phases or tools that are in our repertoire for conflict management but looks at the whole spectrum and puts a great emphasis on prevention, strengthening the capacity, and building the institutional capacities and the civil society in advance too, in order to prevent the conflict.

However, originally it was sometimes seen as just focusing on the military intervention bit. We've done a lot of work in trying to get away from that, to educate civil society and populations. Alongside lots of other NGOs we saw it as a useful tool.

The 2005 statement of the United Nations was seen as a huge step ahead in recognizing the responsibility to protect as a legitimate tool and also in recognizing its broad scope. However, we've seen several cases since then in which the responsibility to protect has been invoked in situations to which actually it wouldn't apply. That creates even more confusion and resistance in countries that were resistant to it to start with, because they see it as infringement of their sovereignty.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: In the case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo the government has indicated that they want everyone out within a year. Internationally we have a responsibility under the right to protect, if we go back to the 2005 document, and yet we are going to really abrogate that responsibility. You have a difficulty, if you have a sovereign government instructing the international community to basically get out for its own interests while at the same time we pay at least lip service to this right to protect, yet see mass rapes and mass murders going on, particularly in the eastern Congo.

How do we reconcile the issues of national sovereignty with the issues of the international obligation under the right to protection, if in fact we believe it is paramount?

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: It's not an easy question, and I don't pretend I know the answer. The responsibility to protect speaks about not waiting for the moment, like the one in DRC, in which the government invokes its sovereignty, but working alongside them, supporting them or putting pressure on them to avoid moments like this.

Also, the responsibility to protect has lost some of its credibility, because some important international governments and players have left it and have stopped talking about the responsibility to protect and putting their weight behind it. This all undermines the idea that sovereignty is limited and that civilians and the populations of the country have rights, and that these rights include the right to not be exposed to violence, and that the state is ultimately the first responsible to protect its own civilians.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: It reminds me that when the forces of Julius Nyerere, at the time President of Tanzania, invaded Uganda to oust Idi Amin, African leaders publicly denounced the Tanzanian government and privately congratulated him—hypocrisy gone wild, of course. He was going in basically on the issue of the responsibility to protect, although it wasn't around then but was obviously an issue, and at the same time that the hypocrisy that "we want to deal with sovereignty" was paramount.

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: If you'll allow me, I believe that has changed somewhat, that internationally there is an understanding that sovereignty is about not just the rights of states but also the responsibility of states to their citizens, and in that way it is limited.

● (1120)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: We could still use the example of Cambodia, when the Vietnamese were denounced for invading. There are many examples. It's not an easy issue.

You had talked about the right time, the right tools, and the right mission with regard to the Canadian military.

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: I don't know what those are, but I do believe that the Canadian military, with its years of experience, and the Department of Foreign Affairs, with the number of missions we have gone to and participated in, would actually be able to help the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations to develop the right tools and figure out what the right times are and what the right missions would be.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: And that would mean better coordination among NGOs in Canada, the Canadian government, the Canadian military, etc.

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: Exactly.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Do you envision a kind of structure that would help facilitate that kind of execution?

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: I think some of the models the Canadian government has engaged around Sudan, with the Sudan task force and similar ones, have worked reasonably well. I know that most of the participation at those tables, at least originally when I was involved in 2004 and 2005, was from CIDA and the Department of Foreign Affairs. I think the Ministry of Defence should be, and I think now is, engaged more closely in that coordination mechanism.

Basically, my whole theory is that we should be using the strategic strengths of different arms of the Government of Canada to do the things they do best in order to make the most effective contribution to peace or humanitarianism in the world.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

I will now turn the floor over to Mr. Bachand for seven minutes.

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to begin by apologizing to Mr. Wilfert. Last week, he read a statement in French, which I didn't fully understand. I jokingly said that I would like a translation. I just want Mr. Wilfert to know that I appreciate his efforts to speak French. I hope he continues to make an effort, even though he has problems at times, which is totally understandable. I promised him that I would apologize, and so I have.

Welcome, Ms. Vukojevic. I hope you are well. Everyone has agreed on the meaning of “peace keeping”. There are several different types of peace operations, namely peace keeping, and peace building. In my opinion, the two principles are quite different. In the case of Afghanistan, our operations fall more into the category of peace building. Our military is helping to build the peace much more than it is helping to keep the peace. Peace keeping implies that the various parties have reached an agreement, that our military's sole role is to ensure compliance with the terms of the ceasefire agreement. Our soldiers have been deployed to Afghanistan on a peace building mission, because there is no peace. That is quite different. I'd like to hear your thoughts on the subject.

How do groups like Oxfam interact with Canadian Forces? Soldiers often tell us that NGOs such as yours would never be able to offer appropriate services without their protection. Others feel that providing humanitarian aid is not really the role of the military. What role do you believe Oxfam and other NGOs should be playing in a hostile environment like Afghanistan, where soldiers are engaged in peace building, not peace keeping, operations?

[*English*]

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: Thank you for your question, a highly pertinent question I was hoping to avoid.

Situations like Afghanistan are really hard for us, as I believe they are for the Canadian military. I believe the militaries are not necessarily the best placed nor do they have the required skills and capacities on their own to build peace. While I think they have a role to play in building the peace, I think there are distinct capacities—peacekeeping, peacemaking. And as I'm not a military expert, you can discard my opinion. But I think the militaries have a role to play in peacebuilding efforts, Afghanistan being one of the hardest environments. There are other examples of situations where the peace operations and peace missions have worked really well by combining the efforts of humanitarian organizations, national governments, national civil society, development efforts, institutional support to the government to build peace jointly.

I think with the way conflict has been developing—with fewer and fewer international conflicts and more conflicts within the countries where one group of people has as legitimate a right to that country as the other group of people in that country, and they are fighting between themselves, it becomes even harder for us to do development, as it does for the Canadian military to build peace in those circumstances.

So to sum up, the way I see it, it should be a much broader effort than the military's effort, and I think the role of the military in terms of peacebuilding should be to provide a secure environment so other players can perform the roles for which they have the distinct competencies. When the Canadian military says NGOs wouldn't be able to provide assistance if it wasn't for the military, the usual NGO response is that if they were able to secure the environment, we wouldn't have a problem providing assistance. This is the circular argument we get into in the field all the time.

I hope that answers your question.

● (1125)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: So then, you're admitting that they have a role to play. Afghanistan is an extremely hostile environment. It is hard to tell these people that they are responsible and that if they had security safely under control and if they secured the perimeters, your presence might not be required. The two seem to go hand in hand in a hostile environment. As I see it, neither Oxfam nor any other NGO would be able to operate freely in an environment like Afghanistan without military protection.

It is true that you play a complementary role. My second question has to do with that very role.

Does Oxfam normally advise the Commander of the Canadian military on the type of operation to conduct and on where operations should be conducted? Conversely, does the military inform you of the type of operation it plans to carry out so that you can remain in a secure area? In other words, do you maintain a bilateral relationship, that is, do you keep each other informed of your activities?

[*English*]

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: I think over the years we did get much better in terms of communicating and coordinating at the headquarters level. At the field level, it's very different, depending on the situation. In environments that you call “hostile”, I don't think that actually happens, because while we would inform the Government of Afghanistan, local government, and the United Nations what our activities were and where we were going, I don't know that we would go directly to the military and tell them, “This is our plan for next week and these are the areas we are going to go to”.

Mr. Claude Bachand: Why not?

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: Afghanistan in particular, and I would say Iraq, may be the only two places where that's the case, because we have seen a deterioration of the security situation for our personnel, both international and national, since the engagement of the NATO forces and intervention in 2001. We do not have proof that these are directly related, but the staffing, the field, often tells us that association with the militaries directly fighting the Taliban makes us a legitimate target, basically, because they see us as allied with the force that they are fighting.

But I have to say, it's very different in all the other places I have been in and have worked in, from the Balkans to Sudan. In Sudan, actually, I have to tell you, in Darfur specifically, our staff has been in daily coordination, even with African Union observers initially. They were literally coordinating who was going to go where. So there was the deterrent effect of international staff being in a different position. The African mission had very few people and they were not able to cover everything, but the coordination was great. It's still happening in Sudan.

It happens in lots of missions, in more missions than you think. It's often done through the United Nations coordinating mechanisms, but as long as it works, it's for the benefit of the people.

The two exceptions, I would say, are Afghanistan and Iraq, and I am afraid that Somalia may become the third one.

● (1130)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now I will give the floor to Mr. Harris.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you for your presentation.

I have a couple of questions. I'll start with your comment about the potential role of the military in humanitarian assistance on a limited basis and ask if you would comment from the point of view of what you saw the Canadian military do in Haiti in the first part of this year. It was a very short mission. We were out within 60 days. And we were doing something very specific. Is that the kind of mission in which you see the military playing a humanitarian role, or are there other types of things as well?

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: I'll start with Haiti, but I would also like to reflect on Sri Lanka, for example, and Pakistan, because those are the three cases I know of.

The Haiti earthquake is exactly the situation where involvement of militaries other than the host country military can be justified. We have no problem with that. The scale of the crisis in Haiti was so great that it was clear that the Government of Haiti, United Nations, and all of the NGOs that were already there didn't have the capacity to respond quickly enough and at the scale that was required immediately. However, where we had a problem with the engagement of the militaries, especially the army of the United States, is in the form of their engagement. I will elaborate and then compare it to Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

Instead of using the military, the only one that has a capacity to potentially fix the airport, on day one the airport got clogged by the U.S. military, for weeks. Oxfam had three planes that were supposed to land. There were a number of them over a number of days. They were diverted from landing on the Saturday after the earthquake as they were approaching Port-au-Prince airport and they were sent to Santo Domingo. I know we were not the only ones. I know MSF was the same, and so on.

The airport was basically useless for the usual humanitarian actors, who were prevented from doing their work for about two weeks, while the same United States army, which has fantastic capacities, could have used those same people and the same capacity to fix the airport. They did eventually expand the airport, create the things that the Government of Haiti didn't have capacity for—the United Nations on the ground were decimated—and NGOs never have the capacity for.

The lift brings staff in, the way that the ships were used post-tsunami in Indonesia—helicopters as well. In Pakistan, the Pakistani army was doing most of the lifting capacities, and then some of the other governments provided helicopters and lifting equipment.

In terms of Canadian engagement, I haven't been to Haiti yet—I'm going on Tuesday—so I only know what I have been told by colleagues on the ground. But given the scale and my experiences from elsewhere, I would say that water purification was justifiably needed. Oxfam is heavily involved in provision of water in emergencies. For example, the DART team coordination following the Pakistan earthquake was excellent. Because the civilian organizations, the government, and all of the NGOs didn't have capacity to provide water for everybody immediately, DART was providing water in one town, while Oxfam was fixing the water system and providing emergency water in another one. Then as DART had to leave after 40 days, there was an orderly handover. It was all coordinated really well.

I would say that using certain rescue operations like lift capacity and so on.... For example, no country in itself has enough capacity to do search and rescue at the speed that's required after a crisis like Haiti, and no civilian organizations do. Those are the areas where I think strategically using the military capacities and developing them in that way is very justified.

I have also heard that as the DART team arrived in either Jacmel or Léogâne, there was a news report that there was a shortage of medical assistance. There was only a small MSF clinic, and because there was a news report that went around the world, the next week there were five health clinics in a small town. The militaries and the governments of the donor countries behaved very much in the way that NGOs have a reputation for: running after the media's attention. They all flocked there and then MSF picked up on that. There was no need for five hospitals.

I'm saying there are instances when it's needed, and it should be very strategic, not led by the media pressures but the needs and using the advantages the military has.

● (1135)

Mr. Jack Harris: Can I ask you to comment on the relationship between the military actions and the humanitarian aid? I'd use Afghanistan as an example. The Canadian government is active in building schools, for example, in the same area in which it's conducting combat operations or securing the territory.

Is it really possible to do humanitarian work, a development work of that nature in what is tantamount to be a war zone? I think we've had the schools themselves becoming targets. Is that something you see as a problem for all NGOs, or is this again something that's limited to Afghanistan?

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: Afghanistan, and I would say Iraq. They're highly politicized environments.

There isn't enough evidence, actually, of what the effects are of these operations. I've just spoken with Peter Walker, who is from Tufts University, and they've recently done research where $1.2 billion has gone for the commanders' exercises, the commanders' humanitarian operations—I'm not sure what they're called—in Afghanistan, with not a shred of figuring out what is the evidence that it actually works, that it's doing whatever it's supposed to be doing.

For a humanitarian agency, the sole purpose of humanitarian operations should be providing the basic protection and assistance to civilians. No other agenda should be involved there. It's very different for my organization's development work because there we have a different agenda. But humanitarian work should only be about saving lives and alleviating poverty. And I don't know that Canada's army or any other army that's currently fighting the war in Afghanistan can be doing humanitarian work according to humanitarian principles.

If the Canadian military is building schools for some other reasons, then it should be called whatever it is. I don't know whether it's peace-building or development, if you know what I mean, because creating the confusion about what is humanitarian and what is not is not beneficial for anybody, I think, in that environment.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now I will give the floor to Mr. Braid.

Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for your presentation this morning.

In your opening remarks you spoke about, within the context of a mission, the importance of providing protection and the importance of providing assistance, and that the record within a mission of providing assistance is relatively good, and with respect to providing protection, not so good. Could you elaborate on what some of the reasons are for the fact that the provision of protection has not been successful, and how we can fix that, how we can improve that?

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: I can try.

There are several reasons, of course. I think one of the reasons is that protection of civilians has often been left to the United Nations civilian organizations and humanitarian organizations, which are not equipped in many of those cases to do so. A good example is the Balkans. Initially, the only organizations that had protection of civilians as a distinct mandate in their organizations were the United Nations High Commission for Refugees—that has protection as a mandate—and the International Committee of the Red Cross. That's it.

Even the NGOs who speak about protection are very limited in what we can do. We can make sure that our activities don't endanger the people, and sometimes they do. We can use our presence as a deterrence, especially in terms of criminal activities and attacks on people in camps and so on, when we are there. When international NGOs are there, it is less likely to happen. And we can expose the perpetrators. But that's basically what we can do.

I think having an International Criminal Court has helped, because there is now an understanding that if you attack civilians, perpetrate war crimes and so on, you may end up being prosecuted for it. So that has been helpful, but it needs to be strengthened, because as good as ICC is, there are no mechanisms for finding those people and ensuring they actually end up being in court. There are still elements missing in that respect.

The sovereignty issue is a big, big problem, because it centres everything on the state, and the state is responsible for protecting its civilians. But in more and more cases where we have internal conflicts, the state is the perpetrator. The state itself is allowing the violation of human rights and war crimes, or the state itself is perpetrating crimes. And because of the nature of the conflict as internal within the states, you have non-state actors that basically are not bound by international norms, international humanitarian law, and cannot have sanctions put on them by the United Nations Security Council, or be even engaged by the international community very often.

The United Nations mission in Croatia in 1991 was called the United Nations protection force. They had no protection mandate. They were not allowed to intervene. In 1995, when Croatian forces entered the area that was held by the Serbs, I think it was a Canadian general who allowed civilians to enter the UN barracks, against the rules of the United Nations and against what New York was telling them.

So the people who maybe had the power to protect civilians didn't have the mandate and still don't have the tools and resources and so on to do so. This is why we think you think the military, like the Canadian military, which does have respect.... In the Balkans, you would always trust a Canadian soldier more than you would a local policeman. There was no question about that. You think that for them to distribute food parcels is a waste of credibility, experience, expertise, and capabilities.

● (1140)

Mr. Peter Braid: In your response now and in your presentation earlier you spoke about previous examples where UN peacekeeping operations in the former Yugoslavia or Rwanda had failures of proper mandate, of communications, channels of authority, of proper tools and resources. Is that still an issue?

You mentioned some reforms, some review of process and procedures within the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations. Have many of those issues been addressed, to your mind?

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: Some of them have been addressed. And they are currently working on trying to address some of the other ones. Even if they address all of them, there is still a problem of politics, because the UN missions are mandated by the United Nations Security Council, which is all about politics. So you can still have a problem with that.

But I think it has become a norm, and partly also because of responsibility to protect being built into the UN document of 2005. Almost every United Nations peace operation now includes a protection of civilians mandate. So I think that creates an opening, and it can be further influenced by governments like the Government of Canada and the other governments that have credibility across the board within the United Nations, and not only in one segment of the community of the United Nations.

Lots more work needs to be done through the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations. But if you only have Bangladeshis and Indians engaging with them, and you don't have the governments like Canada and the military like the Canadian military, which has so much experience and so much training to offer and so on, I'm not sure how well these issues will be addressed.

Mr. Peter Braid: In what types of missions should a military force—Canadian Forces, in this case—be involved and working alongside NGOs, and in what types of missions should there not be a military presence, and NGOs should be working on their own? What's the distinction there?

● (1145)

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: I think for most disasters there is no need for a military presence, other than in exceptional cases. For me, the exceptional ones since Hurricane Mitch would be the tsunami—where DART came in too late—the Pakistan earthquake, and Haiti. The rest can be handled by local governments, United Nations, humanitarian organizations, and NGOs.

We should be having less and less engagement in those repetitive ones. Mozambique has floods every year. There is no need, even, for us. We should be training local organizations to do so.

In terms of conflict, it's hard—

The Chair: Go ahead briefly.

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: —for me to say. There is currently a big debate within the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, and there was a paper issued recently about preventative peacekeeping. Traditionally it meant dividing the roles, observation missions, and so on.

The peacekeeping is definitely easy when it's between the two states. I think Canada should be looking into operations where its credibility can bring value and where there is a clear issue with the protection of civilians. That's not always the case now.

The Chair: Thank you.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Martin.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): *Merci beaucoup, monsieur le président.*

Thank you, Ms. Vukojevic.

In international law, as we know, the right of the individual to be free of abuse and violence trumps the right of the sovereign to do whatever they want.

Given the fact that so many aid workers are being tragically killed and targeted in unstable environments, in your view, what should be the rules of engagement on the part of peacekeeping operations within a conflict zone? Should it be shoot back when shot at, shoot to protect and defend aid workers, or to defend civilians? What ought to be the rules of engagement under those circumstances?

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: I'm not sure that I'm really qualified.

I would say they should shoot to protect civilians, but there should be very clear rules so that you don't have the abuses, if you know what I mean. There are peacekeepers from all sorts of countries and all sorts of places. I don't think the peacekeeper should be protecting aid workers. We—

Hon. Keith Martin: They should not be protecting aid workers?

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: They shouldn't directly. If you protect the civilians, and if you secure the environment, it should be safe enough for us to work. That's our premise. That's how we think we can function. That's how we functioned for a long time until recently.

Hon. Keith Martin: Aid workers, as you know better than I, are being targeted. The question we struggle with is how we protect you so you can engage in the work you're doing. What is the interface of the military with respect to enabling you to do your work and protecting you?

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: What we say to our military colleagues on the ground in an environment other than Afghanistan and Iraq is to coordinate through the coordination mechanism, and then they will know where the humanitarian operation is happening. We will know where their operations are, and we won't go there.

Exchange of information is really important. I honestly don't think direct protection of aid workers is advisable, because our protection is inclusion and acceptance. That's how we think we should be protecting ourselves in operations. We want to be accepted by the communities, by the civilians. For example, in Somalia now there are a lot of bad people running around, armed groups. I don't even want to call them what they should be called. They occasionally—more often than in lots of other countries—stop and abduct for ransom or for robbery or even attempt to kill aid workers.

We believe that our best protection other than arming ourselves and asking for armed protection is working with the communities, and the communities then negotiate with those armed groups. These armed groups are not legitimate armies. They eventually do come from the communities. Whenever in Somalia there is an incident, we suspend our activities, and we tell the communities we're working with that it's not safe for us.

Hon. Keith Martin: Where that's feasible, that's good. You said Somalia would be an excellent example. I would argue that the DRC and Darfur, where aid workers are targeted.... I'm boring down because it's fundamental to any of the questions we're trying to struggle with. Is there a role for peacekeepers to defend your lives with force?

● (1150)

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: I don't think so.

Hon. Keith Martin: Okay.

What is the best relationship between humanitarian aid workers and the military in a conflict zone where you have a good relationship with the locals, where you're working in areas of extreme instability—the eastern Congo, which was a possibility at one time, Somalia? Where you're working in failed states, what is the best relationship, in your view, between peacekeeping operations and humanitarian operations?

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: I would say coordinating through the United Nations mechanisms. When I say that, I mean not being coordinated by, because NGOs are very keen on preserving their independence and so on, but there is extreme value for us in exchanging information, and I guess for the militaries as well.

Hon. Keith Martin: Should Canadian peacekeeping troops be going to the eastern DRC?

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: I don't know. I don't know that I can answer that question. I would say from the point of view of protecting civilians, they would be more justified to be in the DRC than in any other place.

Hon. Keith Martin: When should the DART be used, or not be used?

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: As I said, it was used perfectly in Pakistan. It was there really quickly.

Hon. Keith Martin: The circumstances, not specific.... What would they...?

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: Extreme emergencies where the capacity is exceeded with very specific, strategically chosen elements of assistance. So rather than dishing out the parcels, which any of the civilian organizations can do, strategically using them in coordination. If the UN is coordinating, they coordinate not just us, but the military as well.

Hon. Keith Martin: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I will give the floor to Mr. Boughen for five minutes.

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Thank you, Chair. I'll be sharing my time with Mr. Payne.

Let me add my voice of welcome to you, Madam. It's good of you to share part of your day with us.

I'll make a couple of observations first. I like your phraseology when you say peacebuilding rather than peacekeeping, because it seems to me that war is raging in a number of areas where we have people going in. There's no peace. It's a conflict area. We're trying to build peace, but we're not keeping any peace because no peace exists before we land there.

I think warfare has changed some, and we see that with Afghanistan. As you say, people are there. You feel they may be on your side. I'm sure our troops felt the same way, but one of them got hit with an axe in the head during some talking about how to supply some needs for those folks. So it's a little bit dicey there. When there's no uniform you can't tell if people are the military or not.

How do you see the distribution of whatever you're going to distribute if you're not going to involve the military, if you're not going to have the assurance that someone's going to get what they need and someone isn't going to rip it out of their hands and take it because they're bigger and tougher and have two guns instead of one? How do you see that happening?

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: There are no perfect answers. As NGOs, we've often been accused of having portions of humanitarian assistance end up in the wrong hands or not reaching the people. We sometimes make really difficult choices.

Even putting aside current places like Afghanistan, I can give you the example of the natural disaster at Aceh, or of situations where we bring the supplies and food by helicopter into a place, and the helicopter is being received by the armed group there, who insist we hand it over to them. We hand over assistance to them and they say they will distribute it. We can't really believe them, for one. We shouldn't be giving assistance to militaries anyway, but the only choice we have then is to leave. So what we do in those situations is try to negotiate with them. It sometimes works, sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes we have to pick up and leave. But it sometimes works in a way that they allow us to do the distribution in the place. It's still not guaranteed that some of them that come as civilians will not use the food afterwards. One method we use is to look for the woman that's heading the family, so a wife and mother, to distribute food and other assistance. Usually that works.

Oxfam is fortunate, in that we rarely do food assistance; we usually do water and sanitation. There is not as much competition for water and sanitation as there is for food by the armed groups and armed factions. But then there are attempts to use our assets: our warehouses are robbed and so on. It's a constant juggling of those things. We've had to increase our investment in security. For example, as I said for Somalia, as soon as something happens to any of the agencies, we suspend activities. Nobody's going in. Nothing is happening for a couple of days. It's unfortunate, because that means civilians suffer, but it's the only way for us to ensure, at least to the maximum extent possible, that the assistance is not being misused.

I hope that answers your question.

● (1155)

Mr. Ray Boughen: Yes, that's fine.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: You have one minute. Do you want to use your time right now? No? Okay, we'll come back.

Monsieur Paillé.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Thank you for joining us.

When a humanitarian or other type of crisis unfolds, does Canada ever intervene unless its actions are coordinated with the UN? Does Canada ever decide to deploy troops and vessels to a given area without going through the UN, for example?

[*English*]

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: I don't know of many cases, actually, for Canada, in particular—other governments, more so. I think even the Afghanistan mission has been sanctioned by the UN as a UN-approved mission. It's not a UN mission, but the UN has had a UN Security Council resolution. So I don't know of a case other than the Kosovo intervention.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé: As I understand it, in most cases, when an NGO dispenses humanitarian aid, the civilian population views this help in a more positive light, because it is not being provided by armed soldiers. Do you understand what I'm saying? Is it your experience that when a clearly identified NGO is dispensing aid instead of armed soldiers, in most cases, the distribution process is more effective and seen in a more positive light? Can you confirm that?

[*English*]

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: I think it's definitely perceived more favourably, especially in the cases where an NGO has already been present on the ground, and these are most cases. When we just fly in, there is the same problem with perception, especially with lots of people flying in, but when we're already on the ground there is a definite difference in perception in terms of our objectives, our aims. They simply know us. We've been around for a long time, so the credibility question is definitely easier for us.

There was another aspect you asked about. Was it just perceptions? Perceptions, definitely, and you see that all the time.

I think there is also a difference.... You cannot apply it universally, so when the crisis is extremely huge, like Haiti, then people don't really care who's giving them assistance. If they need medical assistance, then they need medical assistance, and they're not necessarily selective about who is saving their lives. I think the biggest advantage for us is that we've already been on the ground, so they know us. We're civilians. We talk to them. We live with them. We live in the community. We usually talk their language. Most of our staff is national staff, so it's very different, I'd say.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé: So then, in essence, are your saying that it would be in the interests of the Canadian military to try and influence the UN, to improve coordination and international efforts, rather than focus on military considerations? I'm talking about the direction of our Canadian military.

● (1200)

[*English*]

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: Definitely. I would agree with your statement. I would also say, however, that there are cases where military action in the form of peacekeeping or other observers and staff may still be necessary. The United Nations may be able to prevent lots of crises and lots of bad situations by better coordination, by prevention activities, by diplomacy, and so on, but I think there would still be a number of crises where military operation will be necessary as part of the peace operation.

Does that answer your question?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé: I would like to know how Canada is perceived on the international stage for its humanitarian efforts? In your opinion, i there one country that Canada should emulate in terms of its involvement and coordinated efforts and respect for the roles of the various stakeholders?

[*English*]

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: Canada has an excellent reputation for its humanitarian work internationally, but it's mostly due to the efforts that Canada puts into the United Nations humanitarian efforts, coordination, and so on, and through its NGOs. Nationally, it may be different because of the images that you see, but very few people internationally and within the humanitarian system and the community see the Canadian military efforts as a significant contribution, and universal judgment within the civilian humanitarian community is that they are extremely expensive. The U.S. cost is 40%, when the military implements humanitarian activity.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we'll give the floor to Mr. Payne.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I hope you weren't insulted by my comment earlier.

The Chair: No, it's all right.

Mr. LaVar Payne: All right, thank you. Anyway, I'm sorry if I did insult you.

Ms. Vukojevic, in looking at the quick impact and quick collapse in terms of the provincial reconstruction teams and in listening to some of your comments that if you work with the military certainly it appears from the other side that in fact that is not the best situation.... If we look at some of the work that the PRT did in Afghanistan and the building of schools and a number of those things and the infrastructure that has been put in place, would any of the humanitarian organizations have been able to do that without the military?

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: I think so, if the military was securing the place. I don't think the military has much to add in terms of building the school, getting the community together, organizing them, and thinking about the longer term and the needs and where a school should be. They definitely have better logistical capacity, and they can secure the place, if you know what I'm saying. I'm not saying the military should never do it; I'm just saying that the process of building the school is not just putting the building up.

Mr. LaVar Payne: I understand.

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: It's the steps before. It's getting the community to feel that they own it, that it's theirs, so that they are protecting it, rather than never using it or not caring if it gets blown up.

That would be, in my books, more development. And humanitarians have made so many mistakes over such a long period in learning how to do good development that I think if the military is doing it, at the minimum it shouldn't be repeating our mistakes, thinking that by constructing the building you've solved something. For that community, there are implications for costs, who the teachers are, whether the girls can go in, how long it's going to run, who's going to pay the cost, does the community feel that it's its own, and so on.

I'm not saying this because the military can't do it. If the military decides to do it in that way, they can. I'm just saying that I'm not sure it's the most effective way of using military assets.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Let's assume that humanitarian organizations did build schools. Do you think the Taliban would not have tried to destroy those same schools?

● (1205)

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: Not necessarily. They may still try to destroy them.

I think CARE has done a study in Afghanistan. I think the percentage of schools that get blown up is smaller. But the conclusion regarding the schools built by UNICEF and CARE and other NGOs was also that further study was needed to determine whether there was any significance to geographic location, and so on, rather than just who built the schools.

Mr. LaVar Payne: You did talk about some of the armed groups in Somalia and taking away supplies and those sorts of things, and also about your potentially leaving countries. If you do leave those countries, do you take your supplies with you? Do you leave them there?

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: We take supplies with us.

We have a constant system of risk assessment and we try to manage the risk. At some point, when the risk becomes too great to be managed.... For example, our operations in Somalia are now done from Kenya. We don't have warehouses in Somalia. We don't have trucks in Somalia. It's all happening from Kenya. We go in, we do work, we leave; we go in, we leave. That's how we do it, because the risk became too great, from the number of attacks on aid workers. It's not just international aid workers who get attacked, but also national aid workers.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Then there is no protection of those civilians there?

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: No. Exactly. We try to strengthen the local human rights organizations and progressive organizations, so they can do monitoring and so on. Then they become targets as well, as they have been in Somalia. An executive director of one of Oxfam's partner organizations in Somalia was abducted by Al-Shabaab recently, because of his activities. He was with a human rights organization.

Mr. LaVar Payne: You did talk earlier about the 1990s and the UN, particularly the poor program put in place, if I might use that term, for the protection of civilians. It's now 20 years later, so in your view what has changed to move that forward?

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: The UN has developed some tools. They have new guidelines for peacekeepers and operations. They're trying to get the contributing countries to apply and also to better train their soldiers. The missions, as defined in the Security Council resolutions, are better defined and provide for protection of civilians.

One example is Darfur. While it's not a good situation there, the presence of the African Union mission and the United Nations mission has made a difference in terms of the protection of civilians. It hasn't solved the situation, so it's not working in terms of resolving the problem, but the number of attacks on civilians in Darfur has significantly decreased, and that's because the mission is better equipped now.

Because of the nature of conflict, what you need has also changed. You don't necessarily need big trucks and tanks, as we had in the Balkans in the nineties. You need more mobility; you need helicopters so you can move quickly from one place to the other. The armoured vehicles and so on move in smaller teams.

So the way of operating has changed somewhat to make them more nimble and more adjusted to the requirements of the situation.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll give the floor to Mr. Martin.

Hon. Keith Martin: *Merci beaucoup, monsieur le président.*

Ms. Vukojevic, I just want to take one of the threads that we were discussing here and go back to Afghanistan. On the one hand, we're trying to win the hearts and minds of the people by building schools and clinics. On the other hand, non-state actors are destroying those and killing people. What should be the role of our military in those circumstances?

It's a little unclear whether we should be building the schools in the first place. You seemed to say that we should build them, and if the military weren't there, most of them would be fine. Am I incorrect in that assumption?

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: Honestly, Afghanistan is one of those puzzles where I don't know what would work, actually. It's such a complicated situation. Oxfam has been in Afghanistan for 30 years, through the Taliban times and all of this, and it's such a complicated case that it would be really hard to say what the Canadian military should do.

I am not convinced that building schools is contributing to resolving the problem. I don't know that it's actually changing how people think about the presence of internationals, and so on. But that's very Afghanistan-specific. It's a very—

● (1210)

Hon. Keith Martin: There's a fundamental right that you want to enable little children to have the education so they can develop skill sets to be able to contribute to a functional state. I guess my question is that if that's one of the prerequisites to have a functional state, how do we enable those kids to go to a school or acquire health care in order that they can become productive members of the society?

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: I honestly don't know what the answer to that is. I have spoken with a person from Tufts University who has done the research and who went around and talked to Afghani people, focus groups, women, men, and so on. He said that one thing that jumped out of what they thought would resolve the conflict is law and order and decreasing corruption. The question they were asking was what made them angry, what made them join all these armed groups and so on.

Hon. Keith Martin: But in the context of having a completely functional and reliable domestic security apparatus, that's why we're there. If there were a competent domestic security apparatus in Afghanistan, in Somalia, in the DRC, there would be no need for peacekeeping operations for the most part. The fact that they don't have them shows that—

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: Maybe using the efforts that we put into building schools that then get blown up should be put in the military, should be put into training Afghani security forces. Honestly, I'm not an expert, and I don't know if I can speak with any credibility on this, but I would say that restoring law and order and....

Hon. Keith Martin: They've been trying, but I'll switch channels to maybe another thing, because you brought up another conundrum, Somalia and al-Shabaab.

One could argue that in that circumstance, with the kidnappings and random murders taking place, there's a humanitarian disaster occuring in their chronic food insecurity, massive malnutrition. If we were to go in there—and there are security issues for us because of the presence of Al-Qaeda's training camps and al-Shabaab's protection of them—for our own security interests, what would be the interplay between our military and humanitarian actors in Somalia?

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: I'd say better than in Afghanistan, in the sense that the humanitarian agencies.... The situation is somewhat different. While we do get targeted, these are incidents in Somalia, rather than across the board, as it is in Afghanistan.

Humanitarian agencies are not seen as enemies by the people. I think the Somali population is not as afraid of or in favour of Al-Shabaab and these other groups. The Somali civilian population, with millions of people displaced that live on the road going out of Mogadishu, are not necessarily as supportive of those agendas. I think that if the UN mission were able to provide security and get rid of the bad people and so on, and we keep providing humanitarian assistance, Somalia would be better off than it has been for the last 15 years.

Hon. Keith Martin: How should we better use domestic capacity under the circumstances of a natural disaster, where there are remnants of domestic capacity? It seems to me that we don't use domestic capacities appropriately.

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: Somehow I think Haiti was off the charts in every respect. They got decimated, and they didn't have much capacity to start with.

Hon. Keith Martin: I'm talking about Pakistan—

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: Pakistan, for example, is a case where the government has taken control, as in ideal circumstances each government should. They coordinated the effort, and we all worked as a part of their plan for humanitarian assistance and reconstruction.

I think they did receive lots of support, including from the Government of Canada, to their earthquake reconstruction and rehabilitation agencies. NGOs worked with the communities to create these disaster committees in the communities. So I think the work needs to happen at different levels. You can't only work with the central government or with civil defence or something. I think the difference is, once they are past, NGOs can work with the communities. United Nations can work with the ministries of health and I don't know who, but the Government of Canada could support national emergency agencies. But that's a clear example of where it worked.

The Government of India is a good example of where, when they put an emphasis on building their own capacity to respond, the need for external players was reduced significantly.

● (1215)

The Chair: Thank you.

I will now give the floor to Ms. Gallant.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our witness. I'd also like to mention that if there is any time left over, I will be sharing it with Mr. Braid.

You had mentioned one theatre of operation and another disaster zone. Those are the two places I'd like to touch on with my questions.

The first question s in regard to Bosnia. Well after the fighting had stopped and things had been stabilized back in 2001, our soldiers were still there helping to maintain the peace. They conducted operations from time to time, more or less to find secret hidden caches of weapons. During a series of such missions what they found were caches of non-perishable food, seed, fixtures for homes, all things that were meant to go to the people based on donations to humanitarian organizations. It appeared that these caches were being controlled by local municipal councillors, through sort of an underground railroad so to speak for these goods, a black market. So we had that situation.

Then we have the situation we're reading about in Jacmel, where they are putting ghost tent cities up so they can glean more aid. What measures does your organization take to avoid both of these types of situations—one in which they're using the benefactor's goods for a black market and raising money, and the situation in which we have reportedly phoney places so that perhaps more supplies will be dropped off in Jacmel—to ensure that the goods, services, and care are getting to the people for whom it's intended?

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: The Haiti one is easy. It's coordination, coordination, coordination. If we coordinate really well, we will have the information and we won't be falling prey to fake tent cities and so on. Coordination in general has been a big problem in Haiti, partly because there are too many organizations, partly because of the weaknesses in the UN and the Government of Haiti. But I think with good coordination, things like that can be avoided. So even if they put up a tent city, they wouldn't receive any assistance if we—humanitarian agencies, local government, the military presence there, and journalists, and so on, everybody on the ground—had properly coordinated. There are enough people in Haiti to know and to be able to see through those.

While the case in Haiti is corruption, I don't think it is necessarily systemic corruption. It is poor people trying to take advantage of an abundance of stuff. So you prevent it, but I don't think it's as big an issue as is the systemic corruption. It exists in Haitian society, but I think the tent city probably wasn't a good example.

The Bosnia case is a more complicated one and a harder one to deal with, because it was corruption and there was also probably intent—the military aims or whatever—because it's possible that different military factions were stockpiling things so they could sell them in case the war broke out again, or whatever. Some people there still think it's possible.

The way we deal with that one is through direct distributions, making proper lists, and proper assessments to start with. So we do not rush out to distribute things. We register people, which the UN was doing in Bosnia, and we do direct distributions to individuals rather than to centres or communities where you off-load the truck of things in one community and so on.

Bosnia was one of the places where lots of assistance came not through the United Nations systems and big NGOs but rather through small efforts of people's goodwill across Europe. So a family in Germany would collect a truck of goods, bring it there and just give it to town authorities, and there's no way to control that. This again is where coordination is really important.

I think much less of that is happening now with the coordination efforts, because the humanitarian community has worked on it a lot. It is still happening, though. But where the coordination is good, there is much less of that happening.

I don't think it's a big concern when a person gets ten kilograms of something and goes and sells five kilograms so she can buy five kilograms of something else. If it's on a small scale, it's not actually an issue. It's a coping mechanism; that's how people deal with the crisis. But if it starts piling up in warehouses in big quantities, that is a big issue.

There are a number of quality and accountability initiatives that NGOs in the UN have started, which rely on good data management, sharing the databases, comparing the names, issuing IDs, and so on to avoid that and to make aid individual.

● (1220)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now I will give the floor to Mr. Braid, if you have....

Mr. Peter Braid: I don't need my own time allotment. There's no time left, correct?

The Chair: Yes, that's why I gave you five minutes. Take what you want.

Mr. Peter Braid: Okay. I have just one final question then.

From the perspective of an organization that's on the ground in many places around the world, do you have an assessment of what situations are simmering just under the surface that may require the participation of our Canadian Forces at some point in the future?

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: Yes. The one that scares me a lot is Zimbabwe. I hope not, but the country faces so many problems: the humanitarian crisis; the effects of climate change; the years of subsequent droughts; the cholera problem; the hyper-inflation that they have now stopped, but really, the fundamentals of the economy haven't been resolved; lack of political freedoms; and basically the dictatorship. I've been wondering for the longest time when it's going to blow up. I was really afraid last year after the elections. So that one worries me a lot. If that one happens, it will be an internal conflict, it will not be an external one.

There are concerns about some of the existing missions—for example, the UN mission in Chad, which is there, basically, to protect refugees from Darfur. The Government of Chad wants the UN to leave, and there are constant negotiations and renegotiations. That's a really important one.

But the new ones.... You never know with the former Soviet republics and the areas there. Oxfam doesn't have a big presence there, but you know those areas, the Ossetias, and so on.

That's what I can think of at this point.

Mr. Peter Braid: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I will give the floor to Mr. Wilfert.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

If the first casualty of war is the truth, the second casualty must be language, so when we talk about peacekeeping, and we're looking at post-2011, we're looking at getting political buy-in by the Canadian public. The Canadian public has obviously spoken very much with regard to the present situation in Afghanistan. When we talk about peacekeeping, there is obviously the connotation that there's a peace to keep, which would not be the case in the Congo, and which would not be the case in many of these war-torn places at the present time.

What would be your advice in terms of the way we as policy-makers position this kind of language and approach so that way we would get buy-in? Really, a lot of it is peacemaking, and the work that Oxfam and other organizations do is really as a fundamental supporting role, to assist those on the ground who are either displaced or who are clearly the casualties of conflict. Clearly, Somalia in 1993 was not peacekeeping, it was peacemaking, and yet the impression people had was in fact that it was peacekeeping, as it clearly was in Bosnia.

What advice would you give to assist in that regard? You're not going to get buy-in by the public if they think it's going to be a continuation of the same old, same old.

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: I think, possibly, talking about protection of civilians in peace operations. Peace operations covers the gamut of it, which I think is fair to be used. But then knowing the Canadian public, and knowing how they react to suffering of people overseas, focus on protection of civilians would be clearly one that I think would have the broad approval of the Canadian public.

So whether a particular situation is peacekeeping because they signed the peace developed for next week or it's peacemaking, military observers, or something, as long as the focus is on protecting civilians rather than keeping one side or the other, especially in these internal conflicts, which are really bad to get through and to understand, and Canadians go whoa, too complicated.

Focusing on protecting civilians, innocent victims, and providing security and protection for them while we provide assistance to them, and the rest of the Government of Canada works on diplomacy and through the United Nations, and there's mediation and so on to resolve the problem I think would be a reasonable proposition to the Canadian public.

● (1225)

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Thank you. I appreciate that. I think that goes back, again, to the 2005 UN summit. It also maybe deals with some of the capacity-building issues and dealing with poverty and inequality, which Canadians, by and large, seem to be supportive of.

I think the wording is important, because I think the connotations that derive from that really do indicate what we're all about. Since the central tenets of traditional Canadian foreign policy have been human rights—certainly our discussion is on the issue of the right to protection—I welcome those comments. I think they're helpful. Obviously, when we talk about zero tolerance for war crimes, we could do more, as the engineer that has been very much involved in the International Criminal Court. Again, I think these are values that are part of what you have described.

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: It would resonate with the Canadian public.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: I think that's very important.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we'll go to Mr. Bachand.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Earlier, you talked to us about the New Horizons program. I have here a paper entitled "International peacekeeping missions and civilian protection mandates: Oxfam's experiences." I'd like to read an excerpt from this paper in which New Horizons happens to be mentioned. The following is stated:

[*English*]

"The UN Secretariat Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support are reaching a critical point in assessing the performance of peacekeeping operations. They are making the necessary institutional improvements to meet future challenges. Under the Secretary General, Alain Le Roy and Susana Malcorra have recently launched a "New Horizons" reform process. It outlines eight key peacekeeping areas that require further attention and improvement. The fifth of these—clarity and consensus on new tasks—proposes steps to build consensus on policy and requirements for both robust peacekeeping and the protection of civilians, which should provide opportunity for much-needed policy development in this area."

[*Translation*]

I'd like to hear more from you about the new New Horizons program. Specifically, can you tell us a bit about the eight key peacekeeping areas?

[*English*]

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: I don't know if I'm an expert on it. Oxfam has been trying to engage the United Nations and the DPKO, actually, in broadening their consultations and engaging with everybody else. I know that recently they had a report issued that outlined options for reform and different kinds of missions they could have, and so on. We're currently looking into it, and we're expecting to provide feedback to them.

I'm not engaged in direct talks with the United Nations. We think it's important. I think it is outlined in their "New Horizons" plan that the protection of civilians should be really important and a core part of their mandate. For us, that's a big one. We want to make sure that if there are new UN peace operations and new doctrines and so on that it clearly includes protection of civilians. Lots of the stuff is technical. Lots of it is about rules of engagement and so on. We're not necessarily the best to provide input on that. But wherever it comes down to civilian protection, humanitarian assistance, a relationship with civilian actors and players, and our experience of what has worked in UN peace operations, we're willing to share.

● (1230)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: If I understand correctly, this work is under way. The New Horizons program has been launched and I would imagine that consultations are taking place. What is the status of the consultation process? Has a timetable been set for producing a report and formulating new peacekeeping policies?

[*English*]

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: I don't think they have a deadline. I don't think they do. I don't know of one. Knowing the United Nations, it will probably drag on for a couple of years. That's why I said in my presentation that this is a good time to engage. I know that they are having consultations, including consultations with civil society and with the biggest contributing nations. They commissioned a report by academics.

It's a comprehensive process. They are looking into internal procedures, global trends in development, current conflicts, and current operations. Lots of it is specific to military operations. It's a comprehensive review. It's supposed to be on the Brahimi report from 2000. They want to build on that. They see that it has brought some positive changes. It is supposed to be a comprehensive reform of the approach, the policies, and the operational stuff—the way DPKO functions. It is basically a complete overhaul.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand: I don't want to focus on several countries. Let's consider the case of Afghanistan. What is Oxfam doing in this country, what is its policy on Afghanistan and how many staff members are working there? Do you hire any Afghans as part of your programs, or are all Oxfam staff foreigners?

[*English*]

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: Mostly Afghans. We have staff. We mostly focus on humanitarian assistance, but we have some development activities. Most of our staff...in general, it's one international to ten locals. In Afghanistan it's even higher. I think we only have three internationals currently, and they engage with the United Nations and the civil-military relations committee and so on.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Mr. Harris.

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Chair.

I'm interested in Canada post-2011, so I don't really want to talk about Afghanistan right now.

You told us about how Canada was effective in Croatia, despite the inadequate mandate. You told us how the reputation of the Canadian military was very positive in this conflict situation and more respected than the local police. So Canada has some international reputation.

What I am intrigued by is the fact that Canada hasn't really participated in UN missions at all in latter years. There have now been, by some measures, 15 or 18 military operations, involving, from what I've seen here, some 84,000 troops. Canada contributes 5,500 of those and contributes about $5 million a year. In other words, we're not really participating in UN missions at all.

Given the fact that Resolution 1265 was passed by the Security Council in 1999, talking about the responsibility to protect civilians, and this work on the New Horizons project, first of all, do you know whether Canada is engaged in this New Horizons concept of trying to rebuild a peacekeeping mission and further develop the protection of civilians mandate that you say is part of all their mandates now? Is this something Canada should be considering getting more involved in after 2011, or should we continue getting involved in American projects or NATO projects outside the UN altogether—in other words, continuing down the road we're going? Or is there a sufficient or do you think there could be a sufficient enough change in the UN approach to peacekeeping to engage Canadians where Canada's effectiveness and reputation can be of significant value?

● (1235)

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: I'm not sure whether Canada is engaged with the current processes in the UN. I would assume so, but there are different levels you can engage at. So it could be at the level of one person from DFAIT occasionally contributing to discussions where I think Canada could be a leader in the New Horizons process. And I think Canada could contribute to more meaningful change within the process and we could drive the process, as opposed to leaving it to the others.

I do think that with Canada's leadership and engagement, there could be significant enough change in how the UN peace operations are managed. And with all the faults the United Nations has because of universal acceptability and the role they play, I see it as a most appropriate role to engage in. And I think Canada could be leading this process and influencing it to shape it according to its values, priorities, and so on.

Does that answer your question?

Mr. Jack Harris: Yes. It's in accord with my view, frankly, and I just wanted to see what your expression of that role would be.

So is it because of Canada's unique ability or its reputation or its values?

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: Its credibility, values—

Mr. Jack Harris: All of that comes with great—

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: The way it's seen in the world is important, because Canada is still seen as a player that doesn't really have an interest in conflict somewhere else, other than Afghanistan, I would say.

It's not only that Canadians would see the value in Canada engaging in UN peace operations reform and peace operations in general; it's that most of the international community—the nations within the United Nations—would be open to Canada shaping it and contributing to it and changing it. I think Canada has a very distinct profile within the international community.

Mr. Jack Harris: You did say earlier in your presentation that some of the leading countries in the world didn't seem to be pushing this idea of the United Nations engaging in the protection of the civilian side over there. Were you thinking of anybody in particular?

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: The support for the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the number of troops being contributed by the countries with more capacity has declined over the last ten years. It's not only Canada; it's other countries as well. It has not been so radical as Canada pulling out of the UN mission, but that has been the case.

I know that my colleagues in Europe are having conversations with European officials on the European force that's being formed and also with ministries of defence in their own countries about the importance of bringing progressive players with lots of credibility to the peace operations discussion and to the debate on the protection of civilians. That is an increasingly big problem.

Mr. Jack Harris: I take it you see the Medak Pocket, even though it was contrary to the operations, as a high point in Canada's action to protect civilians.

Ms. Mia Vukojevic: I don't know that it was a high point. They were there late. The whole village, and everything, was burnt down. But it was a principled action based on the values of protecting civilians, protecting civilian property, and so on. And once they were there, they were able to protect civilians. They did protect civilians in 1995 during Operation Storm by providing refuge within the UN barracks to those who didn't have any escape and protecting them.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

On behalf of all members, I would like to thank you for your participation, Ms. Vukojevic. I think it was very useful for all the members. Thank you for being with us today.

That will end meeting number 16. I want to thank all members. Have a nice day. Merci.

The meeting is adjourned.

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