HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

FAAE • NUMBER 007 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, April 14, 2016

Chair

The Honourable Robert Nault

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Thursday, April 14, 2016

● (1530)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Robert Nault (Kenora, Lib.)): I'll bring this committee to order, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), for our study on women, peace, and security.

Before us this afternoon are the Institute for Inclusive Security, and Jacqueline O'Neill, the director; and by video conference from New York, Human Rights Watch, with Sarah Taylor.

We're going to start with Jacqueline O'Neill, and then after her presentation we'll go to Sarah Taylor in New York.

Jacqueline.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Jacqueline O'Neill (Director, Institute for Inclusive Security): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to the committee for this invitation.

[*English*]

Thank you for giving this critical issue the attention it deserves. You mentioned that I direct the Institute for Inclusive Security. We're a Washington, D.C.-based NGO, and for more than 15 years we've increased the inclusion of women in peace and security processes around the world.

We work on current conflicts, including in Sudan, South Sudan, Myanmar, Colombia, Syria, Afghanistan, and others. We work with policy-makers in the United States and other governments and at NATO, the United Nations, and elsewhere around the world. We're specialists on national action plans. So we've worked with about 20 countries, always with government and civil society, to either create new plans or strengthen their existing ones.

We are the organization that wrote the independent mid-term assessment of Canada's national action plan in 2014, which was subsequently tabled in Parliament, and I'm hoping today that I can share with you a mere eight recommendations for Canada's next plan.

Before I shift to the policy proposal aspect, however, I am wondering if I can speak on a somewhat personal note. I've been based in Washington, D.C. for about a decade, but I'm Canadian. I'm from Alberta. While I focus on this issue around the world, it is never closer to my heart than when we interact and engage and intersect with Canadians and Canadian government policy.

At Inclusive Security we work directly with women who have experienced almost unspeakable trauma as a result of war. We work with South Sudanese women, for example, who a few months ago told me that their relatives have now started eating grass because there is simply no food to be had. We work with other South Sudanese women who talk about their relatives and family members who make a deliberate choice to leave their camp to seek food, knowing they're going to be raped, but make that choice anyway because they see it that they have no other options.

We work with Afghan women like the ones that Beth Woroniuk discussed and mentioned a few days ago, who are witnessing militants recruiting young men in their communities and who, when they travel at great risk to their own personal safety to report it to government ministers, are effectively laughed out of the room.

The women we work with summon enormous strength and enormous courage to get to the table and to have a say in the decisions that affect their own lives. You can imagine then what it's like for me as a Canadian when I see them engage with Canadians here and abroad, who essentially tell them that their work matters. I've had a number of experiences along those lines.

I understand that the committee has heard a lot about Deb Lyons, Canada's ambassador to Afghanistan. She told those same women who were laughed out of the room by an Afghan minister that they were welcome in Canada's embassy. She invited them for several days, rolled up her sleeves, facilitated a workshop with them, and about a month ago they identified a top priority list of qualified women from their networks who could serve and sit in peace negotiations.

It makes me enormously proud when I see people like Kerry Buck, Canada's ambassador to NATO, the first-ever female ambassador to NATO, who has put this topic squarely on the alliance's agenda, including last month, for example, when she hosted the first-ever high-level panel discussion about women, peace, and security at NATO, and even invited civil society to participate.

I'm really proud to see the work of our RCMP internationally and see the modelling collaboration at home. I was there this morning and heard great reports about their inviting Canadian civil society to observe their pre-deployment training and then provide substantive input and assessment on how to strengthen it.

I was blown away by the Chief of the Defence Staff's directive on implementing the tenets of the Security Council resolutions in the Canadian Forces' planning and operations. It is an amazing document. I'll come back to that later, but I was truly blown away when I read that.

One last point, if I might, I would like to relate to your a story that Hillary Clinton often tells in the United States, including when she announced the United States national action plan in 2011. It relates to peace negotiations in Darfur around 2007; at one point things were especially tense. The negotiations had ground to a halt. Talks were at an impasse over one specific issue. So the parties to the talks, almost all men at the time, couldn't agree over who would have control over a certain river. There was a deadlock. That evening, the mediator met with a group of Darfuri women who were assigned to be technical advisers at the negotiations and said that the talks were stalled because of that river and he pointed to the map. He said they couldn't get past this, that each wanted control. The women asked, “That river right there?” The men said yes. They women said, “That river dried up two years ago. It's been dry for years.”

● (1535)

I love this story because it was Canadian Senator Mobina Jaffer, at the time Canada's special envoy to Sudan, who convinced the mediator to bring women to the talks and to facilitate their participation, to actually pay for them to be there. That's the type of on-the-ground, real inclusion that matters at these peace negotiations.

All of these are examples of Canadian leadership. They are Canada leading by example, and they are things that make me enormously proud.

How do we have even more of that? How do we systematize this? A high-impact national action plan is key. Let me offer eight suggestions for the next version.

First, simplify monitoring and evaluation. Have far fewer indicators overall and reduce the focus on counting, increasing the number of qualitative indicators. Focus on outcomes, meaning look at effects, not just performance. As we start the process of creating a new NAP, ask ourselves, what difference do we want to see? What difference do we want to make over the period of this plan? It's usually about four to six years. Identify a handful of key outcomes at an outcome level, and then work backwards from there.

Canada's in a rare and really great position of actually now having a fair amount of baseline data for a number of indicators. That means we can also set targets, which is something we couldn't do in the first plan. Of course, simplifying monitoring and evaluation also involves releasing shorter and much more digestible reports against performance and implementation of the plan itself. Those reports, if they're simpler, shorter, easier to follow, and perhaps have more visual representative of the indicators over time will lead to more reflection, more learning, and more assessment of how the plan is being implemented. We can course-correct as opposed to just tracking performance.

The second thing I propose to do is take the time to hold authentic consultations to create the next NAP, especially to get input on those handful of key outcomes that both civil society and the government think we should be pursuing. In a lot of countries, our experience has been that the national action plan is no more than a document or a piece of paper that sits on a shelf. Canada has an opportunity right now to really bring it alive and to get a lot of buy-in. I would suggest and urge strongly that you consult heavily with civil society here and directly with women most affected by conflict around the world, as well as consult with Canadian diplomats, civil service, police, and military.

I'll note that just based on experiences elsewhere, and not Canada, authentic consultation isn't just creating a first draft and then giving people a few weeks to respond. It's getting people together and identifying these outcome-level indicators on what it is we want to achieve, and working backwards.

Third, once there is a plan, make the expectations for implementation across the departments exceedingly clear. That means having department and agency-specific implementation plans. We want to take away as much guesswork as possible from the thousands of really well-intentioned people who really want to understand what it means for their day-to-day life to bring this national action plan alive. Two months ago, General Vance did this with the CDS directive. It lays out what he wants to achieve, who's responsible for doing it, and by when they need to do so. Our diplomats at Global Affairs will tell you the best format for doing it there, but I think something similar at Global Affairs could be especially useful.

Of course, for expectations to be meaningful, people need to be held accountable. My fourth recommendation is to institute genuine accountability measures. That means creating a culture of accountability around this plan, getting it essentially into the capillaries or the DNA of each of those organizations. That means putting it in job descriptions, having references to it in performance evaluations, putting references in mandate letters, and then asking questions as it relates to those mandate letters, etc.

The fifth recommendation is to make sure to resource this work. This issue of women, peace, and security is one that suffers from the “budgetless add-on syndrome”, as I call it, where people think we can just add on to people's existing responsibilities and not resource it. Strengthening civil society here and abroad means core funding. Consultations take time and money. Training takes time and money. Reporting takes time and money. If this is an authentic priority, it needs to be resourced. Of course this is some funding, but not an enormous amount. It is truly a pittance compared with the return on the investment.

Six, keep up this parliamentary oversight. I think it's fantastic that you're holding this series of hearings. The Canadian Senate human rights committee had a number of hearings on this topic, but to my knowledge it's the first in the House of Commons.

● (1540)

So having the hearings is essential, as is also asking questions of people who appear before you on other topics, including the ministers who appear before the committee.

My seventh recommendation is to make Canada's commitment even more visible, and I think the Prime Minister is doing his part in raising attention to this issue around the world. It includes having more ministers speaking about this—that means talking about women not only as victims of conflict, but as agents of change—assigning an influential, authentic, and high-level champion within different ministries, and appointing more female heads of mission.

Finally, I would urge us all to embrace this issue and topic as part of Canada's brand and to do so very strategically. Embracing it is the right thing to do. It's also the strategic thing to do, especially as we're talking about a bid for the UN Security Council.

Canada is in a solid place right now and we're positioned to be even better on this issue. We have a Prime Minister who's announced himself to the world to be a feminist. We have great diplomats on the front lines. We have a Chief of the Defence Staff who authentically gets this. We have a vibrant civil society.

At the UN, we've chaired a group of friends on this topic for years. We have police advisers and military advisers who are of the highest calibre. We're already exceeding the percentage of female police officers serving in UN missions. We're at about 25% in the UN target, which the UN itself has not met; it's at about 20%. We also talk about children's rights and vulnerable populations and other language that really makes this brand authentic and genuine for us.

So while we're not perfect, we can certainly be committed. There's a lot of momentum around this issue and a lot of space for Canada to make a visible and powerful contribution, not only for our own interests but to make the world a safer place for men, women, boys, and girls all around the world.

The Chair: Thank you, Jacqueline O'Neill.

Now we'll go to Sarah Taylor in New York.

Ms. Sarah Taylor (Women, Peace and Security Advocate, Women's Rights Division, Human Rights Watch): Thank you so much to the committee for holding these hearings, receiving these presentations from a range of civil society representatives, and, of course, for inviting Human Rights Watch to present.

Human Rights Watch is an independent non-governmental organization that monitors and reports on compliance with international human rights standards in more than 90 countries around the world. For over 20 years we have investigated and documented violations of women's rights in conflict and post-conflict settings, in communities and countries as diverse as the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Colombia, Somalia, Iraq, Sierra Leone, Sudan, South Sudan, Haiti, and the list goes on.

Before proceeding with my presentation, I'd like to flag that Human Rights Watch is a member of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security in New York, which will be presenting to you as well, and that we work closely with the Institute for Inclusive Security and many of the other NGO colleagues who will be providing you with information throughout this hearing process.

I'd like to make today a few points specifically on Canada's international leadership on women, peace, and security, and why it is important for your national action plan and for all of your international engagement on this issue to support women's rights globally. These recommendations include the necessity of accountability for violations of women's rights; the importance of services, medical and psychosocial, for survivors of sexual violence and other rights violations; the key importance of women's participation in peace and security decision-making, as Jackie has flagged; the necessary reforms to international peacekeeping, including tackling sexual exploitation and abuse; and, finally, support to women human rights defenders, particularly in situations of conflict and post-conflict.

As Jackie has noted, Canada is in a particularly good position to champion women's rights internationally. This includes, as she has said, its role of chairing the group of friends of Women, Peace and Security in New York, a leadership role that many of us appreciate here. Canada should put women's rights at the centre of its campaign for the UN Security Council and its work in other international fora. You'll hear a briefing from the executive coordinator of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security next week, but I just want to flag some of the research and what it's shown, which is that the UN Security Council, amongst other international bodies such as the G-8, remains committed on paper, committed in rhetoric, but does not necessarily adhere to their own obligations on women's rights in their daily work. In the UN Security Council alone, briefings on country situations are often absent any information or analysis, let alone recommendations, on women's rights violations and what the UN and other international actors can do.

So what should Canada be doing in the international stage?

First, promote accountability for sexual violence and other rights violations. As a member of the International Criminal Court and a supporter of international and national justice, Canada is well placed to help tackle the scourge of impunity and to secure justice for the victims of these crimes. Human Rights Watch has documented the impunity for sexual violence in many conflicts around the world, with the case of DRC being illustrated. Horrific levels of rape and other forms of sexual violence in that country have plagued eastern DRC for almost two decades.

At the international level, the International Criminal Court's conviction of the former vice-president of the Democratic Republic of Congo indeed a victory for sexual violence victims and a stark warning to senior commanders who turn a blind eye while their troops rape and commit other atrocities. Congolese authorities at the national level have carried out an increasing number of arrests and prosecutions for rape; however, the vast majority of perpetrators remain unpunished. Our recent research on the so-called Minova trials shows that, despite international attention, there's often a failure to deliver justice for either the victims or the accused in these cases.

Canada should press for survivors of sexual violence and other forms of gender-based violence to have full access to the range of essential medical and psychosocial care, which includes economic and social support. Canada can support this both at the forthcoming World Humanitarian Summit and can heighten the work of CIDA in this issue.

Our research has documented many examples of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict and emergency situations around the world and just how stark and dire their need for these services are. This includes women with disabilities in conflict situations, who also face discrimination and additional risk and vulnerability because of those disabilities.

● (1545)

Sexual and gender-based violence has acute and long-term physical, psychological, and social consequences. We've seen that with a great number of reports, including our own research on the attacks on Yazidi women. Unfortunately, to date, the necessary medical and psychosocial service provision for the survivors of these crimes is inconsistent, if forthcoming at all. Our recent research on Kenya and the political and electoral violence in that country in 2007 and 2008 shows just how long term the effects of these attacks can be.

Canada should press for greatly increased investment to address the health needs for survivors of sexual violence in conflict, and press governments to invest in comprehensive emergency health services, including medical treatment for injuries, emergency contraception, safe and legal abortion, and trauma counselling.

The next recommendation, as Jackie has highlighted, is that Canada should champion the participation of women in peace and security decision-making, including in the leadership of centres for those who have been displaced, for refugees, for those making conflict-resolution efforts, and in post-conflict reform efforts. Again, this is one of the areas in which we've seen a great deal of rhetoric and not sufficient action by international actors.

Women are often subject to hostile work environments. Women human rights defenders often face grave risks when trying to heighten and support the work and voice of women and raise controversial issues around women's rights in conflict. Canada should press for women's full participation in all these efforts to create and maintain peace, and support efforts to safeguard women's security in post-conflict elections, in referendums, constitutional drafting, and reform processes. This includes promotion and protection of women candidates, voters, election workers, and women's human rights defenders.

The next recommendation is regarding international peacekeeping. Canada has a particular role to play here, particularly when the UN and other actors in the international community are making an effort to tackle the scourge of sexual exploitation and abuse. Over the past decade there have been many allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse in the missions in Central African Republic, Haiti, Somalia, and the DRC. In 2014 we published a detailed report on sexual exploitation and abuse by African Union peacekeeping forces in Somalia, and more recently we documented cases of sexual exploitation and abuse by peacekeepers in the Central African Republic.

In all efforts to address this scourge, priority must be given to the security and well-being of survivors, including through promoting best practices as basic as maintaining confidentiality, minimizing repeated trauma from multiple interviews and, again, providing and ensuring rapid access to medical and psychosocial care. Canada and other governments should be pressing for a major overhaul to boost accountability mechanisms, ensuring that there are clear policies and training in this area, and for independent investigative mechanisms in an effort to bring judicial redress for those who have had these crimes committed against them.

Finally, Canada should push for better support for human rights defenders, those on the front line in dealing with sexual and gender-based violence and those who are promoting national legal reforms to address and adhere to women's rights obligations. Human rights defenders assist survivors of sexual violence, expose abuse and impunity, and press their own governments to tackle these problems more effectively. Many do this at great risk to themselves.

Human Rights Watch works with many remarkable human rights defenders around the world, and our recent work on women human rights defenders in Sudan documents the efforts by Sudanese authorities to silence women who are involved in protests, involved in rights campaigns and other public action, and who provide social services and legal aid. Women engaged in these efforts are targeted with a range of abuses, from rape and rape threats to deliberate efforts to tar their reputations. Lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender and inter-sex people are often at particular threat of sexual violence in conflict, as our research has indicated in Iraq and in Syria.

On this point, I really hope that Canada will press for greater international support for women human rights defenders and for human rights defenders writ large. This includes more emergency and quick-impact funding to support efforts to document violations in the middle of conflict, and more support to local lawyers to help secure local justice for crimes of sexual violence. Canada can also press for measures to protect human rights defenders from threats, intimidation, and violence.

● (1550)

On that point, I would like to thank you once again and I'm looking forward to our discussion here today.

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

With that, we'll go right to questions, and Mr. Allison for six minutes.

● (1555)

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you, ladies, for coming today to discuss this very important topic.

Ms. O'Neill, you talked about the fact that you know of 20 countries that have plans. Could you just spend a little time telling us how effective those have been, and if some have been better than others? That's one of the questions I've been asking, because sometimes we hear that you must have a plan, but sometimes the plan is not very good. Are there any models out there or countries are doing a really good job? Tell us why you think they're doing a good job.

Ms. Jacqueline O'Neill: There are about 51 countries in the world now that have national action plans. Those include countries that are directly experiencing conflict and countries like Canada that perceive this from the perspective of primarily a foreign policy development and security assistance point of view.

Our organization has identified criteria that we call “criteria for a high-impact national action plan”. We've always said there are four things that go into having a high-impact national action plan: one is genuine political will; two is actually ensuring that the plan was a result of consultation, including with civil society; three is a strong monitoring and evaluation framework; and four is resourcing.

We'd say that right now in the world there is one, possibly two, plans that meet all those criteria and are what we'd consider high impact. Probably about a third of them, about a quarter of them, are close to being high impact; and there are several, as I mentioned in my presentation, that really were not worth the paper they're written on. They're done for show demonstrate that countries are taking action, primarily for and funded by an international audience, and have very little political will at home.

We're often cautious about saying this country's model is ideal and that country's model is not. A lot of things are to be learned from different countries, and I've spoken a fair amount with colleagues here in civil society in Canada who have also participated in exchanges and sessions with governments in civil society around the world, looking at different models that do work.

There is a range of models. For example, the last version of the Netherlands map had 56 civil society organizations sign on to the national action plan and commit to holding themselves accountable for taking certain steps. You heard about Norway's national action plan a couple of days ago that has an implementation strategy associated with it. There are ranges of different national action plans, each of which, I would say, has at least something that Canada can draw from in terms of lessons and models, but there isn't one model that I would hold out.

That said, there are now 51 countries with national action plans. Most of them have been created in the last three to four years, so we're all learning these lessons as we go. Canada has an opportunity to create something tailored, recognizing that national action plans aren't entirely different from every other national government strategy that you create, whereas, as you all know, you want accountability measures, political will, resourcing, and you want some type of authentic collaboration to create it.

I hope that at least partly answers your question.

Mr. Dean Allison: That's great, thank you very much.

Both of you talked about accountability measures, so I'm going to ask you, Ms. Taylor, first, and then Ms. O'Neill.

We push for accountability measures. Obviously we can talk about it, which is important, as I think we should always push for this. Is there any big stick? How do we ensure that accountability measures are set into other plans? Do we threaten funding? What are the things, other than talking about it? We should always be talking about it, but is there anything else we can do to help ensure those accountability measures?

Ms. Sarah Taylor: I'll leave it to Jacqueline as the expert on other national action plans, to speak specifically to accountability in national action plans.

I think that one of the points we see over and over again is the necessary support for civil society organizations at the national level, recognizing that when we're talking about rights violations, particularly in the context of conflict, when we're talking about violations of women's rights, you're not doing an investigation that is disaggregated from or separate from service provision.

So you want to be making sure that you are supporting national level service providers, training local and national level actors on information gathering and evidence gathering, making sure that you're supporting the strengthening and reform of judicial systems. That includes the training of police, judges, and lawyers to make sure that when cases do go to trial, they are held to an appropriate standard.

● (1600)

Ms. Jacqueline O'Neill: On a few levels, one area is accountability internally for the actual implementation of the plan within Canada's own government.

Then there are accountability measures in the way we engage and interact with our partners.

Funding is one thing, and the idea of making some funding conditional upon achieving certain objectives I think is a really reasonable thing to do. If we're saying that we know this yields a positive outcome, we're putting our money behind it, and we expect you to do the same thing. I think implementing some level of accountability and conditionality in the assistance that we give is very reasonable.

In terms of the United Nations—and I know you've been talking a lot about sexual exploitation and abuse and accountability there—I think several things must happen.

One is significantly greater transparency, which leads to greater accountability of national forces at a national level.

In some cases criminal accountability for violations is something we have to press for, completely. The idea of repatriating people, that they get sent back home and that's the end of the deal, is completely unacceptable. Canada needs to be at the forefront of saying that people need to be prosecuted when they arrive back home. Simply losing your job on an international mission is not enough.

Then there are also financial incentives for many countries to send their troops on peacekeeping missions, for the police and military in particular. If we start to get serious about the idea that you will not be invited, you will not be asked or permitted to send troops if you do not deal with this idea of consequences and accountability for those who commit offences, we will start getting a lot more attention in capitals around the world, I predict.

Finally, to echo Sarah's point, women in civil society organizations are at the core of this. Canada's policy never will be, or be able to be, or should be the primary driver of change in a country. It's always going to be people within that country itself. The best we can do from a long-term perspective will always be to build the capacity of women in that country to hold their own government accountable.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Allison.

We'll now go to Mr. Miller.

Mr. Marc Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs, Lib.): Thank you both for your presentations. They were very compelling.

Permit me one small observation: when I read a number of the reports focused on these issues they obviously include very compelling stories, with concrete proposals, and initiatives, but the concept of male buy-in is often completely absent. I don't know if it's because of the history of the study behind these initiatives, but they seem to it allow people to abscond from responsibility and avoid the elephant in the room, which is male buy-in.

We have a Prime Minister who, in terms of feminism, epitomizes male buy-in.

I think it's unfortunate that women are singled out based on gender and that men are often referred to in these reports in the passive voice. The best way to obscure something is to refer to it in the passive voice. That's my observation about a number of these reports.

I think it's important to call things out. To give people, and men specifically, the responsibility of taking action, not for the sake of taking action, but because it's the right thing to do.

That said, I'd like to give my remaining time to Karina Gould. Her question is actually better than mine.

Ms. Karina Gould (Burlington, Lib.): Thank you.

To both of you, thank you so much for excellent participation and intervention and remarks on this topic.

The question I'm interested in, which I asked last session as well, is the following.

Ms. O'Neill, you mentioned this question of moving women in conflict situations and in peace-building scenarios from the status of victim to the status of change agent. As we move forward and reflect on our national action plan and move into the future, how can Canada work to assist ourselves here at home, but also abroad in making sure this is working toward an inclusive peace-building process where women are included?

Ms. Jacqueline O'Neill: That's a good question indeed.

First of all, I do want to comment on the male buy-in point. I think you're absolutely right. Something that the Chief of the Defence Staff's directive has done, that the national action plan outlines, and that I think is really important to keep doing and also relates to your point, is to keep emphasizing that attention to this agenda is not something that we do for women. It's not something that we're doing either as a favour to them or because we want to protect them; it's something that we're doing for all of us.

A study from Harvard a couple of years ago said that the single biggest predictor of whether a country goes to war, either with itself or with its neighbours, is not its GDP or its ethno-religious affiliation: it's how its women are treated. When we look at the relationship between men and women in a community as the blueprint for interaction in the society at large—which does get amplified—getting this right is something that we need to do for all of us. We need to reinforce this point in all of our documentation and in the rationale we provide for why we're doing this in terms of our language—which I agree matters completely—and emphasize that we're doing this not to protect the vulnerable populations of the world but to take advantage of and to capitalize on what they know and what they can contribute. That's something that I think is really important.

Something we also see, I think in a troubling way, is a default to the protection element of this agenda. As you've heard many times, I think, the women, peace, and security agenda has various pillars. We call them the “four Ps”: participation, protection, prevention, and then recovery. That's three Ps and an R. But there's often a default to focusing only on protection, on the things that we will do to secure an environment or to punish people who take action against women or who assault women, etc. By doing so, we're quite subtly undermining their agency as well and saying that they're people who are passive respondents in this process, as opposed to being people who need to be around the table shaping the policy, making the decision, and being consulted, etc. That kind of thing I think adds up in both subtle and overt ways, and it sort of contradicts the idea that women are powerful agents of change and not just, as I say, victims of conflict.

I'd say that it's about watching the rhetoric and also keeping at this outcome level that I was talking about. The reason we're doing these things—and the reasons identified through our process—is not simply for 50% of the population but for all of us, and then that trickles down into a broader range of thinking.

Sarah, would you like to add something?

● (1605)

Ms. Sarah Taylor: Yes, I completely agree. We do talk about these Ps, about these pillars, about differentiating and disaggregating various parts of the women, peace, and security agenda, but you can't actually fulfill the agenda or address any of those individual areas without looking at the whole picture.

You cannot talk about truly protecting women in displacement camps without their participation in decision-making about how and where you set up the toilets so that women can actually utilize these services safely in a insecure displacement setting. You can't talk about women's participation and "meaningful participation", as that phrase often trips off the tongue, in peace processes without addressing the fact that women often face security barriers in trying to get to where talks are being held. We put out a short piece a couple of months ago about Yemen, the nascent peace talks there, and the barriers that women from Yemen face in trying to meet with other Yemeni women to come together and talk about what it is they need out of a sustainable peace process.

Understanding that all of these pieces are integrally tied together is really important here, I think.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Madam Laverdière.

[*Translation*]

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

We feel that Canada's current action plan focuses a great deal on protection and on women as victims. We are not here to get all worked up or to attack anyone.

That said, ladies, do you think Canada's action plan could be improved in that regard?

[*English*]

Ms. Jacqueline O'Neill: When I read it and assessed it, it didn't strike me as disproportionately focused on protection. A lot of Canada's advocacy and the work it does around the participation element and getting people to negotiations and talking about getting organizations such as NATO and others to prioritize this, I think is not tracked and not set forward necessarily as a policy priority within the plan. I think Canada actually is doing a lot on the participation agenda, but it's not necessarily either called for or tracked in the plan.

It didn't strike me when I read it as significantly out of proportion, but to your question on whether we can do better and do more, yes, I'll always emphasize participation, as Sarah said, as being integral to the other elements.

● (1610)

Ms. Sarah Taylor: [*Inaudible—Editor*] which is not specifically to the national action plan. Much of that work, particularly when you start talking about the formal peace processes—track one, or track one and a half—is work that takes place behind closed doors. It's work that doesn't often get seen.

It's really important for Canada to continue to throw its weight behind women's participation and gender expertise, and to ensure that core components of these peace talks, such as not bargaining away women's rights and giving amnesties for violations of them, and the work done done behind the scenes make up an explicit part of a national approach on women, peace, and security.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: My question is again for the two of you.

It follows on Ms. O'Neill's comment about simplifying the follow-up of cases and the need for core funding.

Could you tell us about the impact of all that, specifically on women's organizations in developing countries, and tell us how important that is for those organizations?

[*English*]

Ms. Jacqueline O'Neill: I'll speak to the simplification, first of all. Something that we consistently see in the second and third iterations of national action plans around the world is a reduction in the number of indicators. Canada was in a rare position, along with only a few other countries at the time it announced its national action plan, of also having a monitoring and evaluation framework. It just wasn't a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework.

For example, we've worked with Bosnia over the last several years. Their original plan had some 250-plus indicators. The revised version had between 50 and 75. That's the type of scale of reduction that I suggest.

Again, it's not to oversimplify or to say that complexity doesn't factor into it. But as I'm sure you've all done in trying to digest the progress reports, even in the very helpful civil society shadow reports, it's really difficult to see progress over time, to understand what's really a priority in there, to understand what the target is. Are we making incremental change but still not getting anywhere close to where we need to be?

Simplifying, simplifying, simplifying the number of indicators in the reporting makes everybody happier, because our diplomats, our civil servants, aren't spending all their time reporting and not actually implementing the agenda. I think that will actually help this committee and other organizations or other bodies make better decisions.

Your second point was related to core funding. It's just something that I think is essential to organizations, both in Canada and around the world. Part of the way our governments work, and governments around the world need to work, is through a relationship between civil society and government. It's when civil society has the ability to meet....

As Sarah was saying, sometimes even just meeting is a challenge. Money for gas is a challenge for many of the women in the countries that we work with. It's not like they're asking for an exorbitant salary or to be spending money in fancy hotels and capitals around the world. They're talking about money to rent a room and maybe have coffee or tea for some type of consultation, to have staff who can actually track a government's progress.

It will be these civil society organizations that hold our partners and our allies and those who are not our allies accountable, and really push for change within. I think perhaps the single most important value of having a national action plan is that it gives civil society a tool to holds its government accountable, as opposed to a government just saying, “Yes, this is a priority for us, and we'll take action”, especially in countries where processes are far more opaque.

Having well-funded and well-resourced civil society organizations, paired with national plans that lay out clear priorities, really enables that process, which is so fundamental to the democracy we're all pursuing.

Ms. Sarah Taylor: I really agree, and I'd like to speak to that issue of core funding.

I think we often talk about the importance of funding and don't realize just how tenuous the existence of some of these organizations and really at-risk situations are. Providing one year of funding to a group that is focusing on women's human rights isn't enough. These groups and human rights, as our research shows in far too many places, are subject to particular forms of violence, oppression, and shame. Ensuring that they have the financial and political resources to go about their important work requires long-term, consistent, and reliable funding, not unrealistic one year, outcome-based project funding.

● (1615)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Levitt.

Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.): Good afternoon, and thank you for your testimony here today.

I want to begin with a question for Ms. O'Neill. You laid out for us eight recommendations, which are a pretty superb business plan in any context. Sometimes we make things more complicated. This is really simple, straightforward, and to the point, and I think there are many things in terms of accountability. From our point of view as parliamentarians, the oversight piece is really interesting because that is something we often don't see enough, and it's something that, hopefully, can be taken back and built in.

I want to come particularly to your first point, which was improved indicators. In terms of progress indicators, Inclusive Security's midterm assessment of C-NAP implementation pointed out quite clearly the difficulty in reporting on its indicators and how well or whether at all they measure success.

On Tuesday, we heard that one of the problems with the current C-NAP is that there are a number of indicators but there is no analysis of progress, of how they relate to what we are trying to do.

I'd like to ask you specifically how these indicators should be improved, or what new indicators you would like to see in the new C-NAP.

Ms. Jacqueline O'Neill: In terms of new indicators, as I mentioned, one is an umbrella level of outcome indicators that say, “Within the period of this plan, we want to achieve the following”. I leave this entirely to the consultations you have with Canadian civil society and women around the world to tell you what should be in the plan. An example of that type of indicator would be something like, “Over the period of this plan we want to see a significant improvement in the attention to this agenda, in multilateral organizations of which we are a part, and in our partner nations' security forces.”

We want this firmer on the agenda of those organizations. Then we'll work backwards to determine how we are going to do that.

There is a whole other range of potential outcome-level indicators that you could say.... One is related to the topic we were just talking about. We want to see a significant improvement in the strength of local women's civil society networks and organizations and a targeted list of priority countries—determine how you are going to measure that and what your target is, and move backwards.

I was privileged to be here on Tuesday and hear some of the comments as well, and it's reflected in our report. It's what I mention in my remarks. There is a lot of focus on what we are doing on progress towards the plan in terms of the activities we are creating and not the difference it's making.

For example, the RCMP is working with the United Nations to contribute to and, in many cases, lead training, in many cases now for women only, in police forces abroad who are focused on and want to increase the number of women they send on UN missions. They were finding that the women in those police forces—for a whole range of reasons, in part because they were not exposed to training opportunities, promotion opportunities, etc.—were not passing these pre-selection classes at a high enough rate.

The RCMP was delivering training. They were saying, essentially, let's raise the standard of these police officers so they will be eligible to serve on international missions. They are tracking things like the changes in the pass rate of those classes. Instead of the national action plan calling for, “How many times did we advise the United Nations on this course?”, let's start tracking what difference it makes in the pass rate of the people we are working with. That's the type of outcome-level indicator I am thinking about.

There is a myth in this field that because it relates to advocacy or because things are so long-term or so focused on policy shifts, we can't track them or change them, but that is just not true.

There are a broad range of indicators we can choose from, from plans that measure this type of outcome behaviour that are not just the number of people trained, the number of classes held, etc. I think you all know training can be horrible, and then you get credit for doing the training, whereas in some cases it actually brings everybody backwards and leaves them more confused than before.

Focusing on this midterm outcome and then ultimately the bigger-purpose type of indicator is really going to be motivating for people, and it's actually going to give oversight bodies like yours a chance to assess whether or not we are making progress.

● (1620)

Mr. Michael Levitt: Thank you.

This is a question for both of you. Maybe Ms. Taylor can start.

It's back to this issue of human rights defenders and the challenges these women face. We heard about it on Tuesday. We heard very personal stories of two women who really put themselves in harm's way and faced threats to themselves and to their family.

Canada is in a situation now, both in terms of our review and our renewal of the C-NAP, and having a chance to improve it, and in terms of our re-engagement at the United Nations, particularly on the Commission on the Status of Women.

What opportunities do we have now to add our voice to protecting these human rights defenders? How can we make a real difference to make sure they are not in harm's way?

Ms. Sarah Taylor: I think you can probably take steps at just about every level. We've already talked a little bit about how you can provide long-term, consistent, reliable funding for women's rights groups at the national and community levels, and making sure that you're really providing support to those groups that are most at risk.

At the multilateral level, I think it involves having a clear position on the importance of protection of women's human rights, and women's human rights defenders, and supporting the trips of the special rapporteurs and the outcomes of that, and making sure there is a clear line held in negotiations like CSW.

I think one of the most powerful things you could do in terms of conflict would be to bring the issue of women's rights and women's rights defenders into the UN Security Council. Despite the fact that this is clearly an element of the women, peace, and security agenda, the council, somewhat unsurprisingly, seems to be a little bit allergic to receiving reports on women human rights defenders and therefore supporting them.

So, again, you have this wonderful opportunity in your campaign for the council to really make sure that you emphasize that this something that you're going to be upholding at the court in a later campaign. But if you are on the council, your time on the council means paying attention and really heightening this issue every time the council discusses a country situation.

The Chair: I have to move to the next round.

We'll start with Mr. Saini.

Mr. Raj Saini (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much for coming here. I really like the analysis and thoroughness.

I have a question for you, Ms. Taylor.

In your opening comments, you alluded to the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and I want to talk about a specific case in Minova. The reason I want to talk about it is that I think it highlights some of the shortcomings faced in certain conflict zones.

We know that in that situation there was a shortage of legal experts. There was an inability to gather evidence properly, and there were some prosecutorial errors that also happened there. In that case, the Rome Statute had to be applied.

My question for you is if there are other places. This can't be the only place. Is it a common occurrence in other countries that there is a lack of an ability to prosecute certain crimes, collect evidence, and those kinds of things?

Ms. Sarah Taylor: Yes, absolutely, and even not in a situation of conflict.

The support for survivors, investigations, prosecutions, and fair trail, which includes everything from a fair trial for the accused, witness protection, and support to survivors, is not an easy issue. This is not an easy process. This is a difficult process, and many countries at the national and local levels struggle with fair investigations, support, prosecution, etc.

This is only compounded when we talk about the complexity of conflict; when we talk about the diminution and dismantling of national-level judicial systems; when we talk about increased insecurity, displacement. That's not even getting into the issue of rape as a tactic, a tool, a strategy that's deployed by armed actors. In those cases, it becomes really difficult to adhere to good practice and good process. This is one of the reasons why the ICC is an important tool when national level redress is not possible.

Again, it's about ensuring there is support from the very first step of service provision of training and good practice on documentation, as well as support for women's local civil society groups, up through ensuring training and taking advantage of the international support that some of the actors affiliated with the Justice Rapid Response can provide to train on good practices after the fact.

This is certainly a problem that faces many countries.

● (1625)

The Chair: Sorry, I'm going to have to leave it there, Mr. Saini, and go to Mr. Kent.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Thank you, Chair. I have one question.

Thank you for your testimony and recommendations on the updating of CNAP. Given that everything that Canada and its agencies and NGOs do abroad is very often under the mandate of UN authority, what would you recommend? I ask this in the shadow of the article written by Under-Secretary Banbury some weeks ago where he characterized agencies, departments, individuals with a range of modifiers like “incompetent”, “Orwellian”, “Carrollian”, and “sclerotic”.

You've spoken to the visibility of our Prime Minister and our ministers. What would you recommend that our PM, our ministers, and our foreign-service professionals do at the United Nations in New York and beyond to encourage the reform of the United Nations in this area particularly? Beyond that as well, as the Secretary-General has conceded, in the wake of Under-Secretary Banbury's article, it is absolutely necessary to contemporize and make more effective what the UN does.

That question is for both of you.

Ms. Sarah Taylor: Yes, there have been a couple of really damning pieces on the UN, and that's partially to do with the culture of impunity for certain crimes like sexual exploitation and abuse that have become endemic in a number of peacekeeping operations. But it's also to do with member states. Member states need to take responsibility for this as well.

Over the last year, we've seen a range of pronouncements and commitments by the Secretary-General, by the UN system itself. If it implements a large part of those dealing with reporting significantly on incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse and other grave crimes in country reports, moving forward on vetting of troops before they're accepted into peacekeeping missions, and trying to get a much better and more robust system of vetting to make sure that those who have committed previous rights violations are not accepted into these missions....

It has to do with ensuring that there is real coordination. When I talk about a survivor-centred approach to this, that's part of what a good investigation looks like, and that requires coordination, not only with the appointment of the new coordinator on sexual exploitation and abuse, but also at the mission level, making sure that all the different organizations from human rights to UNFPA to DPKO are on the same page and that victims aren't being re-traumatized.

One of the things that's missing from this conversation or hasn't been highlighted as much is the fact that we're asking the UN—and rightly so—to not accept these troops, to make real its conditions by which it will not accept troops that are persistent perpetrators. We need to provide them with options. We need to provide them with the options of other troops. If there's no one to go, what are their options?

To look at what Tony Banbury actually wrote in that piece is to say, without in any way excusing some of the decisions that were made, there need to be stronger options so that troop-contributing countries know that the threat of non-acceptance is real.

● (1630)

The Chair: The last opportunity is for you, Ms. O'Neill.

Ms. Jacqueline O'Neill: Thank you. I'll be very brief.

In addition to everything Sarah said, I'd add one more point, which is that we're at the helm or dawn of choosing a new secretary-general for the United Nations. We can never under-estimate the importance of member-state accountability and responsibility to drive change, and we need a secretary-general who's authentically committed to it. As Canada is thinking about who it supports and the criteria for its support, we need to think and examine carefully the candidates' commitment to UN reform.

I'll note, perhaps as an appropriate closing, that we've never had a female secretary-general of the United Nations. Anytime you mention that topic, people's knee-jerk reaction is to say that someone must be qualified. Of course, they must be qualified. That's a given. There are 3.5 billion women in the world; I'm quite certain we can find one who's qualified to lead the UN. If we examine and think about the extent to which we want that person to be really committed and have a history of transparency and a record of authentic change and accountability, then I think that sets us up well for all future initiatives they're thinking through.

The Chair: Now that our time is up, I just want to thank Human Rights Watch and the Institute for Inclusive Security.

There's one issue that I'd like you to think about and get back to the committee on. As we talk about the 51 countries that have a plan, and we're going into what we think is the second phase of new plans, it would be interesting to know how a process could be developed, if there is one or isn't one, with those 51 nations to collectively work to improve in the second round so that we have the kinds of structures that you're talking about. My favourite topic, of course, is then to make it easier to go to core funding, because there must have been a reason why people seem to think it should have been more program oriented than core funding.

I'm a big fan of core funding. I bring it up at almost every meeting, so I want you to think about that and maybe get back to the clerk and the committee.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much. We very much appreciate it. It was a very good discussion.

We will take a five-minute break and then we'll go to the next invited guest.

Thank you.

● (1630)

(Pause)

● (1635)

The Chair: Colleagues, we'll begin.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we'll have a briefing on the mandate letter of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. We want to thank, first of all, the minister for coming and, of course, Daniel Jean and Mr. Vincent Rigby, his deputy minister of Foreign Affairs and assistant deputy minister of strategic policy, respectively.

We're going to try to stick to an hour, at the request of members. As usual, it's always a little tough to do that, so we'll start with opening comments by the minister, and then we'll go right into questions.

Minister, I will turn the floor over to you.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Dear colleagues, thank you for inviting us to appear before you today.

I am pleased to be here with my deputy minister, Mr. Jean, and Mr. Rigby. Before I forget, I would like to thank all the public servants who are working so hard and with such professionalism. We can be proud of Canadian diplomacy.

I would also like to say that this first meeting, including our discussion, is very important to me. No party has a monopoly on good ideas or on facts. We learn from each other, and I am sure that your committee will be able to develop inter-party synergy, which will be very useful for Canada's foreign affairs. I feel very optimistic about our co-operation.

In these 10 minutes, I will try to be quick, given that I have a lot of things to say. If I say too much, please cut me off, Mr. Chair. We must respect everyone's speaking time.

So let me jump right into it, by drawing on the mandate letter that I received from the Prime Minister of Canada. This is the first time that ministerial mandate letters have been made public. Since this is what I am required to follow, I will refer to it a great deal in the 10 minutes of my presentation.

Of course, the mandate letter requires me to advance Canada's interests in the world, by serving security and economic interests. It also requires me to support what the Prime Minister calls the deeply held Canadian desire to make a real and valuable contribution to a more peaceful and prosperous world.

To fulfill this mandate, which is quite ambitious as you can see, I have announced that the guiding principle that I will follow is something I call “the ethics of responsible conviction”. By that I mean that the decisions we make must take into account their foreseeable impact on other human beings. I can elaborate on this if you have questions about it.

To achieve the objectives in my mandate, I am bound to work closely with all the members of cabinet. I will mention specifically Ms. Freeland, the Minister of International Trade, Ms. Bibeau, the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, and my colleague Mr. Sajjan, the Minister of National Defence.

I will start from the beginning: our relations with North America, more specifically with the United States. This is a fundamental relationship for Canada, one that we must never take for granted and that we must always strive to improve.

● (1640)

[*English*]

Prime Minister Trudeau has highlighted the need to strengthen our North American partnership and our relations with Mexico. In January, I hosted my foreign minister counterparts from the United States and Mexico in Quebec City. We made progress on climate change, clean energy, economic and security questions, peacekeeping, and health, including joint efforts to combat the Zika virus.

During the Prime Minister's historic state visit to Washington, our governments agreed on measures that will reduce red tape, make it easier to trade, and simpler to cross the border, while at the same time keeping both of our countries safe. This will have real results for Canadian travellers, with an agreement in principle to pursue new preclearance operations at Billy Bishop airport in Toronto as well as in Quebec City's Jean Lesage airport, and an expanded preclearance for rail service in Montreal and Vancouver. As well, we committed to working hard to find a solution to the softwood lumber dispute within 100 days.

In budget 2016 we announced $9.5 million to support the International Joint Commission. This will help all parties with a long term strategy for a healthy Great Lakes region, and for me, the Great Lakes include Lake Winnipeg.

Specific to Mexico, we are steadily progressing on lifting the Mexican visa requirement. This will improve relations with Canada's still largest trading partner.

Now to other international issues, especially multilateral institutions.

[*Translation*]

I could speak at length about COP21 in Paris and the very positive role Ms. McKenna, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, has played there, at the Prime Minister’s request. If I am asked to participate, I will do so. Since I have a limited time at my disposal, let me stress the international component, assistance to the tune of $2.5 billion over five years to help developing countries fight climate change.

[*English*]

Our commitment to multilateralism and the UN was highlighted when the Prime Minister announced we are seeking election to the United Nations Security Council for the 2021-22 term. The same week, Minister Hajdu announced that Canada would run for a seat on the UN Commission on the Status of Women for the 2017 to 2020 term. She said she had a very interesting meeting on the status of women just before. Well, Canada was elected to this body on April 5.

My mandate letter asks that we increase Canada's support for United Nations peace operations in its mediation, conflict prevention, and post-conflict reconstruction efforts. To this end, budget 2016 provides $586.5 million over three years for stabilization, counter-terrorism capacity building, and police peacekeeping programs.

I recently announced that we will renew Canada's action plan on women, peace, and security. I know this committee's work on this topic and look forward to the outcome of your study.

Also, later this year I intend to table the arms trade treaty in Parliament as part of our accession process.

Having been called on to promote inclusiveness and accountable governance, peaceful pluralism, and respectful diversity in human rights, including the rights of women and refugees, budget 2016 provides dedicated funding to support the promotion of pluralism and respect for diversity and human rights around the world. Indeed, the department is now focused more than ever on a comprehensive approach to human rights across the government's priorities, in terms of gender and women, migration, LGBTQI and indigenous rights, climate change, and many others. Our approach to human rights will be comprehensive in order to be effective in the promotion of all universal human rights, including, of course, freedom of religion.

When the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights visited in February, we announced new funding of $15 million over three years to finance that body's work. We now support all sexual and reproductive health rights, and therefore ended the previous government's policy that prohibited giving assistance for pregnancy terminations, even in countries that authorize them.

Also, we put an end to the previous government's case-by-case policy regarding the death penalty. We now demand clemency for all Canadians facing the death penalty anywhere in the world, to maximize the possibility of obtaining clemency for some Canadians.

● (1645)

[*Translation*]

The Prime Minister has also asked me to be more transparent and rigorous than ever with respect to export permits and human rights reports. I will make an announcement about that in the near future.

[*English*]

Turning to security, my mandate letter instructed me to ensure a close link between defence policy, foreign policy, and national security. I worked with my colleagues on the development of the government's new strategy for countering ISIL and responding to the crises in Syria and Iraq. It is comprehensive, integrated, and sustained, and has been well received by our local and international partners, including within the global coalition led by the United States.

Over the next three years, we'll invest $1.6 billion in defence, security, development, and humanitarian assistance in the region. We are working with all our partners to achieve a diplomatic solution to the crisis and to prepare the long road to peace.

[*Translation*]

In terms of the refugees issue, I am proud of the role played by my department and by Canadian diplomacy in general in welcoming 25,000 Syrian refugees to Canada. That has required a great deal of co-operation with other countries, specifically Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, to some degree as well. Thousands and thousands of new files had to be processed within very tight deadlines. I thank them for all their hard work.

Furthermore, I would like to point out the announcement made yesterday by my colleague, Minister Marie-Claude Bibeau, about a financial contribution of $100 million to help the most vulnerable communities affected by the Syrian crisis. Canadians have been very generous, and Canada will support this generosity.

Let’s not forget our contribution of $100 million to the United Nations Refugee Agency to help those affected by the Syrian crisis.

[*English*]

In other areas, I delivered a strong call to the conference on disarmament in Geneva to get back to work, with Canada ready to assist. We announced that Canada would invest an additional $42 million in the global partnership program to improve nuclear and radiological security worldwide. In fact, Canada will lead the push to secure agreement and accession to the anti-fissile material treaty.

[*Translation*]

My mandate letter also mentions my duty to help increase Canada’s educational and cultural interaction with the world and to revitalize Canada’s cultural diplomacy. I will do so in close collaboration with Ms. Joly, Minister of Canadian Heritage.

Budget 2016 proposes to invest $35 million over two years starting in 2016-2017 in promoting Canada’s artists and cultural sectors abroad. As I have just mentioned, I will be working with Ms. Joly and Ms. Freeland on accomplishing that.

As of now, that funding will help Canadian missions abroad to promote Canada’s culture and creativity on the world stage, especially since Canada is preparing to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Canadian Confederation, not of Canada, because Canada had been around well before that time.

[*English*]

We consider it important to stay engaged around the world, understanding that engagement is not agreement, and that we proceed with our eyes open. Engagement is essential to regaining the respect of our allies and to pursuing our interests within the multilateral governance framework.

With Iran, we are in the very preliminary stage of our re-engagement. We continue to have fundamental differences, including serious concerns about Iran's continued human rights violations and its aggressive stand toward Israel, but channels of communication are open, which is an important first step.

We made changes, along with our like-minded partners, to our sanctions regime in line with the joint comprehensive plan of action on Iran's nuclear program, negotiated by the P5 + 1 members. Canadian business is no longer at a disadvantage vis-à-vis our allies.

With Russia, the previous government's empty-chair policy caused Canada to miss opportunities to lead international meetings, to host events, and to play its full role in the negotiation process regarding Ukraine. In line with our like-minded European and American partners, we have applied additional new sanctions to Russia and are now working on a progressive re-engagement where we have clear and common interests, like the Arctic and international security for example, even as we maintain our firm stance on Russia's actions in Ukraine.

Mr. Chair and honourable members, our government has already begun delivering on the priorities identified in ministerial mandate letters. My deputy will tell you that we are keeping the department very busy.

● (1650)

[*Translation*]

I look forward to your questions and comments. I think the discussion we'll have today and in the coming months or even years will be very promising and productive for Canada and for its role in the world.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister. Just as a reminder to colleagues, we will be inviting the minister back for one of the most important parts of our role, and that's the estimates. That will probably be within less than a month. Just keep that in mind as we work our way through here today.

I'll start with Mr. Kent. He'll begin the questions to the minister.

Hon. Peter Kent: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for visiting with us today. As the chair said, these conversations are very important, and much more enlightening than in the very often artificial constraints of question period.

Just as an aside, Mr. Chair, for our next session, it might be advisable, given the Canadian public's interest in these sorts of conversations, to take advantage of a televised facility.

Minister, shortly after the election and your appointment as Minister of Foreign Affairs, you reaffirmed the campaign pledge to work towards normalization of relations with Iran and the reopening of a mission in Tehran.

At one of our first committee meetings, departmental officials told us that it would probably be some time before a safe, secure location and property could be found for a new embassy and for the negotiations that would enable our return to Tehran.

You understand from our interaction in question period that the official opposition is very concerned about the continuing belligerence of the Iranian regime, the ballistic missile testing, the constant reiteration of threats against Israel, and the boasting of funding of terrorist endeavours among its various proxies around the Middle East.

I wonder if you could give us an update on exactly where we are in our relations with Iran today.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Thank you for that important question.

Yes, indeed, we believe that if Canada is alone in cutting links to Iran, it is not helping anyone. It's not helping the people of Iran and their human rights. It's not helping the interests of Canada, not only businesses but also students and families. It's not helping our allies, including Israel. Also, it's not helping our relationship with our own allies who do not think Canada is relevant anymore, or with the negotiations on Syria. If we don't speak to the Russians and the Iranians, it's difficult for us to be at the table on Syria to find a solution.

At the same time we have Canadians risking their lives, we should be at the decision-making table. If we put our fellow citizens in danger for a cause, we should be among the decision-makers.

For all these reasons, we are penalized in Canada much more than Iran or Russia when we take this kind of approach. We need to change it.

We need to do it with open eyes. There are a lot of problems, as you've mentioned, and I fully agree with you about the assessments you've made about Iran. For example, when they tested a ballistic missile, we increased our sanctions. But we did it in co-operation with our allies. If Canada is alone in doing it, it will barely be felt in Iran. If it's a collective sanction, then they are more likely to be affected. I agree fully with you about that.

Where are we? We are in a very preliminary context. It's not yet at the level of politics. The officials are doing it. It's very difficult to recreate links when they have been cut. In another context, I have spent a long time in my political career, and if we cut links with a country it's very difficult afterward to recreate the links.

That was another context, but in this context it's a bit the same. It will be step by step, and it's not so easy to do. We won't have an embassy tomorrow morning. When we have an embassy, a top priority of ours will be the consideration that you very rightly mentioned: the necessity of being careful about the safety of our diplomats.

If there is something that stops me from sleeping at night, and it's the same for my deputy, it is the security of all the diplomats around the world.

● (1655)

Hon. Peter Kent: Thank you.

The safety of our foreign service professionals was at the root of our previous government's decision to close the embassy and withdraw. It was one of the reasons for doing that, and we would hope that you would maintain strongly the listing of Iran as a state sponsor of terror.

My second and only remaining question is on another topic. After the United Nations Human Rights Council formalized the appointment of Canadian professor Michael Lynk as that discredited organization's special rapporteur on human rights in Palestine, you called for the council to review the appointment—although your call was made in the rather unconventional form of a tweet, not unlike the transport minister's tweet about the airport in Toronto. It's interesting that ministerial decisions are being proclaimed on social media.

Seriously, I wonder if you can tell us what actions or interventions you or Canada's diplomats abroad have taken to have Mr. Lynk's appointment reversed.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Is the question if I will ask to reverse...?

Hon. Peter Kent: You asked, in your tweet—

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I'm looking for my tweet. I don't have—

Hon. Peter Kent: —that the Human Rights Council review his appointment. I'm just wondering if that meant you wished that the Human Rights Council would revoke the appointment—which I would certainly strongly support—given Mr. Lynk's history and record.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: What I have said in these tweets that are somewhere in this big binder is that I have.... I'm a practical man. If we choose someone to report and he or she is not accepted by one of the two parties, it's unlikely that he or she will be in a situation to report. What happened to the predecessor....

[*Translation*]

I don’t have the tweets. They are very good, you know.

[*English*]

When you have a rapporteur who is unable to report, there's a danger that the one just chosen will not be able to do his duty any more than the one who was his predecessor and who had to resign as a rapporteur and was unable to report. That's my concern. It's why I sent this message. It's not a condemnation of this individual. It is the mere fact that I have a lot of concern about what we are doing, not about.... There are two tweets. The first one was not about the choice. It was about the process, not the choice. It was not because I have something against this individual, but because I am concerned that he will not be able to do anything that he was supposed to do because there are strong concerns about his impartiality. The concern I have is about the impartiality.

On the process, the difficulty we have is that it's very secretive. Second, the design of the mandate is to look at the behaviour of the occupying authority, which is Israel, but not the behaviour of the other forces in the region. I think this process will make it very difficult for anyone who is chosen. As good as this professor may be, anyone who is chosen will create the problem of impartiality because of the way the mandate has been designed.

Canada has these kinds of concerns, and I think it's good for us to speak out about it. I welcome your views about that, because we have a duty to help improve this important process.

● (1700)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Kent.

We'll go to Mr. Miller.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: That's too bad. Let's talk about this another time.

Hon. Peter Kent: Another time.

The Chair: We have a lot of time, so we'll get back to you.

Mr. Miller.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I'm sorry if my answer was too long.

Mr. Marc Miller: Maybe I can tweet my question?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Okay.

I have the tweets now.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Mr. Miller, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Miller: One of the most significant changes that we have seen in your foreign affairs approach compared to the previous government is, as you said, the planning of a re-engagement policy. You have expressed your intent to re-establish the diplomatic relations with Iran and the possibility of opening a consulate in Tehran. In addition, you stated that you would resume the dialogue with Russia rather than continue to ignore it.

Why do you think this re-engagement policy is an improvement over the previous strategies used to interact with those countries? Could you also explain the role that an internationally re-engaged and popular Prime Minister may play in this new approach?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: This brings me to the concept that I have proposed to define our policy of responsible conviction. Since I am a democrat—and all of us here are democrats—I don't like to have discussions with foreign affairs ministers who have been selected in a non-democratic way. I hate that. However, I have to ask myself what impact my position would have on Canadians and other human beings if I stopped talking to those ministers and listened just to my conviction.

We must agree to cultivate relations, while keeping our eyes open and erring on the side of caution, with regimes that we don't like and governments that we don't think uphold fundamental rights. Those relations don't have to be of the same nature as the ones we have with advanced democracies. I don't know how many centuries it would take, but perhaps some day, the world will be made up of respectable democracies only. That is how we can move forward.

Severing ties with a regime because we don't like it may well fail to improve the situation of that regime and greatly harm Canada and its ability to be of use to other countries. For instance, it is fortunate that Canada had an embassy in Iran in the late 1970s. We were able to come to the rescue of the American hostages as a result. Two films have been made about this: a Hollywood movie, which was not very good, and a Canadian film, which was much better. That is a very simple example that shows that, when Canada is engaged with its eyes open and forges ties, it can get things done.

I wish we were in Geneva right now at the negotiating table on the Syrian crisis. We are not there because neither Russia nor Iran will allow us to participate as long as Canada does not want to sit at the table to discuss issues with them. That is especially true for Russia in this case. We must address the Arctic. The Russians have the largest territory in the Arctic. Some Russian scientists are used to working with Canadian scientists. What is the logic behind wanting to prevent our scientists from working with the Russian scientists? We must at all costs ensure that the Arctic ecosystem is managed properly.

I could give example after example. We must practise this responsible conviction by engaging in the world as it is with our eyes open in the hope of being able to improve it by being present, not absent.

[*English*]

Mr. Raj Saini: Thank you very much, Mr. Minister, for giving us some very incisive remarks today.

I'm an MP from a riding that is a global leader in innovation and research. With the people in our riding, it is very essential that we're able to engage meaningfully with stakeholders and partners around the world. Our relationship with certain countries, especially with the United States, didn't fare so well over the last few years. We were extremely proud and encouraged to see the Prime Minister hosted at the White House last month. We hope this re-engaged approach in Canada-U.S. relations specifically, which you had also alluded to in your mandate letter, will continue.

Can you elaborate further on this re-engagement with the United States and on what your views are going forward?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Thank you very much indeed.

We just talked about creating a good relationship, so I wouldn't be too hard on the approach of the former government. It would be unfair to say that the links have been cut, that the channels have been cut, with the United States, the way they have been with, let's say, Russia. It's not the case.

But I think improvements are possible. One way to do that is to avoid focusing our relationship, in an antagonistic way, on one issue. We shared the view of the former government on the Keystone XL pipeline. We thought it was a project that made sense. We advocated for it from the opposition and in our visits with the United States. But we thought the antagonistic way by which the former government approached the issue, the Prime Minister saying it was a no-brainer and he would not accept no as an answer, was not helpful. It was also a way to slow down progress on other files.

I will not repeat this mistake. We'll have a very comprehensive approach in our relationship with the United States, a very professional one, and I will listen very closely to the views of all diplomats, because this approach was partisan. It was not recommended by our top officials of the department. I think we need to be very professional in our relationship with the United States. It is a key one, and we cannot accept continuing to please ourselves by arguing harshly in a way that is not beneficial at the end of the day. We need to speak frankly, to be strong in our opposition, but to do it with a sense of responsible conviction.

● (1705)

The Chair: Madame Laverdière.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being with us today, Mr. Minister.

I wouldn't want to give you the impression that I am being impolite or rude, but since we were not notified that the meeting would end at 5:30 p.m., I will be quick as I won't have a second round of questions.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I'm sorry.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Mr. Minister, I wrote to you a while back to suggest that you to create a special envoy position for LGBT issues. As we know, President Obama has done so. Could you just tell me whether you intend to create a position like that?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: The answer is no, but a friendly no. I think this is a very valid cause, but I don’t think this would be the best way to proceed. Creating positions for special envoys on various issues was intended to offset the fact that the U.S. president has a hard time appointing ambassadors. Right now, there are 30 or 40 ambassadors that Mr. Kerry, the U.S. Secretary of State, cannot appoint because Congress is putting up resistance. To get around this problem, a lot of special envoys have been appointed for various matters.

Fortunately, we don’t have that problem, and I don’t think we should adopt this approach. Our ambassadors are responsible for those whose sexual orientation is in the minority and who must be defended around the world.

Our ambassador in Geneva is handling this matter with great conviction. I would not want us to create various categories of ambassadors. It would not be useful. I prefer that these issues be supported through collective responsibility.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Mr. Minister, your mandate letter also mentions transparency and openness. In relation to contracts for arms sales abroad, the Prime Minister said today that he would ensure that transparency and openness are heightened.

You may know that I have proposed the creation of a subcommittee of the Committee of Foreign Affairs so that we can study those issues in depth. Do you think it's an interesting proposal?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I find it interesting, but I am not sure that it is a priority right now. However, it is up to the committee to decide what it wants to do.

Together, in all the parties, we will be investing a lot of energy and effort in forming the security oversight committee, which is a lot to chew on. However, if we do a good job, we may want to repeat the experience with another committee. But if we do everything at the same time, things might get out of control.

As you know, we have to overcome the effect of several years of intense partisanship. We can do it, but the idea is to start with the issue we committed to in the election. That's one of our election promises.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Yes, I understand, Mr. Minister. We can talk about it again, but I don't see why one would interfere with the other. We know that Canadians are very concerned about Canada's arms sales abroad.

While conducting and approving the evaluation of arms export permits to Saudi Arabia, why has the department not consulted with civil society organizations that have a lot of human rights expertise?

● (1710)

Hon. Stéphane Dion: My department has ongoing consultations on that.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: However, there is no reference in the document on—

Hon. Stéphane Dion: The consultations are part of the recommendations I receive from people. There is not always a reference to all the people who have been consulted. That is not the goal. The goal is to say: “Mr. Minister, here are the findings of our evaluation; now make your decision”.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: The document mentions that this will help Saudi Arabia in its actions in Yemen.

Does that worry you?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Our priority for the situation in Yemen is to find a peaceful solution very quickly. That said, Saudi Arabia is a strategic partner, not just for Canada, but for all of our NATO allies, too.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: You know that there are very serious allegations in Yemen about international rights violations against all the parties involved. I hope you will agree with me, Mr. Minister, that the international rights violations lead neither to lasting peace nor stability.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I fully agree with you that there are currently serious concerns to be raised about the behaviour of almost everyone in Yemen. All parties present have been the subject of various accusations.

As for this weapons contract, as long as I assume this responsibility under Mr. Trudeau's leadership, the fundamental question that will guide my decision as minister will be to determine whether the use of Canadian equipment was appropriate from the perspective of human rights, our strategic interests and those of our allies. That's what needs to be considered.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Mr. Minister, I thought the idea was to ensure that there is no reasonable risk of the equipment being subsequently used to violate human rights. If abuses occur, will the export permits be suspended and the tanks recovered?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I understand your question. You're asking whether, once the tanks have been sent, it stops there and there is nothing else to do. We need to be careful. We need to keep in mind that the contract we're talking about goes back many years. If the recommendation that was made to me changes at any point and if I learn that the military equipment in question is being misused, I pledge to Canadians—as the Prime Minister asked me to and the process have required me to do—to no longer authorize export permits.

What is the impact of that? Production is stopped immediately. Even previous permits that authorized the shipment of equipment become null.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: That's an interesting point—

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Wait, if I may. I won't take long.

Production is stopped. As for the vehicles that have already been sent, it's important to understand that they need very careful maintenance. Saudi Arabia is a wealthy country, but it's not a high-tech country. It doesn't have the capacity to operate these vehicles in the long term on its own. It needs the help of the Canadian company, which would no longer be able to provide it. When export permits are cancelled, it isn't just the material equipment that is no longer provided, but the advice that goes along with the transaction, as well. Emails can no longer be sent. Everything is blocked and, as the deputy minister mentioned, spare parts can't be sent anymore either.

This is very strong leverage that the Department of Foreign Affairs has to tell countries that buy Canadian equipment—not just Saudi Arabia, but any country—to use it correctly or they won't be able to use it practically anymore.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we'll go to Mr. Levitt.

Mr. Michael Levitt: Thank you for coming here and speaking with us this afternoon, Minister Dion.

You've just returned from a trip to Asia, where you went to multiple countries, including Burma, which recently held democratic elections and elected new leadership. Can you talk to us about the kind of support we offered to Burma and whether we will be offering this to countries in similar positions as they transition to new democracy, and how does this relate to the defence of religious freedoms, such as of the Rohingya in Burma and other minority groups?

● (1715)

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Thank you so much, Michael.

First, I will speak about Myanmar, because they told me that is the name they choose. I understand that we are reluctant to use it, because at the beginning it was the military that imposed this name, but now I'm told it has been accepted by the democrats as well. The military doesn't want to stop the democrats; they want to work with the democrats, and they call it Myanmar.

[*Translation*]

It's sort of too bad. The name “Birmanie” in French is very nice, but the country is now called Myanmar.

[*English*]

Second, there are a lot of problems in this country. It is one of the poorest in the world, the human rights record is appalling, and respect for diversity and religious rights starts from a very low level. But they are courageous. They have decided to become a democracy. It cannot be done overnight, but they have made a lot of progress. Their leader is one of the most-celebrated around the world, and as I'm sure you know, she is an honorary Canadian. We did that unanimously some years ago.

We need to support them. I hope it will work. I told them that I hope it will work not only for them and their minorities, including the one you mentioned, but that it will work for the world. They are almost alone in their region in trying this. Other countries, neighbouring countries—I was reluctant to mention them so as not to create diplomatic problems—are going the other way. They are more military than ever, and less democratic than ever. This one wants to succeed.

So let's work together to help them, to support them, and to encourage the international community to do so. It's why I was pleased to announce $44 million in support as a first step; it's not the end of the story.

One of the things I announced addresses your issue. They want to create national reconciliation, as they call it, together. Today there are still militias in some parts of the country. They want that to stop and to have national reconciliation. One of the ways they are looking at is to create what they call a “federal union”.

One of the investments Canada is making today is to provide the capacity for Myanmar to have access to the best federative practices around the world. We have an international body that is very good for that, the Forum of Federations, which the former government was working with. We're not starting from scratch. That is the kind of support that Canada must provide in Myanmar.

Mr. Michael Levitt: Thank you very much.

The Chair: We now go to Mr. Sidhu.

Mr. Jati Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Dion, for coming to the committee and sharing your knowledge and experience on the world stage.

Recently Canada was elected to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. The government is also pursuing a seat on the United Nations Security Council. Obviously, both of these are beneficial endeavours for our country. How do you view the impact of these endeavours on Canada's relations with other countries? How will a seat on the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women impact policy in Canada?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: As you know, our Prime Minister has some priorities, and one of them is the status of women in Canada and around the world. He doesn't want to miss the opportunity to make a difference. So we need to go there. We need to go to the international bodies that are addressing this issue. Some of them are not every effective and are jammed with traditional views that are certainly not connected with the universal understanding of what gender equality is. So we need to be there to make our case very strongly, to make progress, including at the United Nations. The United Nations is far from being a perfect institution, and I share a lot of the criticisms I hear about it, but you don't make progress by pulling out. You are not making progress by insulting everyone. You're not making progress by going for fast food instead of going to the United Nations for an important ceremony or debate.

We'll be there strong at the United Nations. If some people want them to identify us with the worst practices around the world because we sit beside questioning regimes, we'll not accept it. We are there because we are Canada. We have a strong understanding of universal rights for all human beings. At the same time, we fully respect the diversity of humanity. We think diversity is a strength as long as it is in accordance with universal human rights. We advocate for it everywhere, especially for gender equity.

● (1720)

The Chair: Thank you. That's the end of the first round.

The second round goes to Mr. Fonseca for six minutes.

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Thank you, Minister Dion. As you know, we currently have many Canadians who are abroad. They've been sentenced to the death penalty and are waiting for our government to claim them, to bring them back to Canada to be able to be judged here in our courts. This includes two well-known cases in the United States, in which repeated calls have been made for our government's intervention to return these Canadians to Canada.

Now, Minister Dion, you've been unwavering and very clear that you will be seeking clemency for all Canadians abroad facing the death penalty. This is an obvious change from the previous government's uncertainty on this issue.

What brought you to that decision, and what steps have you taken as a foreign minister to achieve clemency for Canadians facing that death penalty abroad in other nations?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: It is because, Mr. Fonseca, I am a Liberal, and we Liberals are against the death penalty. I think there are two reasons. I will frame it this way. Maybe you, as a Liberal, express it differently from me, but I will list two reasons why we are abolitionist, why we want to abolish the death penalty for all human beings, and certainly for Canadians.

The first reason is that we think justice is about justice, not about vengeance. That's what a civilized society is supposed to be about: about justice, not about vengeance. The second reason is that a justice system, as good as it may be, may always make mistakes. If it is possible to free a jailed man or woman; it's impossible to bring them back to life if they are being executed. So these two reasons are compelling enough to be abolitionist. It's what our party believes. And now that we are the government, we'll implement that.

I want to say that under the Progressive Conservative government of Mr. Mulroney, they resisted going back to the death penalty. The former government decided to have a policy abroad of pick and choose, case by case. If you do that, that means you lose your credibility. You cannot say to a country, “I don't want you to execute this Canadian”, if we have said to another country that it's no, or you may do so. You lose your credibility. You cannot help Canadians anywhere.

In order to have some chance to save some Canadians from the death penalty, you need to advocate it everywhere and in every forum, in the United Nations and elsewhere, and it's what we'll do. Canada is known for being resolutely abolitionist.

Mr. Peter Fonseca: Thank you.

Mr. Raj Saini: Mr. Minister, you're very well aware that weapons of mass destruction, whether nuclear, biological, or chemical in nature, represent a significant threat in the world today. So my question is two-fold. Can you please update the committee of the role that Canada is playing in helping to advance disarmament negotiations around the world, as well as efforts to combat biological and chemical weapons?

Second, can you also comment on the fact that Russia boycotted the 2016 nuclear summit in Washington and the ramifications of that on disarmament in general?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: On the second part of the question, my comment is very short. I completely disagree with what they have done. I think President Obama was acting in good faith with his initiative, and the fact that the Russians boycotted it, I don't think is necessarily linked to this issue as such, as much as some of the difficulties they have in their relationships elsewhere, especially with the unacceptable behaviour of Russia in regard to Ukraine.

What I might say on this issue is that the United Nations conference on disarmament has stalled for the last 20 years. No progress has been made. I said that to them very clearly in March 2016 in Geneva. It's too bad, because we have been involved and have been able to make progress—but outside of this conference. We have made progress on the convention banning anti-personal mines and the convention on clusters munitions—Canada played a big role in both of those—and the arms trade treaty. I repeat on this occasion that we will be a member of this arms trade treaty, and this committee will likely have some work to do on it, because we'll have to make some adjustments in some of our laws.

To unjam and create a new momentum in this United Nations conference on disarmament, what Canada is proposing is not necessarily a new strategy. However, what would be new is a strong focus on successful negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty. That's the one on which I think progress is the most unlikely—or the more likely if you're optimistic. The group of government experts that Canada was honoured to chair has already produced a robust in-depth assessment of future FMCT aspects. Their work showed that a treaty is not beyond our reach. Negotiations will undoubtedly be difficult, but achieving an outcome would be a significant achievement.

● (1725)

The Chair: Mr. Paul-Hus.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Minister, I'll try to be brief. I'd need half an hour to ask all my questions.

The Department of Defence just launched a policy review process. Normally a foreign affairs policy is required before doing that. Since we don't yet have this new policy, we can assume that Canada's foreign affairs policy will be based on your mandate letter.

We assume that the defence policy review is an approach that will lead to our involvement in UN missions. If that's the case, I'd like to know how you see such participation. We know that the UN cannot currently, and hasn't for 25 years, properly manage the presence of armed forces on peacekeeping missions in some countries for economic and security reasons. How will our forces be deployed and in what conditions?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: First of all, my hon. colleague, I fully agree that the foreign policy must support the defence policy. That's why the Prime Minister asked me to work very closely with the Minister of National Defence. We have an excellent relationship. The message was sent that there should be no more state within a state. Everyone must work together.

That said, our soldiers and our defence system are part of the foreign policy considerations. It isn't just saying, “They follow and we advance”. When both ministers worked together, as in the case of Iraq and Syria, foreign policy goals were very clear. We also need to look at our defence systems and our key strengths and, for example, to determine how many instructors we can send for the mission. We managed to triple our numbers. I didn't have the information to establish a figure, but my colleague was able to take care of that.

What was the priority for our American allies? I collected information on that and so did they. I received information from Mr. Kerry and he received it from Mr. Carter and others. So we are working together very closely.

So we are going to review the defence policy and the international development policy at the same time. The Prime Minister asked us to do it together. We have an interdepartmental committee. I'm on it, and so is Ms. Bibeau and Mr. Sajjan. We're going to make headway together.

You're right to say that we will focus more on our role in the UN than in the past, particularly when it comes to peacekeeping missions. But let me tell you that our role in NATO will not suffer. We can and will take action on both fronts.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: I'm pleased to hear that, given that the missions of each are really different. For example, the NATO mission and the current mission in Iraq are totally different from UN missions.

Having myself been a peacekeeper with the Canadian Forces and participated in that kind of mission, I unfortunately saw that many of my colleagues were very happy to be done with peacekeeping. We were proud about it in the beginning, but the conditions we faced, especially in Bosnia, meant that things have changed.

As for the future, we need to truly understand your intentions. In your mandate letter, you say that UN missions will be focused more on mediation, conflict-prevention and reconstruction efforts.

Does that mean that soldiers will be required to play only a peacekeeping role and will no longer have to fight? Is that your intention?

● (1730)

Hon. Stéphane Dion: No, our activities will never be limited to that. However, we had ceased peacekeeping missions and we need to engage in them again. People expect that of Canada. People count on Canada so that peacekeeping missions operate well. They face enormous problems, as you know.

The trend has changed. Previously, it was developed countries that provided soldiers. Now, developing countries, particularly African countries, want to do it themselves. It's a matter of national pride and so on. They think that the local populations would be more accepting of people from the same region. That said, these soldiers need to be seen as security not a threat. But the opposite happens in many cases. The rapes are unacceptable. These are absolutely harmful behaviours. That's why Canada must be present to help professionalize peacekeeping missions.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Do you intend to have Canada in some way take control of peacekeeping operations in the world?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: The idea isn't for Canada to take control, but for it to be present to help to make the missions effective. It isn't necessarily to send our own forces into the field, but to ensure that the personnel deployed are trained by Canadians who know the business.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: You spoke briefly about the Islamic State group and the work we are currently doing on site, but it isn't mentioned in your mandate letter.

Do you plan to withdraw troops at the end of the planned period and focus more on UN operations?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: We would all like not to have to keep coalition forces in Iraq and Syria. We hope that these countries become stable again and capable of moving toward becoming pluralistic democracies. But we're far from that. In the meantime, we have a commitment of several years to honour. Our goal isn't only to abolish this horrible terrorist group, but also to ensure that it does not re-emerge later through another group and under another name. So we need to create conditions conducive to lasting stability and peace.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: I'd like to move on to something else.

You mentioned that $2.5 billion had been sent abroad. I'd like to know what it's for.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Did you say $2.5 billion?

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: I think it's for the environment.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: You mean $2.65 billion. Don't cut my funds.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Could you tell us exactly what it's for?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I think we can find that information.

[*English*]

The Chair: Because we are going to be doing the estimates on this specifically as we go forward—

[*Translation*]

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I have the information on that. I could send it to you.

[*English*]

The Chair: —maybe what I'll do, because our time is pretty much done, is certainly to revisit this.

Minister, I want to wrap this up by letting you know how much we appreciate your time today. I also want you to know that the committee is working very collaboratively to try to depoliticize, if I can put it in those terms, to make this committee very effective, as hard as it may be for all of us who make our living being politicians. Part of that role will be to have you visit us on a fairly regular basis. You know I will be asking to have you visit the committee and talk about these issues, so people will have an opportunity to ask these questions and make their points. This was a very good start.

I want to let the committee know just a little of what has transpired to set up this meeting. I did ask to have it televised and was told that it was booked by other committees, so we'll attempt to do that as we work our way through this. I think it's important.

Frankly, on the women, peace and security study, I wish we did get it televised more often. We've had some absolutely amazing witnesses so far. The more I think about it, the more I wish that Canadians could listen to what we've been listening to on a regular basis.

Minister, I will invite you, on behalf of the committee, to do the estimates sometime very soon.

I think it was a very good start. We appreciate your time and effort here today, and we look forward to seeing you again.

Colleagues, as you know, next Tuesday we have General Vance, Chief of the Defence Staff, and Lieutenant-General Christine Whitecross, chief of the military personnel command. We will also have the head of the RCMP. We will have an opportunity to speak on the military side as it relates to the women, peace and security study, which, as you know, is a very important part. I look forward to seeing you back here on Tuesday at 3:30.

Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.