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Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

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• (1215)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)): Good afternoon, everyone.

Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), we're here to talk about the main estimates for 2015-16. Welcome to our witnesses.

Before we have our opening statements, I want to recognize our colleagues from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development. We have Daniel Jean, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. Welcome, sir. We're glad to have you here for the first time before a committee.

We have Malcolm Brown, Deputy Minister of International Development. Welcome, sir. We're glad to have you.

We also have Arun Thangaraj, acting assistant deputy minister and chief financial officer. I know you've been with us before. Thank you very much for being here.

We'll start our opening statements with Minister Nicholson. Then we'll go to Minister Paradis and Minister Yelich.

After your opening statements, we will go around the room for questions back and forth. We're scheduled to meet until 1:30. At about 1:25 I will cut it off, because we have just a tiny bit of committee business that we need to deal with. It's not a lot, but it's still something that we need to deal with to give direction before the break.

Minister Nicholson, Minister of Foreign Affairs, welcome. We'll start with your opening statement, sir. Then we'll go through the other opening statements and get right to questions.

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Foreign Affairs): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I am pleased to be joined by my colleagues, the Honourable Christian Paradis, Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, and the Honourable Lynne Yelich, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Consular.

We have seen important progress towards policy coherence since the 2013 amalgamation of the three key functions of our department: diplomacy, trade, and development. We've also seen the growing complexity of today's geopolitical landscape. Threats to international security are taking on many different forms. Insurgency and asymmetric warfare waged by ISIL and its affiliates is one example. Iran's sponsorship of Shia sectarian militias and proxies, like

Hezbollah, is another. Of course, Russia's hybrid warfare in eastern Europe is yet another example among many.

As a result, the amalgamation is now allowing foreign service officers to advance Canadian values and interests on files with unparalleled complexity, using a wide range of knowledge that they didn't have access to before, delivering better results for Canadians. The need for this kind of effective policy and program coherence is most evident in the Middle East, where many of our latest security challenges are concentrated. In recent months the world has seen the rapid growth of violent extremist groups, including the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. In Syria and Iraq, this has led to the largest humanitarian catastrophe of this century.

Although these threats stem from far abroad, they are felt here at home. Recent terrorist-inspired or terrorist-led attacks here in Canada and abroad remind us of the truly global threat of terrorism. They've carried out attacks on Canadian soil that claimed the lives of two of our Canadian Armed Forces personnel.

Canada has responded to this crisis with strength and compassion. We are working to halt ISIL's advance and assist vulnerable populations. With our allies in the global coalition against ISIL, Canada is pursuing five lines of effort: one, military assistance; two, humanitarian support; three, stemming the flow of foreign fighters; four, disrupting ISIL's financing; and finally, countering ISIL's depraved ideology. Iraq and Syria exist along the fault line of a broader sectarian war being waged across the region.

We also have grave concern that Russia's illegal invasion of Crimea and its destabilization of eastern Ukraine through hybrid warfare are stark reminders that traditional security threats have not disappeared. Canada will never recognize the illegal annexation of Crimea. We will continue to stand against Russian aggression as long as the Russian-sponsored insurgency continues.

[Translation]

Canada actively supports the Ukraine's democratic integration into Europe, as well as a potential integration with Europe security-wise.

[English]

We have imposed a broad range of sanctions against more than 270 Russian and Ukrainian individuals and entities. We will do more as long as pro-Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine continue to violate the February Minsk agreement.

Beyond sanctions, Canada has provided non-lethal assistance to Ukraine. Canada has provided radar images to help Ukrainian forces monitor their border. Canada is supporting the OSCE special monitoring mission to monitor, track, and ultimately hold Russian aggression in Ukraine to account. Canada is providing bilateral development assistance to strengthen democracy and promote economic growth. Since January 2014, development assistance has gone up by more than \$132 million.

All of these measures are integral to Canada's ongoing assistance to Ukraine's efforts to stabilize its new government, restart its economy, and re-establish its territorial integrity in the face of escalating Russian aggression.

When Prime Minister Harper welcomed Ukraine President Petro Poroshenko to Canada last September, they discussed the steps needed to restore Ukraine's territorial integrity and ensure the country's sovereignty in light of Russia's occupation of Crimea and its continued military aggression in eastern Ukraine. The Prime Minister also announced a \$200-million loan to promote economic and financial sector reforms in Ukraine. This loan was followed by a second \$200-million loan in January 2015. The more we can integrate Ukraine with the market-based economies of the world, the better the chance for Ukrainians to chart their own sovereign future.

Colleagues, support for Israel, especially its right to live in peace and security with its neighbours, has remained central to the core of our government's Middle East policy. We will not hesitate to speak out against those who seek to delegitimize Israel and to isolate it internationally. Israel has the right to defend itself. By itself, and in order for peace to be a possibility, the Palestinian Authority's unity government must recognize the State of Israel in order for a comprehensive peace solution to be reached.

• (1220)

[Translation]

Canada is committed to strengthening its ties with Israel through a strategic agreement, reaffirming that commitment just a few months ago.

[English]

Canada continues to advocate for the resumption of direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians as the only viable path to a two-state solution.

Canada's security is inextricably linked to our principled leadership and defence of our values. Free, open, and democratic societies that respect human rights and the rule of law are constructive and effective partners in the promotion of security and prosperity. As the Prime Minister has announced, Canada is poised to welcome Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the first official bilateral visit in over 40 years. This can transform the Canada-India partnership towards mutual prosperity and the security of both our countries.

My department's commitment includes broad international engagement to support human rights and the dignity of all persons, including the freedom of religion. The Office of Religious Freedom has set the global standard for advocating for religious freedom, and

is establishing a global contact group to strengthen religious freedom.

Freedom of religion and conscience is under attack all over the world. The recent and tragic attacks against Jewish communities in France and Denmark only highlight the importance of continuing to denounce anti-Semitism and other forms of religious intolerance while promoting Canada's values of pluralism and tolerance.

The 2015-16 estimates before you will place the department on sound footing to deepen and widen Canada's horizons. Our department is committed to being fully integrated and aligned in order to advance Canada's interests and values. The men and women who serve in our foreign service abroad must feel confident that they have the tools, knowledge base, and responsibility they need to assure our future prosperity as a country, to keep Canadians safe at home and abroad, and to promote freedom and democracy overseas.

We will continue to build and leverage our relationships based on shared values that also advance prosperity, security, democracy, and the rule of law in the world.

I look forward to discussing these issues further with you.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

We're now going to turn it over to Christian Paradis, Minister for International Development and Minister for La Francophonie.

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of International Development and Minister for La Francophonie): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and colleagues. It's a pleasure to be here today.

I'm proud of the development work undertaken by our department, and I'd like to tell you about some elements of that effort that are particularly important to me.

With no surprise, you all know that saving the lives of mothers and children remains Canada's top international development priority. In 2010, Prime Minister Harper drew the world's attention to the plight of women and children. Our contribution to the Muskoka initiative has led to some impressive results on maternal, newborn, and child health. For example, with Canada's support, the micronutrient initiative programs have ensured that an average of more than 180 million children receive two doses of vitamin A each year, a key nutritional element important for healthy development, immunity, and eyesight. As well, Canada's support for Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, contributed to the immunization of an additional 145 million children between 2010 and 2013, preventing two million deaths.

At the Francophonie summit, the Prime Minister announced an enormously important contribution that will help with the immunization of an additional 300 million children, with the aim of saving up to six million lives.

By working with our partners, Canada has increased access to water and sanitation for more than 860,000 people, 80% of whom are women and children. We should all be proud of the difference we have made in the lives of the most vulnerable around the world.

• (1225)

[Translation]

It is also very clear to everyone that official development assistance, or ODA, is not enough to reach our objectives. We are seeing new opportunities for the public and private sectors to work together to mobilize investment, reduce poverty and promote prosperity.

Emerging economies are increasingly seeking private investment to create jobs, spur sustainable growth and generate revenue to pay for public services. Donors like our department can play a critical role in reducing barriers to private investments. But we do not possess all of the required resources or expertise. Canada has already seen great success with this model, and has helped mobilize more private investment in emerging and developing economies.

Canada is also looking to expand our own development finance toolkit to promote more of these opportunities in the future. For example, we are playing a leadership role in the Redesigning Development Finance Initiative of the World Economic Forum and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, to combine the skills, knowledge and resources of public and private investors to expand opportunities in emerging and frontier markets.

Canada is also exploring the merits of new mechanisms to provide financial solutions for viable business ventures with a high-development impact.

Going forward, development will increasingly be about leveraging new resources to solve fundamental challenges facing people living in poverty. Another way that Canada can address those challenges is to leverage our roles in key international institutions.

For me, La Francophonie has been a very important venue to promote development goals, as well as Canadian foreign policy priorities. Canada is proud of its recent accomplishments within La Francophonie. Canada's role and achievement in 2014 made that year particularly significant.

At the Dakar summit in Senegal last November, Canada's former Governor General Michaëlle Jean was named Secretary General of La Francophonie. We are confident that Ms. Jean will bring La Francophonie into the 21st century and advance its values and missions to build a more just, prosperous and peaceful world.

Moreover, Canada left its mark on the documents adopted at the Dakar summit, from the Dakar declaration, with its references to combatting the Ebola virus and child, early and forced marriage; to the Resolution on Maternal, Newborn and Child Health; and the economic strategy—all of which are key to the future of La Francophonie.

Canada plans to continue exercising its leadership on a number of major issues and playing an active role in the development of La Francophonie. Canadians can be proud of this kind of leadership in driving positive change.

• (1230)

[English]

Canada and Canadians can be proud of how Canada has answered the call to help those in need. In 2013-14 Canada responded with its

largest contribution ever to humanitarian assistance, providing its partners with \$857 million to respond to the unprecedented amount of humanitarian need. This represents a 62% increase over the previous year and included funding for such troubled areas as Iraq, Syria, the Philippines, Ukraine, the Central African Republic, and South Sudan. Of course, committee members will also recall Canada's leadership and our timely and effective response to the Ebola crisis affecting portions of West Africa.

Mr. Chair, I feel it's important, given the timing of this appearance, to reassure committee members that with respect to Canada's mission to combat the threat of ISIL, my department is indeed committed to continuing efforts to assist those directly affected. Canada has been at the forefront of the international response to the crisis in Iraq, as well as in Syria and the surrounding area, since the beginning of each crisis. We will remain at the forefront.

Those are only a few elements of the work undertaken by our department on behalf of Canadians.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Paradis.

Now we're going to turn it over to Minister Lynne Yelich, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Consular.

Hon. Lynne Yelich (Minister of State (Foreign Affairs and Consular)): Thank you.

As Canada's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Consular, I am pleased to join Ministers Nicholson and Paradis today to provide an update to the standing committee on the past year.

We have 179 missions abroad, 260 points of service, and more than 9,700 Canadian and locally engaged staff around the world and at headquarters. Our government stands ready to provide the best possible consular assistance to all Canadians abroad. The mission network is a vital part of our government's role in providing support to Canadians abroad requiring emergency assistance.

We are also engaged in a wide range of bilateral and multilateral relationships that can be leveraged in pursuit of international policy objectives. We've already heard from both ministers that our government is actively pursuing Canada's interests in a dynamic global environment. I'm honoured that my role as minister of state allows me to support these global priorities. I've had the honour to support Minister Fast through the promotion of our global markets action plan, and I'm working hard to help advance Canada's international trade objectives and the creation of jobs at home.

On the development side, I've had a number of opportunities to support Minister Paradis' efforts to advance global issues. These efforts are related to maternal, newborn, and child health, as well as providing education for children and youth in Afghanistan, and improving economic development among Afghan women.

As minister responsible for consular affairs, I would like to share with you some of the hard work that we are undertaking at consular affairs. First, let me highlight that Canadians are a travelling bunch. Canadians have made more than 61 million visits abroad, including over 14 million visits to countries other than the United States, and it's estimated that another 2.8 million Canadians reside outside of Canada. To respond to this demand our Prime Minister created the first ever minister for consular affairs. The creation of my role demonstrates the importance that our government places on assisting Canadians when they choose to leave our borders.

While most trips go off without a hitch, when Canadians find themselves in distress and need to reach us, Canada's team of dedicated consular officials is there to provide assistance. Our government created an emergency watch and response centre to respond to the growing number of international crises and requests for consular assistance. The centre works 24-7, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

I must stress, however, that it is first and foremost the responsibility of the traveller to make an informed travel decision. It is extremely important that before going anywhere, Canadians read up on the country they are visiting. Through travel.gc.ca we provide timely advice on everything needed to make smart travel choices. We also provide guidance on important issues that Canadians seem to forget in the excitement of their well-deserved vacation.

For example, we've been emphasizing the importance of obtaining travel health insurance before you travel. We recently launched a fact sheet full of important travel insurance tips, called "Say Yes to Travel Insurance!", which is available in downloadable formats on the travel.gc.ca website. It is amazing how many Canadians don't think they need travel health insurance and are unpleasantly surprised when they're hit with a hefty medical bill when they become ill.

In 2014 the EWRC responded to approximately 15 major emergencies worldwide and managed over 2,500 emergency consular files. To deal with these situations our government created the standing rapid deployment team. This group of highly trained employees, who are deployed to work alongside Canada's missions abroad, help provide critical services to Canadians during emergencies. For example, in 2014 the SRDT was deployed to help respond to Kiev in February, and to Gaza for the assisted departure of Canadians in July.

The nature of international travel is changing and so too is our approach to consular services. In August of 2014 I unveiled the 21st century consular plan. That's our government's platform to modernize Canada's approach to consular services so that we can focus our attention on helping those who truly need it most, offer assistance more efficiently, and better educate Canadians on how to make smart travel decisions with the goal of reducing consular issues before they arise.

•(1235)

The plan has been oriented around four key initiatives. First is a focus on children. The vulnerable children's consular unit was created in the fall of 2013 to bring together policy and case management expertise. The unit improves our ability to respond to

consular issues involving Canadian children. Through the creation of this unit, Canada is taking a leading role in finding new ways to assist in cases of international children abduction, including abduction prevention, as well as taking a leading role on emerging issues such as child, early, and forced marriage.

Our second initiative is targeted outreach. Many Canadians are unprepared for the realities of international travel and may have an unrealistic expectation of the services our government offers abroad. Innovative partnerships and technologies are being leveraged on an ongoing basis to reach out to Canadians, along with more traditional public awareness campaigns, such as the one on the need to purchase travel health insurance.

Our third initiative is going digital. This initiative will improve online resources for a routine service request so that Canadians can better rely on current technology. As well, we are enhancing the Travel Smart app so that travellers can readily access essential information on the go.

The last key initiative is strengthening our response network. With Canadians travelling to more remote areas, having the right people in the right places will allow citizens to get help when they need it. We are doing this by implementing regional delivery models, enhancing Canada's standing rapid deployment team response capability, and building on partnerships with other foreign offices. We want to empower travelling Canadians to help themselves in order to reduce the number of routine demands on missions. This will allow us to focus resources on complex consular cases.

Dear colleagues, allow me to remind you as always that the Privacy Act limits how much information we can give publicly on any individual case.

Thank you.

Merci.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister Yelich.

We'll proceed in our customary fashion and start with Mr. Dewar from the NDP.

You have the floor for seven minutes, sir.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): My question is directed to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. I say that because, with respect, I want to make sure that he understands the need for him to answer this question and not his colleague.

We know Mohamed Fahmy is stuck in legal limbo in Egypt. He's free but not free. Right now he's obviously not in jail, but he's not able to come back home as the minister knows. He surrendered his Egyptian passport because he was asked to do that so he could be deported to Canada, but now the Egyptian authorities have lost his Canadian passport. That is now established; there's no question about it. I have all the documents here, and I'm sure the minister has access to them as well.

The passport is the standard basis of identification in Egypt, and Mr. Fahmy needs a passport. It's not just to travel within Egypt—which he's allowed to do—or to rent a car, or even to get an apartment, but also to marry. He's been trying to get married to his fiancée and he needs a passport to apply to do that. The government took three months to send Mr. Fahmy a letter rejecting his application for a new passport even though the Egyptian prosecutor and the police say his old one is lost, which is one of the issues, they claim.

We know that the passport order in the legislation gives the government authority to grant a passport in this case. So this is a very straightforward question for the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Fahmy is a Canadian citizen, as you know. He's entitled to a passport. Why haven't you granted him one—or will you?

• (1240)

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Mr. Chairman, as you know, Canada has continued to call for Mr. Fahmy's immediate and full release. The prospect of his continuing to stand trial is unacceptable. So we advocate for Mr. Fahmy to receive the same treatment that other foreign nationals receive.

That being said, my colleague, who has direct responsibility for this, may want to make an additional comment, but my understanding is that when Mr. Fahmy is able to travel, the proper documents will be available to him.

That being said, we have raised this matter at the highest levels with the Egyptian government, and we'll continue to focus on it as well.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Thank you, Minister. I mean no disrespect to Ms. Yelich, because we've already talked about this. There have been questions in the House, and I've heard the government's response.

But I need to ask the Minister of Foreign Affairs whether he is aware that, under the passport order, right now he has the authority under the act—as the government does, the Governor in Council—to issue a passport to Mr. Fahmy today. Is he aware that he has the power to do that—yes, or no?

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Mr. Chair, we have indicated that we are on top of this file, and we'll continue to make it a priority.

As my colleague has already indicated, I believe, on two successive days in question period in the House of Commons, travel documents will be made available when Mr. Fahmy has the—

Mr. Paul Dewar: That's not the question.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: —ability to travel. So

Mr. Paul Dewar: That's not the question.

Mr. Chair—

Hon. Lynne Yelich: Mr. Chair—

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Chair, I'm actually not asking my question of Ms. Yelich; I'm asking my question of the minister.

Is he aware, under the act, that he and his government have the power to issue a passport? Does he know his actual powers within his office and within his government? It's a very straightforward question.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: We know all the authorities and the powers that we have as government, and I have complete confidence in my colleague—

Mr. Paul Dewar: Why aren't you using them?

Hon. Rob Nicholson: —and she may wish to comment.

Mr. Paul Dewar: My question is for the Minister of Foreign Affairs. I'm asking him a very straightforward question.

Is he aware that he has the power to actually issue Mr. Fahmy a passport? If he doesn't know that, he should. I have the act and the citations here for him. If he's not willing to do that.... Why can't he give Mr. Fahmy, a Canadian citizen, a passport? Mr. Fahmy just wants to get married. He wants to be able to rent an apartment. These are very basic needs. The minister is the only one who's blocking that.

Why won't he give him a passport?

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Mr. Chairman, I can inform the honourable member that it's actually the Minister of Immigration who puts out passports.

Mr. Paul Dewar: It's your government, sir, and you have a chance to do that.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: That being said, when I made inquiries, he said that he was the one who issues passports in Canada.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Why is it so hard?

Hon. Rob Nicholson: That being said, Minister Alexander is the Minister of Immigration—

Mr. Paul Dewar: Will you talk to Minister Alexander to issue a passport?

Hon. Rob Nicholson: —and he has that power and that responsibility.

Certainly, when we looked into this, I was very pleased to hear the comments of my colleague—

Mr. Paul Dewar: But you were completely—

Hon. Rob Nicholson: —who indicated that travel documents will be made available—

Mr. Paul Dewar: No, it's not the issue.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: —to this individual when the time comes.

I listened very politely, but I did have to make that very clear, Mr. Chairman. It's the Minister of Immigration.

Mr. Paul Dewar: It's up to the government.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: It's not out of my office that we produce those. Again, I have complete confidence in him.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I'm sorry.

Mr. Chair, he's ragging the puck. I know what he's doing.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: I'm very pleased about the comments made by my colleague in the last two days in the House of Commons.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I have a very direct question.

The government is now saying it will not issue a passport, as per its powers, to Mr. Fahmy. It's incredible. It's astonishing, Mr. Chair. This government not only has left Mr. Fahmy abandoned in Egypt but it also won't even grant him the basic identification he needs to rent an apartment or to get married. The only thing stopping Mr. Fahmy from being able to travel within Egypt, as is his right, or rent an apartment or get married—

Mr. Nicholson, you're married. I'm married. You remember what it was like. You had to go to officials and provide documents. Why aren't you allowing Mr. Fahmy to get married? Don't give me this "It's Mr. Alexander". You know that this has been in front of you. Your government took a month to send erroneous information back to Mr. Fahmy to say he is not able to get a passport from your government.

• (1245)

Hon. Lynne Yelich: Mr. Chair, could I answer this?

Mr. Paul Dewar: Is that the standard of service that this government is giving to Canadians abroad? If it is, then you're incompetent, sir.

The Chair: Mr. Dewar—

Mr. Paul Dewar: Well, he is.

The one thing you should be able to give Mr. Fahmy.... If you can't provide a passport to a Canadian and you have the powers to do so, then it is a matter of incompetence and it is disgraceful.

The Chair: That's all the time we have.

We're going to move over to the second round.

Mr. Trottier, go ahead for seven minutes.

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

I'd like to thank the minister for joining us today.

[English]

The purpose of today's meeting is actually for the crown to present its request to Parliament to spend money. That's what is actually being discussed today. We as parliamentarians, on behalf of Canadian taxpayers in particular, want to ensure that Canadians are getting value for their money. Some members wish the crown would spend more within the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development. Some members might feel that the department should be spending less.

Through your main estimates and your report on plans and priorities, you presented your prioritized spending plans. I note several things in there, especially in the RPP. In the budgetary planning summary, I see some reductions in spending in most of the program areas, in keeping with our government's effort to reduce the deficit. I see increased estimates in support of international commerce in particular. I see spending at about the same levels in international development and international humanitarian assistance. Of course, some priorities and events, such as typhoon relief or earthquake relief, are inherently difficult for Foreign Affairs to

predict. Another event that was very difficult for us to predict was the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant.

Minister Nicholson, could you expand on some of your comments earlier about the atrocities that ISIL is carrying out on ethnic minorities? Why is it so important that Canada fight to stop these horrors from being committed? Also, do you feel there's enough in your estimates to rise to these challenges?

Hon. Rob Nicholson: I think there certainly is, Mr. Chair, and, as you can see, the budget for the department has risen. I'm very pleased about that and all the different areas that we have become involved with and all the areas to which we contribute.

You made specific reference with respect to ISIL, the jihadi terrorists. We have made that a priority. That's a priority for our government. This group is a threat to Canada. It's a threat to the region. That's why we are there assisting in Iraq. We've expanded the mission to Syria because we are not going to give this organization, this terrorist group, free rein to move in and out of Iraq, so we're joining with our coalition partners.

The list of atrocities committed by that group is astounding. I don't know if the world has ever seen anything quite like this before. Unlike some parties, some individuals, who want to stand on the sideline, we are a country where that has never been the Canadian way. We stand up for what is right in this world, and that is what we are doing with the extension of this mission. This is what we are doing in our assistance for Ukraine. This is what Canadians can count on their government to do, that when they see such atrocities committed, they can expect this government to stand up and take action about it.

We have a joint responsibility with our coalition partners, but we should make no mistake: this organization directly targets Canada. We know that. We know of the threat, we will stand up to that threat, and we will do what is right.

The Chair: Mr. Goldring.

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for appearing here today, Ministers and gentlemen.

My question is for Minister Yelich. The deep freeze has ended and summer is rapidly approaching. Students are finishing up their exams soon, and many of them will be looking to be doing some international travelling. What consular advice can you share with us to ensure safer travel for our constituents?

Hon. Lynne Yelich: Thank you. I do have some information to share.

I also spoke earlier about the importance of my job as Minister of State for Consular Affairs. The consular issues are my issues. I would like the committee to understand that it is my responsibility to answer Mr. Dewar's question on Mr. Fahmy. We have done a lot for Mr. Fahmy, as he well knows. I do think that he should understand that his questions should be directed to me, as yours should be directed.

We have three Rs when it comes to travel.

First of all, we want people to read up. Our government has revamped the travel.gc.ca web page so that it's a one-stop-shop educational resource for the Canadian traveller, featuring an up-to-date informative travel advisory mobile device while on the go. I can't stress how important it is to ensure that people who are travelling have valid travel insurance before going anywhere, regardless of where they are travelling to or from. I want to encourage all of you to promote this website to ensure that people see that there is valuable information available for all Canadians who are travelling so they can avoid situations and be aware of some of the advisories that we are posting.

I would also like to encourage young people to register when they are travelling. We do have registration. We encourage travellers to use the registration of Canadians abroad service. It's called ROCA. It's free. It's a critical tool to allow contact of Canadians during an emergency so we know where the Canadians are. It only takes a few minutes to complete for wherever you're going. It is quick, confidential, and mobile-friendly. As I said earlier, people are travelling to many different and remote areas around the world, and in the event there is a tragedy or a crisis, we will be able to reach those who might be in these serious situations.

Finally, "reaching" us is our third R. We want you to know that there are consular services offered to Canadians, as I said, 24-7. That's 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, by phone, by email, and by social media. Canadians can call collect from anywhere in the world when they need assistance from us.

Again, this information and more on travel can be found at travel.gc.ca. I'm wishing that Canadians do enjoy their summer travel and read up on their excursions.

● (1250)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Garneau, you have seven minutes, sir.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

My questions will be about the department's expenditures.

In last year's *Public Accounts of Canada*, some \$345 million was approved but not spent. Could you please tell us why that money wasn't spent?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Thank you very much.

Overall you will see that the department's spending and budget are up. Some of the money was not spent because of the timing. Some of it was spent the year before. We're not losing any of the money. Some of it, for instance, wasn't spent on the chancery, for instance, in Moscow. That was a fairly big sum. It wasn't spent, but nonetheless it's not lost. It will continue on in the future.

Overall, as you can see, and I'm sure you're very pleased to see, the Foreign Affairs budget has gone up, and that will continue.

Mr. Marc Garneau: Thank you.

I recall that when I was president of the Canadian Space Agency, Treasury Board would check very carefully at the end of the year how I had spent my money. They always had questions, not only if I overspent, which I didn't, but also if I underspent, and the reasons for it.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: I suppose they'd be more upset if you overspent than underspent. I'm just guessing, but....

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Marc Garneau: If it were for no good reason, yes.

On page 26 of the RPP, there's reference to the international security and democratic development program, which I'm sure you know. That program's funding will decline by about 40% between 2015-16 and 2017-18. In other words, it will go from about \$377 million down to \$229 million.

Now, that program, amongst other things, for the benefit of everyone, "supports democracy through projects that work with partners to promote participation in political processes, enhance respect for human rights, strengthen the rule of law, and support the emergence of effective and accountable democratic institutions".

My question, very simply, is why the decrease?

● (1255)

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Again, the funding approved by the Treasury Board in December 2014, which provided funding of \$127 million in 2014 and \$130 million in 2015, was for task force operations to conduct international assistance and to prevent and respond to crises or provide stabilization. We recognize the importance of security, democracy, and the rule of law. Without security, obviously stability and peace cannot take root.

Again, all of the money for the stabilization and reconstruction fund is an increase of \$130 million, and we of course are supportive of that.

Mr. Marc Garneau: With what's going on in Iraq and Ukraine, one would think that a program such as this would be the kind of program that could help to build democracy in those countries. I'm surprised to see that the moneys are actually decreasing.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Again, our assistance for both Ukraine and Iraq, as you have seen over the last couple of years, has continued to increase. The situation with respect to Syria is that we are the sixth-largest contributor. With respect to Iraq, we're the fifth-largest contributor. We believe our military efforts have to go hand in hand with our other assistance.

I think an analysis, which I'm sure the committee will do, of what we are doing and the loans we have made...are all steps in the right direction.

Mr. Marc Garneau: Have moneys specifically been targeted under international security and democratic development for building democratic institutions or assisting with it in Iraq?

Hon. Rob Nicholson: They're certainly a part of that. The stabilization and reconstruction task force and the global peace and security fund do exactly that. They work with individuals and organizations to help build the infrastructure that will be necessary for the long term. I'm sure this has the support of everyone. We have been very clear, as you know, Monsieur Garneau, that it can't be just a military operation. These have to go hand in hand. That's exactly what we have been doing on that, and that will continue.

Mr. Marc Garneau: Well, again, I understand the purpose of it, but you haven't answered my question. Has money been earmarked for Iraq specifically to help with institution-building?

Hon. Rob Nicholson: It is under the global peace and security fund and stabilization and reconstruction task force. There are funds directly involved with helping to rebuild those institutions in Iraq, as part of the mission we have.

Mr. Marc Garneau: Would the same be true in Ukraine?

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Yes, it would be.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Garneau: Earlier this year, it was mentioned that money allocated to maintain and beef up security in our embassies had not been spent for three years. And yet we all know that, with a real property inventory of approximately \$3.5 billion and embassies located in dangerous countries, the department's top priority should be security.

We learned that the money hadn't been spent because the previous minister, your predecessor, hadn't signed the documentation that needed to be sent to Treasury Board. According to the report on plans and priorities, that may change and some funding has now been allocated for that purpose.

Has the funding allocated to embassy maintenance and security in the report on plans and priorities already been approved, or do you still have to sign off on it?

[English]

The Chair: Minister, to give you some context on the time, you have only about 30 seconds left.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: All right.

Every cent that has been allocated for the safety and security of our missions is available. Some of this is part of infrastructure that has been built and that has already taken place. I already made reference to the fact that the reconstruction or the replacement of the chancery in Moscow hasn't been done.

That being said, we watch these things very carefully. We're absolutely committed to the safety and security of our missions abroad. Every single cent allocated by the government is available for that.

• (1300)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Nicholson, and thank you, Mr. Garneau.

We'll start our second round, which will be five minutes.

Mr. Hawn, you will lead us off.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, lady and gentlemen, for joining us.

To Minister Paradis, I think all Canadians are impressed by the results that have been achieved in the Third World in terms of our efforts to save the lives of women and children in the developing world. I was fortunate enough to spend a bit of time in Tanzania last year and to see directly some of the results of that.

With the renewed funding, can you give us a bit of an update going forward? Are we making any changes to where we're putting emphasis? Are there any changes to the funding? Obviously it's another large commitment over the five years from 2015 to 2020. Can you give us a bit of an update on that, please?

Hon. Christian Paradis: First of all, I think I should start with the MNCH. As you know, in 2010 we committed a total of \$2.85 billion over five years, from 2010 up to 2015. I'm glad to report that all of this money has been disbursed. This is how Canada is recognized: it pays what it pledges.

It has been a good tranche, and now we are going with a second tranche, as you know. The Prime Minister announced \$3.5 billion over the next five years, from 2015 to 2020, so of course there are more resources. The idea is to make sure that we can reach beyond the low-hanging fruit.

We need to do more. The summit that we held in Toronto I think sent a good signal to the entire world to ask what we can do better in terms of immunization, in terms of nutrition, in terms of a civil registration and vital statistics system, and with the newborns. There is still work to do, but we are very confident that we will achieve more. This is why we've also announced this pledge of \$500 million to Gavi. Of course, we are also very active in the Global Fund. We increased our participation there by 20% from when we announced that in 2014.

The idea is that we are happy to be active where we can make a difference. Canada is well recognized in regard to the MNCH initiative, and we intend to do this.

You alluded to Tanzania. Tanzania is a good partner on this, and Prime Minister Harper commissioned a report, with Jakaya Kikwete, on accountability and transparency. This is why we were very proud to launch, in New York City during the UN General Assembly, the Global Fund finance facility, in which, once again, money is earmarked for MNCH and the building of the CRVS, the civil registration and vital statistics system.

Beyond this, of course, we have 25 countries of focus that were designated last June, plus 15 partner countries, more or less. We've talked about Iraq, and Iraq is now a partner country.

In terms of bilaterals, now what we want to do is keep this good work that has been done in the last five years and stay focused, not dispersed, in terms of long-term development. Other interesting countries like Jordan, Burma, and Mongolia are now in, because of course we see opportunities for us to help in building sustainable economic growth and in making a difference to eradicate poverty.

I'm giving you a quick snapshot, but I think things are going for the best. It is also all in line with what we see. I sense that there is a better coordination among the donors.

We're talking also about blending finance, because as I alluded to in my previous remarks, ODA is not enough. We have to go to ODA-plus. So how can we do that? How can we engage private sector foundations and the diasporas? The diasporas have good knowledge that can be shared. They already do things, and they make huge remittances, but there are fees on this. How can we manage this all together in order to be more effective?

These are very interesting files on which we are working now to make sure that we are more effective in this 21st century with the means that we have in front of us.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: I have a very short question, Minister.

I would assume that the response from the 25 countries of focus has been pretty strong and pretty grateful. Are they coming back with anything about how it's great but they'd like us to do a little more over here or over there? Are they involved in the flexibility of changing the program if it needs to be changed?

• (1305)

Hon. Christian Paradis: Of course. I think it's important to mention here that when we announce the countries of focus, you can see a link on our website to their national development plans. The idea is that we want them to keep the ownership of their development. We are there to support them, but we also expect that our standards would be followed.

This is why I announced publicly that these countries of focus will have to sign a mutual accountability framework agreement with us to make sure that we can manage the expectations and that we can be accountable. After that, when everybody knows what the intentions are on both sides, it is easier to manage. When there are unexpected things, at least you have a framework with which to work.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hawn.

We'll now move to Madame Laverdière for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, since I have a lot of questions for you and a limited amount of time, I'm going to get right to the point, if you don't mind.

Minister, why is it that, as Canada commits to extending its mission in Iraq and Syria—at a cost of hundreds of millions of dollars—unlike its European Union, U.S. and U.K. partners, Canada didn't make an announcement at the donors' conference for Syria held in Kuwait this week?

Hon. Christian Paradis: First of all, Ms. Laverdière, I'd like to remind you that, on January 7, I announced \$50 million in aid for Syria for 2015. Second, I'd like you to know that the money was paid out. We see this as an important issue. It's well and good to hold conferences and pledge money, but partner countries have to honour those pledges, as well.

That's what we've done. Not only have we spent \$50 million to date, but we have also sent Ms. Jacovella, the assistant deputy minister, there to reiterate Canada's support. And we're keeping a very close eye on the situation. Keep in mind that Canada is the six biggest donor when it comes to Syrian aid.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: We have been so far, but we still have to commit funding for the future. As we all know, the needs are still there and they keep growing. Basically, Canada needs to pledge aid now, together with its partners.

And while we're on the topic of delays, the deadline for proposal submissions for the international youth internship program was nine months ago, and still, the results haven't been announced. How do you explain that?

Hon. Christian Paradis: As I announced back then, the department underwent a realignment further to the merger, and that gave us the perfect opportunity to review some of the selection criteria. That being said, I want to tell you that we feel very strongly about the international youth internship program, which generates considerable benefits and spinoff.

The program seeks to engage Canadians, promote awareness among youth and give them life experience. It also teaches them about what goes on in emerging economies and countries in need. A call for proposals was held, and the results will be announced shortly. The program is very important to me.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Let's hope so, minister, because the merger happened well after the department's restructuring, in fact, nine months later. It makes absolutely no sense. I know you had very positive things to say about civil society, but those organizations can't operate without predictability, and it's very hard for them to deal with a nine-month waiting period.

I was also wondering whether Canada planned to contribute funding to NORAD again and when we might expect Canada to get involved in the Gaza reconstruction efforts.

Hon. Christian Paradis: We're very active in the region and we have development programs there.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Minister, I'm going to stop you there, if you don't mind. Because of the time constraints, I'm going to ask you to comment on the Gaza reconstruction, specifically.

Hon. Christian Paradis: We are already active in the region and we're keeping a very close eye on the situation. Much remains to be done. That's what I can tell you for the time being. A variety of options have been proposed, but we have to make sure that taxpayers' money ends up in the right place. And you know as well as I do that that's a challenge on the ground. Options are under consideration.

• (1310)

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Minister, Canada is no longer funding TB REACH, an initiative where it used to be a leader. That's another area where Canada is moving backwards. Obviously, no announcements have been made in that regard. Nor have we heard any announcements on the global education program. And the international youth internship program also appears to have been put on hold, and the rationale makes absolutely no sense.

For the fiscal year that just ended, do you plan to put the hundreds of millions of dollars that weren't spent back in your budget?

Hon. Christian Paradis: The programs you mentioned are important. Announcements are coming, but we're talking about large amounts of money. We need to make sure we align our efforts with those who will benefit from the aid and those managing it, as well as the other donor countries. That's what we are committed to doing. We want to achieve the best possible outcomes while ensuring transparency. Even though the merger is said to be done, a lot of work is still under way. There are a significant number of programs, and that's why a review was undertaken. We are satisfied overall. And, yes, announcements on those issues are coming.

As for the amounts being put back, I can tell you that the two big reasons that the amounts were put back in last year's case are very straightforward. First, because of the instability in Africa, Mali specifically, we weren't able to allocate all of the planned funding, in spite of the commitments that had been made. The region was just too unstable.

Second, there was the matter of forgiving Pakistan's debt. The Paris Club makes those decisions. Certain requirements have to be met. We aren't the only ones with a say in the matter. These are things that happen. From an operating budget standpoint, however, and overall, we're still ahead and we always kept our commitments.

I repeat, this is what we tell other countries: pledging money is nice, but you have to follow through on that pledge. No one in the world can say that Canada doesn't honour its commitments.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Minister, we could spend all day discussing the numbers. I don't think the situations with Mali and Pakistan were what made the difference last year.

Quickly, I have one last question for you.

This June will mark a year since the Global Partnership for Education conference was held. Are you waiting until then to say that Canada is proud that exactly a year has gone by and it has yet to honour its commitment?

[English]

The Chair: Minister, just give a quick response because we are over time.

[Translation]

Hon. Christian Paradis: We focus our energy on results, not announcements. We have a good relationship with Ms. Albright. She knows exactly where we stand on the issue. When an appropriate program is developed, beyond the announcements, we will work on achieving results. Announcements are one thing, but achieving positive results is another. And that's what we work towards. That is our duty.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: I think the Global Partnership for Education has already proven its worth.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

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

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Thank you, Chair, and thank you, ministers, for being here.

Minister Paradis, we have had enormous success with our maternal, newborn and child health initiatives. In 2010 when our Prime Minister announced the \$2.85 billion, we saw that leveraged, working with our partners, to something around \$7.3 billion. We've now announced \$3.5 billion for this next five years.

I wonder if you could talk a little bit about the partnerships that we have, such as with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and some of the other partnerships we have and what we expect to see accomplished with that money.

I'll just ask all my questions now and then I'll give you the floor.

I know you were at the World Economic Forum and there was the announcement of this new funding mechanism that's going to be handled through the World Bank. I wonder if you could give the committee some insight into what that looks like.

[Translation]

I have one last question for you.

My riding is home to the Association des francophones de la région de York, a group of people who want to speak French and be served in French. The group would like to know about Canada's relationship with other countries in La Francophonie.

Hon. Christian Paradis: Thank you for your question.

As far as partnerships go, the Canadian Network for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health is a national partnership that developed on its own.

[English]

This is a great thing to see because you see the level of interest among the stakeholders. There is World Vision, Save the Children, and other players that are all part of this, and they want to work *à l'unisson*. They want to be united on this, which is a good thing, because at the summit in Toronto, one of the main outcomes expected of this was to foster and reinforce partnerships and to say that we have to do all of this together. When we talk about saving every woman and every child within arm's reach, this is ambitious, and there is no other way of doing this than by being partners with other players.

It's always good...when Bill Gates was here about a month ago, he once again had a lot of praise for what we are doing on the Canadian side to push on this file. We have a national network here, but now on the international stage we see more and more, and expect, people to contribute to some initiatives like the one I just alluded to on CRVS, the \$200 million that we committed to the GFF at the UN. We have \$100 million earmarked for MNCH in general, but we have another \$100 million earmarked for CRVS. CRVS is very important because if you don't have statistics.... If you deal with estimates, your results will be estimates, and this is not acceptable. We want to have real results based on facts and real data. This is why we are once again at the forefront and are assuming leadership in this regard. We can see now more and more partners interested to contribute, so we are very enthusiastic.

What was the second question?

•(1315)

Ms. Lois Brown: It was about the new financing mechanism.

Hon. Christian Paradis: It's a kind of blended financing. As a representative of the Canadian government, I am chair of the the redesigning development finance initiative, which is a very good initiative led by WEF and OECD. The Gates Foundation is there. The U.S. and Sweden are involved, with Abraaj Funds, the Rockefeller Foundation, the World Bank, IFC, and others. The idea is to see how we can attract interest in blending public and private money to make sure we can address the gaps.

We know that to put in place the best strategy to resolve health issues, there is a gap of \$30 billion U.S. a year. When we talk about the infrastructure per se, the gap is \$1.5 trillion U.S. a year according to World Bank estimates. You cannot achieve that with ODA alone. On the private side, sometimes things need to be better connected in order to connect the dots, if I can put it that way. So if we can establish a common lexicon and we can attract deals and get more people to contribute in order to make sure that we do accomplish this. As Charlotte Petri Gornitzka, the director from the Swedish development agency, said, we're ready to coinvest where we can find mutual interest. The ODA is there. The goal of the Canadian Government is to eradicate poverty. We want to ensure good development, and sometimes that can connect with projects from the private sector. The idea is not to subsidize but just to define for the committee the common interests, the impacts, the benefits, and so on.

Your last point was on la Francophonie.

[*Translation*]

I think La Francophonie is a very important and relevant vehicle. The legacy Abdou Diouf has left us with today is a modern, credible and transparent vehicle. When coups d'état happened in Mali and Madagascar, the countries were suspended from the organization. That puts a stigma on them, attaches a moral weight to the events that occurred. At this stage, what can be done to propel La Francophonie further into the 21st century?

Discussions are under way with countries in West Africa, like Senegal, which has some very positive economic development standards in place. Another country of focus is Benin, where the president has led a relentless campaign against corruption. What can we do to help these countries in terms of economic strategy? How can we develop that economic block? That is what was interesting about the Dakar summit.

Michaëlle Jean was named Secretary General. She presented an economic strategy and put forward a credible and realistic plan to implement that strategy. We are very excited about that. And that's why our department is looking at how it can align its programs in a way that would help those countries' economies grow.

Again, I would say that Canadians have an excellent reputation. The Africans want to do business with us because we are respected. We're talking about sustainable development and benefits to communities. It's well-known. There's a lot of potential there.

Yes, the Government of Canada, as well as the Government of New Brunswick and the government of Quebec are part of the solution. But it involves all Canadians. La Francophonie is not just

something for francophones, but also a Canadian symbol. Canada is a member of La Francophonie, and we must seize the development opportunities it presents.

•(1320)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Paradis.

Mr. Hawn.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think I'll start with Minister Nicholson. One of my secondary duties is to be the Canadian co-chair of the Canada-U.S. Permanent Joint Board of Defence, and we deal a lot with security issues and some development issues in the Americas. We've talked here a lot about the Middle East and Africa and so on, but we do have a lot of engagement in the Americas.

I'm just wondering if you could comment on where we're sitting in terms of some of the development of regional security through security systems reform in that part of the world, particularly in the Caribbean, Haiti, Central America, and Mexico. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Yes. We've had a great record in that area, as you may know, Mr. Hawn. We recognize that this has to be an essential part of our security concerns. You know about the Canada First defence strategy in terms of the protection of Canada, and then, of course, there is the protection of North America and indeed the whole hemisphere.

I'm actually looking forward to going to a security conference next week, where we'll discuss a wide range of issues. That will be taking place in Panama. I'll have the opportunity to meet with quite a few of my colleagues who will be there, and we'll have the opportunity, over a period of a couple of days, to discuss all aspects of this. We know that the threats we have don't respect or know borders. We know that sort of thing. We know that those individuals, those organizations that are in the business of dealing drugs, for instance, or terrorists, will go wherever they see a weakness.

I have had discussions over the years with colleagues from the Caribbean and Central and South America. They tell me that organized crime will target them. If their country is stable, the borders are safe, and the beaches are accessible, they find that therefore they are targeted. That is completely unfortunate, so it's important that Canada will continue to make them a priority in terms of our aid and development. We are one of the leaders in assistance to our Caribbean colleagues. I'm very proud of the fact that we have a long record of association and assistance.

We engage on a regular basis with our South American and Central American colleagues on the question of security. The meeting I have will actually follow up on other meetings that I've had. I was in Peru several months ago, meeting with defence ministers. Again, there was a collective recognition that we have to work together and cooperate against the international threats that we all have.

There are those who think that we can stand on the sidelines and these terrorists will go away. I'm very proud of the fact that we are part of a party and a government that doesn't buy into that—that somehow these things will go away and that we have to do nothing—and I was proud of the fact that our party and our government stood in Parliament, were very clear, and put that motion before the House of Commons that we will stand up and do what's right in this world.

We will go after those terrorists, those people, and those organizations that are in the business of massacring people and degrading individuals. I'm proud to be part of a party that doesn't go along with that and recognizes that we have to do something about it. That has been the Canadian way. Our government, we, you, and I, and those supportive of us will do that, regardless of whether we get support across the aisle.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: It won't surprise you that I agree with you.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That's all the time we have.

We're going to suspend for one minute.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Mr. Schellenberger agrees as well. Is that right?

Gary, do you agree with that?

Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Yes, I agree.

Hon. Rob Nicholson: That's good. I just wanted to get that for the record.

The Chair: That's all the time we have. We're going to suspend for one minute, and then we'll come back to do a bit of business.

- _____ (Pause) _____
-
- (1325)

The Chair: We're back. There are five things that I want to address with the committee very quickly. I want people to know that on Tuesday, April 21, while there is going to be the federal budget presented, we are going to attempt to find a room. Typically during budget days it becomes very difficult, so I want people to know that if we cannot find a room, we'll cancel the meeting and the meeting won't happen on April 21.

The second thing on the list is that there doesn't seem to have been a whole lot of interest in the diamond development initiative, so I'm just going to suggest that our committee—

An hon. member: What's that?

The Chair: It was a letter that was sent. It was an organization. I think Kirsty Duncan sent a letter saying that there was a diamond development initiative. There hasn't been a lot of interest, so we're going to see if the—

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair, but I can't remember having seen that letter.

The Chair: We'll get you a letter. We have a copy.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: We might be interested.

The Chair: If there's some interest individually, then by all means we want to do it. I'm just saying that there aren't enough numbers for

a committee, so individually, absolutely. They wanted a breakfast or something like that. We still want to make that available, but I didn't get a huge sense that there were a whole lot of people.

The third thing I want to mention is that on April 20 and 21 there's a parliamentary delegation from Afghanistan. We're looking at an informal meeting as well. Once again, that will probably be on the Monday when we come back from the break. We're going to have Joann talk to the defence committee clerk to try to set something up. It is informal. It is with the Afghanistan delegation. If people could make it on the Monday, it would obviously be greatly appreciated. It's not a requirement. It won't happen during our meeting time.

The fourth thing is that we did get a letter from the Embassy of Turkey asking us to come over there to some of the refugee camps. I do not believe that we can fit that into our timeframe, so I'm going to write a letter. I'll send a response back to thank them. I don't know if we can get to it in the fall. Obviously, committees won't be set up, etc. As well, it will be a whole new committee.

Hélène, and then Lois.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Oh, that's okay. I was just about to comment that I visited a great refugee camp in Turkey.

The Chair: Absolutely, and that's what they were asking us to do as well.

Lois.

Ms. Lois Brown: Chair, this is just a comment or observation. Given the difficulties that are going on over there, and the money that Canada has committed, I think it would have been a very good thing if the committee had done some travel.

The Chair: Okay. Well, I don't know...

Do we want to address it when we come back? I'm ruled by the committee, so...

Hélène, and then Lois.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: There were some studies, and some very important studies, that were proposed here in this committee, and we were told we didn't have time to do them. I don't see why we wouldn't have the time to do important studies here in Ottawa but we would have time to travel. So I really don't agree with that.

The Chair: Okay. And you've been there as well, so you've had a chance.

Lois.

Ms. Lois Brown: Mr. Chair, it's almost unnecessary to say that this travel should have happened last fall, and we know who held it up.

The Chair: All right.

There's one last thing we need to do. I realize that you people have to go, and I appreciate your dealing with a bunch of issues in a very quick amount of time.

We need to pass the two budgets that you have before you for the Subcommittee on International Human Rights. One is \$5,200 for a study on Bangladesh. The other is \$2,600 for a study on Venezuela.

Are there any concerns or questions about that?

All those in favour of those two budgets?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your indulgence in getting through this very busy day in a short period of time. For those of you

who thought you were going home early, thank you for sticking around to be with the ministers.

With that, I wish everyone two great weeks in the riding. We look forward to seeing everyone back after Easter.

Thank you. The meeting is adjourned.

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