



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

FAAE • NUMBER 048 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, October 16, 2012

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Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

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•(0850)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)): I want to welcome everybody as we get started, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), to our briefing on the situation in Syria.

I want to thank our officials here today from both the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and CIDA.

We have with us Mr. Mark Bailey, who's the director general of the Middle East bureau.

Mr. Bailey, welcome today, and thank you for taking time to be here.

From CIDA we have Ms. Leslie Norton, who's the director general of the international humanitarian assistance directorate.

Ms. Norton, thank you once again for being here today as well.

I believe, Mr. Bailey, you have an opening statement.

Mr. Mark Bailey (Director General, Middle East Bureau, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade): That's correct, Mr. Chairman, and then we'll take questions.

The Chair: I think you know how we work around here. We'll then move around the room to ask some questions, back and forth.

Mr. Bailey, once again, thank you for being here. We'll turn it over to you for your opening statement.

Mr. Mark Bailey: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and honourable members, for inviting us here to talk today about Syria. It's my pleasure to provide an assessment of the situation in this country, where, frankly, conditions have deteriorated markedly since my predecessor last talked to you in February.

While the number of deaths remains difficult to confirm due to lack of access, it is believed that more than 29,000 people have been killed, and many more are missing. The number of refugees receiving assistance from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees has now surpassed 258,000, with tens of thousands more awaiting registration. An estimated 2.5 million Syrians are in need of assistance, including 1.2 million internally displaced people—that is, those who have had to leave their homes within Syria.

Bashar al-Assad plunged his country into chaos and despair in a vain effort to cling to power. He now finds that his own days are numbered. The question is not whether he will fall but when, and, more importantly, what next? The Syrian regime is slowly collapsing. It's no longer able to maintain control of all of its territory at once. Victory in one location results in loss elsewhere.

Meanwhile, the armed opposition is gaining strength, holding its own to an unanticipated degree in Aleppo, and even capturing strategic locations.

Yet the opposition remains fragmented. Without a unified command and control, it is unable to defeat the regime, and the regime itself still has considerable firepower—unused firepower so far—at its disposal. Neither side can achieve a solely military victory at this point. It thus seems likely to result in a prolonged battle with Syria's suffering civilian population caught in the crossfire. Neither side is willing to negotiate seriously and in good faith to achieve a political solution. Both sides fear that the other side seeks its annihilation, and thus they're engaged in a fight to the finish.

The inevitable fall of President Assad is unlikely to mean an immediate end to the bloodshed. Regime remnants will continue to fight. The regime has to some extent lost control of the private *shabiha* militias it has been deploying against restive communities, and armed opposition actors are deeply divided and increasingly entrenched. As a result, it looks as though the post-Assad phase will continue to be violent. Syria also risks becoming a stage upon which a wider geopolitical and sectarian competition plays out as regional powers back rival forces on the ground.

As a former Canadian ambassador to Syria, I'm heartened but not surprised by the spirit and resilience of the Syrian population. In rebel-held areas, we're seeing opposition and other grassroots actors rise to the challenge of providing local administration and services to their communities. The external opposition is attempting to overcome its fragmentation, but it remains unable to coalesce around a strong leadership and a clear vision for a post-Assad Syria. It has little credibility with Syria's internal opposition and has yet to address the concerns of Syria's ethnic and religious minorities.

Meanwhile we're seeing a number of disturbing trends. Terrorist jihadi networks are taking root on the ground. It's not clear how much support these more extreme actors enjoy amongst the local population, but they are increasingly well armed and organized. This is particularly troubling given Syria's considerable chemical weapons stockpiles.

We don't believe the regime would deploy these weapons against the opposition, and we believe they currently remain under regime control, but a partial loss of control of these stockpiles could have disastrous consequences for the Syrian population and for Syria's neighbours.

The situation in Syria is also posing a growing threat to the stability of its neighbours. Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq are all feeling the strain as they endeavour to meet the needs of a growing Syrian refugee population, which is expected by the UNHCR to surpass 700,000 people by the end of this year, if current trends continue.

Tensions in Syria have resulted in sporadic violence in Lebanon, although all of Lebanon's main political actors, including Hezbollah, have so far shown themselves to be committed to maintaining domestic stability.

Fatal incidents of cross-border shelling recently raised tensions with Turkey to worrying levels, but Turkey, to its credit, has demonstrated considerable restraint in its response.

[Translation]

Canada has taken a strong position on Syria in international fora, including the United Nations and the Friends of the Syrian People. We contributed financially to the mission of former UN-Arab League Joint Special Envoy Kofi Annan, and we support the efforts of his successor Lakhdar Brahimi to achieve a negotiated end to the crisis. The Canadian government has always been vocal in urging the UN Security Council to impose binding economic sanctions and an arms embargo on the Assad regime. And just yesterday, our ambassador to the UN again reinforced Canada's position during a UN Security Council Open Debate on the Middle East.

The fact that the Security Council remains paralyzed more than a year and a half after this crisis began is tragic. As long as tough measures are not taken, those who want to protect the Assad regime with Syrian blood will benefit from the political and legal cover this impasse provides.

Canada actively continues to call upon countries like Russia, which have influence with Syria, to play a more positive role, cooperate with international efforts and use their leverage to help achieve an end to the violence and an inclusive, Syrian-led political transition.

Minister Baird recognizes that this is a central pressure point and uses every available opportunity to raise the issue with his international counterparts, as he did at the APEC summit in Russia. Departmental officials have also raised the situation in Syria numerous times with Russian officials, both here, in Ottawa, and in Moscow. In the absence of a Security Council resolution, Canada continues to work with our regional and international partners to isolate this brutal regime and increase the pressure on it. We closed our embassy in Damascus on March 5, all of Syria's diplomats in Canada were expelled on May 29, and the Canadian government has imposed 10 rounds of tough sanctions on the Assad regime. We are calling on all states outside and, especially, within the region to do the same.

To this end, we co-chaired a meeting of the sanctions working group of the Friends of the Syrian People with the Netherlands and Tunisia on September 20 in The Hague, placing a particular focus on the effective implementation of financial sanctions.

Canada is also committed to helping the non-violent Syrian opposition gain the skills and resources to achieve a free and democratic Syria, including a contribution of up to \$1 million for

pro-democracy initiatives. The funding was announced on April 1. We are considering additional projects to support the Syrian opposition—both inside and outside Syria—and help it prepare for a post-Assad transition.

In order to help meet urgent humanitarian needs arising from the crisis, Canada, through CIDA, has already provided \$12 million in assistance this year. United Nations agencies and the Red Cross are currently delivering it. This support has been directed to address pressing humanitarian needs both inside Syria and in neighbouring countries. Canada will continue to closely monitor the humanitarian situation in Syria and in the region, and stands ready to respond further, as appropriate.

My CIDA colleague joining me today will be pleased to answer any questions you might have about Canada's humanitarian contribution.

As I mentioned earlier, Canada is also extremely concerned about the impact of the conflict on Syria's neighbours. Consequently, during his visit to the Zaatari refugee camp on the Jordan-Syria border in August, Minister Baird announced \$6.5 million to assist Jordan in coping with the massive influx of refugees from Syria. Canadian funding will enhance the capacity of the Jordanian Armed Forces to transport refugees efficiently and safely from border crossing points to reception centres and the Zaatari camp in Jordan.

We are also exploring options to provide additional assistance to Jordan, which would include increasing donations to the Jordanian Armed Forces for the transport of refugees and providing protective equipment to the Jordanian Armed Forces to deal with incidents involving Syrian chemical weapons.

● (0900)

[English]

We should be under no illusions, and I can assure you, the government is not. The road ahead for Syria will be long and fraught with difficulty, but Canada remains actively engaged in efforts to assist the Syrian people in their struggle for their democratic rights. We will continue to work with them to bring an end to the crisis and to promote stability in the region.

With that, I'll stop here and be happy to respond to your questions.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bailey.

We're going to start with Mr. Dewar and Mr. Saganash for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Thank you very much.

I want to thank you for coming to the committee today.

I just want to get straight to the questions around the support for the successor to Mr. Kofi Annan, Mr. Brahimi.

You mentioned in your statement that the government supports the efforts of Mr. Brahimi. Is there still continuing financial support for his mission?

Mr. Mark Bailey: We have not made an additional contribution, to my knowledge. There was a contribution made at the time of the Kofi Annan mission. I'm not sure whether that contribution was entirely used. If it hasn't been, then obviously it would be used to support Mr. Brahimi's mission.

Mr. Paul Dewar: With regard to Mr. Brahimi's mission right now—which has been difficult, he's admitted that—one of the things he's called on very recently is the idea of a ceasefire that would be aligned with the time of the upcoming Islamic holiday. Has the government taken a position on that?

Mr. Mark Bailey: On that specific aspect of his proposal, no, we have not, although in general obviously the government remains favourable to a ceasefire, which would then lead to a negotiated solution. I think it would be fair to say that we would be in support of that proposal, but the minister or the government haven't made an explicit statement on his particular proposal, no.

Mr. Paul Dewar: You mentioned in your statement about the government taking action and Minister Baird taking action to urge Russia to support what we've all been hoping for, a Security Council resolution that would be in line with what we all want to see in condemning the violence in Syria, along with the support of the regime.

Beyond what you've given us here, what specific actions...? Has it just been within meetings that they've urged...? Has it been formal diplomatic notes? Further to your comments, could you give us more detail on what the government's actions have been, specifically with Russia, and anything else you can add in regard to our actions with China?

Mr. Mark Bailey: As I mentioned in my remarks, this was a topic on the agenda of the bilateral meeting the minister had with his Russian counterpart on the margins of the APEC summit in Russia. There have been other conversations. They see each other, of course, in multilateral meetings—in the G-8 context, in the United Nations, and so on. I can assure you this subject is on the agenda for a good many of those conversations. In addition, we've sent instructions to our embassy in Moscow to go into the foreign ministry at senior levels and raise this topic, repeating the same points, basically. In that regard, obviously we're acting in concert with our allies—the Americans, the British, the French. We're all repeating the same points to the Russians at just about every chance we get.

• (0905)

Mr. Paul Dewar: Is the same to be said about our Prime Minister with regard to President Putin? Have there been direct conversations?

Mr. Mark Bailey: That's my understanding, sir, yes.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Thank you.

Finally, I have a question about sanctions before I turn it over to my colleague. Some of us had concerns that the sanctions early on weren't aligned with others' sanctions, specifically around energy. There were concerns about a Canadian company remaining in Syria. That changed eventually, not because of our sanctions, but because of others' sanctions. I'm just wondering how our sanctions align with those of other nations. Are our sanctions in line with our allies' sanctions, and if they aren't, what differences are there?

Mr. Mark Bailey: Obviously, a number of our measures differ from those of other countries simply because of the nature of our regime and the nature of the laws that Parliament has passed that regulate economic activity in Canada in different ways from those of the U.S., the European Union, or other countries. Our sanctions have to be designed in light of Canadian laws. In terms of the impact and effect of the sanctions, they are quite well-aligned. In fact, they are the most strict. Basically, the effect of our sanctions has been to shut down all trade investment and financial relations. There is no economic activity now between Canada and Syria except with the sorts of things that one can literally carry in a suitcase on an airplane.

Mr. Paul Dewar: That would be for pre-existing investments as well as a ban on any future investments?

Mr. Mark Bailey: Yes. Financial transactions are completely banned. Even those who want to send money to their families have to apply for a permit. Those permits, of course, are granted quite quickly and easily.

That's just to tell you that you couldn't make an investment in Syria now because you wouldn't be able to move the money to do it.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I'm just wondering why we initially excluded some of the oil and gas from the original sanction regime.

Mr. Mark Bailey: That would predate my time in the bureau, but my understanding of this is.... The particular investment you are talking about, which was in the Ebla gas project, was actually realized, or at least they were able to get approval to proceed with the project, at the time when I was the ambassador to Syria, so I am familiar with the project. The basic rationale would be that this is not an export project. It does not allow the regime to gain. It doesn't export the gas. Rather, the gas is used to generate electricity for the Syrian electricity grid. That in turn is something that provides comfort and support to the Syrian population. Without it, of course, they would have difficulty lighting their homes, running their appliances, heating their houses, and so on.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Notwithstanding that, though, due to sanctions from the United States, there was an effect of closing down that operation.

Mr. Mark Bailey: I think it was the European Union.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Sorry, I stand corrected.

Thank you very much. I'm going to turn it over to my colleague.

The Chair: Mr. Saganash, you have only 30 seconds.

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): You've got to be kidding.

[Translation]

Now it's my turn to thank you for being here today.

You mentioned humanitarian aid geared towards the pressing needs in neighbouring countries. Jordan and Turkey, in particular, have made a huge contribution by taking in 210,000 and 100,000 refugees respectively.

What kind of assistance is Canada providing to these countries to help them cope with this influx of Syrian nationals?

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Bailey, give just a very quick answer so we can move along. We have to follow—

Mr. Mark Bailey: I'll let my colleague from CIDA respond.

[Translation]

Ms. Leslie Norton (Director General, International Humanitarian Assistance Directorate, Canadian International Development Agency): The assistance we are providing to UN agencies such as the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the World Food Programme is in the form of money. Those organizations are now in a position to address the needs of refugees in Turkish and Jordanian territory.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Dechert, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Bob Dechert (Mississauga—Erindale, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Bailey and Ms. Norton, thank you very much for being here and for providing us with this important briefing.

You paint a very grim picture of what's going on in Syria today and of the near-term future of Syria.

As you know, Canada is home to a very large Syrian Canadian population. I and many other members of Parliament have met continuously with members of the Syrian Canadian community over the last year, including just last week. When I was back in my constituency, I had a long meeting with a group of Syrian Canadians who, first of all, were telling us about some of the very grim things that are happening to their relatives and friends in Syria. They also wanted to know how they can get involved to support refugees and to assist remotely, in any way, the rebellion movement.

My sense, and I think you confirmed this in your remarks today, is that the opposition there is quite fragmented. I wonder if you could describe that in a little more detail. Who are the actual actors who are fighting the Assad regime? And how is it different from what happened in Libya a year or more ago?

● (0910)

Mr. Mark Bailey: I'm not a great expert on Libya, but my understanding is that in that case, you had a relatively unified opposition to the Gadhafi regime, centred in Benghazi, under the umbrella of the TNC, the Transitional National Council. There is no such umbrella body in the case of Syria. There is one that sort of tries to be that, the Syrian National Council, but it has not succeeded. And indeed, it is contested. Others have not accepted its overall leadership, and indeed, some are quite critical of the group.

In addition, and this is a problem that was there initially and has gotten worse over time, there seems to be a rather serious disconnect between those elements of the opposition that are in exile and living abroad outside Syria—they tend to be in Turkey, Egypt, or Europe, and various places here in Canada and the United States—and those who are actually leading the opposition inside the country, who do not accept, acknowledge, or recognize themselves in this exile

leadership. They, indeed, don't agree with a lot of what the exile leadership has to say. They do not accept their directives and so on.

Those inside the country, we also know, are quite divided. There are those I guess one would call the free Syrian army, which is not a unified army at all. It's not a unified force. It doesn't have a centralized command and control. Frankly, it's a brand different militias have adopted to describe themselves or give themselves a name. Then, as I said, we're also aware of various quite militant, quite Islamic, radical groups, some of which have carried out these spectacular bombings you've seen. Although they will collaborate with free Syrian army units, certainly they don't accept their direction or leadership or anything like that. It's quite the contrary; it's clear that they are receiving funding as well as ideological guidance from outside the country.

You're absolutely right, sir. It's an extremely fragmented and troubling picture, and it creates difficulties for those who wish to help. They don't know who to back and how to channel assistance in a way that doesn't end up making the situation worse or that doesn't promote an outcome that will actually be quite contrary to our interests and to stability and prosperity in Syria and the region.

Mr. Bob Dechert: We certainly hope that the opposition forces can come up with some kind of credible alternative government to the Assad regime that the western world, the rest of the world, could support. That would certainly be helpful.

You mentioned in your remarks the spillover of violence into neighbouring countries. You mentioned Lebanon, and specifically Hezbollah. I met with a member of Parliament from Lebanon recently who told me that he has evidence that Hezbollah fighters from Lebanon, funded by Iran, have been fighting in Syria for the Assad regime. We're trying to get him to appear before this committee later this week. Are you aware of those reports?

Mr. Mark Bailey: Yes, sir.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Can you confirm that?

● (0915)

Mr. Mark Bailey: The U.S. Secretary of State was citing them just yesterday or the day before, I recall seeing.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Does that change the nature of the conflict in Syria, and could you elaborate a little further and tell us what role you think Iran is playing in Syria?

Mr. Mark Bailey: Iran is playing an extremely unhelpful role, and I would go so far as to say a conflict-provoking or conflict-enduring role in Syria. There's no doubt that they see the Assad regime as their key ally in the region, and that the crumbling of this regime would be regarded by Iran as a very significant setback, a real blow to their interests. Therefore, they've doubled down. They're putting everything they've got into trying to help Assad and his regime survive, including working with the other partner in that chain of influence and resistance, as they call it, Hezbollah.

Indeed, we are aware of these reports that you cite. They're in the media. Of course, we also see it in some of the intelligence sources that are available to us. Indeed, Hezbollah fighters and Hezbollah leadership are actively supporting the Assad regime. There have been reports that Hezbollah fighters have been killed. Some of them have been captured, and so on. They are certainly making the problem much worse from our point of view.

Mr. Bob Dechert: The UN Security Council, as you've mentioned, is paralyzed. Is that primarily because of Russia's veto?

Mr. Mark Bailey: Yes. Well, China is also exercising the veto there, but in our view, the main actor, the one who sees its interests engaged, is Russia. Our view would be that if Russia's position were to change, perhaps we would see a change in China. Obviously you'd have to ask their representatives, but that would be our thinking about it.

Mr. Bob Dechert: What should Canada and the rest of the world that wants to see an end to the violence in Syria do? What should it be considering in terms of Russia in order to encourage Russia to change its stand?

Mr. Mark Bailey: We have to persuade the Russian government that its interests are not being served by what's going on in Syria, and indeed that it is placing Russian interests in severe jeopardy by continuing to promote this instability in conflict, and that the eventual outcome will actually be a much bigger catastrophe for Russian interests than the preservation of the regime.

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

We're now going to move to the last person in this round, Mr. Cotler.

Welcome, sir. You have seven minutes.

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

Thank you for your comprehensive statement, Mr. Bailey.

You mentioned in the conclusion of your remarks that Canada remains actively engaged in efforts to assist the Syrian people in their struggle for their democratic rights. You earlier commented—and rightly so—on the resilience of the Syrian people, and that's something that I appreciated in my own visits there. As you say, the conflict is likely to be long and fraught with difficulties.

I'd like to address three particular initiatives that the Canadian government has been engaged in, in accordance with your remarks and the follow-up on those.

The first is your saying that Canada is committed to helping the non-violent Syrian opposition to gain the skills and resources to achieve a free and democratic Syria. To that effect, there was a \$1 million announcement for pro-democracy initiatives on April 1. You then made the point that we are considering additional projects to support the Syrian opposition, both inside and outside of Syria, to help prepare for a post-Assad transition.

What are some of these projects that you're considering when you speak of the opposition to Assad in this particular frame here, as if there is a kind of central opposition? As you otherwise comment, this opposition is fragmented, etc. To what extent are we assisting in

the organizing of a coherent and evolving democratic opposition to Assad? That's the first.

The second is on the humanitarian needs. You made reference to humanitarian assistance. As we know, there's been an exponential increase in the number of refugees and there's been an exponential increase in the number of internally displaced people. The UN has put it at 1.5 million, and a larger number of 2.5 million in terms of those more or less affected. What is Canada's contribution beyond the \$12 million to which you referred in that regard?

The third thing is the concern in terms of the regional fallout of events. You mentioned that as well, the impact on Syria's neighbours. I'm particularly concerned here about the situation in Jordan, because of the instability that's been developing in Jordan, and its connection to the whole question of protection against chemical weapons risks.

Those are the three issues.

● (0920)

Mr. Mark Bailey: Well, indeed, as you will understand, Mr. Cotler, I'm obviously not going to scoop my own minister and announce projects before they've been approved by him. What I can say is that my colleagues in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have actively worked up some project proposals, which are on the minister's desk now. As soon as he has considered and approved them, they will be announced.

Going back to what I said a bit earlier, we have provided assistance to the Jordanian forces to help them physically cope with this inflow of refugees.

Indeed, I would go so far as to say that perhaps more of that is being considered in light of these larger numbers—the 700,000 number that I mentioned. This is prompting consideration of additional assistance to Jordan.

We're also looking as well at ways of helping Syrians inside Syria. The French, quite frankly, have been taking a lead in this regard. Projects that would help those people in the parts of Syria that are not under the control of the regime are also being considered. As I said, when the minister has considered these things and approved them, I'm sure announcements will be made in due course as to exactly what they are.

We're also looking at ways to assist the other regional countries as well, and projects are being worked up in that regard.

I'll let my colleague address the issue on humanitarian needs, and I'll turn now to the chemical weapons issue, which I can assure you is a very, very high concern for the government. Minister Baird, in particular, has made it clear that he wants a great deal of effort and focus addressed to this issue.

We're in consultation with our close friends and allies on possible measures that need to be put in place. In the event, for example, there is one of those catastrophic scenarios that I described in my opening remarks whereby somehow the regime loses control of one of the depots where they have this dreadful stuff stored, well then obviously one would want to see action taken quickly to ensure that control of those stocks is regained, and hopefully in due course they are destroyed.

As I say, we're in consultations with our closest allies about this now, and as I've mentioned as well, we've already decided to provide.... We're looking at some assistance to the Jordanians to cope with what might be coming their way in that regard.

I think I'll stop there and invite my colleague to address your second question about humanitarian needs and refugees.

The Chair: Ms. Norton, sorry, you have about 45 seconds.

Ms. Leslie Norton: Thank you. I'll be quick then.

Canada has been systematically responding to meeting the humanitarian needs of the Syrians who are affected by the conflict.

We started back in 2011 when there was a spike in the violence, and since then, as our partners have revised their appeals, we have been systematically responding to the revised appeals.

In August, we provided more assistance to the World Food Programme when they let us know that the needs had been increased with regard to food assistance.

Most recently, you might recall, there was an announcement about medical assistance in the form of cash for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Even more recently, the UNHCR has revised its Syrian regional response plan for the Syrian refugees.

Once we receive these revised appeals, we basically study these appeals and make recommendations. You will see that as the appeals have been revised, there has been a systematic response by the Government of Canada.

• (0925)

Hon. Irwin Cotler: They've announced the fact that the appeals have only been funded up to the 30% of the requests made by the UN.

Ms. Leslie Norton: Yes, that's a good point. But you have to keep in mind that these are appeals about needs that they anticipate. They don't currently have 700,000 refugees to respond to; they're anticipating that by the end of 2012 they will have that many. Right now they have 40% of the required needs, and based on access and trends, they anticipate 700,000 by the end of 2012.

Donors are keeping up in responding systemically. Yes, there are needs that perhaps could be met additionally, but the needs do continue to be met.

I was in Geneva two weeks ago to meet with UNHCR, and they said they are doing quite well with the response for the Syrian refugees.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're now going to move into round two, which will be five minutes, and I'm going to turn it over to Ms. Brown.

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and my thanks to both of you for being with us today. It's been most helpful in giving us some perspective on the situation.

I have a question for each of you.

Ms. Norton, I will start with you and ask if you could talk to the committee about what access is there for getting humanitarian

assistance into Syria. Have we had cooperation from the Assad regime, or are they putting up barriers to allowing our partners to get in there and get to the people who are in need?

Mr. Bailey, I wonder if you could comment on the most recent developments with Turkey and what we've seen happen in the past few days, with the escalating situation there.

Mr. Mark Bailey: Let me address the question about Turkey, and then I'll turn it over to Leslie.

Turkey has been extremely concerned from the very beginning about what's going on in Syria. You may recall that in the early stages of the conflict they made pretty significant efforts to persuade Bashar al-Assad to accommodate the opposition, to introduce reforms, and to start loosening up things. Instead of following their advice, Bashar and his regime responded with violence. This then caused the Turks to turn against the regime and start calling for Bashar's replacement.

We don't have the fullest detailed information about this shelling, the incident that happened down on the border. It's not clear, for example, that the shells that were fired from the Syrian side and landed in Turkey, in that one tragic incident, killing five people in the village of Akçakale...it's not clear that that was done deliberately by the Syrian forces. It may simply reflect poor training, poor competence levels on the part of the Syrian forces that were engaged in the military action.

The Turks have made it clear that they will not stand for this and will indeed respond quite vigorously. In fact, I think they've announced that for every one shell that comes in, they're going to fire two back to try to deter the Syrian forces, to force them to be careful about what they're doing and not direct their fire towards the Turkish border. The Turks have moved aircraft down towards the border, as well as army units, all of this in a show of force to the Syrians to be very careful with what they're doing.

I think it's fair to say that both sides understand that it's very much in their interests to avoid a greater conflict between the two countries. This could end up being quite damaging for the Turkish armed forces. They're already engaged in combat with the PKK guerrillas. Fighting with the Syrians as well would expose them to a two-front kind of war. That would be quite unpopular, and the Turks want to avoid it. At the same time, they have to deter the Syrians from these kinds of careless actions.

Leslie, I'll let you address the first question.

• (0930)

Ms. Leslie Norton: Within Syria itself, we have five key partners at this time. We have the World Food Programme. We have the High Commissioner for Refugees. We have the International Committee of the Red Cross. We have the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. And we have the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs .

The majority of the humanitarian response in country is undertaken by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. They are a respected partner of the Red Cross movement and of our UN agency partners. The access shifts day to day, as we see on television, so depending on where the violence is, you might not have access in Homs in certain neighbourhoods on a certain day. However, our partners are able, *grosso modo*, to carry out field visits and do quick needs assessments when the violence has ended. This way they can assess the needs and then see about provision of humanitarian assistance.

I understand that in early September President al-Assad committed to the Red Cross movement that Syria would improve access of humanitarian actors in the country. Since then, there have been reports that the regime is meeting those conditions. However, it changes day to day. It's war, so it can be very difficult for our partners. The humanitarian workers are putting themselves at risk on a daily basis, and this is something that we're keeping a very close eye on and monitoring.

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

We're going to move back to Madame Laverdière for five minutes.

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

[Translation]

Thank you.

First off, I would like something clarified. It may have been mentioned already, but I didn't hear it.

How much money did Canada spend to support the first mission of UN Secretary-General envoy Kofi Annan?

Mr. Mark Bailey: The contribution was \$250,000.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: I assume that most of our allies contributed at least as much, if not more.

Mr. Mark Bailey: I don't know. I can check how much their contributions were. To some extent, it depends on the mission budget. If half the budget was provided, perhaps only one other country contributed the same amount. I will check.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Thank you.

[English]

On another issue, we've had reports that some cluster munitions have been used at the border of Syria and Turkey. Could you comment on those reports?

Mr. Mark Bailey: I've heard of cluster munitions being used, but not at that particular place on the border with Turkey.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: If cluster munitions are used widely, this is another issue that will make it even more complex, eventually, to plan the after-Assad regime.

On this specific after-regime fall, is the international community starting to work on some sort of road map of what we can do if ever—I don't know—Assad flees the country or the regime falls? I know it's difficult to do so because nobody has any idea of if and when it will happen and what the situation will be on the ground, but still, has there been some work done on that?

Mr. Mark Bailey: Yes, indeed, there has been. In fact, this is one of the main strands of work of the Friends of the Syrian People grouping, in which Canada is participating, along with quite a large number of countries. One of the working groups of the Friends of the Syrian People.... The Friends of the Syrian People is a sort of ministerial conference, and then it has a number of working groups that meet at the level of officials, one of them being the sanctions group I mentioned, which met in the Hague.

There is another one on economic reconstruction and development, which indeed is looking at exactly the questions you mention about what's going to be needed in Syria when the day comes when Assad is gone and it's time to start rebuilding the country. It is chaired by German and United Arab Emirates officials. Canada has been participating in that group as long as we've participated in all the other working groups.

In addition, there has been the beginning of some thinking about going beyond the pure economic scope. There is also thinking about bigger issues of constitution-writing and of accountability. There is another working group, actually—or project—under the Friends of the Syrian People on the issue of accountability, documenting the crimes against humanity that are being committed, especially by the regime forces but not exclusively and only by regime forces. There is an effort under way to try to document these with the idea that some day some kind of process will be mounted in which these folks will be held accountable for the crimes they have committed.

Your question is quite well taken. Indeed, considerable work is being undertaken on this score, but I do have to mention that it's not, at this point, being undertaken in the United Nations. This is a reflection, of course, of the fact that there's no Security Council agreement, and therefore no agreement that the UN Secretariat shall start undertaking this. It's being undertaken in this other grouping—the Friends of the Syrian People—on a kind of ad hoc basis.

•(0935)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: I will give it to my friend.

[Translation]

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): I will keep it brief.

Women and children in refugee camps often fall victim to violence. Could you give us a general sense of where things stand? For instance, what is the scope of Canada's mission in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq or Turkey, all countries that deal with the majority of refugees?

Mr. Mark Bailey: I don't have any information on that specifically, but I can ask my colleagues to prepare a report, if you like.

[English]

Leslie has some information.

The Chair: Very briefly. We're over time here.

[Translation]

Ms. Leslie Norton: We know that women and children in camps have seen and experienced extreme hardship. In Lebanon, for example, 75% of the refugees are women and children, with children making up more than 50%. As a result, our partners such as UNICEF and UNHCR work to address the psychological and psychosocial needs of these children. They also ensure that programs are available to women and children targeting sexual violence and gender-based violence, in particular.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll finish off this round with Mr. Van Kesteren for five minutes.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Ms. Norton, in answer to some of the questions my colleague asked, you provided us with some information on what CIDA was doing to help. Obviously, there's going to be some real need for medical attention and things like water and sanitation. How have we responded to that?

Ms. Leslie Norton: Are you asking in-country, in Syria itself, or in the refugee camps?

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: Syria and refugee camps, yes, the situation there.

Ms. Leslie Norton: Okay. The partners we are working with are actually addressing these needs. UNICEF is working to meet the water and sanitation needs in the countries where the refugee camps are. They're working in close collaboration with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. In this context, what will happen is the UN organizations will come together, they will have a clear delineation of who has the lead on what sector, and in this case, UNICEF has the lead on delivering elements in water and sanitation and the psycho-social support for kids as well, as has been mentioned.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: Has CIDA been able to provide funds for that?

Ms. Leslie Norton: Give me one minute. I have to double-check something for you. My apologies.

• (0940)

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: While you're looking—and it's a quick answer—I do want to get a question in to Mr. Bailey.

I think most Canadians are probably wondering, when they think about the Middle East and the problems we've seen there, what in the world is going on. What is the root of all this? I wonder if you could give this committee, and Canadians, a history lesson as to where the turmoil and the struggles are coming from. I would think the average Syrian is content to simply live his life. What are the pressures that are pushing this turmoil in this region?

The Chair: That would be a history lesson on the Middle East in three minutes, right?

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: In three minutes.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Mark Bailey: I'll let my colleague respond.

Ms. Leslie Norton: I would say at this time we have not funded UNICEF for these activities. I should have clarified that. As the camps are opened, UNHCR provides all of the assistance and protection for the refugees. As the situation settles more, they will bring in partners, like UNICEF, to provide the water and sanitation elements. But in the meantime, the medical needs are being met by UNHCR in this context.

Inside Syria itself, it is the Syrian Arab Red Crescent that is trying to meet the water and sanitation needs, as well as the medical needs of our partners. You can ask more from the Canadian Red Cross when they come in after our session. The other partners, like the UN agencies, are also becoming more and more active in Syria in places where it's calm and they can work effectively. They are trying to meet these needs.

The Chair: You have two minutes now.

Mr. Mark Bailey: Well, it's very difficult to respond to your question, sir, without in fact venturing into controversy. In this part of the world, even the kinds of words one uses to describe problems can get you into difficulties, because they betray what some might allege are biases in your approach. All I can do is give you my own personal take on this.

I guess what I would say is that you have to start, frankly, with the peace settlements that were made after the First World War—the Treaty of Versailles, and the Lausanne treaty, which made peace with the Ottoman Empire—and the way those territories that had previously been part of the Ottoman Empire were divided up into mandates along lines that corresponded to the interests of the victorious powers in World War I but not necessarily to the human geography of the region itself at the time.

That kind of set the region up, as it were, for difficulties over time, and now, as time has gone on, and as various things have happened through the course of history, notably the Second World War, which was obviously a major event in the region's life, and then subsequent events, notably the overthrow of the shah in Iran and similar kinds of things.... I mean, the problems have gotten worse rather than better, to be perfectly honest.

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

To the committee, we have only one witness coming in for the next hour. Would you like an additional round? Or how would you like to do this?

An hon. member: [Inaudible—Editor]

The Chair: All right.

Why don't we just have one more question from the Conservatives and one more from the NDP, if we want one round each.

Is that okay if we could just keep you an extra five or ten minutes? Okay.

We'll move into the next round, with one from the Conservatives and one from the NDP.

I'll turn it over to Mr. Dechert, and then we'll come back over here to finish up.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate this opportunity.

Mr. Bailey, you mentioned that neither side is really willing to negotiate with the UN special envoy because they both think that it's the intention of their opposition to annihilate them.

You mentioned that the Assad regime continues to have a cache of military weapons. Are they being resupplied, and if so, by whom? What can be done to prevent them from being resupplied?

I understand that recently Turkey was successful in stopping at least one shipment of military supplies to the Assad regime. Can you tell us about Canada's reaction to that incident, and what was said to Turkey?

Just tell us a little bit more about who is supplying the Assad regime and what we can do to stop it.

• (0945)

Mr. Mark Bailey: I'll make just one very small remark: both sides have been willing to meet with the UN special envoy—both Mr. Annan and Mr. Brahimi—but what they aren't willing to do is negotiate with the other side, either directly or through him. But they are willing to meet with him. I just wanted to make that absolutely clear.

Yes, the regime is being resupplied. It is being resupplied, to the best of our knowledge, by Russia and Iran. Indeed, you're absolutely right that the Turks recently intercepted a Syrian Arab Airlines civilian aircraft overflying Turkey on its way back to Damascus from Moscow. They had information that led them to believe this aircraft was carrying equipment or weapons related to the war effort.

When they inspected the aircraft, they did indeed find such material, which they proceeded to unload and impound.

Mr. Bob Dechert: What exactly was on that aircraft?

Mr. Mark Bailey: The information that is available to me indicates that it was components related to the radar system that you use to control an air defence system. It was addressed to the Syrian ministry of defence. As I say, Turkey undertook that action.

They also, by the way, recently stopped an Armenian overflight. Apparently on that Armenian flight they didn't find anything, so it was allowed to proceed and carry on its way to Aleppo.

Canada naturally, as you can imagine, strongly approved this action by the Turkish authorities. Indeed, Minister Baird put out a statement to that effect, approving their action and calling on the Russians and others to cease trying to resupply the Syrian armed forces.

We've also called on Iraq to do the same. The Iraqis have indicated that they are at least doing spot checks of overflights of their territory by Iranian aircraft.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Thank you.

The Chair: Do you have any further questions? You have two minutes.

Mr. Bob Dechert: I'd like to explore the United Nations process a little more. What can be done by the rest of the world—other than Russia and China—to try to push that process forward? Can

anything be done in the absence of the UN Security Council bringing forward sanctions?

Mr. Mark Bailey: In the absence of the UN Security Council agreement to adopt measures, frankly, all that can be done is the kind of moral pressure that we saw in the General Assembly resolution that was adopted a few weeks ago—I forget the date of it—calling on the regime to change its ways and start getting much more serious about engaging with the opposition and finding a political solution.

When it's not backed up with sanctions or an arms embargo or other measures like that, it remains just an exhortation. That's why this process, the Friends of the Syrian People, has been set up by countries who were determined to not just stand back, arms crossed, and say they couldn't do anything; the Russians were blocking them.

This Friends of the Syrian People process, in which Canada has been participating actively, is the substitute for UN action mandated by the Security Council. It has succeeded in bringing in quite severe sanctions adopted by a number of countries: the Arab League countries, the European Union countries, Canada, the U.S., and others. There is that pressure, but as Syria's main friends, Russia and Iran, continue to resupply and support the regime, it's obviously not 100% effective.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Can I ask you just quickly about crimes against humanity?

You mentioned some were being perpetrated. Some documentation is going on with respect to those incidents, and some are obviously being perpetrated by the Assad regime, but some incidents may be being perpetrated by others. Can you give us a sample of that?

Mr. Mark Bailey: The regime's actions caught everyone's attention, but that's one we know about. There is reason to believe that other such actions have taken place, but of course because the international media is not given access, not allowed into the country, not able to move around freely, the suspicion has to be that other such action by the *shabiha* militia or even by the regular forces of the regime has taken place.

On the rebel side, there are reliable reports of executions. I don't know if any of you were watching *60 Minutes* the other night. They showed a video of an execution of captured soldiers by a militia force. They were made to kneel on the ground and then machine-gunned. That would, I think, probably constitute a war crime. I'm not an expert, but it would be my assumption that it is.

• (0950)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Dewar, you have five minutes.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Thank you.

One of the questions people are seized with right now is how you get the resources to those who need them. There have been reflections on a humanitarian corridor or other methods.

I'm curious as to the areas we're able to get our aid to. Are they simply around the borders? Is there any presence within Syria whereby we're able to get our aid directly to people? You mentioned, and maybe the following witnesses will elaborate.... Is there any knowledge of a method by which we can get that aid directly within the country, and particularly of course to women and children?

Mr. Mark Bailey: You've put your finger on a very significant problem. I'll let Leslie talk a little about the work they're doing and maybe add a comment or two at the end.

Ms. Leslie Norton: The challenge here, of course, is the actors in-country who can effectively access those in need. You've put your finger right on it. That is why the majority of our partners are using the Syrian Arab Red Crescent as the key actor in-country, because they're essentially local folks who are running either branch or sub-branch level offices, and they have access on all sides of the conflict, or on both sides of the conflict, depending obviously on the location of the branch or sub-branch office.

The World Food Programme is predominantly using SARC, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, as is the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and the ICRC. That really is the partner that has the key access. With the revision of the UN appeal for Syria, they are working on increasing their level of presence within the country itself. Within that context, not only are they scaling up their presence, but we also understand at this time that their presence is maintained through 11 agencies in seven offices located across the country. A number of international and non-governmental organizations have also appealed, within the context of this UN appeal, and they include Action Contre la Faim, the Danish Refugee Council, an organization called HELP, and a whole lot of members of the international medical corps. I would say there is a range of partners who have claimed access at this time to certain spots across the country.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Moving to you, Mr. Bailey, with regard to our help in supporting governance of post-conflict Syria—and I appreciate your comments earlier about not scooping your minister—what capacity do we have as a country to help in that area? It's absolutely critical that we do this. We've seen this in other scenarios, in Libya right now, for instance. The key is that the war is going to end at some point. In some ways that's the easy part. As horrific as it is right now, it's about what happens after. What tools and capacity do we have to help post-conflict? Is it through START, or what resources within the department could be exercised?

Mr. Mark Bailey: You're quite right: START would be one. The International Development Research Centre is also right now funding a project that tries to bring together various members of the opposition to start thinking about these very issues of governance and constitution-writing, and about what kinds of economic policies and institutions we will need as we go about rebuilding a country and a Syrian state in the post-Assad era. In fact, they've been doing some work on it already. I agreed just yesterday in fact to send some of our staff to attend a gathering with these Syrian oppositionists in Istanbul a bit later this month.

So yes, we have some tools to deal with this. Others are doing the same thing. All kinds of people are worrying about this topic. As I said, it's way up the list of priorities for the Friends of the Syrian

People as well. A lot of work is under way, and Canada is participating in it.

• (0955)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Cotler.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Perhaps in the interests of equity, not equality, I might be able to put one question in this round.

The Chair: You'll have to ask your colleagues to see if.... Sure. You can have one question.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: I have one question, which arises out of Mr. Bailey's comments and his response to other questions.

In Libya the international community intervened when there was a threat of impending mass atrocity, through the UN Security Council and by invoking the "responsibility to protect" doctrine. With regard to Syria, even though there have been a series of recurring mass atrocities, with some 30,000 civilians in Syria already dead, the international community has not intervened—and we know why, in terms of the UN Security Council—and it has acted almost as if the R to P doctrine does not exist.

My question is this. As you put it, the Friends of Syria has effectively replaced the UN Security Council. What is stopping the Friends of Syria from invoking the R to P doctrine? It seems a threshold for that purpose has long ago been reached. Why can't they move for more protective initiatives in the form of safe havens, and even towards considering a no-fly zone, given the massive and indiscriminate aerial bombardment and the like? In other words, why is there not a more proactive position by the Friends of Syria invoking an R to P doctrine?

Mr. Mark Bailey: You're of course a far greater expert on international law than I am, Mr. Cotler, but I think probably everyone would be very reluctant to take any steps down that road in the absence of a UN Security Council mandate. It's the only international body that has this kind of responsibility to mandate the use of force in any particular situation that might envelop this. If we say we're going to put together some kind of coalition of the willing or some new kind of effort in the absence of a UN Security Council mandate, many countries, including Canada, would want to think carefully about the kind of precedent we would be setting with that.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: There was a precedent for that in Kosovo. We did do it.

The Chair: Thank you very much once again, Mr. Bailey.

Ms. Norton, thank you for extending some extra time to us as well.

We're going to suspend very quickly to get our witness from the Canadian Red Cross in.

Once again, thank you. We'll be back in a minute.

• _____ (Pause) _____

•

• (1000)

The Chair: If I could have all the members back, we're going to get started.

I want to welcome Ms. Johnson, who's here today on behalf of the Canadian Red Cross. She is the director general of international operations and movement relations.

You also have a colleague with you. Would you introduce your colleague? I realize you'll be making the remarks, but if you could introduce your colleague before you get started, that would be great.

We're going to turn it over to you for your opening remarks at this time.

Ms. Susan Johnson (Director General, International Operations and Movement Relations, Canadian Red Cross): Thank you very much. I'm very pleased to be here this morning with the committee. Indeed I am here with a colleague, Stéphane Michaud, who's our head of operations for emergency response.

I listened to the earlier discussion you had with colleagues from Foreign Affairs and CIDA. I think you've already heard quite a bit about the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. In fact, a good part of my remarks will paint for you a portrait of the capacity and the nature of the Red Cross/Red Crescent in the country.

I will make remarks that focus on four different areas. I'll talk a bit about the humanitarian situation on the ground. Let me just say, of course, that we're very aware that the humanitarian situation is played out against a very complex political dynamic. As the Red Cross, we're not here to speak about that. We will focus our remarks and any discussion we might have with you on what we know in terms of day-to-day experience, in terms of the humanitarian situation. I will update you as to the humanitarian activities of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement inside Syria. I'll make a couple of remarks about the broader regional impact, and then lastly a few words on humanitarian challenges we face, as we speak.

It might be helpful for the committee for me to take a minute and remind you of the composition and mandate of the Red Cross/Red Crescent, because already you've heard about the International Committee of the Red Cross, the international federation, and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. You may well be wondering what all these different actors are. We are the largest and longest-standing humanitarian network in the world. We're non-partisan, and our mandate is to provide assistance to people affected by conflicts and natural disasters in a neutral and impartial manner, independent from governments.

The Red Cross/Red Crescent movement is made up of nearly 100 million members, volunteers, and supporters in 187 countries where there are national societies around the world. Our movement has three main components: the national societies themselves in these 187 countries; the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies; and lastly, and importantly, the International Committee of the Red Cross.

At the local level, in 187 countries there is a Red Cross or Red Crescent national society. Just like here in Canada with the Canadian Red Cross, each national society works within its own borders to respond to the humanitarian needs of the people who are affected by disasters or conflicts in its country. This is certainly the case in Syria, where the Syrian Arab Red Crescent is extremely active. Many national societies offer programs such as first aid training, community disaster preparedness, or health services. You can see

how these activities go a long way to responding to humanitarian crises.

All 187 national societies are members of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, which coordinates support to national societies in need.

The third component is the International Committee of the Red Cross. It is an organization that focuses on protecting the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence, as well as providing humanitarian assistance.

In Syria and around the region, all of the components of the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement are active and operational.

Before I go on, I just want to underline the relationship between the Canadian Red Cross and our own government. We are fully operational here in Canada as a national society, and we work very closely with Canadian public authorities to fulfill our mandate in Canada. For our international operations, we enjoy a long-standing relationship with the federal government. This was underlined in June of this year when we signed a memorandum of understanding for a strategic partnership with the Canadian International Development Agency. This MOU will allow the Canadian Red Cross, in partnership with CIDA, to focus on developing national societies in other countries so they're better able to respond to disasters and conflicts; it will improve our own capacity to respond quickly and effectively to humanitarian crises; and it will increase public awareness of Canadian humanitarian efforts.

Now let me turn to the actual humanitarian situation on the ground in Syria. We're monitoring the situation in Syria and in the region very closely. We are in regular contact with all of our Red Cross/Red Crescent partners, including the International Committee, the International Federation, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, and the other Red Cross and Red Crescents in the region, as well as other humanitarian actors.

The Syrian population in cities and rural areas is facing a very stark situation. The very nature of the conflict is such that it's conducted in the streets, in the homes, and in the public buildings of neighbourhoods and communities.

● (1005)

People are living in a context of constant fear and insecurity, lawlessness, and increased criminality, and with a lack of access to the basic necessities of life: food, water, medicine, and medical services. Some Syrians have not been able to work for months. Many are unable to pay their rent or buy basic supplies for their families. The unemployment rate in certain parts of the country has quadrupled.

Because of the violence and worsening conditions, there are now over 2.5 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, including 1.2 million Syrians who have lost their homes and have been forced to move. More than 336,000 Syrians have been forced to seek refuge in neighbouring countries and in North Africa.

These hardships will only increase with the approaching winter. We can expect fuel shortages, the breakdown of heating and electrical systems, and a lack of basic water and sanitation.

Basic infrastructure in the country continues to be targeted and destroyed as part of ongoing hostilities. Hospitals in various areas continue to operate but have suffered from loss of power, water, and supplies, including medical staff. The WHO has recently assessed that 67% of public hospitals have been affected, and fully half of the ambulances in the country have been attacked. Distribution of pharmaceutical products has been disrupted and there are shortages of essential drugs.

Thankfully, it is still possible to move relief supplies from Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey into the country; however, we are often facing challenges in distributing relief items due to the very volatile security conditions. Having said that, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, the International Committee, and others are still active in many parts of the country, in both government- and opposition-controlled areas.

The Syrian Arab Red Crescent is playing a very critical role in Syria today. The Red Crescent is the largest national humanitarian organization in Syria. It was created in 1942 and is present across the country, with the headquarters in Damascus, a branch in each of the 14 governorates, and a number of additional sub-branches.

The Red Crescent is fully committed to the Geneva conventions and is governed by the fundamental principles of the Red Cross movement. It has a strong history and a proven track record in emergency health and primary health care, in disaster preparedness, in response and risk reduction, and in providing psychological support. It has approximately 10,000 volunteers trained to offer its core services, including first aid and ambulance services.

Since the beginning of the tensions in Syria over 18 months ago, the Red Crescent has substantially scaled up its relief operations to meet the growing needs. It is currently distributing food parcels in a very successful manner and is assisting over 850,000 individuals each month. I just note that this may well grow to 1.5 million per month in the coming weeks, as the WFP plans to expand its reach through the Syrian Arab Red Crescent.

The Red Crescent has set up and is expanding its medical and first-aid posts. It has expanded its ambulance services in certain areas. I need to note to the committee that with this tremendous capacity of the Red Crescent Society in-country, reaching all parts of the country, it has not been without its own tragedy. Six of the Red Crescent members have been killed while delivering humanitarian assistance during these hostilities.

The Red Crescent is an organization with many young volunteers. Every day, new volunteers are coming forward, wanting to be part of the Red Crescent effort. To date, the Red Crescent has been able to provide enough briefing and training so that these young volunteers can deliver humanitarian services in a neutral and impartial manner.

The International Committee of the Red Cross continues to provide us with assurances that the Red Crescent is respecting humanitarian principles in delivering assistance. The Red Crescent is also acting as a national coordinator for international assistance and is the implementing partner of many of the UN agencies, as my colleague Leslie Norton shared with you in her remarks earlier. Also, the Red Crescent is a facilitator for other international organizations present in the country.

The International Committee of the Red Cross is also a very important player inside Syria. It's working right now to support the Red Crescent in areas directly affected by the conflict, often conducting its relief operations hand in hand with the Red Crescent Society. The International Committee is supporting medical relief and health services, as well as food distribution. In addition, as you may well know, the International Committee has a particular relationship and responsibility with regard to the Geneva conventions, and this allows it to have direct dialogue with governments.

• (1010)

The ICRC has met with President Assad, as well as the ministers of foreign affairs, the interior, health, and so on, and continues to dialogue with all parties to the conflict, including opposition groups in Syria. This is to advocate for the full respect of international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians and detainees.

On behalf of the International Committee and the whole Red Cross movement's efforts, I would like to thank the Canadian government for the contribution of \$1.5 million so far provided to the International Committee earlier this year.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies is also active in Syria, assisting the Red Crescent to support displaced and local populations. An emergency fundraising appeal was launched in July this year, seeking \$27.2 million to support health, relief, and livelihood activities for 200,000 individuals. To date, this appeal has only covered 60%.

The Canadian Red Cross would also like to thank the recent support of the Canadian government for contributing \$2 million to the emergency fund. For our part, the Canadian Red Cross has also provided \$175,000 from our own funds.

We are actively monitoring and liaising with many contacts on the ground and we're in regular contact with the Canadian government through CIDA and Foreign Affairs regarding the situation and response.

I'll turn soon to humanitarian challenges, but let me first make a few remarks about the regional impact. As we've already mentioned, and as the colleagues from Foreign Affairs and CIDA mentioned, there are already 336,000 people registered as refugees, or awaiting registration, in the countries around Syria. These include Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq. The UNHCR is currently predicting that unless there is a positive breakthrough, the number of refugees will double before the end of the year.

The pressure on local communities and host families in neighbouring countries, and of course on the governments of these countries, is not to be underestimated. It's important to note that there are refugees who are living in actual refugee camps, but there are also many refugees who are living with host families, so we need to have a very nuanced approach in terms of helping the host families and communities, as well as people actually in organized and registered camps.

In each case the national society of the country is playing an active role in assisting refugees, whether or not they're in established camps. In order to respond to this regional dimension, the International Federation launched an appeal in August seeking support, and this appeal has only received 32% of coverage to date. This appeal aims to provide assistance to beneficiaries in Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq.

To conclude, Mr. Chair, the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement is able to have a wide range of activities in Syria and in the region, thanks in large part to the support of the Canadian government as well as other donor governments. This support has allowed us to provide assistance to those affected by the conflict in Syria and in the region. We are delivering our assistance in full respect of our principles of independence, neutrality, and impartiality. We are in dialogue with both the government and opposition forces.

Our main challenge right now is access. Accessing certain parts of the country is difficult and volatile because of the very difficult security environment. Linked to our security concerns, another important challenge is the actual threat and attack on humanitarian health workers and health facilities. This is a humanitarian issue that is experienced again and again in situations of conflict, and we have recently launched an awareness campaign entitled "Health Care in Danger" to bring more attention to this ongoing humanitarian challenge. I've included information about this campaign in your information packages.

As I mentioned earlier, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent has lost six workers, including the secretary general, who were attacked while performing lifesaving humanitarian activities. Many of their ambulances have been shot at and volunteers have been wounded. These attacks have an immediate impact, and they also create a long-term effect, as it means fewer and fewer people will actually have access to critical medical care. I remind you that attacks on health professionals, volunteers, and health facilities are all violations of international law and are unacceptable, and we call on the Government of Canada to join its voice with ours in calling for full respect of the medical mission.

In conclusion, whichever scenario one subscribes to now, we anticipate humanitarian needs will only increase in the face of the approaching winter months, as the winter's cold weather makes the plight of displaced and vulnerable families that much more desperate.

At the Red Cross it's our job to plan for the worst and be prepared for the unexpected, and we have contingency plans accordingly. We foresee an increased need to respond both inside and outside Syria, and we encourage the Canadian government to provide support to our regional appeal, since there is great need for support for Syrian refugees who have already fled and those who will be fleeing to neighbouring countries.

I hope these brief remarks have provided you with an initial sense of the humanitarian dimensions of the situation, and I look forward to responding to your questions.

•(1015)

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Johnson.

We're going to start with Mr. Saganash, for seven minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the two witnesses as well. I found the presentation very informative.

You said there were 360,000 registered refugees. Could you give us a breakdown of where they are located, which countries they are in?

Could you also tell us what these refugees need the most, where they are currently located? You said that certain areas were difficult to access and that the needs would likely increase. Could you give us some information on that, please?

•(1020)

[*English*]

Ms. Susan Johnson: Thank you very much for your question.

I will ask my colleague, Stéphane, to give more precise figures and information regarding your question on which refugees may be where and under what circumstances.

Certainly, I think it's important, following the question your colleague asked earlier, to remind you that the majority of refugees are women and children. The majority of refugees are people who have come through extremely difficult situations to even arrive in the other country. Their needs are grave in any one of the situations they are in, be it in host families or in refugee camps in Turkey and other countries.

I will allow Stéphane to give a little bit more precise information to you. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Michaud (Senior Manager, Emergency Response for International Operations, Canadian Red Cross): Thank you for your question.

The figures we have on refugees are from October 5.

If we factor in those registered and those awaiting registration, there were 93,576 refugees in Turkey, 87,140 refugees in Lebanon, 105,166 in Jordan and 36,500 in Iraq. Those figures don't include the 5,000 or so refugees in North Africa, where the registration process is more challenging.

That was the breakdown as of October 5, with a total of approximately 330,000 refugees. As Susan mentioned, that number is expected to hit 710,000. It will probably double. That is our prediction by the end of 2012.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: In late September, there was a news report about a conflict between Syrian refugees and police. I believe it was at the Zaatari camp in Jordan. Could you describe the living conditions of the refugees there and the reasons such a conflict might arise?

[English]

Mr. Stéphane Michaud: I can't speak specifically to that incident in that camp. What I can say is that in Jordan, the majority of refugees are actually not living in camps; they are living with host families.

Whether they are in camps or with host families, it creates added pressure on the limited resources already there. Most conflicts during these population movements usually arise from that increased pressure on the local resources. I can't speak specifically to that incident, but we have seen many indications of that, not only in Jordan, but also in Turkey and Iraq.

[Translation]

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Do I still have time?

[English]

Given the current situation in Syria and the destruction that has taken place there, it is likely that many of the refugees will not be able to return home one day, if at all. Has the Red Cross made any long-term plans in terms of how we can help in Syria?

Ms. Susan Johnson: It is our expectation that there will come a day when the situation in Syria will be stabilized, through whatever process that might be, and people will be able to return home. What's important for us is that while people are inside Syria in the refugee situation or in host families, they are offered the humanitarian assistance that allows them to be living in reasonable conditions throughout this period.

What's also of concern for us is that we are able to work with and preserve the strength of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent such that it is able to continue to be the independent humanitarian actor in its own country that delivers the service it is well known for and that has access throughout the country. When the day comes that the country has returned to some level of stability, we want the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to continue to be a respected humanitarian actor in its country.

Mr. Stéphane Michaud: If I may add, the current appeal for operations of the Red Cross movement inside Syria of \$27.2 million is for 12 months, from June 2012 to June 2013. It's typical that this emergency appeal would be followed by recovery programming. It's revised every three months.

I don't want to go too far on projections, but typically with emergency appeals such as this one, as the situation progresses it evolves into recovery and longer-term programming, assuming there's funding to support that.

•(1025)

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

We're going to move over to Ms. Brown, for seven minutes, please.

Ms. Lois Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for being here today.

First of all, I would like to take the opportunity to commend the Red Cross and the arm of the Red Crescent that's active in Syria for the amazing amount of work you're doing. It is very difficult circumstances in which you find yourselves, and yet you're doing a

Herculean job. I'd like to say thank you on behalf of Canadians for the work you're doing.

I wonder if you could talk a bit more about the situation inside Syria, as we know it. You talked about the lack of access, but the SARC is building tendrils, if I may say, into the communities, by developing these volunteers.

How are you recruiting those volunteers? What communication does SARC have to find people who are willing to act in a conflict zone that is very risky and there are no confirmations that they'll come back safely?

I wonder if you could talk about that situation a bit. Is there any mechanism for documentation on where people are, who is receiving the assistance, and whether or not there is any safety in that zone for them? Or does that change on a daily basis?

Ms. Susan Johnson: Thank you very much for your question.

I'll make a couple of remarks, and, Stéphane, if you want to add something, I'll certainly invite you to get into more detail.

Let me start with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the nature of the national society even before the conflict. It's very well respected for actually having reached throughout the entire country, and it does have a very active network of existing volunteers, in all of the country. It's not a question of reaching out; it's a question of actually having the capacity and ensuring we are able to continue to support that capacity—the local volunteers, the local branches of the Red Crescent Society.

In terms of volunteers coming forward, one of the remarkable things in situations of crisis—and we've faced the same thing in Canada when we've had a natural disaster, or any kind of situation—is that people spontaneously volunteer. People can see the relevant actor in their community, the humanitarian organization that can actually deliver assistance, that might be delivering assistance to their neighbour, and they want to take action. They want to be part of the solution. They come forward spontaneously. It's not a question of having to look for people, so much as that people are coming forward.

Then you have to be very careful at integrating new volunteers to ensure that they... They might be very well-intentioned, but do they understand what it means to be wearing the emblem of the Red Cross or Red Crescent? That emblem means very particular things, in terms of neutral, independent, humanitarian action. Ensuring that volunteers understand that, and that they will incorporate that in their behaviour so there can be no accusations of favouritism in the relief distributions or the medical assistance, is important to us.

In terms of the documentation, we are very careful, within the reasonable environment that we're in, to document who is getting assistance. We need to be accountable also for the resources that are put in the hands of the Red Cross family system, so we are monitoring.

We work with beneficiary lists of who is where. Whether it be people who are in a public school and they've taken refuge there...we are able to visit. The distribution is done in relation to the need: how many people are living in this school; therefore, how many relief supplies need to be delivered?

Ms. Lois Brown: Ms. Johnson, if I may, when you're talking about the volunteers who are going into these conflict areas, is there any ability to provide them with protection of any sort, or are they taking their lives in their hands when they go into some of these conflict zones?

Ms. Susan Johnson: The only protection that anybody working for the Red Cross or Red Crescent ever has is the emblem. It's having the T-shirt with the Red Cross or the Red Crescent on it that gives them the protection.

To the extent that it offers protection is in relation to how they and their organizations behave and how their behaviour is understood by the community and by those who hold power or who are contesting power. But it's also the dialogue with authorities. That's why it's so important for us to have contact with the government and opposition forces at all levels. The only protection is that all of these actors understand who we are and what our intention is. Our intention is to deliver humanitarian assistance, neutral and impartial. We can be trusted to do that. To the extent to which they appreciate that, understand that, and can actually achieve compliance with that within their own ranks is what gives us the protection. Part of the difficulty right now in Syria is that there is territory that goes back and forth. It can be very difficult to reach. If we cannot be assured of reasonable safety, if we don't know that people going into an area are going to be reasonably safe, then there are judgments made that we can't travel into a certain area. We can't be everywhere all the time. We're not prepared to put people at tremendous risk if we have a choice. I'm talking about the international workers there as well.

Certainly, it is important for us to have this constant dialogue with all actors in an area and that we do our best to ensure that they understand who we are. Evidently, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent making those same judgments has had six terrible events, with loss of life, and there have been other situations where people have been shot and wounded. What I'm describing is what we strive for and don't always achieve.

• (1030)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Cotler.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Jacques Beres, the co-founder of Médecins Sans Frontières, recently returned from Syria. He said that unlike in his previous visits to Homs and Idlib, half the wounded rebel fighters that he treated were non-Syrians. I don't want to suggest that this is necessarily representative of the opposition as a whole. Can you give us some idea of to what extent the Red Cross or other humanitarian groups are finding themselves increasingly treating non-Syrian fighters, and whether this suggests any radicalization within the opposition elements themselves? That's the first question.

Second, is there a need for humanitarian corridors or safe havens to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian and medical assistance, which you said was sometimes difficult and risky, as well as to protect Syrian civilians?

Ms. Susan Johnson: As to your first question, I'm not in a position to make a comment. I would only say that it would be the approach of the Red Cross/Red Crescent and any medical professional to treat anybody who needs assistance.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: I appreciate that this would be your mandate and your credo, but I'm wondering whether in the course of discharging that mandate you have noticed a difference in the character and representation of the rebels you are assisting.

Ms. Susan Johnson: I'm not in a position to make a comment in regard to that.

In regard to your second question, which I thought I remembered and now I don't....

Hon. Irwin Cotler: I asked whether we should be establishing humanitarian corridors or safe havens.

Ms. Susan Johnson: Thank you for the prompt. Certainly, I think it would be the position of the International Red Cross that we would be very much in favour of anything that could be done to create access, to provide more assurance that we can move supplies and to create environments in which international or local humanitarian workers can work in greater elements of security and safety—as well as civilian populations, who want to have a safe environment.

Mr. Stéphane Michaud: In Syria you can divide the areas into three categories: currently under government control, under non-government control, or under intermittent control. Access is very good in both the government and the non-government areas. It's most difficult in the areas under intermittent control, and every access to that humanitarian space is negotiated day by day and case by case. It's proven most difficult and not always successful.

As for relief coming in from neighbouring countries, that's not an issue. The issue is really to get to these what we call grey areas, the zones under intermittent control.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Do you see a clear definition of areas under control, for example, that the northern rural part is increasingly under opposition control, and then in the grey areas, Damascus, Aleppo, you have ongoing battles. Are we finding that government and opposition are being more clearly delineated in the areas under control?

• (1035)

Mr. Stéphane Michaud: All I would say is that it's shifting weekly. I'm not going to comment on....

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll move to the second round. We'll have time for two quick questions. We're going to Mr. Dechert, and then we'll finish up with Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Dechert, you have five minutes.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Johnson, how are Canadians responding to the Red Cross call for contributions to the refugee relief effort?

Ms. Susan Johnson: There's some response. It's not massive. We are appealing. If you were to go to our website, you would see that you would have the opportunity to contribute to the work of the International Red Cross and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent through the Canadian Red Cross. As I mentioned, so far we've contributed \$175,000 to the effort. We have had some support from Canadians, but not a massive response.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Has the Syrian Canadian community been involved? Have they worked with the Red Cross and the Red Crescent to help raise funds?

Ms. Susan Johnson: Yes. In the spring we had an arrangement with a Syrian Canadian organization in Montreal, where we did a joint activity, a joint fundraiser, and the funds went to the Canadian Red Cross.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Is the Red Cross in ongoing, active communication with members of the Syrian Canada diaspora about this issue?

Ms. Susan Johnson: We are. I would say most actively in the Montreal area.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Okay, but not so much in the Toronto area.

Ms. Susan Johnson: With any diaspora population, frankly, we maintain a pretty active dialogue, especially when there are moments of particular crisis in their home country. We are in active discussion with them about what the situation might be, what support through the Red Cross would mean, ensuring that they understand who we are and what we can achieve with the support they might offer, absolutely.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Is there more that can be done to encourage Canadians, all Canadians, to contribute more to this effort? What would you suggest?

Ms. Susan Johnson: It's important for Canadians to know that they have a reliable, credible channel through the Canadian Red Cross to the International Red Cross and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. We've done a fair bit to get that message out.

I think it's fair to say, though, that Canadians find it challenging in any conflict situation to.... At least, we find that in conflict situations, Canadians—and not Canadians alone—are sometimes a little bit more reluctant to respond than they can be to what we call a sudden-onset natural disaster. I think part of that is that they may well have questions as to how reliable we.... Are we able to deliver what we say? Who is going to receive the assistance?

The situation we're facing in Syria and the region is not unlike other conflict situations around the world where we're also very active.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Hopefully, the fact that the Canadian government is supporting your efforts will help solve or answer some of those questions for the average Canadian citizen who is trying to decide how they can assist and who they should be contributing to. If the Canadian government is satisfied that the International Red Cross is the right organization, then presumably that can be a guide for the rest of the Canadian population that might want to contribute.

Is there anything that the Syrian Canadian community is asking the Red Cross to do, in particular in providing services? Are they supplying you with information about what's happening to their friends and relatives? Are they asking for something more that perhaps the Red Cross can't provide but that some other agency could?

Ms. Susan Johnson: Thank you.

The fact that the Canadian government has been able to be as generous as it has been to the response efforts of the International

Red Cross and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent is testimony to the importance of the Canadian government having the humanitarian assistance budget envelope that it has and its ability to make those kinds of decisions, whether or not the Canadian public en masse is excited about something. It is really important that governments have that kind of capacity.

In the dialogue we have with the Syrian Canadian community, they are of course bringing to our attention what they might know from their friends and relatives and so on inside the country. We take that information into account. I think their biggest concern is that we continue to support the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and that the work they do in-country is reaching all areas of the country and reaching the people in most need.

• (1040)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to finish with Mr. Dewar. You have five minutes, please.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Thank you.

Thank you to our guests for coming before committee; it's not the first time.

With regard to the funding gap, if we can call it that, do you have a number? You mentioned some numbers, what the asks were and what the response was. Is there a global kind of number on that, what both organizations are looking for in terms of moneys?

Ms. Susan Johnson: A global number?

Mr. Paul Dewar: Ballpark.

Ms. Susan Johnson: Right. One element of our response that we highlighted in our remarks was for the regional appeal of the International Federation. The appeal is not ginormous—it's \$3.7 million—and we would like to see the Canadian government make a contribution to that regional appeal. So far it's covered 30%, so a contribution from Canada would be helpful in that regard.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Do you have an ask for the Canadian government right now that you would like to see directly? You have the opportunity.

Ms. Susan Johnson: Given the situation on the ground and the mix of actors—this is a conversation, of course, and we're in direct dialogue on a daily basis with Leslie Norton and her team about this—a reasonable contribution from Canada, given the size of Canada's response elsewhere, would be something like half a million Canadian dollars.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Another issue of great concern for many—and there were reports I was following in the summer, in fact in the spring—is on the whole issue of security of women and children, in particular citing rape as a weapon of war, which we've seen in all of these conflicts, as something that is not only an outcome of war, but is sometimes a strategy of war. This is deeply concerning.

It's confidential in terms of individuals, of course, but can you talk in terms of that whole phenomenon of rape being used as a weapon of war and what is happening in terms of victims?

Ms. Susan Johnson: We've been aware of similar reports, the same reports, both in terms of the situation for women and gender-based violence and also the reports in regard to children. I'm not in a position to make any particular remark or confirm what might be behind the known facts. I would only point out that our understanding is that in situations of conflict—of course tragically—it's not unusual to find that women are subject to particular violence. We've also recently published a report documenting the relation between violence against women and children in natural disaster situations. Our experience at the Red Cross is that it's not only in situations of conflict. Even in a simple natural disaster environment we see a spike in interpersonal violence, in which women and children are particularly vulnerable.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Do you have requisite resources right now to deal with victims, both children and women, particularly of sexual violence? In other words, do you have the capacity to deal with that?

Ms. Susan Johnson: We have some capacity. We work with other partners as well in regard to that. One of the aspects of the work we do is with the national societies themselves. Part of it is raising awareness of the volunteers and the staff of the national societies, so that people are alert to the circumstances they might be confronted

with and how to actually ensure that we are sensitive to the situation and able to ensure we have an appropriate response.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Johnson, thank you very much.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: May I make a very brief point?

The Chair: Sure.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: I'm dangerous.

• (1045)

I wanted to apologize for having missed part of the presentation. I have been going back and forth—I had a little emergency—but my apologies to everybody.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Johnson, thank you very much.

Mr. Michaud, thank you as well for being here.

With that, we'll adjourn the meeting.

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