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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.)): Good afternoon, everyone. It is my pleasure to call this meeting to order. I welcome each and every one of you to meeting number 32 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of January 25, 2021. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. So you are all aware, the webcast will always show the person speaking, rather than the entirety of the committee.

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few points. First, members and witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You have the choice, at the bottom of your screen, of floor, English or French.

For members participating in person, proceed as you usually would when the whole committee is meeting in person in a committee room. Keep in mind the directives from the Board of Internal Economy regarding masking and health protocols.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are on the video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself. For those in the room, your microphone will be controlled as normal by the proceedings and verification officer. This is a reminder that all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

With regard to the speakers list, as always, the committee clerk and I will do the very best we can to maintain the order of speaking for all members, whether they are participating virtually or in person. When I raise the hand in my box there, that's the indication that you have one minute remaining in your speaking or in your introduction.

With that, members, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on March 23, 2021, the committee will now begin its study of the government's response to the Ukraine International Airlines flight 752 tragedy.

I would now like to introduce and welcome our witnesses today. Appearing for the first hour, from 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., is the Honourable Omar Alghabra, the Minister of Transport, and the Honourable Marc Garneau, the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Between 4:30 and 5:30, we will have, from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, Sandra McCardell, assistant deputy minister; Arif Lalani, director general, international organizations bureau; Brian Szwarc, director general, consular operations; and Michelle Cameron, head of the PS752 task force.

From the Department of Transport, we'll have Kevin Brosseau, assistant deputy minister, safety and security; Patrick Juneau, director, aviation safety policy and intelligence; and finally, John Velho, director, passenger protect program and targeting operations.

Starting us off for the first hour, we have both Minister Alghabra and Minister Garneau.

I'm not sure which one of you wants to go first, but whoever does, you have the floor for five minutes. Welcome.

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Foreign Affairs): I suggest Minister Alghabra. We didn't queue this up between us, but I'm ready as well.

Hon. Omar Alghabra (Minister of Transport): I'm happy to start, if you want. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chair and colleagues, good afternoon. Thank you very much for inviting me back to be with you once again. This is, I think, my third appearance since my appointment, and I am also delighted to join with my colleague, Minister Garneau, who was the previous Minister of Transport. He has been working diligently on the file on this tragedy since he was Minister of Transport, and he is continuing the hard work that Canadians and families deserve as the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

I'm also here with officials who can offer some assistance as needed.

Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to participate in this discussion.

[Translation]

I am happy to join you virtually today.

[English]

Transport Canada appreciates the work of the committee on all matters related to air safety and security and is available to assist in any way it can.

On January 8, 2020, the downing of Ukraine International Airlines flight 752 claimed the lives of 176 innocent people, 138 of them with ties to Canada, including 55 Canadian citizens and 30 permanent residents. The loss of so many lives was a terrible tragedy.

We honour the memory of those who perished and offer our sincere condolences to all who mourn the victims of the PS752 tragedy. We share the grief of the families, relatives and friends who lost loved ones. It left behind a void that can never be refilled for all Canadians, but especially for the victims' families. Over the last year, I've had the privilege to work closely with many family members, including those represented by the PS752 family association.

● (1540)

[Translation]

Their strength, resilience and determination should set an example for all of us.

[English]

We have a duty to learn from past events. We have to do better. We owe it to the victims and their families. The Government of Canada's priority since the downing of PS752 has always been to provide families and loved ones with the support they need. We continue to work with other impacted countries to hold Iran to account for this tragedy and seek transparency and justice for the victims and families.

Canada has been at the forefront of global efforts to uncover the full truth of what happened when flight PS752 was shot down, including by highlighting the major shortcomings of the Iranian investigation and demanding that Iran provide answers to Canadians who lost loved ones.

Through the safer skies initiative, we are addressing the gaps in how the civil aviation sector deals with conflict zones. The safer skies initiative commits Canada to working with international partners to improve the safety and security of worldwide air travel. Much progress has been achieved at the international level to advance Canada's safer skies initiative, including the creation of the safer skies consultative committee, the safer skies commitment statement and Transport Canada's hosting of the first global safer skies forum, focused exclusively on the risks that conflict zones pose to civil aviation operations.

Budget 2021 provides \$9.1 million for the safer skies initiative, including a permanent, dedicated and fully resourced conflict zone information office within Transport Canada. This office will enhance our ability to monitor foreign conflict zones and rapidly warn air operators of new or emerging risks.

We began engaging with dozens of countries on how to make the world's airspace safer. We held the inaugural safer skies forum in December, bringing countries together with the united goal of preventing these events from ever happening again. People travelling from one part of the world to another should have confidence that they will not be exposed to safety and security risks that conflicts pose to civilian flight operations.

We will further address the clear shortcomings and failures of Iran's final accident investigation report at the International Civil Aviation Organization. We are also examining the annex 13 regime, which so far has worked as intended, to see if any improvements can be made.

[Translation]

The tragedy of flight PS752 was heartbreaking.

[English]

Another terrible incident like it would be unthinkable. We must never forget, but we must move forward. We can demonstrate our commitment to the families by working to prevent potential future disasters.

Today, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship announced a new public policy to offer a pathway to permanent residence for in-Canada families of victims of Ethiopian Airlines flight 302 and Ukraine International Airlines flight 752 who were Canadian citizens or permanent residents. This measure is an important part of the Government of Canada's ongoing support to these families. In-Canada families of victims who were Canadian citizens, permanent residents or foreign nationals who were found eligible on their permanent residence application can apply for permanent residence under the policy, which will remain in effect until May 11 of next year.

The Government of Canada is committed to supporting these families, who have demonstrated strength, courage and grace throughout this difficult and challenging time. Every aviation tragedy and each loss of life is one too many. This is why we continue to ensure better and safer air travel for all Canadians, both at home and abroad.

To honour all victims of air tragedies, the Government of Canada has designated January 8 of every year as a National Day of Remembrance for Victims of Air Disasters. On this day, every year, we will stand with Canadians across the country to remember and honour the people who were lost in these tragedies and mourn alongside those they left behind. We will continue to work to ensure that this never happens again.

I want to thank you again, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to meet with you virtually today.

● (1545)

[Translation]

I will be happy to answer your questions.

[English]

I welcome your questions. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Alghabra.

We'll now move on to Minister Garneau.

Minister Garneau, you have the floor for five minutes.

Hon. Marc Garneau: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Garneau, before you start, we're getting a mix between French and English. I'm hearing both. Mr. Clerk, please deal with that.

Mr. Garneau, you have the floor.

[Translation]

Hon. Marc Garneau: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before the committee today. I am happy to be back, this time as Minister of Foreign Affairs.

[English]

We all remember January 8, 2020. We remember our feelings of devastation from the tragedy. We remember our grief over the incredible lives lost. The downing of flight PS752 is a Canadian tragedy.

[Translation]

Let me begin by reiterating my deep condolences to the families for their loss.

I have had the opportunity to speak with families a number of times over the past year. Each encounter is a painful reminder of their heartbreaking loss. The stories and incredible lives of their loved ones touched so many of us. They will be remembered.

[English]

From the beginning, the government has been focused on providing families and loved ones with the support they need.

Global Affairs' consular team worked around the clock to deliver services and deployed a team to Iran to provide immediate local assistance to families. Officials worked to respect the wishes of the families to repatriate their loved ones. They brought in Farsi speakers to translate documents and answer questions. Counselling services, legal advice and expedited banking support were all arranged for families free of charge. Visas were facilitated to enable relatives to travel to Canada to settle affairs and to support surviving family members, with all fees waived. RCMP coordinated local police across the country to offer continuing support to all family members.

To reduce the immediate financial burden, as families dealt with the loss of their loved ones, \$25,000 per victim was made available to families for emergency costs. Canada matched private donations to the Canada Strong campaign. Talks were opened with the airlines to ensure prompt compensation, as required by law.

[Translation]

Our support to the families continues to this day, with regular communication with families. In December the Prime Minister designated January 8 of each year as the National Day of Remembrance for Victims of Air Disasters. We are offering a pathway to permanent residence to family members, establishing scholarships

in memory of those lost on PS752, and will establish a physical tribute in remembrance of air disasters.

From that very first day the Prime Minister was also absolutely clear. Canadians and the families have questions, and they deserve answers from Iran. We knew that getting a full accounting of the causes of this tragedy from Iran was going to be a long and difficult process. Only Iran has full access to the evidence, the crash site, witnesses, and those ultimately responsible. Iran's initial denials of responsibility, and their lack of transparency since, has not inspired confidence.

[English]

The government continues to work tirelessly and in coordination with other nations affected by this tragedy.

To keep Iran accountable for its actions, Canada founded the PS752 international coordination and response group to bring the voices and efforts of all the grieving nations together. We have repeatedly raised PS752 at the ICAO Council, the UN General Assembly, the UN Human Rights Council and just recently, last week, at the G7.

In March 2020, our government appointed the Honourable Ralph Goodale as the Prime Minister's special adviser on PS752. In December 2020, he delivered his report. In it, Special Advisor Goodale asked 23 groups the critical questions we expected Iran to answer.

Despite Iran's final report, released in March of this year—14 months after the downing—we are still without a complete accounting of the events that led to the disaster.

[Translation]

We knew that we could not trust Iran to produce these answers. This is why we stood up the Canadian Forensic Examination and Assessment Team. We await their final analysis, but we fully expect a transparent account of what Canada knows and an assessment of Iran's final report, including what questions remain outstanding.

● (1550)

[English]

We are now entering into the process of negotiations with Iran to ensure that they make full reparations, which includes a transparent accounting of the true causes of this tragedy, as well as compensations.

We enter this process with eyes wide open. Our focus will be on getting answers backed with credible evidence from Iran, first and foremost, for the victims and their grieving families. We will also ensure that we receive assurances, in concrete terms, that measures have been put in place to prevent such a tragedy from occurring in the future.

[Translation]

Throughout this process we will continue to keep the world's attention on this issue. We will raise it at every appropriate multilateral venue. Our resolve will not fade. And we will never forget. This is our solemn promise to the families of the victims, and indeed all Canadians.

I look forward to your questions.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Garneau.

We're now going to move on to our first round within the first hour. Starting us off, from the Conservatives, is Mrs. Kusie.

You have the floor for six minutes.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Minister Garneau, on January 8, 2020, PS752 was struck out of the sky by two Iranian missiles: 176 souls on board perished; 138 were heading to Canada; 55 were Canadian citizens; 30 were permanent residents of Canada.

Do you believe that the downing of PS752 was an attack against Canada, yes or no?

Hon. Marc Garneau: I thank my colleague for the question.

As a result of the tragic downing of PS752, we have required those answers from Iran. As I said in my opening remarks, those answers have not been provided to us as of yet.

Special Advisor Goodale, in his final report, put out a list of 21 critical questions that remain to be answered, questions such as why the airspace was left open and why the airlines that were flying out of Tehran airport were not notified that there was a heightened level of security.

Those questions remain to be answered. Iran has not provided all of the answers that we are looking for, and we will continue to push for those answers.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Minister Garneau, do you believe Iran targeted Canada in response to the assassination of General Soleimani, yes or no?

Hon. Marc Garneau: We are waiting for the forensic report, which I mentioned in my opening remarks. Hopefully, that will provide further information on what actually happened that night. Ultimately, Iran knows all the facts and Iran must provide all the answers, and that will be part of our negotiations.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Minister Garneau, why has no response been taken by this government of any significance, in particular implementing Magnitsky sanctions specifically against Iran, in particular placing the IRGC as a terrorist group, as was passed in the House of Commons in the last Parliament?

What is most despicable, Minister, is that your government continues to exploit the pain of the victims' families while not taking any unilateral actions. When will you have the courage to act on behalf of the victims' families and Canadians?

Hon. Marc Garneau: Mr. Chair, I would like to say very clearly that we have been working tirelessly to get the answers so that our

grieving families can get full accountability on what happened with PS752. We will continue to push for it.

With respect to sanctions, as my honourable colleague will know, Canada has established sanctions against Iranian individuals and entities in the past, and we always keep that option open for the future.

With respect to the IRGC, she will know that the Quds Force, which is part of the IRGC, is classified by Canada as a terrorist entity.

• (1555)

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Minister Garneau, you state in your opening statement that the government is waiting for the truth about what happened to come out of Iran before taking any significant action, which I mentioned you have clearly yet to do.

If that is the case, Minister Garneau, do you believe the world will ever truly know what happened to flight PS752?

Hon. Marc Garneau: We will do our utmost to provide those answers to the world. We require Iran to be fully accountable for what happened, and I think the forensic report, which will come out in the coming weeks, will also shed additional light.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: With military action having taken place in Iran from the assassination of General Soleimani, and then the missile strikes against U.S. troops in the area, was Canada concerned for the safety of Canadians in Iran? Were any measures taken to inform the Canadians in Iran of the ongoing military dangers?

Hon. Marc Garneau: What I will say to my colleague is that Canada did notify the only airline company—I was transport minister at the time—that had a flight path that went over Iran. We notified them that they should divert and not fly over Iranian airspace.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Canada's statement on flight PS752 at the ICAO said that Canada is "deeply concerned about the lack of convincing information and evidence, despite the publication of this investigation report. The report makes no attempt to answer critical questions about what truly happened" that fateful evening.

If that's the case, why has the government not administered consequences for Iran, such as sanctions, due to Iran's lack of transparency and co-operation and, worst of all, its disregard for Canadian lives?

Hon. Marc Garneau: We are in the process of continuing to try to get those answers.

My colleague should also know that we are in the process of beginning negotiations for reparations. That is an integral part of the whole process, and we will see how that process goes forward. One of the requirements with that, of course, is the full accountability that we're all seeking.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Garneau, and thank you, Mrs. Kusie.

We are now going to move on to the Liberals.

Mr. Ehsassi, you have the floor for six minutes.

By the way, Mr. Ehsassi, welcome to the committee.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for having me here today.

Thank you, ministers, for making yourselves available for the umpteenth time to this committee and always making yourselves available on an individual basis.

Minister Garneau, if I could begin with you, sir, since the beginning of this tragic incident 16 months ago, we have all witnessed the Iranian government display unconscionable conduct and a cavalier attitude towards the families as well as its international obligations. Among others, we could cite the fact that we did see the Iranian government bulldoze the scene of the accident the day after the tragic accident.

We have seen the Iranian government intimidate the relatives of those who lost loved ones. We saw and experienced the Iranian government's delaying of the handing over of the black boxes. We have had an opportunity to read their final report, which essentially raises more questions than it answers and says nothing about the decision-making process that happened on that tragic day. We have also seen the Iranian government not pursue culprits in Iran.

In other words, everything we have seen for the past 16 months demonstrates that the Iranian government has acted in an egregious manner and has demonstrated a flagrant disregard for due process and transparency.

Would you agree with my characterization, Minister?

Hon. Marc Garneau: Yes, Mr. Ehsassi, I would agree 100% with your characterization.

It began right away, with Iran first of all denying that they had committed this shooting down of flight PS752, and in the ensuing months, as you pointed out, intimidating family members. It took us repeated communications with Iran and speaking at the ICAO to finally get them to send the black boxes to Paris for analysis.

The report that they have put out is totally unacceptable in terms of accountability. The Iranian final report says that it was human error, and they have recently announced that they are indicting 10 people. What they are doing is laying the blame on some low-level people who operated the missile battery and not providing the accountability within the chain of command and the real decision-makers surrounding this and answering why the airspace was left open and why the airlines were not warned that there was a heightened level of activity.

The behaviour of the Iranian government has been frankly unconscionable in these past 15 months, and we are going to continue to pursue them so that we have accountability for the families.

• (1600)

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you, Minister.

As you know, in international law, the Iranian authorities are required to provide a prompt, effective, independent and transparent investigation. Now, in your remarks, you did say that, as Canadians, "[o]ur focus will be on getting answers backed with credible

evidence from Iran". Given what we have seen in the last 16 months, how do you propose to do so?

Hon. Marc Garneau: It is by continuing to insist on getting full, accountable and transparent answers in our interactions with Iran, and by making clear to Iran that we are not satisfied with what they have provided so far. At this point, we will also be going into negotiations with them for reparations. This touches on a whole bunch of areas, but part of that will also involve providing full accountability.

That is what the Canadian government has committed to doing to get all of the answers, and I believe the forensic report that was commissioned by our government will provide some additional insights. It will be coming out in the coming weeks.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: I'll now turn to Minister Alghabra.

Again, thank you, Minister Alghabra. You have been intimately involved with this issue since day one and have done tremendous work.

Given all that we have seen in the past 16 months, Minister Alghabra, how would you characterize the Iranian government's conduct?

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Let me pause for a second to thank Mr. Ehsassi for his advocacy on behalf of the families of PS752. I have seen him first-hand, from day one, interact closely with families and speak on their behalf in caucus, in Parliament and, as you can see here today, at committee.

Let me build on what Minister Garneau just said. Unfortunately, and frustratingly, Iran continues to avoid providing answers and accountability for what happened. As Minister Garneau said, there are many remaining unanswered questions. Our resolve remains strong to get to the bottom of what happened and to hold those who shot down the plane accountable.

We will exhaust all international avenues, work with international partners and continue to pressure Iran on getting answers for what happened.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Alghabra and Mr. Ehsassi.

We'll now move to the Bloc.

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, you have the floor for six minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

News of the crash of flight PS752 caused by Iran came as a shock to most people. The victims and their families still feel the consequences of that event today. Canadians and Quebecers alike wonder how anyone could have fired on an airliner.

Unfortunately, the families still do not have answers concerning this incident. Mr. Garneau, do you think your government has done enough to get answers for those families?

Hon. Marc Garneau: Thank you for your question.

I'm in constant contact with the families. We meet regularly to talk and so I can answer their questions and provide a progress report that we prepare. We also send them a letter every month and communicate with them on a weekly basis. Minister Alghabra and I are in close contact with the families.

We tell them we're still looking for certain answers because the preliminary and final reports didn't answer all questions in an open and transparent manner, as was supposed to be the case. We assure them that we'll keep digging for those answers that are so important to them.

In the meantime, we're providing them with several services, which I mentioned in my opening remarks, to support them during this extremely difficult time.

• (1605)

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you for your answer.

Canada has obtained "expert" status in the investigation to determine what happened. Unfortunately, we've been unable to find out much about that.

Given the large number of Canadian victims, why have we only received "expert" status?

It may be for technical reasons, but perhaps politics is also involved. Could you explain that to us? I think many people expected that we would have a more prominent role.

Hon. Marc Garneau: There are technical reasons. The rules are very clear in the event of a tragedy: the first country under suspicion is the one where the incident occurred. The second is the country represented by the airline, and the third is the one or ones where the aircraft was built.

The main countries under suspicion in this case are Iran, Ukraine, the United States and France. France builds this type of engine.

As we were on site as expert observers, we were able to determine from the black boxes what had happened in the aircraft but unable to obtain complete answers.

However, the most important thing is to find out what happened on the ground. Why were missiles fired on that aircraft? Who gave the orders? Why wasn't the airspace open? The answers to those questions won't come from the black boxes, and they're the ones we're looking for right now.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you very much for your answer, Mr. Garneau.

Since you were the Minister of Transport at the time and are now Minister of Foreign Affairs, you've been involved in this file from day one. So you have a fairly complete overview, or at least a much clearer picture than I or any ordinary person could have.

I nevertheless noticed that you share my frustration at being unable to get answers for the victims. I imagine the same is true of the new Minister of Transport, Mr. Alghabra. However, unlike me and any ordinary person, you're in a position to take steps.

I'd like to know what else you're going to do to get those answers.

Hon. Marc Garneau: As you know, my predecessor, Mr. Champagne, headed up the international coordination and response group for the victims of flight PS752, which includes representatives from the five countries that had citizens aboard that aircraft. In addition to Iran, they are Ukraine, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Afghanistan and Canada.

We formed a group and adopted a united position on the demands we'll be making in compensation negotiations with Iran. Those demands obviously include clarity and monetary compensation, but also other items, including an official apology from Iran.

The five countries have worked together over the past year to present a common front when we address Iran, as we are about to do.

• (1610)

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you.

I understand you felt it was important that there be adequate compensation, but even though the victims will welcome compensation, I imagine what they want first and foremost are answers from Iran. We've learned that 10 Iranians have been charged, but we don't know who they are or exactly why they've been charged.

What can you do to get the information you want? Those 10 Iranians could easily be 10 individuals who were arrested on a street corner. I'm not sure they'll ultimately give us the answers we're looking for. What powers do you have to ensure you can get the information you want and determine the identity of those people and what they did?

Hon. Marc Garneau: You're right: answers are the important thing for the families and for us. Monetary compensation is all well and good, but we first want answers because we really want to understand what happened.

During the negotiations, we will collaborate with the five previously named countries, and we won't allow Iran merely to declare that 10 individuals have been charged. Incidentally, I don't exactly know what they've been charged with.

We know perfectly well that the military members involved in this affair, who belong to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, have all been completely cleared because that information was in the final report. No explanation of the chain of command was offered that might give us an idea of who made the decisions, who was ultimately responsible or what soldiers fired the missiles. We know that individuals at the bottom of the chain of command fired the missiles and will be charged and convicted. We don't find that satisfactory, and we've clearly stated that we want to know who in the chain of command was responsible. That goes right up to the highest level.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Garneau. Thank you, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

We're now going to move on to the NDP.

Mr. Bachrach, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to both of the ministers for being with us today.

Let me start by saying that my thoughts today are with the families of the victims of this terrible tragedy. I hope that our meetings at this committee can lead, in a constructive way, to getting answers to the questions they have, and can make some positive contribution to ensuring that something like this never happens again.

Some of my questions have been answered already, but perhaps I'll start with Minister Garneau.

Minister, on March 17 you jointly released a statement expressing concern with the final report of the Iranian investigation, and you promised that the Government of Canada will soon disclose the results of its own investigation. I understand from your comments today that the final report is expected in the coming weeks. Is there anything else you can share around the timeline and when we can expect to see the outcome of that investigation?

Hon. Marc Garneau: You're right. This would be known as the forensic report, and it will come out in the coming weeks. It is the result of an analysis by a group of experts of all the facts that were publicly available, with access to some additional intelligence. That report will speak for itself when it comes out in a few weeks.

We felt it was necessary, particularly Special Advisor Goodale, as he was preparing his report and investigating what had happened, to focus as much expertise as possible to look at all of the known facts that followed the tragic downing so that we could have our own internal analysis. We felt, after the preliminary report came out, that the Iranians were not answering all the questions that needed to be answered.

We'll wait for that forensic report, which should be out in the coming weeks.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Minister, based on what you know about that analysis, how confident are you that the outcome will provide answers to the questions you've highlighted today?

Hon. Marc Garneau: You'll understand that I'm not at liberty to pre-empt that report. We'll just have to wait until it comes out.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Okay.

Perhaps I'll turn to Minister Alhabra with some questions about annex 13. On March 18, the TSB called for a review of the provisions in annex 13 of the ICAO convention, to improve transparency in the future when a state is investigating itself. Do you support this call for transparency?

• (1615)

Hon. Omar Alhabra: I thank Mr. Bachrach for the question.

It is part of our initiative, in fact. Annex 13 has worked well in the past, but this tragic incident has exposed that there are certain vulnerabilities where sometimes we could see a question of credibility. Canada has been now leading an effort to find a way to strengthen annex 13 so it can fill in the gap for these perceptions of conflict or real conflict.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Minister, does that include amending annex 13 to give other states a greater level of involvement when it comes to investigations of air accidents?

Hon. Omar Alhabra: Yes, it involves strengthening annex 13. I don't want to prejudge the outcome to be exact on how annex 13 will be prescribed enhancement, but for sure we need to strengthen annex 13, because we just found out there is weakness in how it is structured right now.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Minister, has ICAO expressed an interest in strengthening annex 13?

Hon. Omar Alhabra: ICAO has been supportive of our efforts to benefit from the lessons learned from this tragedy. ICAO has been supportive of the safer skies initiative. ICAO is engaging in discussions on strengthening annex 13.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Perhaps to both ministers or either, how satisfied were you with the access that the TSB was granted to the crash site and the black box, and with its general role in the investigation of this incident?

Hon. Omar Alhabra: Maybe I'll take that, Mr. Chair, and then see if Minister Garneau wants to respond as well.

The Chair: Go ahead, Minister.

Hon. Omar Alhabra: Minister Garneau certainly was involved at the time as Minister of Transport. As you know, TSB is an arm's-length organization and it's mandated to conduct independent investigations. I followed with great interest the criticism, the comments and the observations the TSB has been making throughout this journey about the shortcomings of access and transparency in the investigation.

Hon. Marc Garneau: I will add that it would have been nice had the TSB been allowed to become a fully involved investigator when the black boxes were analyzed. It was an observer. That is because of very prescribed rules that exist, as I explained in French, which say that the ones who have the principal roles are the country where it happened, Iran; the owner of the airline, which is Ukraine; and the maker of the airplane, which is the United States and France. That's prescribed in the rules.

Our Transportation Safety Board has a huge amount of expertise. I'm sure that even as observers, they were able to get a very good understanding of what the black boxes revealed. Their report and their public comments were very valuable in recent months.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Garneau.

Thank you, Mr. Bachrach and Minister Alhabra.

We're now going to move on to our second round.

Starting us off, for five minutes, is Mr. Shipley, with the Conservatives.

You have the floor.

Mr. Doug Shipley (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the ministers for being here today.

I'd like to start off with Minister Garneau.

Minister Garneau, the Canadian Coalition Against Terror would like this government to do more to hold the Iran government accountable for this terrible attack. They would also like the government to list the Iranian revolutionary guard corps as a terrorist organization.

Why has the government refused to classify the IRGC as a terrorist organization?

Hon. Marc Garneau: I will remind my colleague, because I've been in Parliament for a while, that the same demand was made of the Conservatives when they were in power under the Harper government. Former minister Baird, who was the foreign affairs minister at that time, also said that it could not be done.

However, that being said, the Quds Force, which is an element of the IRGC, is classified as a terrorist entity.

The process of deciding whether an entity is a terrorist entity is done very carefully by the government within certain very well-defined criteria, and it is a process that we have to respect.

However, there is no question that the Quds Force, which is a very active element of the IRGC, has been identified—in fact, by the Conservatives, and we support that—as a terrorist entity. We have put sanctions on members of the IRGC over the years.

• (1620)

Mr. Doug Shipley: Thank you for that. And yes, that's definitely before my time.

I need a bit more clarification, if you could, please, Mr. Garneau. You have all the knowledge to share with me here today. Back on Monday, June 11, 2018, there was an opposition motion brought forward by Mr. Garnett Genuis. I'm not going to read it all. It's too long, and I have only a few minutes left. It reads, in part, as follows: "immediately designate the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a listed terrorist entity under the Criminal Code of Canada". There was a vote taken on Tuesday, June 12, where that part remained in that. You voted yes to that, Mr. Garneau, and it was passed.

Why would you vote yes to that, and that it not be amended or taken out, if you're saying now today that it can't be done?

Hon. Marc Garneau: There are very specific rules that come into play in defining whether any entity is classified as a terrorist entity. The IRGC, which is very much identified with the State of Iran, does not, as a total entity, fit within the criteria with respect to designating a terrorist entity.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Thank you for that.

I have one more question in regard to this. Obviously, after this, I'm going to have to look more into these criteria.

I have in my hand a news release from February 3, 2021, from the Government of Canada, indicating 13 new groups that were placed on our Criminal Code and listed as terrorist groups. All these groups fit into the criteria you mentioned, but the IRGC does not. Am I correct in that?

Hon. Marc Garneau: That is correct.

Mr. Doug Shipley: I will move on, then, Mr. Garneau, and thank you for that.

What role has Canada played in the international coordination and response group with other countries, namely Ukraine, Sweden, Afghanistan and the United Kingdom, to hold this Iranian regime accountable for its actions?

Hon. Marc Garneau: My predecessor, Minister Champagne, brought the five together under his chairmanship, and they have been meeting on a regular basis since that time. I will be meeting with them very shortly.

The group included the five countries that had citizens on board who died, apart from Iran itself, which had citizens as well. The purpose of creating this coordination group was to arrive at a coordinated approach with respect to how we would deal with Iran, particularly in the context of seeking reparations. The feeling was that it would be very important for us to be unified in approaching Iran with our claims, based on a common approach with respect to what we were looking for.

This group has met on numerous occasions. Since I've become the foreign minister, I've met individually—virtually—with each of the member foreign ministers. We will soon meet as a group to move forward with what's called the notice of claim, which is the official notice to Iran that we are going to enter into negotiations for reparations.

It's a very important group in terms of taking a common approach. It has worked very well up until now.

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

We're now going to move on to the Liberals.

Ms. Jaczek, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Helena Jaczek (Markham—Stouffville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to both ministers for being here in front of our committee yet again.

York region was particularly hard hit by the shooting down of Ukrainian flight 752, because so many people of Persian origin live here. They're our friends and our neighbours. In my own riding of Markham—Stouffville, we lost three members of the Rahimi family. The town of Whitchurch-Stouffville organized a candlelight vigil. During the tributes that we heard that evening, it was very clear that they had become really well-loved members of our community.

I'm very pleased, Minister Garneau, that you're keeping those lines of communication as open as you can as you discover more of the answers. We did see in the Ethiopian Boeing Max 8 crash that this was particularly important, bringing as much information as you possibly can to the families' attention.

My first question is for Minister Alghabra.

It's so important that we prevent any future tragedy like this in any way we can. I'm particularly interested in how the federal government communicates risks to safety or security to air carriers. We know there are many areas of conflict across the globe. What does that look like? What kind of communication occurs?

• (1625)

Hon. Omar Alghabra: I want to thank Ms. Jaczek for her advocacy on behalf of the families. Undoubtedly, York region has been hit hard. Not only immediate families live in the region, but there are so many friends who live there. I've been there on many occasions, meeting with families and their friends. I want to thank her for her advocacy.

She's right. It is very important, and Transport Canada takes its role extremely seriously, to ensure that we constantly liaise with Canadian air operators to share information—to discuss and provide them with information on risk profiles and appropriate mitigation measures.

We do this on a regular basis, either through notices to airmen, which are known as NOTAM, or through the aeronautical information circulars, which is a notification mechanism that we provide to air operators.

I do want to say that because of what happened, we looked to strengthen our mechanisms or our systems. Transport Canada has recently established a conflict zone information office to be responsible for monitoring foreign conflict zones and issuing notifications to air operators, so they have the information that they may not otherwise have to keep their passengers safe.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Do the airlines actually notify passengers? How does that risk assessment end up? Are airlines required to notify passengers of any particular risks?

Hon. Omar Alghabra: The information comes into three different levels. One is just as information provided to the air operators, so they are aware. The second type of information comes in the form of a recommendation, where we would recommend mitigation measures. The third form would come in a NOTAM, which is notice to airmen, where we ban flights from flying over certain zones.

It is really incumbent on air operators to take that type of information seriously and act accordingly.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: You have touched on the role of ICAO to a certain extent, but can you explain maybe in a little more detail the role that ICAO plays in promoting safer airspace and explaining the dangers of conflict zones?

Hon. Omar Alghabra: ICAO plays an extremely important role in the coordination and development of standards, recommendations and guidance across the world. It provides air navigation advice. It provides advice to operators. It sets standards.

They really play an important role as a multilateral international institution to coordinate efforts to maintain safer skies and to ensure that air operators follow a stringent and high level of standard.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: In the few seconds I have left, did the airspace in Iran meet the ICAO threshold for a conflict zone the night of the shooting?

Hon. Omar Alghabra: That's why we still have so many unanswered questions, as Minister Garneau has repeatedly said today. Iran is refusing to answer why their airspace was left open, why they gave permission to the airliner to fly under these circumstances.

It is from the lessons of that particular tragedy that we're creating the safer skies initiative, because we know now that we need to play a global leadership role in identifying, assessing and providing information on global conflict zones and providing information to air operators.

• (1630)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Ms. Jaczek.

We're now going to move on to the Bloc.

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, you have the floor, for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In the discussions we've had thus far with Mr. Alghabra, Mr. Garneau and other members of the committee, we've frequently revisited the fact that it's impossible to get answers from Iran and that we're unable to resolve this mystery. As we've noted, the families' questions remain unanswered.

In the report that he tabled last December, Mr. Goodale wrote that where there is concern about the independence, transparency, impartiality or efficacy of investigations being undertaken by other parties in a disaster situation, the government should give prompt consideration to the creation of a Canadian investigative vehicle along the lines of the forensic examination and assessment team to ensure that we have capacity to develop our own analysis of what happened. The families are also calling for an independent investigation.

Do you intend to put that in place?

Hon. Marc Garneau: That's why we set up a Canadian examination and assessment team to conduct our own investigation based on available information. That's what we decided to do because we weren't satisfied with Iran's report.

My colleague Minister Alghabra has noted that this is one of the reasons why we want to try to introduce amendments to annex 13 of the Chicago Convention. Overall that annex covers quite well what has to be done in the event of an accident, but not what must be done in the event the country where the accident occurred is the country responsible for the accident.

That creates a conflict of interest, and that's precisely what we want to avoid in future so that investigations are conducted independently, which is not currently the case.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: What steps have you taken to ensure annex 13 is amended?

Is there a timeline?

Could that have an impact in the specific case of Iran?

[English]

Hon. Marc Garneau: Perhaps I could defer that to the current transport minister, the process of seeing whether Canada can bring changes to annex 13.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Thank you to Mr. Garneau and to my colleague for the question.

It is, of course, an important question. We are continuing to advocate for reforms of annex 13. Also, as I said in my earlier response, there's willingness on behalf of ICAO and other international partners to have these discussions. That's not to say that these discussions won't be difficult and that different ideas won't be debated, but we are committed to seeing a way to strengthen annex 13.

I also want to take a moment to answer another question about our resolve to get to the bottom of this. While it is frustrating to see that Iran continues to avoid answering these questions, and while we remain committed to pursuing international processes and multilateral organizations to get these answers, we keep all options on the table. We are going to pursue all options, but we will continue to exhaust international processes. We're going to continue to work with international partners to put pressure on Iran to get there, but all options are on the table.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

We're now going to move to the NDP for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Bachrach, you have the floor.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, has Canada brought the issue of accountability in this matter to the United Nations? If Canada is not successful at ensuring accountability, is this a matter that Canada would be willing to push for the UN Security Council to address?

• (1635)

Hon. Marc Garneau: We brought this matter to the United Nations, and to the United Nations Human Rights Council as well, in March of this year.

As I said, I've just come back from the G7, and it is in the communiqué of the G7, so it is something that we, as a country, are

bringing to the attention of as many multilateral groups as possible, to point out the unacceptable behaviour exhibited by Iran.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Minister, Ralph Goodale was appointed and was acting as a special adviser on PS752 and was tasked with developing recommendations and mechanisms that could prevent such disasters in the future. Last month, the Prime Minister appointed him the new high commissioner to the U.K. I'm wondering what happens to his role on this file and whether a new special adviser will be appointed.

Hon. Marc Garneau: The situation is that Special Advisor Ralph Goodale was given a specific task. He completed that task with an extremely comprehensive report, which he delivered to the Prime Minister last Christmas, with a number of recommendations and, of course, with a list of questions that remain to be answered.

His mandate is complete. He has done his job. I can tell you that he is still very personally involved. I saw him last week, and it was the first subject he wanted to talk about, because he has had so many conversations with the families and he wants—as do all of us—to see this resolved in a satisfactory manner.

His job is complete, and Minister Alghabra and I are continuing. We have all the facts and we have the mandate to do everything that needs to be done.

The Chair: Mr. Bachrach, you have time for a quick question.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I'm not sure I can articulate it quickly, but the question is around the information Minister Alghabra was providing for air operators. It seems as though steps are being taken to inform the airlines in a more accurate and timely way about potential conflicts. However, the ultimate decisions and assessments are still being left to those air operators.

I see the minister shaking his head. Perhaps he could elaborate on how we're moving towards a different situation.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: Thank you to my colleague for his question to help me clarify.

As I stated, there are three levels of notification that we provide to air operators. First is information. Second is recommendations. The third is a ban.

In fact, I can say that the newly formed office recently issued a NOTAM over certain parts of Ukraine because of the rising military tension at that border. We've seen the results of this office take effect in the issuance of a ban for Canadian operators. They are not to travel over that region.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Alghabra.

Thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

We're now going to move to Mrs. Kusie for the Conservatives, for five minutes.

Mrs. Kusie, you have the floor.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'll be passing on my time to Mr. Kram.

The Chair: Mr. Kram, go ahead.

I think you're on mute, Michael.

Press it again. We're not hearing you.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: It's okay. I'll go ahead while Mr. Kram is getting set up there.

I'll go back to Minister Garneau, Mr. Chair, if you will acknowledge me.

The Chair: Sure. Go ahead, Mrs. Kusie.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Minister Garneau, I just absolutely have to compliment your colleagues who are here today, who all just make fantastic points—Mr. Ehsassi in particular. He outlines very clearly, and even more articulately than I do, the atrocities of the Iranian government in its attempts to stymie and hold up this process.

However, the reality is that you have the opportunity to do something significant outside of a bursary, a compensation or a day of recognition—those are all valuable things. I repeat this again: Why are you waiting for these outcomes from the Iranian government, when you have victims' families that clearly feel that your government is not doing enough? Why will you not take significant unilateral action, such as the Magnitsky sanctions, as we have talked about? I feel you've done a valuable job of explaining the IRGC. Why are you not taking further unilateral actions? It is not clear to me, when your colleagues have so clearly outlined that the Government of Iran is.... We cannot rely on the information that it will provide to us.

Your colleague, the honourable Minister of Transport, Minister Alghabra, said that we hope that this will never happen again. It will. It absolutely will, if we do not take accountability as a nation to hold these other governments to account. What will you do, please, Minister?

• (1640)

Hon. Marc Garneau: We've been insisting on accountability from the beginning, and accountability has not been provided. We will continue to insist on accountability as we move forward.

There is a process in place. That process also involves negotiations with Iran, which are going to start in the near future. We will be negotiating for reparations. At this point, it is important for us to continue the process, which will also yield a forensic report in the coming weeks, followed by the process of negotiation, which may take some time. It is important for us to stick to that path and, during all of that time, to continue to insist on accountability and transparency and to criticize Iran when it is not providing it, which, up until now, it has not provided.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: At what point will you stop expecting them to be accountable, when they have clearly shown to this point that we cannot rely on them? Your colleague, again, pointed out the atrocities of bulldozing human remains, of denying the black box. Minister, these are significant things that I certainly believe no one within our world would possibly allow.

Minister, what is the point at which you will be satisfied with the responses that you receive from the Government of Iran, which I feel very confident will be less than sufficient?

Hon. Marc Garneau: When we get all the answers, that's when we're going to be satisfied. We do not have all the answers. In the meantime, we're going to continue to push for them, and we're going to continue on multilateral forums, such as the United Nations and the Human Rights Council, to point out that Iran has been derelict in its obligations to provide accountability. We will continue that process until we get all the answers. We owe it to the families, and we owe it to Canadians.

Believe me, I have been involved in this process since the beginning, and I am determined to put in all of my energy to make sure that we get to satisfactory resolution of this issue.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Garneau and Mrs. Kusie.

Go ahead, Minister Alghabra.

Hon. Omar Alghabra: I just want to affirm my colleague Minister Garneau's passion and resolve to pursue international forums and processes to get to the bottom of this.

I also want to add that, as I and Minister Garneau have committed to families, we are not going to relent. We will pursue other options that will have recourse measures for us to get answers if the process is exhausted without getting to the bottom of this. These processes tend to be painfully long. I understand that. If we want to pursue other recourses, we need to first continue to exhaust the international processes that are internationally agreed upon. If that process does not yield our expectation, we will continue to consider options, including the Security Council, the International Court of Justice and other mechanisms, but we need to continue to focus on this internationally recognized process.

• (1645)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Alghabra.

We will go to our final speaker of this round, Ms. Martinez Ferrada.

You have the floor for five minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Hochelaga, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to both witnesses for being with us this evening to discuss a tragedy that has affected all Canadians. I remember where I was when I heard the sad news.

My question is for Minister Alghabra.

Minister Alghabra, you discussed the safer skies initiative earlier. Can you tell us a little more about what's proposed in that initiative? How can Canada, acting alone or in cooperation with other countries, ensure the initiative works and becomes a reality?

[English]

Hon. Omar Alhabra: Mr. Chair, I want to take a moment to thank my colleague and parliamentary secretary for her hard work and welcome her to the committee and to Transport Canada. Her advocacy and insight have been incredibly helpful to Transport Canada.

Under the safer skies initiative, Canada established a domestic conflict zone information office. This office monitors foreign conflict zones 24-7 and creates efficient and timely sharing of information and intelligence both domestically and internationally. On a regular basis, this office monitors and assesses risks at areas of interest and shares information with air operators. Based on the assessment the office comes up with, we provide information. As I stated earlier, that information could take several forms. It could be information, it could be a recommendation, or it could be a flight ban.

[Translation]

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Thank you.

Minister Alhabra, from what I understand, we want to make our airways safer and to prevent another tragedy like the one Canadians have suffered.

Apart from the safer skies initiative, what can we do to make commercial flights safer?

How can we establish communication among governments? How can we work internationally to make commercial flights safer?

[English]

Hon. Omar Alhabra: Transport Canada is leading two global initiatives that bring partners together to broaden the global civil aviation system awareness of conflict zone risks, risk management and best practices to enhance international dialogue and strengthen information-sharing policies. We created the safer skies consultative committee and the safer skies forum.

Canada also created a safer skies commitment statement, where signatories pledged to take key actions with respect to conflict zone risk mitigation. To date, 19 countries and four industry organizations have endorsed this statement. That is significant progress to keep our skies and global skies safer.

[Translation]

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Minister Alhabra, are there currently any bans on flights over certain conflict zones? You briefly discussed that earlier. Can you tell us more about the important work being done to ensure air safety in conflict zones?

[English]

Hon. Omar Alhabra: As I stated in an earlier response, currently we have a NOTAM or a ban on flights over a segment of Ukraine because of the heightened tension that exists at the border because of Russian military activity. There are other conflict zones that we are regularly monitoring. I'll just name some countries: North Korea, Syria, Libya, Saudi Arabia and a few other countries. We're constantly monitoring the entire globe but certainly have

conflict zones that we provide additional attention to. I should add Iran as well. Iran and Iraq are on that list.

• (1650)

[Translation]

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: I'll be brief.

My question is for Minister Garneau.

Minister Garneau, you held the position of Minister of Transport until quite recently and are now Minister of Foreign Affairs.

I listened closely to what you said earlier. You spoke very passionately about your intention to shed light on this tragedy and to ensure Canadians get the answers they deserve.

How will you go about that effort to shed light on this tragedy and to get the answers Canadians deserve?

Hon. Marc Garneau: Thank you for your question.

I'll go about it simply by following a process, without however taking my foot off the gas, as it were.

We absolutely have to keep pressuring Iran to give us the answers. We have various mechanisms at our disposal for that purpose, and we won't give up until we have those answers.

If the normal processes we follow to get those answers aren't enough, we'll exercise other options. For the moment, we're trying to work through internationally established procedures. We will continue to focus completely on this matter.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Garneau.

Thank you, Ms. Martinez Ferrada.

I want to express my sincere appreciation to both ministers on behalf of the committee. You both went 20 minutes over your time. You gave us a bit of extra time and we very much appreciate it. It got us through two rounds.

To all members, those were great interventions. It was wonderful to hear from each and every one of you.

With that, we are going to let the ministers go. We're now going to suspend for three to five minutes because we have to do some sound checks. I'll let the clerk take care of that. Once again, we'll suspend for that amount of time.

Thank you.

• (1650) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1655)

The Chair: To start us off for six minutes, Mr. Kram, you have the floor.

Mr. Michael Kram (Regina—Wascana, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for joining us today.

My questions will be about the safer skies strategy that the ministers talked about in the previous hour. I think that people of all political stripes can agree that preventing passenger airliners from being shot out of the sky is a good thing and a public policy worth pursuing. I was wondering if the witnesses could tell the committee whether they believe that flying internationally over conflict zones is safer today than it was a few years ago, and why or why not.

Mr. Kevin Brosseau (Assistant Deputy Minister, Safety and Security, Department of Transport): It's a difficult question to answer because of the dynamic nature of conflict zones and international safety, but I will say a few things.

Post-MH17, the Dutch did a significant amount of work and made progress in relation to ensuring the safety of international civil aviation. As well, the ICAO has changed a number of its standards and recommended practices related to the manner in which conflict zones are managed and assessed by airlines and by countries. That was the big impetus to the safer skies initiative and why Canada seized the moment to build on the great work by the Dutch after their tragedy to build on international co-operation, to share information, to share intelligence, so that properly informed risk assessments are made so that, in fact, airlines are aware of and stay away from dangerous air zones.

Mr. Michael Kram: Are the new safer skies strategy and the new foreign conflict zone office fully up and running, or is that yet to be done?

Mr. Kevin Brosseau: The conflict zone information office at Transport Canada is up and running. It started up over the course of the summer, so it's almost coming up on a year. That's staffed with experts here in Transport Canada, who monitor the air zones 24-7 and exchange information with international and domestic partners.

As well, the safer skies initiative is moving and making progress. Minister Alghabra and Minister Garneau mentioned the safer skies forum in December, where we brought together 90 countries, about 400 representatives from around the world, looking at how we unpack the manner in which countries interact, share information and break down barriers of information sharing so that we are levelling the playing field for all countries and all airlines around the world.

Mr. Michael Kram: Okay.

In the last few days, I've seen in the news that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is heating up. The Israelis are launching rockets at the Palestinians. The Palestinians are launching rockets at the Israelis.

I went to expedia.ca before this meeting and I looked up flights from Toronto Pearson to Tel Aviv, and there are all sorts of flight options to fly from Toronto into Israel right now. Shouldn't the safer

skies strategy have alarm bells of some sort going off to stop passenger airliners from flying into areas where there are rockets being launched?

• (1700)

Mr. Kevin Brosseau: Certainly, it is a very dynamic situation going on currently in Israel. I don't want to speak too much about a current active environment. The conflict zone information office is actively monitoring that, engaging in regular conversation with Air Canada, our only carrier that flies into Tel Aviv, as well as with other regulators—international regulators such as the FAA and other regulators—to ensure that the measures being taken by the state, by Israel, are sufficient so that we're assured of aviation safety. We will monitor that. We're monitoring it continually, and we'll adjust as necessary.

Mr. Michael Kram: I can understand that the Government of Canada can stop Canadian airlines from flying direct into a conflict zone. If a Canadian who doesn't know about this conflict could change planes in New York or Europe or somewhere, how does the Government of Canada co-operate with other countries and other airlines to stop Canadians from catching connecting flights and going into a war zone unsafely?

Mr. Kevin Brosseau: It's an important element of the work that safer skies and the conflict zone information office do in working with other authorities such as the FAA and the states of those airlines that you mentioned, Mr. Kram, so that information is shared and people are on a level playing field to be able to make decisions about their own risk assessments and carry out their own risk assessments with respect to the safety of flying into Tel Aviv, for instance, and flying out.

As we've seen over the course of the last few days, there have been periods of time when the airport has been closed and then reopened, so again, it's a highly dynamic situation. It speaks to the importance of international co-operation so that Canadian operators are aware. However, we're also playing a role to ensure that other states are properly informed.

Mr. Michael Kram: Finally, and quickly, the Government of Canada has a travel advice and advisories web page at travel.gc.ca.

If Canadians are looking to travel abroad, will the aviation safety advisories about dangerous conflict zones make their way to travel.gc.ca?

Mr. Kevin Brosseau: I will start the answer and then turn to my colleague at Global Affairs.

We're in very close contact with Global Affairs regularly to ensure that the proper advice is being given to Canadians through the GAC travel advisories. Let me turn it over to my colleague Ms. McCardell.

Ms. Sandra McCardell (Assistant Deputy Minister, Europe, Arctic, Middle East and Maghreb, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): I will turn to Brian Szwarc, who is the head of our consular department. He can speak to the travel advisory program.

Mr. Brian Szwarc (Director General, Consular Operations, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Global Affairs does maintain up-to-date travel advisories for most countries throughout the world, both where we are represented and where we are not.

As to the information and question raised regarding the safer skies initiative and active conflict zones, we will need to explore this to make sure we are including all of the developments. However, when there are developments that can impact the safety and security of Canadians, we update the travel advisories. We do so very frequently—daily—as the information is presented to us.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Szwarc, Ms. McCardell, Mr. Brosseau and Mr. Kram. Well done.

We'll now move to the Liberals. We have with us Mr. El-Khoury.

Mr. El-Khoury, you have the floor for six minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to all our witnesses and guests.

My question is for Mr. Szwarc, from the Department of Foreign Affairs. Canada took the lead in establishing the international coordination and response group for the victims of flight PS752.

Would you please tell us more about that group and Canada's leadership within it?

• (1705)

[English]

Mr. Brian Szwarc: I'll ask my colleague Sandra McCardell to respond to that question.

[Translation]

Ms. Sandra McCardell: I'll be pleased to answer.

Yes, as Minister Garneau noted, shortly after the flight PS752 tragedy, Canada began to organize a group of countries whose citizens had died in the crash. We promptly communicated with the United Kingdom, Ukraine, Sweden and Afghanistan so we could work together to get answers regarding the tragedy that had occurred in the sky above Tehran.

In the following days, we organized an initial meeting at the ministerial level in London and began a coordination process. We were assisted in that effort by the presence and advice of the Dutch minister, who had experienced a similar tragedy when flight MH17 crashed in Ukraine. Right from the start, we established a form of organization that is still in place today. The group's legal subcom-

mittee is coordinating the introduction of a negotiation process ultimately designed to secure reparations from Iran.

So Canada has put itself forward from the start. We had the largest number of victims, consisting of citizens, permanent residents and family members with ties to Canada. We took on the role of leader, we put ourselves out there, and we continue to do so.

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: Thank you.

My second question is for Ms. Cameron.

Welcome to the committee, Ms. Cameron. It's a pleasure to see you again. The last time we saw each other, I believe, was in Lebanon, in Beirut.

Since January 2020, Canada has mobilized its allies and international partners to hold Iran responsible for its acts.

What steps has Canada taken nationally and internationally?

Could you please tell us about Canada's interactions with the other countries on these matters?

Ms. Sandra McCardell: You asked Ms. Cameron the question, but I can start.

[English]

The Chair: Yes, go ahead.

[Translation]

Ms. Sandra McCardell: As we noted, the coordination group included several coordination components. We discussed the events together to develop a negotiation strategy. We also worked together to compare available information. We spoke at length with Minister Garneau about the facts, as they're known, surrounding the incident that occurred in Iran, and we agreed to share information. With regard to Ukraine, for example, we are currently supporting a criminal investigation. That has resulted in significant and continuing international cooperation.

You also mentioned the work being done in Canada. As you can see here, the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Department of Transport are cooperating closely. However, we also have other partners. The RCMP, for example, has been working with the families from the start. It has established a counselling system to support the families during the hardest times. Our work continues with Ukraine. We have also established a consular system and services. Minister Garneau discussed that earlier. By that I mean visa services for families wishing to come to Canada and financial support for those families. The \$25,000 has helped them deal with the biggest financial emergencies.

There has been cooperation in Canada and internationally from the start, and it continues.

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Cameron, do you have anything to add? Go ahead.

Ms. Michelle Cameron (Head, PS752 Task Force, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

That was a very comprehensive answer that covered our domestic efforts within the Government of Canada across departments. I would just supplement the answer.

We've worked with both municipal governments and provincial governments to ensure that when families come to us with their needs.... As they're processing their grief and as they're settling their estates, they come to us with a number of challenges. We also work domestically to make sure that services are aligned across the various levels of government.

In addition to the international efforts that Ms. McCardell outlined, I wanted to highlight as well, because it really is worth reiterating, that with our coordination group partners and standing together with them, we were able to bring a strong statement to the Human Rights Council. We were able to garner support for the annual human rights resolution around Iran, which included the failures of Iran around PS752. Leveraging our allies and our international partners, we also made a strong case with the G7 ministers, at the G7, that PS752 was indicative of Iran's continuing human rights abuses.

I would just add that to supplement.

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Cameron.

Thank you, Ms. McCardell, and thank you, Mr. El-Khoury.

We're now going to move on to our next speaker from the Bloc, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

You have the floor for six minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for you, Mr. Juneau. Earlier you mentioned that you had introduced an air security program. Please remind me of the exact name of that program, which I've forgotten. The aim is to ensure that people don't fly over sectors that might put them in danger.

Did you have any indication that flight PS752 might not be safe before it flew over Iran?

What specifically was done to advise passengers of that?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Brosseau: I'll start that answer, and perhaps my colleagues from Global Affairs might want to speak about public notice.

I'll say, first of all, that we knew, based on the activity and the heightened tensions in that area, that the conflict had escalated. On that date, we talked to Air Canada, which was our only Canadian

air carrier that was flying in and around that region on a flight from Dubai. They had decided to reroute so they weren't flying over that specific region, given its tensions. We spoke with Air Canada and had discussions with the FAA as well. The FAA had issued a notice—we call it a NOTAM, a notice to airmen—about three hours before PS752 took off.

Back to your direct question, what specifically was told to the passengers on that plane, I do not know. Our interactions, again, were with Air Canada. We also tweeted out information that Canada and Transport Canada were actively monitoring the area that night because of the concern.

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: From what I understand of your answer, you essentially communicate with the airlines here to give them recommendations that they might generally be inclined to follow. However, you don't necessarily contact people who fly on non-Canadian airlines.

This happened in 2020, but what would be different for people boarding an aircraft of a non-Canadian airline if the same situation occurred in 2021?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Brosseau: I think what the honourable member is speaking to is exactly at the heart of safer skies and the work we're doing in terms of exchanging information with other countries.

On the issue of the NOTAM, which I've talked about many times, it is available to all airlines, while our regulatory enforcement is only over Canadian airlines. It is available to all pilots and other airlines as they make their decisions. When they see a NOTAM issued by Canada over a particular area, it would alert them that Canada is concerned about that, and that ought to inform their risk assessment. It goes to the heart of making sure that, to the extent possible, information is shared among airlines and among like-minded countries so that everyone is able to make a risk assessment based on the same information, or as much information as possible and, ultimately, those conflict zones and dangerous airspace are safer.

Thank you.

• (1715)

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you.

If I understand you correctly, an effort still has to be made to forewarn people of these situations. It's our responsibility to inquire and to consult government websites, but we know that people increasingly switch off the news. So it's appropriate to contact them and inform them about these situations.

Going back to the Iran situation, would you say that a flight over Iran is a safe flight?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Brosseau: I'll speak to a couple of aspects related to that.

First of all, the report that was released by Iran, their final investigative report, talked about measures that had been taken, but I think it left significant gaps and questions in our minds associated with the measures and steps they had taken to ensure that the airspace was safe.

Second, ministers have spoken about the forensic team report. I don't want to prejudge it, but the purpose is to be able to tell the full story about what actions were taken, which then, I think, will lead to being able to make a proper assessment of the safety of that airspace in the future.

Finally, I would say that today Canada does have a NOTAM over Iran and Iraq that it didn't have in that space on January 7, 2020. Steps have been taken, and more needs to be happen, for certain.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brosseau, and thank you, Mr. Barsa-lou-Duval.

We'll now move on to the NDP.

Mr. Bachrach, you have six minutes.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of the officials for answering our questions.

Mr. Brosseau, I want to pick up on a line of questioning that I started with Minister Alghabra. This is around the different levels, if you will, of notification that are provided to airlines, related to the risk of flying into or over conflict zones.

If I understood him correctly, there are a number of different notices that can go out. The most stringent level is the ban. However, at all of the levels prior to a ban, the ultimate risk assessment still lies with the airline, with the company. I'm wondering about the incentive that those companies have to continue flights into higher-risk situations and how that should be managed so that they're responding appropriately to a given level of risk.

I'm not sure if I'm making that question clear, but there is a decision made about whether a flight goes ahead. It's based on all the information they have, but obviously there's an interest there in pursuing that activity. They have a financial interest at stake.

How do you see the safer skies initiative managing that decision-making process?

Mr. Kevin Brosseau: Thank you, Mr. Bachrach, for the question. Let me lay out the groundwork in terms of some of the decision-making in the first place.

You are correct that most airlines have some sort of a security function or a safety function that will make a determination based on the carrying out of a risk assessment as to whether or not that particular flight is safe to proceed.

The pilot also has a very heavy responsibility in determining whether it's safe for her—or him—to fly that day, and in fact will inform herself of the NOTAMs and the various other conditions that are in existence in the space at that particular time, as well as the air traffic control and obviously the state where the airport, in this case, would be. There are a number of different players who have important responsibilities.

I recognize your point, and I'll say, as a regulator in Canada, that safety is part of it and we drill it in through our regulations, through the safety management systems, etc., that it has to be the primary concern. The various stops and checks along the way include, as I mentioned, providing the proper information in ensuring that all those decision-makers along the way actually are properly informed and have timely access to the best information they can possibly have.

I hope that answers your question.

• (1720)

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: It's useful information. I think the reality is that those pressures exist in all sorts of different transportation sectors, where there are safety considerations at play and there are pressures to continue with business. I appreciate the points you've made there.

Perhaps shifting to a slightly different aspect, senior Ukrainian officials recently said that they believe Iran intentionally shot down PS752. Do you agree with this assessment?

Mr. Kevin Brosseau: I think it's really important—and Minister Garneau spoke to it—that Iran is the country that has all the information. It has the information to be able to make that determination.

The commitment the Prime Minister and the ministers have made is to get all those facts properly unearthed and understood. That's part of the reason why the forensic examination and assessment team was formed: to be able to assess all the information and intelligence available and to be able to reach findings and conclusions, etc., related to what in fact happened. It really is key, through that process, to be able to make that determination as to the point or the conclusion that you made.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Ukraine, under annex 13, is an active participant in the investigation. Presumably, they have access to more information than Canada does.

Will Canada's eventual assessment be based on the same amount of information as the Ukrainian...? The Ukrainian officials have already put their assessment out there that it was intentionally shot down. Can Canadians trust that assessment?

Mr. Kevin Brosseau: I can't speak to what information Ukraine had access to in the context of the safety investigation, as an accredited representative, because they of course represent the state of the airline.

What I can say is that this was a fundamental reason why the forensic examination team was established, because we were not receiving all the answers from Iran, and as a consequence, we had to set up a team of experts here in Canada who would look at all the information, information that perhaps Ukraine had access to—I don't know—to be able to have a fulsome assessment of that information and intelligence, and to be able to tell the families the best we know.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brosseau.

Thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

Moving on into our second hour, we're going to go into the first round of the second hour.

Mr. Soroka, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Gerald Soroka (Yellowhead, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll start off with Mr. Brosseau for my first question.

When Minister Alghabra was here, he mentioned that 19 countries and four businesses have signed on with the safer skies initiative. Are there going to be more countries signing on? If they do, will the information be better? Will there be more information, meaning that it will be safer to fly, or will it be just that if more countries or businesses sign on, it will be a safer world for people, in general, flying?

• (1725)

Mr. Kevin Brosseau: What Minister Alghabra was referring to was a joint commitment that emanated out of the safer skies forum at the beginning of December of last year. It really was an expression, almost like a joint statement, that came out of an international meeting. That's how I view it.

Regardless of whether a particular country, for whatever reason, perhaps doesn't sign on to it, I think the purpose of the forum, of the initiative, of the consultative committee that Minister Alghabra referred to is ultimately about making the dangerous airspaces in the world safer, and civil aviation safer.

Mr. Gerald Soroka: Mr. Brosseau, do you have any measurable outcomes so far from the safer skies initiative?

Mr. Kevin Brosseau: I would start with the fact that, first of all, the conflict zone information office, CZIO, has been stood up. We've had a number of important meetings, with agreements signed. Canada has issued a notice to airmen over airspaces around the world and has ongoing dialogue in an important area where perhaps that dialogue and those discussions weren't happening and information wasn't being shared to that degree.

Perhaps it's not as clear as one, two and three, but the manner in which international civil aviation regulators and countries are interacting and sharing information is absolutely better than it was prior to.... Again, as I mentioned, it builds on the work of the Dutch post-MH17.

Mr. Gerald Soroka: With all the objectives that are laid out under the safer skies commitment, do you have the resources to implement it all currently, or do you need more resources for the future?

Mr. Kevin Brosseau: We were very fortunate to be identified to receive funds through the budget a few weeks ago, which will go a long way toward enabling us to give the stability and to crystallize the work here at Transport Canada, but it is a multipronged, multi-departmental, multi-country initiative, so the resources we have will absolutely be able to advance the safer skies initiative in a tangible and meaningful way.

Mr. Gerald Soroka: My next question will go to Ms. McCardell.

I understand that under the safer skies program we're trying to stop terrorists from attacking our planes. Are there some other opportunities besides the information sharing? Are we going to look at, basically, war crimes against some of these people?

The problem comes to, even as the minister said earlier, the fact that they seem to sacrifice the lower-level people in the organization, except for the heads of the organization. Can we somehow manage to attack the head of the organization as opposed to just the underlings?

Ms. Sandra McCardell: Certainly we have our work cut out for us as we proceed forward. I think maybe what is going to be the most important tool for us to get real satisfaction, justice and accountability, as the ministers referred to earlier, which we've all been seeking for families, is really going to be the reparations negotiations. This is the best way we have under the international legal system to address a number of areas that I think are critical for the families and for Canadians in general.

Reparations aren't just about compensation. It's an opportunity for us to negotiate with Iran for a full and detailed accounting of what happened, to get a public acknowledgement of wrongdoing and to aim for an official public apology, as well as assurances of non-repetition, which means that the circumstances are in place and conditions have changed so this doesn't happen again.

That's all part of what we're working on with the coordination group—to achieve that through that negotiation process. I think that's really going to be the best way we can aim to get justice and accountability for families.

• (1730)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. McCardell, Mr. Brosseau and Mr. Soroka.

We're now going to move on to the Liberals, with Mr. Ehsassi.

Mr. Ehsassi, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

We heard from the two ministers that we are very much committed to holding Iran to account. One of them did actually say that every option remains on the table.

Ms. McCardell, could you kindly explain to us what those options are?

Ms. Sandra McCardell: There are a number of options. I just referred to the reparations negotiations and how we intend to use that in co-operation with those other four grieving countries to move forward and press Iran to give the answers to ensure this doesn't happen again, as well as compensation. That's the most important avenue, longer-term, to achieve our objectives through international law.

As Minister Garneau referred to, we have not hesitated at every opportunity in multilateral forums and international conferences to raise the importance of PS752 and to use those venues to press Iran to do more to provide answers for families.

Minister Garneau referred to the G7. That was just last week. In March, we did a joint statement with Sweden, the U.K. and Ukraine at the Human Rights Council, where we exactly pressed Iran to meet its obligations and to address the concerns of families. We have that avenue as well, and we will continue to work very closely with that coordination group going forward.

There are a number of areas we're looking at, in addition to the preventive measures that we've been talking about through safer skies and the work on annex 13.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you.

Moving to the issue of compensation, it's well settled within international law that the level of compensation be just and fair. We know that the Iranians did put an offer on the table that was entirely inadequate.

Ms. McCardell, could you kindly address that issue?

Ms. Sandra McCardell: First of all, I would offer my agreement with your assessment that it is an inadequate figure.

There will be a process through negotiations. Our legal subcommittee of that coordination group has already put together a common negotiation position, so that we can work together to achieve a package for families, both on the answers and the financial side, which will be what they deserve. Certainly, nothing is going to compensate for the loss of their loved ones. I think we all fully recognize that.

In terms of how that's going to go forward, obviously there are some precedents in other tragedies where states have paid compensation—a few are highlighted in Mr. Goodale's report—which give a certain kind of parallel where a plane was downed.

All of that will be taken into consideration by the legal teams, both in Canada and those of the other countries we're working with. More broadly speaking, this work is under way and obviously our teams won't be able to share too many details as this is an ongoing negotiation.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Mr. Lalani, I am wondering if you could also address the issue of all options being on the table. Are there other international venues where we could pursue Iran and hold it to account?

Mr. Arif Lalani (Director General, International Organizations Bureau, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Certainly. Thank you.

As the minister said, and as Sandra has said, we are prepared to pursue all options as we pursue the negotiations. I think those options are at the UN, where we continue to raise the matter at the UN Human Rights Council, and also to introduce language in a resolution on Iran at the General Assembly. We have taken every opportunity at ICAO to raise the issue. I think the Minister of Transport has spoken at every single council meeting since this tragedy occurred.

We'll continue to do that in coordination with the other countries that are part of the process and mindful of our ultimate objective, which is these negotiations, where we hope to get justice and to get information and accountability.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Mr. Lalani, I am wondering if you could possibly address the issue of the International Court of Justice. Is that an option?

• (1735)

Mr. Arif Lalani: That's not my area. I might turn to my colleague Sandra on that, but I think there are very specific criteria for going to the International Court of Justice. I'm not sure we are at that moment yet, but I will turn to Sandra for that.

Ms. Sandra McCardell: Mr. Chair, we brought you a number of witnesses today, so there's a rich group of us to draw from.

I'll just say that the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice is not automatic. There are a number of steps we need to follow before we can get there.

The first part of that is to engage in the negotiations I've described—and good-faith negotiations. We have to show a genuine willingness and co-operation with our CG partners to engage Iran and to negotiate for an outcome that is suitable, acceptable and appropriate for families.

After that, we need to engage a decision-maker, which may be the ICAO Council or another form of arbitration, for a view on those negotiations. Only then, if that's not satisfactory, can we proceed to the ICJ.

There are a series of steps under international law that need to be followed before we can get to the International Court of Justice. There have been instances before where that process hasn't been followed and the court, quite frankly, has rejected outright to hear the case.

I will just underline that we are going to follow those processes. The legal teams across all five countries are highly engaged on this, and I know they will not hesitate to move forward to the ICJ if those good-faith reparations negotiations don't achieve a satisfactory result.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. McCardell, and thank you, Mr. Ehsassi.

We're now going to move on to the Bloc.

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, you have two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you, Mr. Chair

My question is for Mr. Szwarc.

In fact, our understanding is that, during the discussions between the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Iran, there was a willingness on Iran's part to say that it was important for them to restore consular relations with Canada.

Do you think it's appropriate for Iran to seek concessions or to make demands when victims and people here want answers?

If we give in to that approach, aren't we signalling that we're rewarding the perpetrators of attacks?

Personally, I'm uncomfortable with that. I'd like to hear more from you on circumstances and context.

How do you think we can manage that kind of situation?

[English]

Mr. Brian Szwarc: I'll speak to the consular aspects of that question, and I'll ask my colleague Sandra to maybe supplement that with any other comments regarding the broader issue.

In terms of consular assistance, we do not have an embassy there. We do have a protecting power. We work very closely with the Italian embassy, which was quite instrumental in the early days in providing consular assistance to Canadians. Through the Italians, and through our standing rapid deployment team that was deployed to Iran, we engaged the Iranians to advocate for the interests of the family members, in particular in relation to their wishes in terms of burial or repatriation. We did advocacy on behalf of them, which we feel was instrumental in having the wishes of the families respected.

At this point, I will maybe transit over to Sandra to answer the rest of the question.

The Chair: Mr. Barsalou-Duval, you have time for a quick one.

[Translation]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: I think Mr. Szwarc was going to let Ms. McCardell complete the answer.

I'm happy to listen, Ms. McCardell.

Ms. Sandra McCardell: I just wanted to add to Mr. Szwarc's answer and say that, even in difficult circumstances between two countries, we don't want citizens to be harmed. That's why there are protective powers among all countries. For example, Italy represents Canada in Iran, and Switzerland represents Iran in Canada. That's how we manage to meet the everyday needs of the citizens of each country through consular services.

Apart from that, we don't think this is an appropriate time to entertain a greater Uranian presence in our country. Its conduct clearly does not merit a physical presence in Canada. We acknowledge that interest, but we are satisfied at the moment that Switzerland is able to provide the necessary services to Ukrainian citizens in Canada.

• (1740)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. McCardell.

Unfortunately, Mr. Barsalou-Duval, that is your time.

We'll now move on to the NDP.

Mr. Bachrach, you have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Speaking to the issue of compensation and the decision to reject the Iranian offer of compensation, was that decision made with the support of the families of the victims?

Ms. Sandra McCardell: To be clear, there has been no formal offer and no formal rejection. What we've seen is media commentary made by Iran to attract attention to their position. While these negotiations are ongoing and we can't discuss details, I can assure you that there is strong coordination among all five countries that we will follow through on negotiations with a united voice to press Iran, and that negotiation will be beginning as soon as possible.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you for that response.

Do those negotiations occur with conversation with the families of the victims? Perhaps I'll rephrase that. Are there ongoing conversations with the families that are occurring parallel to the negotiation around compensation?

Ms. Sandra McCardell: We have regular communication with the families at a variety of levels. You have heard that Minister Garneau and Minister Alghabra have been in touch directly with families. Through the task force, which Ms. Cameron leads, we have regular exchanges with families through writing and phone calls. We do have good communication with them.

I think that, as the negotiations go forward, given the need to keep those positions as protected as possible, we need to ensure that the five countries coordinate together but that the Iranians don't understand what our positions or strategies are. That aspect does limit our ability to be as transparent as we might be in other circumstances. Clearly, a difficult negotiation like this over many years requires very judicious strategies and close protection of that information.

The Chair: Mr. Bachrach, you can squeeze in one more question.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Has the government worked with international aviation organizations, including ICAO and IATA, to pressure Iran to comply with the international standards for the investigation and to ensure adequate compensation for the victims?

Mr. Kevin Brosseau: I'll speak to the first part, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Brosseau.

Mr. Kevin Brosseau: Perhaps my colleague Ms. McCardell may speak to the others.

We've absolutely worked very closely. In fact, ministers have made multiple representations and statements at ICAO exercising our concerns and describing what we would like to see from Iran—all the way from clear, transparent investigation to turning over the black boxes. There were a number of different areas with respect to compliance with its international obligations, not only to annex 13, but to ensure that civil aviation is safe in that country.

Perhaps Ms. McCardell would like to supplement that answer.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brosseau.

Ms. McCardell.

Ms. Sandra McCardell: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I think what we will be doing in our engagement on this issue going forward is to use every single opportunity we have to gain leverage to pressure Iran to provide the justice and accountability we've been talking about since January 8 a year ago. We are looking very closely at what those opportunities are—whether we work with like-minded bodies directly, whether we work with the coordination group, whether we use UN forums or the yearly Iranian hu-

man rights resolution we have with the United Nations. We're looking at every tool we have and we'll be very careful and strategic in how we use those tools to apply the pressure we need at the right time to advance our reparation negotiations and to be able to get those answers and the fair compensation that families deserve.

● (1745)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. McCardell.

Mr. Bachrach, thank you as well for your last intervention.

Thank you to all the witnesses. You brought out the entire team today, and we really appreciate that. We had a lot of great dialogue between you and the members, and I want to thank you for that.

To members as well, thank you for the meeting today. It was a great exchange. Please enjoy your constituency week next week. We'll see you back the following week.

With that, I'll take this opportunity to adjourn the meeting. Good night.

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