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# **Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, October 25, 2011**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Scott Reid**



## Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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• (1310)

[Translation]

**The Chair (Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC)):** Welcome to the third meeting of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, on this day of October 25, 2011.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are studying the issue of sexual violence against women in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

[English]

We have with us a number of witnesses today. Normally I would run through correspondence received and all that sort of thing, but in the interest of time, perhaps we'll skip that.

We also have a number of motions that are in order, and those who have proposed them are within their rights to introduce them at any point in the proceedings. I'd just ask that if anybody actually wants to do something like that, in the interest of fairness to our witnesses, perhaps find out if you have support from your colleagues for the motions, and then we'll deal with any motions at the end rather than while the witnesses are ready to testify.

That being said, we have a number of witnesses from the Department of Foreign Affairs and also from CIDA. You can see their names below.

I assume you've had a chance to talk among yourselves as to who will go first. Do the DFAIT folks want to go first and then the CIDA people, or the reverse? I see nods that it's DFAIT.

Okay, why don't we begin. We normally have 10 minutes for opening—that's been our practice in the past. I'll just state the obvious, that if you take 10 minutes each, it will reduce the amount of time for questions and answers. But we'll deal with that problem as it arises.

I'm going to turn the floor over to you, please.

**Ms. Jillian Stirk (Assistant Deputy Minister, Europe, Eurasia and Africa Bureau, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Honourable members, thank you for your invitation to appear this afternoon.

Together with my colleagues from Foreign Affairs and CIDA, I welcome this opportunity to address questions you may have about issues related to sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo. But before we focus on the tragedy of sexual violence, it's useful, I think, to take a step back and look at the history of the DRC and the Great Lakes Region more broadly to provide some context.

The DRC has a history blighted by tragedy, first under colonial rule, then followed by the brutal regime of President Mobutu, who ruled for over 30 years. Regional wars, including the 1994 Rwandan genocide as well as the 1997-2003 first and second Congo wars, which involved armies from eight neighbouring countries, have undermined the social and political fabric of the region. Together these events resulted in approximately five million deaths from murder, famine, and disease. Millions were displaced, economies were devastated, governance structures collapsed, and armed groups became increasingly powerful. Corruption is a fact of life.

More recently there have been some improvements. Successive ceasefire agreements and extensive negotiations, along with the UN peacekeeping force in the DRC, MONUSCO, partly restored peace and brought greater stability to the region. In 2006, DRC's first multi-party presidential elections raised hopes for a new era of democracy. Since then, the political situation in DRC has improved. However, the security situation remains of concern.

In the lead-up to the presidential and legislative elections on November 28, 2011, DRC is facing significant challenges. Difficulties in the electoral process include logistical delays, polarization of political parties, and the limited experience of the security forces in responding to political demonstrations.

[Translation]

While peace and stability have largely spread through much of the country, the situation remains volatile and unpredictable in certain areas, and insecurity continues to prevail in eastern DRC, where armed groups wage war against each other and against the population.

Peace negotiations have led the Congolese Armed Forces to amalgamate some 50 armed groups, from various ethnic backgrounds; however, a lack of discipline and unity has meant that members of the Congolese Armed Forces are frequent violators of human rights. Although the main conflict is currently between the Congolese Armed Forces and les Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda, made up of Rwandan and other ethnic Hutus who oppose Tutsi influence in the region, other groups such as Uganda's Lord's Resistance Army exacerbate the humanitarian situation.

Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo is plagued by a vast illicit flow of arms; illegal exploitation and trade of natural resources; limited access for humanitarian workers to conflict-affected populations; and a countrywide lack of infrastructure.

The DRC has approximately 1.7 million internally displaced people, mostly in the Kivu provinces, and 450,000 Congolese are refugees in neighbouring countries. The most common cause of this displacement is armed conflict. Moreover, widespread rape and sexual violence continue and have reached epic proportions in eastern DRC. More than 15,000 people were raped in 2009 alone.

• (1315)

[English]

Sexual violence is used as a weapon of war by various armed groups, including Congolese forces. The consequences are devastating. Not only does the violence result in physical and psychological trauma, but victims are often marginalized within society. Following a rape, survivors are very often rejected and treated as outcasts by their families and are seen as objects of shame rather than victims. Sexual violence contributes to the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. The health impacts are especially serious for young girls. Victims often abandon their education. They may also be cast out of their villages and communities, with all the social and economic consequences that this entails.

Unfortunately, the Congolese state's capacity to put an end to this situation, to reform the security forces, and to enforce laws against sexual violence as well as gender inequity is limited.

Canada has been at the forefront of international efforts to combat sexual violence in eastern DRC. Canada addresses the issue by raising concerns publicly, by working through multilateral organizations such as the UN, and by providing very practical support for victims of sexual violence.

Former Governor General Michaëlle Jean, during a state visit in the DRC in April 2010, stated:

...that all forms of sexual violence to any person with the intention of destabilizing them, of breaking up a family or of making an entire people disappear are crimes against humanity and punishable by law.

...Canada condemns this violence, which it finds unacceptable, shameful and dehumanizing.

Canada is providing \$15 million between 2006 and 2011 to assist the UN, the Congolese government, and the Congolese civil society to provide services to victims such as medical care and legal support, including support for assistance with judicial cases addressing acts of sexual violence against women.

Prime Minister Harper announced in 2010 a further \$13.5 million to build the capacities of local organizations to support 11 women's

collective groups involved in combatting violence against women and girls in Burundi, the DRC, and Rwanda. My CIDA colleague will provide further details about these important projects.

Acts of sexual violence are often committed in a climate of impunity that does not deter perpetrators. Canada encourages recent efforts made to prosecute those responsible for such crimes. We've welcomed the first military court conviction in February 2011 of high-ranking officers of the Congolese forces accused of mass rape. We believe this conviction constitutes a major step in efforts to address sexual violence in the DRC.

[Translation]

To this end, Canada's commitments include funding military justice projects aimed at putting an end to the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war. The military justice sector has been identified as an area where Canadian expertise can provide value added. Through the Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force, or START, Canada is funding a project of nearly \$3 million over two years for the creation of support cells for judicial and military prosecutions in order to reinforce the ability of Congolese authorities to bring those responsible for sexual violence to justice.

As part of Canada's whole-of-government engagement on security sector reform in the DRC, another START project aims to support judiciary and penitentiary institutions in eastern provinces of the DRC. This \$2.6 million project reinforces the organizational and functional capacities of judicial institutions, including four peace courts. Other projects provide needed training tools to assist the Congolese police to respect human rights and combat sexual violence.

Canada is also engaged within the UN Stabilization Mission in the DRC, or MONUSCO. We deployed up to 12 military officers, as well as up to 6 civilian police officers. They contribute to advancing key areas of the mission's mandated work, such as strengthening the capacity of the DRC national military, judicial and correctional systems. Earlier this year, former Foreign Affairs Minister Cannon met with the special representative of the UN Secretary General Head of MONUSCO, Roger Meece, where the minister underlined that Canada deplores the ongoing sexual violence in eastern DRC, and noted our support for MONUSCO's work.

• (1320)

[English]

As part of Canada's priority to address all forms of violence against women, we've been a strong supporter of the international women, peace, and security agenda, including the fight against sexual violence. The Canadian Permanent Mission to the UN chairs and coordinates the work of the Group of Friends of Women, Peace, and Security. In October 2010 the government announced a national action plan for the full implementation of the UNSC resolutions on women, peace, and security. Also former director general of the stabilization task force, Elissa Golberg, along with departmental colleagues, made a presentation in front of this subcommittee in December 2010 to discuss the specifics of Canada's action plan.

Canada has been a leader as well on the issue of children and armed conflict since the late 1990s. Canada established and currently chairs the Group of Friends on Children and Armed Conflict, which advocates for the United Nations Security Council to take stronger measures aimed at those who commit grave violations, including sexual violence against children in conflict situations. Canada also participates in a first-of-its-kind, in-country Group of Friends on Children in Armed Conflict in the DRC.

At a regional level, Canada, as co-chair of the Group of Special Envoys and Friends, supports the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region in seeking solutions for regional stability, including the prevention of sexual violence against women, men, and children.

During my visit to Kenya earlier this year, I had an opportunity to meet with Kenya's national coordinator of the ICGLR, who expressed her appreciation for all of Canada's efforts and encouraged us to maintain our active role in combatting sexual violence. I also had the opportunity to meet with a number of NGOs that are active in promoting human rights in the Great Lakes Region. All of these NGOs underscored how developments in the region are interlinked —as are conflicts, the illegal exploitation of minerals, and sexual violence.

Canada is also addressing the causes and drivers of instability in the DRC such as conflicts over land and the illegal exploitation of minerals. For example, Canada supports mediation to help the return and reintegration of internally displaced persons and refugees. Since 2010 Canada has financed a \$1.5 million Canadian project through UN-HABITAT for a project to support land conflict mediation in eastern DRC. The project is helping to prevent local conflicts by reducing the number of cases linked to the return of IDPs and refugees. Through this contribution, Canada is now a leader among international donors in developing local mediation programs.

Canada is engaged in projects to prevent armed groups from benefiting from illegal taxation and smuggling of natural resources. Since 2009 Canada has contributed \$3 million for the fight against conflict minerals and for more transparency in the mining sector in eastern DRC through support to the International Conference on the Great Lakes regional certification mechanism, the OECD'S due diligence guidelines for responsible supply chain and natural resources management, the registration of artisanal miners, and the building of supervised trading centres.

[Translation]

Although the DRC and the region of the Great Lakes have made notable progress in terms of peace and stability in the past 10 years, a lot remains to be done. In spite of the challenges described earlier, we hope that the future electoral process will be a success leading to sustainable peace and stability, which implies protection of women's rights in the DRC and the area as a whole. Canada will continue to bring its support in order that those issues be resolved.

• (1325)

[English]

My colleagues and I look forward to taking your questions. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. That was amazing. That was exactly 10 minutes to the second. We don't normally give out awards here for this sort of thing, but if we did, you'd be in contention to be our winner for the entire season.

Ms. Hill, go ahead, please.

**Ms. Julia Hill (Acting Senior Vice-President, Geographic Programs Branch, Canadian International Development Agency):** She set a very high standard, then. I was told five to seven minutes, so we'll see how I do.

**The Chair:** Well, there's a special prize for that.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Ms. Julia Hill:** Mr. Chair and honourable members, thank you very much for your invitation to appear this afternoon.

To build on the statement by my DFAIT colleague, I'll provide a little bit more detail with respect to CIDA's current engagement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region.

It's important to note first and foremost that the problem of sexual violence is recognized not only by the international community but also by DRC's own government and its society's stakeholders. Steps are being taken to address this very serious issue.

One of the most important pledges to fight sexual violence came in 2008 when DRC President Joseph Kabila ordered a zero-tolerance policy towards the perpetrators of such acts. This declaration was followed within a year by the *Stratégie nationale de lutte contre les violences basées sur le genre* and the *Politique nationale genre*.

Both of these documents were developed by the DRC explicitly to help fight sexual violence. However, the DRC authorities remain overwhelmed. As you know, the problem is vast, and it's compounded by the size of the territory. The DRC is the size of Ontario and Quebec combined, and it has a population of nearly 74 million. The country lacks roads, which makes access extremely difficult, even for very short distances.

The police and the military have limited capacity, and the government's ability to control them over the vast territory is quite weak. There are too few properly trained, independent judiciary personnel and judges, and the state of the courts and the prisons is very poor. In this context, we are working with the DRC and with the international community with respect to prevention, to respond to lifesaving needs, to rehabilitate victims, and to help bring justice to the perpetrators of this horrific crime of sexual violence. We're doing this through a variety of projects.

My colleague mentioned briefly a couple of them.

[Translation]

The first that should be mentioned is a project for the prevention of sexual violence in the eastern provinces of North Kivu and South Kivu. The United Nations Population Fund, UNFPA, looks after the coordination of that project. CIDA contributes \$15 million dollars over five years, from 2006 to 2011. The other partners involved are UNICEF and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The project supplies medical and psychosocial support as well as socio-economic reintegration services in the two provinces. It attempts to reinforce the role of the government in terms of coordinating measures to prevent sexual violence all over the country, as well as a follow-up. Approximately 50,000 victims have had access to health care and psychosocial support and about 5,000 victims have received legal aid.

Through that project, CIDA has participated in the deliberations of the military tribunal in South Kivu, in Kalehe, where 11 army officers were tried under the charge of mass rape in the eastern region of the country. Through CIDA's financial support, in cooperation with Lawyers Without Borders, 19 very courageous women benefited from legal and judicial aid.

Canada was encouraged when the 11 high-ranked officers accused were convicted. Our contribution to the conviction of those officers is a testimony that our efforts to put an end to impunity are starting to bring about results in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

[English]

A second initiative, which was launched in 2010, was the \$13.5 million seven-year contribution agreement that was signed with the Canadian NGO, CECI, Centre d'étude et de coopération internationale, for a regional project that aims to combat violence against girls and women in the Great Lakes Region.

CECI is working with a network of local experienced women's organizations to help better protect girls and women in the DRC, Burundi, and Rwanda against the physical and psychological effects of sexual violence. This is being done through the development and implementation of treatment protocols and by working to change community attitudes and behaviour towards victims.

A third initiative, LEAP, which is the learning for equality, access, and peace project, is managed by the World Bank. CIDA is contributing \$4.3 million over two years from the years of 2011 and 2012. This project supports the integration of gender-sensitive activities into national programs for disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of ex-combatants. This was developed after an evaluation of national programs that showed that the priority for services was mostly for men. Women's specific needs as civil victims, ex-combatants, and domestic or sexual slaves certainly were not being taken into consideration. This is looking to redress the balance.

More broadly, through CIDA's international humanitarian assistance Canada is able to respond to immediate humanitarian needs of those affected by armed conflicts in the eastern DRC, including victims of sexual violence.

In 2009-10 we provided \$22 million to the UN, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and a number of Canadian NGOs.

While the majority of CIDA's efforts are focused on issues related to sexual violence, I should also mention that we are involved in a few other developmental initiatives in more stable parts of the DRC. Most notably, CIDA is actively contributing to maternal and child health in Kinshasa province, \$28 million from 2003 to 2017.

We are currently contributing \$9 million to the UNDP electoral cycle initiative in preparation for the upcoming presidential and legislative elections, and through a different mechanism we will be deploying election observers to the EU election observation mission to monitor the presidential elections in November 2008.

In conclusion, addressing sexual violence remains a high priority for CIDA. Canada's contribution in 2007, at a time when few resources and actions were directed at combatting sexual violence, is widely considered to have raised the profile of the issue internationally and to have leveraged more resources from other donors.

We're very proud to have been among the pioneers, and we are committed to continue this work with the DRC and the international community to help eradicate sexual violence.

We will also, of course, be very happy to answer any questions you may have.

• (1330)

**The Chair:** I want to give a quick clarification with regard to the presidential election. Were you referring to a future election or to the one in 2008?

**Ms. Julia Hill:** Impending, November 28.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

It is now one thirty-five. I mention that because given that we only have hour-long meetings, we theoretically have time for two rounds of questions, but I think in practice we are probably better off this time having one round of questions. This is the first time we've done questions in this Parliament. We used to have four parties. We have 25 minutes and we have three parties. That means you have a round of about eight minutes each.

We will start. The order we have down here—we voted on this last time—is the NDP, then Conservative, and then Liberals. So with that being said,

[Translation]

Ms. Pécelet, you have the floor.

**Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP):** In his report on stabilization in the DRC, the secretary general states that during the last election, 47 women were subjected to rape and other acts of sexual violence.

What will be the role of Canada during the next election? Is there a specific program put in place? What steps will be taken by Canada in order to protect women's rights?

[English]

**Ms. Jillian Stirk:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Certainly Canada is monitoring the lead-up to the elections and has been looking at ways in which we can support the orderly conduct of those elections. We know there is a risk of sexual violence if there is unrest at that time, and I would say that our efforts are not targeted specifically at the election but rather more broadly at all the instability or insecurity that takes place.

We have mentioned a number of projects that Canada has supported thus far with ongoing support. Of course, when we work with the DRC government and officials, the messages are ones in which we underline the importance of their taking the necessary steps to ensure security during the electoral period and emphasize that the safety of women and children during that time is essential, that we know there is the risk of sexual violence and encourage them to take all the steps necessary to prevent its taking place.

• (1335)

**Ms. Ève Pécelet:** My second question concerns mining companies. Should mining companies be allowed to continue their operations in conflict zones? We know that proceeds from this sort of development fuel the conflict by providing funds to the warring parties, which are then used to purchase weapons and materials. Doesn't the resulting instability further fuel the violence against women?

**Ms. Jillian Stirk:** The issue of mining in DRC, and indeed across the region, is a complex one. And certainly mining is an essential industry in the DRC and provides much-needed revenue for the population.

Canada has been largely focused on helping both DRC and other international actors develop codes of conduct to govern mining operations and ensure that mining is conducted in a way that is beneficial for the population and meets international standards—and that the profits are not used to support conflict.

It is a complex issue, and it's a question of finding the balance of not cutting off the source of revenue, which is so essential for people in developing countries, while at the same time ensuring that international standards and norms are respected.

[Translation]

**Ms. Ève Pécelet:** Armed conflicts in Africa often centre around the possession of mining resources, amongst others. In fact, in several African countries, armed groups, i.e. rebel groups opposing the state, battle it out to take possession of these resources. It is true that it gives them a certain revenue, but they are under strong pressures. A great number of conflicts in these zones are not necessarily verified. You mentioned the fact that the army and the police cannot cover these zones. It might be too dangerous for people to go there and defend women's rights.

Don't you think that this is a major problem that might be settled in another fashion?

[English]

We know that the current code of conduct...

[Translation]

No one checks to see if these organizations force people to follow the rules in this respect.

I would like to hear what you have to say on this.

[English]

**Ms. Jillian Stirk:** Mr. Chairman, perhaps I could provide some specific examples here of where Canada has made a contribution. As I mentioned, we are working to assist the DRC in improving its capacity to regulate and control production and trade of metals and minerals in some of the strategic mining areas, working with, as I mentioned, a number of bodies—the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the OECD, and others.

Through MONUSCO, Canada is contributing to a project to establish five mineral trading centres in the eastern DRC, the goal of which is to better regulate the mining that takes place there.

Of course, as I mentioned, we are an active participant and co-funder of the OECD guidelines for conflict-free minerals.

Perhaps my colleague, Madame Gervais-Vidricaire, has something she'd like to add.

• (1340)

**Mrs. Marie Gervais-Vidricaire (Director General, Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade):** If I may, I'll mention that we have a number of projects focusing especially on conflict minerals. The main one is with Partnership Africa Canada, through which we have up to \$1.7 million to help the DRC and to assist the International Conference for the Great Lakes Region's secretariat to develop the regional mineral tracking and certification mechanism of all mineral imports and exports in the DRC and within the African Great Lakes Region. It's quite an important project.

Then we have, for example, another project for \$500,000 to build a capacity for Congolese mining authorities, bringing them closer to the sites of mining production and establishing a permanent presence in the eastern DRC, in partnership with the International Organization for Migration.

There are a couple of other projects, but these are two good examples of what we're trying to achieve.

[Translation]

**Ms. Ève Pécelet:** Could you talk about the role of observers you have there if you do, and of the kind of relationship they have with the Government of Canada in order to determine where the funds go, and if it works.

**Ms. Julia Hill:** Are you talking about election observers?

**Ms. Ève Pécelet:** No. You say that Canada invests million of dollars. Who receives this money on the ground? Is it given to the government, to organizations or to Canadian observers who use it for particular purposes?

**Ms. Julia Hill:** A number of projects sponsored by CIDA that I have mentioned are financed by the World Bank or UN organizations. Directions and clear agreements are applied with respect to financial reports. Regular verifications are also done, amongst other things. These are followed very closely. I've also mentioned contribution agreements with CECI. Once again, things are managed in a very strict fashion. Verifications are done and regular reports are tabled. In short, we follow each dollar very closely.

[English]

**Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC):** On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I don't want to waste any time today because of the important nature of our conversation, but maybe at the next meeting we could take some time for some business. I think if we're going to do the time in packages, with eight minutes for each party, when we have three members here we should apportion it so that we have enough time and each individual person has some time for questions.

**The Chair:** It's a good point.

I take your point on that subject. What I'm going to do is send a memo to members of the committee with a suggestion as to how things be divided up. Maybe we could start with that as a starting point. You're quite right; the way I divided it today was not proportional.

That being said, your time hasn't started. Would you like to ask a question?

**Mr. David Sweet:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I have two questions; then I'll turn it over to my colleagues.

I want to ask whoever would like to answer, do you have an estimate of the average literacy in the DRC right now?

**Ms. Julia Hill:** I don't have it at my fingertips, but we could certainly....

**Mr. David Sweet:** The grade level, yes.

I'll tell you why. It's that on the second initiative that was mentioned, in the comments from CIDA, I believe. You're talking about three initiatives, and the second is \$13.5 million for a seven-year contribution regarding protocols on changing community behaviour. I was interested, with the significant investment we're making, in knowing just how much uptake there is when trying to deliver programs that would be at the capability of the citizenry. That was the purpose of that question.

The second question is this. I'm on the MONUSCO site right now, and the initial authorization from the United Nations for troop strength there in uniformed personnel was 19,815 in military personnel. I note that today it's down to 16,819 military personnel, so there has been a shrinkage of 3,000 military personnel on the ground. Do you know whether this is because there's a lack of resources coming out of the United Nations for MONUSCO and all the contributing partners, or is it because capacity has been built in the DRC so that they're able to look after their own security to a greater degree?

• (1345)

**Ms. Jillian Stirk:** There could be a number of reasons the personnel strength is lower than it was at the outset. Certainly there is a shortage of troops for these international missions. This is a phenomenon that we see not just in the DRC but elsewhere. There is always the pressure to be able to man at strength. Also, of course, because of troop rotation, sometimes the numbers do vary with troops moving in and out during their rotation.

I might also add, since I have the floor, that although the number of Canadian personnel there is rather small, our officers and soldiers

are generally deployed in areas where they have specific niche capabilities that many other armed forces would not be able to provide. They might be working on legal issues—for example, there are officers from the Judge Advocate General. So there are very specific niche capabilities that correspond both to Canadian interests and to the needs of the peacekeeping operation.

**Mr. David Sweet:** Thank you.

I'll let me colleagues continue from there, Mr. Chairman.

**Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC):** Thank you.

In your opening remarks, Ms. Stirk, you comment about how, historically, the eight neighbouring countries used to have an influence on the instability in the Congo. What's the status of those neighbouring countries? Are they still trying to interfere, or are they now on their own?

**Ms. Jillian Stirk:** I would say that the Great Lakes region as a whole remains an area of instability. The wars that have driven the crisis over the last few years have been brought to a halt, generally speaking, but that doesn't mean that we don't have pockets of instability, incursions across these very porous borders. I mentioned some of the groups, the Forces rwandaïses, and also the Lord's Resistance Army, that remain active in the area.

So while we've certainly advanced from the situation we were in a number of years ago when the Congo war was under way, I would say that there are certainly pockets of instability and that these activities take place across borders.

**Mr. Russ Hiebert:** Later on you made the remark that more than 15,000 people had been raped in 2009. Is that an estimate, or is that a reflection of a very strong reporting mechanism that exists within the country?

**Ms. Jillian Stirk:** Yes, Chairman, these figures come from the UN Security Council reporting. I would say that they are considered to be reliable, but I would also add that all of the reporting that takes place in this region marked by instability is perhaps not as rigorous as one might like. Nonetheless, it's considered to be a very accurate assessment of the situation.

I believe my colleague from CIDA has a comment as well.

**Ms. Julia Hill:** The statistics, as they are provided, are reliable; that is to say, that is the number that has been reported. But we know this kind of violence tends to be underreported everywhere.

Do we have a really accurate picture of the size of the problem? It's difficult to say that we have absolutely perfect numbers because we know of the phenomenon of underreporting.

**Mr. Russ Hiebert:** Right. That's what I was trying to get at. Was it trying to compensate for that phenomenon or not? And you're saying it's an accurate reporting.

The last question I have before I pass along to my colleague is this. You talk about the lack of judicial support, and I notice there's a number of projects that provide support for the police to respect human rights. We provide military officers and civilian officers to strengthen their correctional systems, but what are we doing to actually train judges and lawyers to prosecute these crimes?

•(1350)

**Ms. Jillian Stirk:** If I may, I will just provide a few examples. Canada is supporting a \$2.8 million prosecution-style project, from 2010 to 2013, which has the goal of professionalizing the military, holding the military accountable for their actions, and building a complementary capacity for crimes that fall under the Rome Statute.

Another project aims to support judicial and penal institutions in the eastern DRC. This \$2.6 million project aims to reinforce the organizational and functional capacities of justice institutions.

**Mr. Russ Hiebert:** I see it talks about the four peace courts. Are they building these courts? Are they recruiting judges and lawyers? It wasn't clear from these remarks.

**Ms. Jillian Stirk:** My understanding is that, generally speaking, we focus more on capacity building than on the actual bricks and mortar.

Perhaps you have something to add.

**Mrs. Marie Gervais-Vidricaire:** I think what my colleague just said is absolutely right. Our programs aim more at capacity building and training rather than at the actual building of prisons in the DRC.

For example, we are working to equip the Police Nationale Congolaise with multimedia training tools. We want to equip them so that they will be able to promote respect for human rights and combat sexual violence. This program has focused as well on the role of military justice, which includes the police in the fight against sexual violence and the protection and security of people.

**The Chair:** We have just one minute left in this round.

Mrs. Grewal.

**Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC):** I have a short question. Could you please tell us what success the international community has had in preventing sexual violence? Is there anything that can be built upon?

**Ms. Jillian Stirk:** We certainly see that there has been some greater understanding and appreciation for the complexity of the problem that DRC authorities are engaged in. One of the examples I gave was the trial of the military officers who had been involved in a mass rape earlier this year. We felt that was very much a turning point. This was the first time we had seen this kind of action taken, particularly at a relatively high level. Certainly, there's a greater awareness and appreciation of the problem and the need to take action. Nonetheless, as we've all described, it remains a serious problem, particularly in the DRC, and sexual violence, sadly, remains a tool of war, particularly by a number of these armed groups.

**Mrs. Marie Gervais-Vidricaire:** I would add that there's a greater capacity to prosecute as well. The government has adopted a zero-tolerance policy with regard to violations of human rights, including sexual violence by the armed forces. It doesn't mean that it's been fully implemented, but we can see a positive trend. A lot of work remains to be done.

**The Chair:** It's time now to go to the third party. Professor Cotler.

**Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

This first question is to Jillian Stirk, but anyone can answer. You referred to the upcoming presidential and legislative elections and also some of the problems attending them—logistical delays, etc. I met with one of the presidential candidates in the upcoming election, Guillaume Ngefa-Antondoko. He has expressed concern about the security threats to members like himself from opposition parties—and, indeed, the targeting of opposition candidates—harassment, and the like.

You mentioned your concern about the orderly conduct regarding the elections. His specific concern and question was whether Canada could somehow help protect the security of people like himself who are candidates for the presidential election. Otherwise, the whole question of a free and fair election is comprised because of security threats.

•(1355)

**Ms. Jillian Stirk:** Indeed, we are quite concerned about the security situation and the potential for violence in the lead-up to the forthcoming presidential elections. We very much look to MONUSCO, I would say, to provide security during this period. Part of their role will be to provide the logistical, technical, and security support for the conduct of the election. Certainly, we have been delivering clear messages to the DRC government about the importance of conducting the election in a free and fair manner and ensuring that all candidates have the opportunity to participate in an open and transparent way.

**Hon. Irwin Cotler:** Thank you.

I'm going to move to another question, also referring to your testimony, Ms. Stirk, and I want to commend you for the range of involvements with regard to the issues of sexual violence.

As your own brief acknowledges, “widespread rape and sexual violence continue and have reached epic proportions in eastern DRC”, and the consequences, as you acknowledge, are devastating.

My question is that in addition to those particular initiatives with which Canada is now engaged, are there other specific initiatives you might recommend we could be involved with or initiate in order to help combat this devastation to human life, as you put it, by “epic proportions” of mass sexual assault?

**Ms. Jillian Stirk:** Indeed, it's a very troubling issue, and one for which I think there is no straightforward answer.

I would suggest that part of the question is that it's a larger regional problem. Much of this is rooted in the history, particularly in the recent history of conflict, and some of the answers will lie in bringing peace and stability to the broader region.

In terms of what Canada can do, we've worked through multilateral institutions; I've mentioned some of the work we've been doing with the UN and with the ICGLR. I think being able to have those multilateral approaches remains very important in terms of having an impact on the ground.

Likewise, we work closely with a number of our closest allies and partners there. And then of course we have the various projects we have mentioned. We're constantly reviewing to see what other avenues we might pursue and where our assistance would be most useful.

Perhaps my colleagues have something they'd like to add.

**Ms. Marie Gervais-Vidricaire:** I would add that the advocacy side of this issue remains very important. It was mentioned in our statement that Canada has greatly contributed to raising awareness about what's going on there. Other countries, other partners, are also concerned and they are doing initiatives similar to ours.

I think we have to keep the pressure on, and we have to continue to bring up this issue and encourage our partners not to forget about it as well. Canada cannot do everything on its own. Obviously we work with others—we work with the UN. But beyond the money we can invest, I think the advocacy side remains very important.

**Ms. Julia Hill:** If I may add to that, Mr. Chair, I think we need to remember this is a long-term problem. These are social fabrics that are very, very badly frayed; child soldiers who were obliged to rape members of their own family....

The social values in certain parts are so damaged that it is going to take generations to repair. We have to have the patience to stay with it for the long term.

**Hon. Irwin Cotler:** I'm sorry to move to different topics, but I would like some follow-up questions, and I just want to get to this third issue.

In April 2010, Canada announced a welcomed contribution to the G-8 initiative on maternal and child health, but regrettably it didn't include programs with regard to access to safe abortions. If one looks at the evidence in that regard, programs that give women and girls access to a full range of family planning—let me put it that way—and obstetric care options are the most effective at reducing preventable maternal deaths and childbirth injuries.

Is there a recommendation for a policy to be put in place to remove the restrictions with respect to this financial contribution so we can provide greater obstetric options, family planning, and protect against maternal deaths and childbirth injuries?

• (1400)

**Ms. Julia Hill:** Canada is very proud of the leadership role it played with respect to MNCH, and there are of course a whole range of issues and approaches to MNCH.

We are quite confident that we have a well-considered approach to the issue, in partnership with other countries. As you know, it's a multilateral kind of initiative because other countries have come on board.

Everyone brings to the table that which they judge to be the most appropriate and the most effective in their circumstances. The maternal, newborn and child health initiative in Kinshasa province, for example, deals with women and children in a more stable environment but also tries to develop models and examples for the rest of the country.

Thank you for the question on MNCH. We think it's a very solid initiative.

**Hon. Irwin Cotler:** No, I commend the initiative. That's what I began by saying. I commend the initiative. I think it was an important initiative, and I think it was responded to with overall praise.

But there has been concern with respect to the programming restrictions in matters related to sex education and the like, which, if funded, would help to secure the very objectives that Canada itself is putting forward. That's my whole point. In order to better secure your objectives, remove certain restrictions on funding.

**The Chair:** That actually was the end of the available time.

Is there a very quick answer you could provide to that?

**Ms. Julia Hill:** I would simply say that it's an international initiative, so there is a full range of services available and projects available. I think all of the bases are covered.

**The Chair:** I wonder if the committee would indulge me very briefly and let me ask one of the suggested questions our analysts had put forward for the committee members to ask. Seeing as nobody else raised it, maybe I could do that.

Some of the witnesses we had before the subcommittee in the previous Parliament, when we were looking at the question of violence toward women in areas of conflict, indicated that in the DRC some local non-governmental organizations are beginning to mistrust some of the international agencies. They feel that the agencies aren't responding to their needs. I wonder if you could comment on that.

In particular, Ms. Stirk, I wonder if you could explain whether and how CIDA is ensuring that the programs it's funding are not dismissing the views of people who have such concerns.

**Ms. Julia Hill:** With respect, Mr. Chair, if it's CIDA, it's Hill. If it's Foreign Affairs, it's Stirk.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, I.... It's dyslexia.

**Ms. Julia Hill:** That's okay. Thank you.

I did read that in the previous transcripts. We are not aware of that concern. The one initiative that I mentioned....

Actually, this gives me an opportunity to come back a little bit to the question from the honourable member for Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale on the education levels.

With regard to the work we are funding through CECI, our Canadian NGO, CECI works directly with these eleven women's organizations. They are from DRC. They are *congolaises*. They develop the programs. So it's empowering or supporting these organizations, and it's these organizations that determine really what their needs are and how best to address those needs.

In this respect, the role of CECI is really to support them to bring in any technology or any ideas they may have learned from elsewhere to help move this forward. But it's very much in the hands of these *congolaises* women.

To my knowledge, I cannot think of CECI ever having been viewed with mistrust by any NGOs. In the broader world, I'm not aware of any examples.

So I can neither support nor refute that statement.

**The Chair:** Yes, Mr. Sweet.

•(1405)

**Mr. David Sweet:** On that point, if I may, those eleven organizations are indigenous to the DRC?

**Ms. Julia Hill:** Yes.

**Mr. David Sweet:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** All right. Thank you very much.

Thanks for the indulgence of the committee in letting me ask that question.

I will send out the memo, as I mentioned, regarding times for interventions.

As well, our clerk may have already distributed, or perhaps is about to distribute, the minutes from previous meetings in the last Parliament, the evidence that was submitted relating to the DRC. So that will be coming around.

As a final note, on Thursday we had a request from Mr. Marston—I thought it was a good request, but I want to confirm that the committee agrees—that we invite Desire Kilolwa relating to today's subject. He would be testifying as a witness with a bit of a ground-view perspective. I believe the information relating to that was sent by Mr. Marston to everybody.

Does it seem acceptable to the group that we do that?

Is that a “yes”, Mr. Cotler, or is that an “I want to comment”?

**Hon. Irwin Cotler:** It's a yes. I've met with the people, and I support it.

**The Chair:** All right. Good.

In that case, we are adjourned. Thank you very much.

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