



SENATE | SÉNAT  
CANADA

# SAFETY AND SECURITY FOR GLOBAL AFFAIRS CANADA EMPLOYEES AND CANADIANS ABROAD

Report of the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs  
and International Trade

June 2019



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CANADA

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS ..... 3

THE COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP..... 4

ORDER OF REFERENCE..... 5

INTRODUCTION..... 7

PHYSICAL SECURITY AT CANADA’S MISSIONS ABROAD ..... 8

IMPROVED SECURITY AWARENESS TRAINING..... 9

COUNTRY RISKS ASSESSMENTS AND CONSULAR COMMUNICATIONS ..... 10

EMPLOYEES’ MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING IN HIGH-RISK ENVIRONMENTS  
AND DURING EMERGENCIES..... 12

CONCLUSION ..... 14

LIST OF WITNESSES ..... 15

# THE COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Honourable A. Raynell Andreychuk, *Chair*  
The Honourable Paul J. Massicotte, *Deputy Chair*

## The Honourable Senators

Salma Ataullahjan  
Peter Boehm  
Patricia Bovey  
Jane Cordy  
Mary Coyle  
Dennis Dawson  
Tony Dean  
Stephen Greene  
Leo Housakos  
Thanh Hai Ngo  
Raymonde Saint-Germain

### *Ex-officio members of the committee:*

The Honourable Senator Peter Harder, P.C. (or Diane Bellemare)(or Grant Mitchell);  
Larry Smith (or Yonah Martin); Joseph Day (or Terry Mercer); Yuen Pau Woo  
(or Raymonde Saint-Germain)

### *Other Senators who have participated in the study:*

The Honourable Bev Busson

### *Parliamentary Information and Research Services, Library of Parliament:*

Billy Joe Siekierski, Analyst  
Pascal Tremblay, Analyst

### *Senate Committees Directorate:*

Marie-Ève Belzile, Clerk of the Committee  
Jacqueline Sirois, Administrative Assistant

## ORDER OF REFERENCE

### ORDER OF REFERENCE

Extract from the *Journals of the Senate*, Wednesday, January 27, 2016:

The Honourable Senator Andreychuk moved, seconded by the Honourable Senator Tkachuk:

That the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, in accordance with rule 12-7(4), be authorized to examine such issues as may arise from time to time relating to foreign relations and international trade generally; and

That the committee report to the Senate no later than June 30, 2017.

After debate,

The question being put on the motion, it was adopted.

Charles Robert

*Interim Clerk of the Senate*

### ORDER OF REFERENCE

Extract from the *Journals of the Senate*, Wednesday, June 21, 2017:

With leave of the Senate,

The Honourable Senator Andreychuk moved, seconded by the Honourable Senator Patterson:

That, notwithstanding the order of the Senate adopted on Wednesday, January 27, 2016, the date for the final report of the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade in relation to its study on such issues as may arise from time to time relating to foreign relations and international trade generally be extended from June 30, 2017 to June 30, 2018.

The question being put on the motion, it was adopted.

Charles Robert

*Interim Clerk of the Senate*

ORDER OF REFERENCE

Extract from the *Journals of the Senate*, Thursday, June 14, 2018:

The Honourable Senator Andreychuk moved, seconded by the Honourable Senator Tkachuk:

That, notwithstanding the order of the Senate adopted on Wednesday, June 21, 2017, the date for the final report of the Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade in relation to its study on such issues as may arise from time to time relating to foreign relations and international trade generally be extended from June 30, 2018 to June 30, 2019.

The question being put on the motion, it was adopted.

Richard Denis

*Interim Clerk of the Senate*

## INTRODUCTION

The Standing Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade (the committee) held two meetings — on February 20, 2019 and April 11, 2019 — to examine the findings and recommendations of the Office of the Auditor General’s Fall 2018 report entitled *Physical Security at Canada’s Missions Abroad—Global Affairs Canada*.<sup>1</sup> Aware that the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts issued its own report on the Auditor General’s findings,<sup>2</sup> this committee’s report addresses the audit but also discusses other related security and safety issues that fall within the responsibilities of Global Affairs Canada. Those include: the security awareness training provided to employees; employee mental health and well-being in high-risk environments and emergencies; and country risks assessments and consular communications.

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<sup>1</sup> Office of the Auditor General of Canada (OAG), *Physical Security at Canada’s Missions Abroad—Global Affairs Canada*, Report 4 of the 2018 Fall Reports of the Auditor General of Canada.

<sup>2</sup> House of Commons, Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Report 4, Physical Security at Canada’s Missions Abroad—Global Affairs Canada, of the 2018 Fall Reports of the Auditor General of Canada*, April 2019, 42<sup>nd</sup> Parliament, 1<sup>st</sup> Session.

# PHYSICAL SECURITY AT CANADA'S MISSIONS ABROAD

The Office of the Auditor General made several noteworthy observations in its report, which Carol McCalla — who led the audit — summarized for the committee. Those observations include:

- Global Affairs Canada had identified 200 urgently needed security measures across the missions it operates in 110 countries, but it did not have a plan to implement them;
- One-third of Global Affairs Canada's threat assessments, which are supposed to inform security measures, were out of date, while many vulnerability assessments were also incomplete;
- Of 13 delayed physical security projects reviewed during the audit, nine were an average of three years behind schedule because of weak departmental project management and oversight;
- One-third of staff members working in some of the most dangerous locations around the world had not taken the mandatory security awareness training.

Global Affairs Canada agreed with the Auditor General's observations and its recommendations for how the problems it identified should be addressed. [Heather Jeffrey](#), Assistant Deputy Minister, Consular, Security and Emergency Management at Global Affairs Canada, told the committee that the audit covered the period from April 1, 2015 to May 31, 2018. The work recommended by the Auditor General is largely underway and, in some cases, complete. She said that this progress "was enabled by the 2017 announcement by the government of an investment of \$1.8 billion over 10 years in security funding for Global Affairs [Canada] under the duty-of-care initiative for the very specific purpose of strengthening security measures at our embassies, high commissions, and consulates."

The committee learned that this funding has already allowed for additional resources to be allocated for physical security upgrades and mission relocations. Moreover, steps have been taken to improve the governance and management of physical security projects and to address gaps in the provision of mandatory security awareness training.

At the same time, however, Ms. McCalla — in response to a question from a committee member — agreed that the short tenure of heads of mission in some of the highest-risk countries has also occasionally resulted in incomplete vulnerability assessments and delays in implementing remedial measures. "We called for better and improved documentation of what measures are required at each site, especially because of the rotational staff, so that it is well understood," she said.



## IMPROVED SECURITY AWARENESS TRAINING

Concerned by the Auditor General's findings related to security training, the committee decided to delve more deeply into that particular subject. [Jerome Berthelette](#), the Assistant Auditor General, told the committee that his office had found that one-third of staff members working in some of Canada's most dangerous missions abroad had not completed mandatory security awareness training. Consequently, "Global Affairs Canada did not have assurance that its staff members had the appropriate level of security awareness needed for their effective protection."

Part of the problem, [Ms. Jeffrey](#) said, is that there are a number of circumstances that do not lend themselves to pre-departure training. She explained, for example, that when staff move directly from one posting abroad to another, they may not be able to immediately return to Canada to take security awareness training.

While [Ms. McCalla](#) indicated that the audit generally uncovered a lack of departmental oversight, she added that it was clear from discussions with departmental personnel that the primary issue had been insufficient resources. She pointed out that the new funding received under the duty-of-care initiative included dedicated funding to provide training, which should, in her estimation, "help bridge the gap."

Indeed, the funding has already allowed the department to increase its training capacity. [Ms. Jeffrey](#) told the committee: "[o]ver the past fiscal year, offerings of our mandatory personal security seminar and the hostile environment training have been increased by 30 and 40 percent respectively to address the increase in security training requirements." According to Ms. Jeffrey, the department expects "to be in full compliance with the mandatory training by this fall."

[Ms. Jeffrey](#) also informed the committee that the department's security program managers — those responsible for mission security briefings upon arrival and for maintaining mission security standards and protocols — are now receiving 14 extra weeks of training, and that a comprehensive internal training tracking tool has been developed. In addition, she explained that the department is piloting the delivery of key training courses at headquarters and in the field, where they can be tailored to the local environment.

During the committee's study, the training of locally-engaged staff stood out as an area requiring further improvement. [Ms. Jeffrey](#) noted that locally-engaged staff play an essential role in Canadian missions, but have not been required to complete security training owing, at least in part, to their familiarity with the local environment. However, the committee underscores that the Auditor General recommended that appropriate security training should be provided to locally-engaged staff. On this issue, Ms. Jeffrey commented: "In response to the audit, the department has reassessed the current mandatory security training offered to this group and is developing a new training course that will expand the training to the threat environment and position requirements."

## COUNTRY RISKS ASSESSMENTS AND CONSULAR COMMUNICATIONS

Canadians are travelling and living abroad in greater and greater numbers.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, Canadians abroad, such as those working for humanitarian and development organizations or companies active in certain industries, can also be widely dispersed throughout a given country, including in remote or unstable regions.

Global Affairs Canada uses different tools to ensure that Canadians are well-informed about the risks to which they are exposed when travelling in a different country. The department stressed that its Travel Advice and Advisories service is the “go-to source” for Canadians travelling or living abroad. [Ms. Jeffrey](#) pointed out that those reports provide the department’s “most fulsome advice” about the security situation on the ground in various countries and are updated constantly in response to new or evolving threats. According to [Ms. Jeffrey](#), whenever the department becomes aware of information that would impact the security of Canadians abroad, the information is “instantly” incorporated in the department’s travel advice for Canadians.

Global Affairs Canada also explained that, in order to build a comprehensive understanding of the threat picture, Canadian mission security program managers are continually consulting and sharing information with other missions and international organizations. [Ms. Jeffrey](#) highlighted the collaboration with the British as an example: “These are close, like-minded partners with whom we share a lot of information. We coordinate with them already on a whole range of threat assessment, travel advisories, mission security postures and protocols.” Missions can also draw on an in-country volunteer “warden network” of Canadians who are long-term residents. That network can help the department “extend [its] reach” during a crisis.

Global Affairs Canada also highlighted the Registration of Canadians Abroad as an important crisis-management tool. To access this service, Canadians must input their contact information and location so they can be informed by the department about the latest news and risks, including those that would not necessarily need to be included in the more general Travel Advice and Advisories, but that would be important to know if a person is in a particular place on a particular day. This service, however, is voluntary, and the committee is aware that concerns have been raised in the past about low registration and incomplete information. Notwithstanding the service’s low uptake, the committee believes it is important that the Government of Canada find ways to provide adequate and timely information to citizens.

More generally, the committee heard that Global Affairs Canada is making efforts to modernize and expand its “consular communications” to ensure that Canadians have necessary information before and during travel, and to facilitate communications with them during a crisis. [Ms. Jeffrey](#) indicated that the department has expanded its repertoire of tools to facilitate consular communications with Canadians, noting for instance the use of

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<sup>3</sup> OAG, [Report 7—Consular Services to Canadians Abroad—Global Affairs Canada](#), Report 7 of the 2018 Spring Reports of the Auditor General of Canada. In its audit, the OAG estimated that, “In 2015, Canadians made almost 55 million trips abroad—an increase of 21% from 10 years ago.”

WhatsApp, text messaging, and Facebook Messenger. The committee was told that the department is also working to improve its web interface, with the view to ensuring that it is easily navigable on a mobile device and accessible with limited bandwidth.

The committee is aware of the Auditor General's Spring 2018 report, which focused on Canadian consular services. With regard to the Travel Advice and Advisories and consular communications, the audit concluded that "in crisis situations, Global Affairs Canada promptly updated its online advisories to provide information to travellers," but "did not always complete mandatory cyclical reviews of its online Travel Advice and Advisories on schedule." Moreover, the audit found that the department "[did not] assess, as part of its communications and outreach, how to best engage the specific types of travellers who are more likely to face difficulties abroad and how to best target its advisories and information." The Auditor General's report indicated that Global Affairs Canada agreed to implement the recommendations relevant to Travel Advice and Advisories and consular communications by October 2018.<sup>4</sup>

The fatal crash of an Ethiopian Airlines' plane on March 10, 2019, which claimed the lives of 157 people, including 18 Canadian citizens, occurred between the two meetings held by the committee on this topic. The tragedy prompted Senators to examine how Global Affairs Canada handles communications with victims' families in such difficult cases. The department confirmed to the committee that consular officers receive a range of training to ensure that they are prepared to handle consular cases in an appropriate and sensitive manner, including during situations that can be highly traumatic for victims' loved ones. [Ms. Jeffrey](#) noted that such training includes a specific course on difficult conversations.

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<sup>4</sup> OAG, [Report 7—Consular Services to Canadians Abroad—Global Affairs Canada](#), Report 7 of the 2018 Spring Reports of the Auditor General of Canada.

## EMPLOYEES' MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING IN HIGH-RISK ENVIRONMENTS AND DURING EMERGENCIES

The committee also took the opportunity to take stock of the department's efforts to address the mental health and well-being of its employees in high-risk missions and during emergencies. While the committee was told that more education is still needed on the issue of mental health and well-being in the department and in Canadian missions, the committee also heard that there is now greater awareness of these issues and a willingness to act: "Having the general awareness of mental health and well-being is a big project for [the department] and one where we're excited about some of the new directions," [Ms. Jeffrey](#) said.

Departmental officials discussed initiatives and processes that can occur before, during, and after employees are posted abroad. For instance, [Ms. Jeffrey](#) said that Global Affairs Canada works closely with the Department of National Defence to ensure that the mental health and well-being aspect is taken into account within hostile environment training and that such training is reflective, as much as possible, of the risks that can arise both in military and civilian contexts. The committee also heard that debriefing and counselling is part of both the pre-posting and return-to-Canada processes, and that a "decompression leave" is mandatory for employees coming back from postings in high-risk missions, such as those in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Noting lessons learned from the department's extensive deployments in Afghanistan over the last decade, [Ms. Jeffrey](#) explained that managers also receive a mandatory course on mental health and well-being to ensure that they are sensitive to the needs their employees may have and are able to recognize possible signs of post-traumatic stress. [Reid Sirrs](#), Director General, Security and Emergency Management at Global Affairs Canada, added that, in addition to mandatory "rest and recuperation" leave that allows employees to decompress from a stressful environment, missions in high-risk environments receive periodic visits from the department's Employee Assistance Program "to make sure people are being assisted or supported as much as [possible] while they're in the field."

Departmental witnesses recognized that mental health and well-being issues can also affect employees and their families in lower-risk environments, for example, during emergencies. To respond to such situations, [Ms. Jeffrey](#) said that the department's [Employee Assistance Program](#) can be deployed to a mission during and after a crisis, and cited as an example the deployment of the program immediately after the recent fatal plane crash in Ethiopia.

[Ms. Jeffrey](#) pointed out that the department also needs to be responsive to situations where the sources of pressure are subtler, perhaps originating from recurrent low-level stress. The department further recognizes that consular officers, whether they work in missions abroad or at headquarters, can be involved in difficult and traumatic cases that can trigger significant anxiety. She said that specific training and follow-ups are provided

to consular officers to address such circumstances, and that employees are allowed time to recover from such cases.

The committee also inquired about the impact of the so-called “Havana syndrome” on Canadian government employees and their dependents in Havana, Cuba. [Ms. Jeffrey](#) told the committee that the causes and health impacts are still being investigated, and that different departments are contributing to the investigation and the decision-making around that situation. She also stated that the Canadian government has put in place mitigation measures to ensure the safety of the employees who remain at the mission in Havana. The committee notes the concerns that were expressed in relation to the “Havana syndrome” and will continue to monitor that situation closely.

## CONCLUSION

The committee made a point of scrutinizing the Auditor General's Fall 2018 report on physical security at Canada's missions abroad, and Global Affairs Canada's response to it and other related concerns, because the Committee is of the firm belief that the department has no greater responsibility than the security and safety of Canadians abroad. All of the issues identified in this report – security measures and upgrades, threat and vulnerability assessments, consular communications and outreach, and employee training and mental health – require urgent and thoughtful attention on an ongoing basis. That necessity is amplified by the growing complexity of the threat environment in many countries where Canadians are posted, living, working and travelling. In light of this:

- The committee believes that Global Affairs Canada should provide more information on the criteria used to identify the high-risk missions from which – upon returning – its employees must take “decompression leave”;
- The committee is of the view that Global Affairs Canada should ensure that employees who have been posted in conflict zones – and, when appropriate, their families – have access to psychological care;
- The committee believes that Global Affairs Canada should, in its Departmental Results Report, provide an update on its progress in implementing the recommendations in Report 4 of the Office of the Auditor General of Canada's 2018 Fall Report;
- The committee recommends that Global Affairs Canada take additional steps to promote and increase public awareness of the Registration of Canadians Abroad.

The committee is committed to closely monitoring efforts made by Global Affairs Canada to ensure the security and safety of its employees as well as that of Canadians abroad.

## LIST OF WITNESSES

### **February 20, 2019**

Jerome Berthelette, Assistant Auditor General, Office of the Auditor General of Canada

Carol McCalla, Principal, Office of the Auditor General of Canada

Dan Danagher, Assistant Deputy Minister, International Platform, Global Affairs Canada

Heather Jeffrey, Assistant Deputy Minister, Consular, Security and Emergency Management, Global Affairs Canada

### **April 11, 2019**

Heather Jeffrey, Assistant Deputy Minister, Security and Emergency Management, Global Affairs Canada

Reid Sirrs, Director General, Security and Emergency Management, Departmental Security Officer, Global Affairs Canada



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