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The Honourable Andrew Telegdi

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•(0805)

[English]

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lui Temelkovski (Oak Ridges—Markham, Lib.)): Good morning. My name is Lui Temelkovski, and I am the member of Parliament for Oakridges—Markham, which is just outside of Toronto, Ontario. With us we have Helena Guergis from Simcoe—Grey, which is just north of me in Ontario, and we have Bill Siksay who is from B.C. and the riding of...?

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Burnaby—Douglas.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lui Temelkovski): We'd like to get started. Our usual chair isn't here yet, but he will be joining us.

Every panellist will have seven minutes to speak or to tell us about themselves and their situation, and then we will have five minutes of questioning, which is questions and answers from all of the members of the Parliament.

We will start this morning with Lloydetta, please, if you're ready.

Ms. Lloydetta Quaicoe (As an Individual): Yes, I'm ready.

Good morning, everybody, and thank you for this opportunity to present to the committee.

My name is Lloydetta Quaicoe, and I am affiliated with a number of community organizations here. I would like to begin by providing the context within which I make this presentation and to focus on the issues associated with the major barriers to integration and settlement of newcomers in our province, and that is the lack of recognition of international experience and credentials. I will conclude this presentation with some recommendations.

Just to give some context, the Speech from the Throne acknowledged that immigration is necessary, and I quote, "to boost Canada's slow labour force growth and declining population due to low birth rate, out-migration and an aging population". This is even more so a necessity in this province, which has the highest rate of out-migration in the country, and statistics show a decline in birth rates as well as an aging population. Furthermore, the province has been experiencing secondary out-migration of immigrants and resettled refugees who have chosen to make this province their home but were forced to leave due to lack of employment and recognition of their academic credentials and international experiences. This is a phenomenon that needs further consideration.

If this province is to increase and retain its immigrant population, CIC would have to consider the broader implications of this reality in view of the fact that there is only one government-recognized,

federally funded settlement agency in the whole province. There would be no point in sending immigrants and resettled refugees to this province if, after staying here without prospects for employment, they migrate to the larger provinces or leave the country. Recent statistics show that less than 2% of immigrants come to the Atlantic provinces, and less than 50% of that 2% remain in the province after five years. We are trying to build a viable ethnocultural community, but it is a losing battle if immigrants are forced to leave to find work elsewhere.

The 2001 census reported that the foreign-born population makes up 1.6% of the total population of our province. This being the case, there should at least be 1% of visible minority employees in the institutions that provide service to this population, including the federal public sector. There is a need to ensure that workplaces reflect the multi-ethnic and multicultural composition of Newfoundland and Labrador.

One of the major barriers to employment for immigrants in this province is the lack of recognition of international experiences and academic achievement. What is ironic about this is the fact that the very reasons why immigrants were chosen by CIC to come to Canada were on the basis of their credential and work experiences. According to CIC's point system, which assesses skilled workers for entry into Canada, the highest points are given to those with a PhD or master's degree and at least 17 years of full-time or full-time equivalent study. Can you imagine after studying and working for 17 years to be told that your education and experiences don't count?

It seems as if Canada picks the best of the crop and then discards them when they arrive. This province is now referred to as, and I quote, a "Transit Camp for Immigrants" because of the high rate of secondary out-migration of immigrants. This was the title of an article in a local Sunday newspaper, *The Independent*, September 12, 2004. Mr. Rahman, who came to Canada on the basis of his qualifications and high rating on CIC's point system, could not find work in this province. Many immigrants experience this. Some have left the province and others are preparing to leave. So we ask the question, if the very basis for which Canada admits immigrants is to increase its declining population and boost its workforce, why are highly qualified and skilled workers unable to obtain employment that will keep them from poverty while increasing the economic growth in Canada?

When immigrants arrive in Canada, if they do not already have work, they are at the bottom rung of the ladder. They do not have the networks of people born in Canada or of people who have lived in Canada for a long time. Who will introduce them to prospective employers? There is a provincial immigration office operating I think on 1.5 staff, and this is the same for the provincial nominee program, which needs more human resources to increase the demand for attracting and retaining immigrants in the province.

Findings from a recent study demonstrated that the value of foreign work experience in Canada's labour markets has declined significantly over the past 30 years, due to the change in source countries between the 1960s and 1990s. Immigrants from western Europe and the United States saw essentially no change in the returns to their foreign experience, so why are the experiences of immigrants from Asia and Africa not recognized?

The studies show that the earning gap was even more pronounced among university graduates, where recent immigrants earned 31% less than those born in Canada. The study suggested that additional factors for the disparity in earnings between immigrants and Canadian-born include differences in immigrant familiarity with Canadian labour markets, particularly how to find jobs; differences in immigrant access to social networks, which might be an important determinant of whether immigrants obtain jobs in high-wage firms or sectors of the economy; and discrimination.

The Conference Board of Canada reports that this country's economy loses \$4 billion to \$5 billion a year due to the lack of recognition of immigrants' international credentials. This is a reality that this province cannot afford. Although there is a need for skilled and experienced workers, the international credentials and academic qualifications of immigrants are not recognized, even those coming from Commonwealth countries.

Canada has an Employment Equity Act, but is it equitable? Is every potential employee on the same level playing field? There are systemic barriers preventing immigrants from obtaining employment.

Those who have language barriers are in a worse situation because it takes them longer to learn one language, or at least one of Canada's official languages, without adequate supports within the community to practise the language. We have often emphasized that using a language within a work environment would greatly enhance the quality and the rate at which the language is learned.

The lack of recognition of international credentials and experience places a lot of stress and frustration on families. Their hopes and expectations of a better life in Canada are dashed, and their children suffer. In some cultures, it's not acceptable to receive money without earning it. This causes emotional and mental stress, because they know they have the ability, skills, and capability to work but have to depend on government handouts and food banks to survive. This is very dehumanizing for immigrant families.

Secondly, migration is not an option for immigrants because of the fears associated with venturing out into the unknown again, but many have been forced to make that choice. Resettled refugees have been on the move for years, and they come to Canada hoping to settle down and make it their permanent home. Unfortunately, the

thought of moving again and uprooting the children from schools causes a lot of stress and mental anguish for families. Immigrants know that if they were employed in their professions, they could be self-sufficient and provide for their families, thereby ending the cycle of poverty.

Another issue here is the job-finding clubs and employment and career counsellors who encourage immigrants to retrain, redo their degrees and training. Apart from the fact that they are paying more money to do this, some immigrants have to choose between paying the university fees or feeding their family, and we feel this is a decision that they shouldn't need to make.

On the basis of the above, we recommend that Citizenship and Immigration Canada work with employers by providing incentives to educate them on the benefits of recognizing the international credentials and experiences of immigrants; provide mentoring programs between employers and unemployed skilled workers and professionals; create a transitional program for immigrants to make connections with employers in their field of expertise, especially immigrants who do not require the language instruction for newcomers program; ensure settlement agencies and job-finding clubs are culturally competent and understand the issues facing new immigrants, skilled workers, and professionals; encourage partnerships between professional associations, governments, and civil societies—and we mean partnerships, not just something that's written on paper—and hold them accountable to tangible strategic outcomes on these issues; and ensure immigrants have more access to information prior to coming and soon after they arrive about the job market in the provinces where they are sent.

We ask that CIC revisit the policies of the provincial nominee program, which should reflect the changing dynamics of immigration to Canada. In this province we have I think 1.5 staff. This is an unacceptable human resource for such a critical program.

This is my final paragraph. I think I'm within my seven minutes.

Let's break down the barriers, and let's build strong communities in which every individual has the same opportunities for employment regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, skin colour, agenda, ability, age, or socio-economic status—in other words, our basic human rights, our Canadian dreams.

Thank you.

● (0810)

The Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.)): Thank you.

Ms. Freake.

Ms. Eileen Kelly Freake (Career Services Manager, AXIS Employment and Training Centre, Association for New Canadians): Good morning. My name is Eileen Kelly Freake. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today to address the recognition of international experience and credentials of immigrants.

Before I proceed with my comments, I would like to give a brief background on the organization I represent and the services we offer. The Association for New Canadians was established in 1979 with a mandate to empower immigrants with the skills, knowledge, and information necessary to become independent, contributing members of the community. On an annual basis, the association provides services to approximately 155 government-assisted refugees as well as those newcomers who arrive in Canada under various other immigration categories, including refugee claimants.

For the past 10 years the association has partnered with the federal-provincial governments' human resources to deliver our comprehensive career services program to address and support the needs of newcomers through all steps of the labour market integration process. As a career services manager employment counsellor, I have delivered front-line employment and career services to several thousand newcomers over that period of time.

The recognition of international experience and credentials has been a priority for this program and for our organization for many years. In this regard we have actively engaged in regional and national committees and working groups mandated to address labour market attachment issues and barriers for newcomers. Because we deliver a full range of settlement and integration programs and services on behalf of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, we are able to utilize a more holistic model in our approach to newcomer integration. While our numbers are small, we believe we are making progress in developing strategic partnerships with the business community, educational institutions, and governments, and we have been successful in creating opportunities for ongoing interchange among community partners. Nonetheless, there is much work to be done.

The credential assessment process is mired in complexities, so much so that most of us working in the field have difficulty navigating, yet we expect newcomers to Canada to understand the process. Currently, there are five provincially mandated credential assessment centres that are part of the Alliance of Credential Evaluation Services of Canada. Immigrants are free to choose one of the five centres. However, for higher education in Canada, most post-secondary institutions require that their own assessment be conducted in order to sanction acceptance into various programs. While this assessment may be centralized in some institutions, in others an individual department can complete and sanction the assessment.

Additionally, there is no automatic acceptance or recognition of assessment of foreign credentials between jurisdictions. Completion of the credential assessment process provides merely a Canadian education equivalency indicator and does not factor in the skills, competencies, and language proficiencies that are required for success in the Canadian workplace. Furthermore, when they're actually job-ready, the past work experience of these immigrants is not often recognized. In fact, most of these experienced professionals are treated like recent graduates.

This haphazard system leads to duplication of services, loss of time and resources, as well as inconsistencies in approach, which can result in different outcomes depending on who conducts the assessment and for what purpose. No doubt many of the same issues have been voiced and supported by research across the country. Indeed, it is time to aggressively focus on solutions and develop a comprehensive and collaborative national plan. Because we believe that the academic credential system must be relevant, fair, portable, and accepted by all end-users, I'd like to propose several recommendations for consideration.

One, when possible, academic assessments should be done before immigrants leave their home country.

Two, there must be increased emphasis by CIC officials overseas on the importance and value of appropriate documentation and credentials in a Canadian setting.

Three, working groups and steering committees at various levels, dedicated to finding practical solutions and ensuring action to remove barriers that immigrants face in entering the labour market, must continue to be engaged.

Four, champions at the community and workplace level, who can engage employers in immigrant labour market integration issues, must be established.

Five, more marketing and promotion must be done. Service provider organizations have a responsibility to go beyond advocacy and focus on capacity building and establishing linkages with the greater community.

Six, increased awareness and resources need to be put in place. There is a need for human resource management training programs among governments as well as within the corporate sector. This should include cultural competency training in diversity strategies to promote the mobility of immigrants into jobs that are consistent with their level of knowledge and skills.

● (0815)

Seven, a common databank of university and college programs to determine equivalency should be established. This would promote collaboration for recognition and portability of assessments across sectors and jurisdictions.

Eight, PLAR portfolios should be used more effectively as a way to demonstrate previous skills and experience. This process would enable individuals to document the competencies and experience in a tangible way. This could also be done using the essential skills framework.

Nine, nationally standardized competency-based assessment tests should be developed and used in the hiring process. These assessment tools could be developed collaboratively by post-secondary institutions through a federal government incentive program.

Ten, sector-specific language tests need to be developed in order to provide the licensing body, the employer, post-secondary organizations, as well as the individual with a more realistic assessment of the language competency required for particular occupations.

Eleven, online upgrading courses should be developed for various professions and trades and made available to immigrants to assist in addressing the skills gaps and the requirements for licensure in working on the job.

Twelve, special workplace internship programs should be developed and supported in order to facilitate skilled immigrants' initial attachment to the labour market. This would be particularly beneficial for those immigrants who have deficits in the latest software technology, and I thought such programs should initially be spearheaded by the federal government to lead by example.

Thirteen, specialized loans should be provided to assist immigrants with licensing fees, professional examination requirements, and assessment costs of dealing with the accreditation system.

And finally, a collaborative structure such as a national accreditation body should be developed. This national body would include multi-jurisdictional representation and would be responsible for accrediting professional organizations and other licensing authorities.

At present, there are numerous national and provincial initiatives under way targeting occupations such as engineers, physicians, and nurses, and providing bridge training, enhanced language teaching, mentoring, and work placements. However, additional resources must be invested so that these services can be mainstreamed in order to support the integration of immigrants in whatever province or region they reside. Clearly there is a continued need for all groups to collaborate in order to deal more effectively and more efficiently with these complex issues.

In the province of Newfoundland and Labrador we have taken a collaborative approach in engaging communities, employers, and all levels of government. Furthermore, the process of immigration has increased significantly at the provincial levels.

Whatever emerges from these cross-Canada hearings, the ultimate goal should be that every competent immigrant professional or tradesperson has the opportunity to be accepted into his or her field. These new Canadians can then begin to participate in and contribute to our economy, our culture, and our society.

Thank you for this opportunity.

● (0820)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we have Kaberi Sarma-Debnath.

Ms. Kaberi Sarma-Debnath (Member at large, Multicultural Women's Organization of Newfoundland and Labrador): Good

morning. Hi, I'm Kaberi. I am representing the Multicultural Women's Organization of Newfoundland and Labrador. I want to thank Canadian Immigration and the Multicultural Women's Organization for sending me here to do this presentation on their behalf. A special thanks to Yamuna Kutty, who edited my presentation, and to all the board members of our organization who offered their services to the women of this province, especially ethnic women.

I am a registered social worker, and today I am presenting on the recognition of international experience and credentials of immigrants. Being a foreign-born Canadian, I had the experience of going through the process to get my licence to work as a social worker in the province.

I will start my presentation with a quotation. Some of you may have heard the song where they say, "Don't assume everything on the subject is what you see, that taxi driver's got a PhD". This is a well-known Canadian singer who reached the top of the charts with this song containing this line. As many Canadians know, these lines are rooted in some truth. Lots of professionals cannot do their job in their profession with foreign credentials.

Immigration has always played an important role in our Canadian society. In this presentation I will focus on various issues faced by skilled immigrants and professionals. I also want to share some of the stories. They tell what some people of this province face as professionals whose credentials are not recognized. Finally, I'll try to make some recommendations, both for the policy-makers and the professional groups.

We all know that demographic factors in the world change. There is a demand for skills and a growing need for new workers. Canada has been characterized as a cultural mosaic, which immigration has played an important role in making. We have a skills shortage, and increasing numbers of skilled workers enter the country every year. Between 1991 and the year 2001, 1.8 million newcomers were admitted to Canada, and rising numbers of skilled immigrants coming into this country are struggling to find suitable employment. Many newcomers are still unable to obtain work that matches their education and past experience. Seeking accreditation is a complex process involving several institutions and resulting in lots of frustration.

Recent immigration data show that a large number of skilled immigrants are professionals. In fact, an estimated six out of ten immigrants take jobs outside their fields of specialization.

According to the census of 2001, one out of every five Canadians was born outside Canada, and 24% of the 25- to 44-year-old immigrants who arrived from 1996 to 2000 are highly skilled. Only 65.8% of that group are employed. Among immigrants, our unemployed rate is 12 times that of Canadian-born people.

These facts are alarming for us. Some research was done before with different organizations, like NOIVMWC in 1995. They did a survey for the immigrant and visible minority women in Canada to assess the effects of the accreditation of foreign credentials on the lives of women. From this input and suggestions, many barriers to recognition were noticed. They made some recommendations in 1995. It also came out that in addition to the common problems faced by the male counterparts, women were more negatively affected by the lack of services and resources in child care and language training.

Another study said that some participants decided that immigration policies themselves need to be addressed. For example, government should remove the citizenship requirement currently demanded for public service employees, through legislation.

Through the multiculturalism program, Heritage Canada has supported a variety of projects that identify the pervasiveness of the problems faced by associations, government, individuals, and representative organizations. Immigrants, especially the skilled and the professionals, are not getting the jobs they dreamed of before coming to this country.

● (0825)

Also, there is a need to involve our labour force in that connection. Studies show that over half of the 200,000 immigrants who enter Canada each year are skilled. So if we cannot use these skilled people in the labour force, there is a lot of money wasted... and in our capital too, and also in their skills.

In another study, the Conference Board of Canada recently concluded that as a result of the unrecognized qualifications, the Canadian economy loses between \$4 billion to \$6 billion each year.

So those are the facts that came out. That is why it is important to use this labour force.

Now I will focus on some of the challenges they face and why we cannot integrate them and why their credentials are not recognized. We know that language is a factor. It is not easy to get language, especially the two languages in Canada, English and French. So even if an immigrant can speak English or French at a basic level, he or she may not be able to adequately express his or her feelings to their employer.

Sometimes discrimination occurs during the hiring process and also with promotion. Timing is a factor when lots of professionals cannot enter into the field and when the citizenship requirements for employment in the public service mean that immigrants cannot work in the public service until they become a citizen, which takes three years.

When someone emigrates from another country, there is also a financial burden on them and their family. Credential evaluation itself requires a lot of money, to find out the information to send them, and sometimes they need to collect all these documents from their home country. That is a challenge faced by the immigrant professionals, who sometimes cannot collect these documents from their country and present them. That is why they cannot get their degree evaluated and they sometimes do odd jobs.

On organizational barriers, accreditation is a problem. There is no national accreditation body for professionals—doctors, engineers. There are some professional associations, and it depends on what kind of profession you are in. Doctors have a very good organized profession.

As a social worker, we are evaluated from the central...and I heard it is recognized everywhere. This is good for social workers, in one way, but some professionals cannot get their licence so easily, and many things have come out there.

Another thing is the lack of necessary information. They face challenges. When professionals come to their new country they don't get the necessary information on how to secure this information or where to go for this evaluation. Really, it takes a long time; it is a long process to go through all these things.

Finally, in my presentation I use some case studies, such as for the college teacher who is doing odd jobs. On discrimination, one lady came here and worked part-time, and because of the racial discrimination and harassment from co-workers, the boss, the company, she had to leave the job. These kinds of situations are going on in this province.

I am suggesting that we need a common and national accreditation body that can evaluate and provide this process easily. Policy needs to be developed to accept all these professionals anyway, and experience needs to be recognized, not only the degree. We need to build awareness around this issue, around the barriers and the policy-makers, around the education board, and other people too.

I conclude my presentation with this. We need to do more research to find out the real barriers province to province and nationally.

Thank you so much for hearing my presentation.

● (0830)

The Chair: Thank you.

Next we have Mr. Summers.

Mr. Nick Summers (President, Canadian Council for Refugees): Thank you. It's always a pleasure to appear before the committee.

I am here speaking on behalf of the Canadian Council for Refugees. We don't have a prepared report for you, amazingly. I know you get used to all the paper we flood you with, but on this topic we just wanted to make a few interventions on a few particular aspects of it.

We certainly recognize the vital aspect of this issue. It is very important that people coming to this country be recognized for their training, their skills, and that we not mislead them as we bring them to this country. But we are concerned that too much of the debate has been about the people who come as skilled workers and aren't able to get the qualifications for which they were selected recognized in this country. A great number of the people who come to this country don't come as skilled workers. They come as family class members or refugees or through other streams. These people as well need to have our assistance in becoming part of the employment market. They also come with skills. They may not have been selected for them, but they are very much in need of help.

I know just in this town alone we've had doctors, engineers, lawyers, and other professionals who have come as refugees who have had similar problems in getting their credentials recognized as skilled workers. But also, people who aren't professionals need to be recognized. People with trades or even people with fairly minimal educational skills need assistance to become part of the job market, and it is of benefit to all of us if that happens.

We need to put more into training people on how to fit into the Canadian market. That can be as simple as language skills, life skills, upgrades of fairly basic employment skills. One of my fellow presenters talked about computer training, which is essential in this society, maybe not somewhere else.

We are also concerned that in preparing to do what it can in this field the government should be careful to do a gender analysis. There really hasn't been a lot of debate about whether men or women have greater or lesser difficulties fitting into our job market. We feel that's something that needs to be studied, and the programs have to be carefully tailored to make sure there isn't an imbalance being created.

A lot of what my fellow presenters have said is supported by the CCR, that is, the need for national accreditation boards and generally a more open and welcoming program for people. One of the things we did want to emphasize is that the emphasis shouldn't be put totally on the immigrant refugee or whoever is being upgraded to Canadian skills. We also have to look at improving Canadian employers' attitudes toward foreign workers. We need to have ongoing programs educating just the general public. Unfortunately, there is racism within Canada. There is prejudice. We'd all like to think that it's not that bad and it's a dying thing, but the fact is it's out there. We see it in the job market. People of colour, people with less than perfect language skills are discriminated against in the workplace, and we do need to do some work on ourselves as well as putting in programs for those newcomers to Canada.

That's basically all I have to say. I'll actually leave a few minutes for other people.

● (0835)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next, we have Ms. Jeffrey.

Ms. Donna Jeffrey (Executive Director, Refugee Immigrants Advisory Council): I probably should first apologize that I just have scattered notes here. I've been working as a sponsorship holder for the past 25 years, both in Ottawa and now in St. John's. For the past 15 years I've been working with the immigrant population through

the Refugee Immigrants Advisory Council, which is an organization almost all made up of volunteers, with the objective of helping refugees and immigrants in order to assist them in attaining a productive and independent life.

A few of us here, I believe, spoke on this same subject two years ago, i.e., the recognition of international experience and foreign credentials. Unfortunately, it still isn't fixed. We continue to lose the skills of the professionals—the doctors, the dentists, the medical researchers, the engineers—who arrive within the immigrant population; instead of contributing to Canada, many of them actually become a burden on the system. I realize in some cases, particularly with the medical profession, the doctors, the accrediting gatekeepers are a problem.

What is extremely disturbing for those professionals who come—for instance, with doctors—is that they are even stripped of being called a doctor. I've listened to doctors tell me how they feel when this happens to them, when they are no longer able to be called a doctor. I don't see where we have the right to say you can't be called doctor. Is it because we fear that they might go around and practise as a doctor? That is the first thing. Then they find out—and, again, I'm sticking a lot with doctors—that their degrees are not recognized. The World Health Organization has accredited a number of medical schools around the world, but that is not taken into consideration at all.

Unfortunately, what happens is that they sometimes, or very often, end up on social assistance. This is a cost not only to the province but to Canada. Also, further costs are incurred because of family breakdown. This does happen when the gentleman in the family—usually it is a gentleman—finds he cannot get ahead. He is no longer able to bring home the bacon, so to speak, and in the family there is breakdown. They're on social assistance, and the road ahead is loaded with roadblocks.

Actually, the worst situation for a person who comes if he is a medical doctor is to be a specialist and a PhD as well. Again, you should come just graduated from medical school, and then you can get somewhere. Otherwise we lose all the skills of these doctors when they come because they cannot practise, and they have to go back to the beginning, and the number of years they are out of practice.... Canada needs doctors, but the system operates as if we don't.

The other group of people are the immigrants who come on points. They are the ones Canada says we need, the skilled workers and those with good credentials whose points allow them to come to Canada. When they come, and that has happened here, they find out there isn't work. They are told, "We need you", and then there is no work for them.

● (0840)

Particularly in this province, they cannot get work. That again leads to exactly the same scenario as mentioned before with the doctors, a feeling of "Why did I ever come? I was better off back where I lived."

Again, as you know, they have to live on the money they come with, but after two years there is no job. I've had cases where they can't afford to go back to their home, and they end up having to go on social assistance. This is ridiculous.

The people who come on points should be told up front, overseas in the visa post, that there is possibly no job, or that they will not be able to get a job, that they don't guarantee it, but also I think a way to help them is to have jobs in a job bank at the visa post. So there is more work done with them before they come over, but certainly the thing to be done is at least to say, "You might not get a job."

We need to then stop this ongoing scenario. With doctors, there are ways they could do shadowing, observing, so that they can get into the system a lot quicker. I am tired of seeing a profession that is needed here—I presume we do need doctors—having to waste their time and continue to have to go on social assistance, all because they can't break into the system.

For some professions here in Newfoundland, I also realize, as I get older, that apprenticeship and mentoring is a very good program for professionals and skilled workers. In Newfoundland, our pharmacists were apprenticed. They went to a community college for their studies. As the years went by, until I think it was about five or six years ago, when they travelled to other provinces, they weren't accepted as pharmacists, so we have changed to working within the university. However, apprenticeship is a good thing.

The other thing is with the medical exams. When they have to go from Newfoundland to Halifax or Toronto to write their exams, this is a big expense for them. So something could be done there.

I can see that you want me to wind up.

• (0845)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we're going to go into questions. It is a five-minute round, which means that questions and answers should be concluded in about five minutes, because if we get to have a couple of rounds, sometimes we get into discussions that we might not have if the members get to speak only once.

Ms. Guergis.

Ms. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Good morning. Thanks very much for being here.

I appreciate the time you have taken to put your reports together. I am sure, as one of you mentioned, that you actually made some presentations going back even a couple of years ago with a lot of the same information you are providing today.

I am one of the new rookie MPs, and I have quickly come to realize, after the many witnesses I have heard and the many reports and recommendations I have seen, that I keep hearing the same thing over and over again. I really believe government and the policy-makers do know what needs to be done at this point; we just need to really have the political will to follow through with it. I, for one, like everyone around this table, would really like to see us proceed.

Yesterday there was an announcement. I don't have all the details. I guess we'll have that information come to us later this afternoon.

I'm not sure if it's going to be helpful to what we're talking about today, but I do have some questions.

I would like to know how many of you have actually made recommendations in the past, and have they changed over the last couple of years?

Often, as a new member, I've heard many make reference to the Australian model. I'm not an expert on it. I'm not someone who can speak to it in full detail. I'm wondering if you are aware of it, and would you have any comments on it as something we could use here in Canada?

I have a question based on gender. What is the ratio between men and women coming into Newfoundland, and what is the difference in some of the skills and trades they may have?

Mr. Nick Summers: I can respond to some of that.

I'm afraid I don't know the Australian model. The Canadian Council for Refugees has certainly made statements in the past with regard to the need for recognition of foreign credentials. I can't tell you for sure that we've made any submissions to this committee on that before. I don't believe we have.

With regard to gender, one of our issues is that no study has really been done on gender differences with regard to foreign training and foreign credentials. I can certainly tell you that from my own practice and from talking with others, it depends on what country and what part of the world you're talking about. I can certainly remember when we had a large number of eastern Europeans coming that there really wasn't a lot of difference. Women and men were in many ways trained in the same manner. One of the things coming out of the old Soviet Union is that they certainly paid some attention to gender equality, although much of it was surface and didn't go as deeply as you might think. From less developed parts of the world, you often only have one person in the family who has skills.

We're trying to say in our submission, don't forget those who don't have the professional skills, and make sure we have the programs in place to help those others as well.

Ms. Eileen Kelly Freake: I only want to speak for a moment on the Australian model. I'm familiar with the Australian model. I have studied it and the work the European Union is doing. I know the Australians are working on this national body right now, a national organization to look at the whole thing jointly. They do a lot of work before the newcomers come with their assessments and before they actually arrive from their countries. It's something we need to be working on as well.

In terms of gender for the services we provide and the clients I'm working with, it's usually 50-50. On average, we have the same number of females as males. In terms of professions, because we have continuous intake—we're receiving clients all the time—there's a very wide range of skill sets, professions, and trades that they are trained in. It's quite a large variety.

One other thing you mentioned was how long this has been going on. I've been working on this since 1997, attending national working groups and that sort of thing. While it is discouraging and while it's so slow, I think there are some good things happening.

I think as a community we have to work harder at the grassroots level to involve all jurisdictions. It can't be only national or provincial; it has to be municipal and it has to be service providers. Everyone has to work together, especially the employers. We're really targeting that group right now.

●(0850)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're now going to get some experience in our second official language. You have headpieces for translation.

Madame Faille.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Thank you.

I come from a province where the majority of the population speaks French. Let me share with you my concern about recognizing foreign credentials. I worked in the technology sector. I studied engineering, computer science and management and I worked for IBM Canada, a company with a large technical workforce. Overcoming obstacles is not always obvious. Often, the company needed engineers and provided training, ultimately leading up to their accreditation. A comprehensive process was in place.

At the time, we were grappling with staff shortages. As a result, people with a minimum level of computer skills were being hired and then subsequently trained. Perhaps the problem is one of supply and demand. Those who are arriving may not be finding jobs in fields where the demand is greatest.

As Ms. Freake was saying earlier, it could also be a case of there not being enough jobs available. In the case of doctors, some may grow discouraged and go elsewhere before they can obtain all of the proper credentials and pass all of the exams.

From what I've read, I can't necessarily disagree with you. I also volunteered my services to professional career counselling agencies. I agree with you that a lot of work needs to be done at the beginning, that is before the person decides to come to this country.

I don't really have any questions for you, except for one. I read in one of your documents that you place a priority on persons who speak English. I think it depends on the region. In some regions, French is the predominant language.

How do you intend to address this reality within a national organization? Would you require immigrants to be equally proficient in both languages?

●(0855)

[*English*]

Mr. Nick Summers: When in doubt, defer to the national organization.

To speak to your last point about first languages, you are quite correct. When we talk about English language training, we should be talking about official languages training, and I take that correction.

I don't have a lot else to say. I agree with most of what you are saying.

There is one point I did want to make. You speak a lot about needing to do front-end work. We have to be careful that we don't fall into the trap we used to fall into of selecting people based on needs in Canada. We found that didn't work, partly because our process is so slow that people who were selected because they had a particular skill found that when they got to Canada, that skill was no longer needed because other sources had been found—we had done more training in our trades colleges or whatever. So again, we had the same problem of having no job for the person.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille: Therefore, there needs to be a balance of some kind.

[*English*]

So we need balance. Even if we do it up front, the system is often not fast enough, so we need something very flexible, right?

Mr. Nick Summers: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you all for your presentations this morning. They have been very helpful to our work.

I have so many questions and only five minutes, but let me start with this. Someone mentioned the accreditation process and said it would be helpful if this could be done while the newcomer was still in their home country. We've heard that suggestion from other groups as we've been across the country.

We've also heard how people who are thinking about immigrating to Canada tend to be a very optimistic group of people, and even when they hear about the difficulties they might face in Canada, it often just doesn't sink in because they're so bound up in seeking a new life and see this as the place where that's possible.

So I'm wondering if doing accreditation outside of Canada solves the problem or might only add to it, in the sense that if people get a document that says this is what your education or your professional qualifications are worth in Canada, it might only feed into that whole process of optimism and not really solve the problem of giving them a more realistic picture.

If the issues are Canadian experience and language—and I often think the Canadian experience one can tend to be more related to racism than anything to do with someone's experience—those are more the real issues. Does accreditation outside the country really address the problems we're talking about?

Does anybody have a comment on that?

Ms. Kaberi Sarma-Debnath: I think it may help a bit but not much. If you are throwing that out, people will come. Whoever wants to come will come. But the real issue is if they can get some information. Without accreditation and evaluation they cannot get into the job field. That information would be helpful, which I mentioned in my presentation. Information is lacking.

Another thing I face when they come here is that people from war countries cannot get their documents when they need them. But to get your credentials you need all documents directly sent from your academic institution. This is the hard part for refugees and victims of international war. I think if the interprovincial body needs all these documents, if in some cases they could have some kind of alternative when the refugees come here and cannot get it....

So I feel evaluation when they come here is good, because they will come anyway, but the process needs to be more clear and it needs to be reviewed occasionally, not like that traditional system of five years back. Maybe this time we could have more information and more process to go through all these things.

That's my submission.

Ms. Eileen Kelly Freake: Again, I do feel it's going to be very useful if they have a lot more accurate information about the regions of Canada and all the basic information about where they're coming to when they are coming.

Also, if they had the opportunity to know what is expected, then they will have gathered all their documentation, and it would make it a lot easier for us at the moment, and much faster. As I said, if more accurate and realistic information were given from the visa post, as well as some idea of what the time span would be to get all this together so that they don't think they can work tomorrow.... That's what's so frustrating for me as a counsellor, when I try to explain all of this and what the process is, because in every profession and every trade it is different.

• (0900)

Mr. Bill Siksay: One of the things we've heard from the government is that they're establishing this new web portal to have that kind of information available to people.

I keep asking whether that's the best way of getting information to people. It seems to me that here in Canada we're used to finding a lot of our information on the Internet now, but I wonder how your clients or the people you know who come to Canada would have access to the Internet.

Again, it's this problem of optimism. You can read what's there, but how do you interpret that information? And are there other things we should be doing other than putting all this information on the Internet? I think it's basically a good thing, but does it address the issue?

Ms. Lloydetta Quaicoe: I think it is important to have training for the visa officers at the visa posts; they are the people who actually come into contact with those who apply to come to Canada. If they have the information, particularly on the sort of skills needed in various regions and what those people need to get those skills... because it takes about three to four years from the time you apply; you have to go through your medicals and you have to do a police check, and all of that, which gives a lot of time to people to say, "Well, okay, I need to learn this, and I need to bring this, and I need to find this". The problem is when they actually come here and then realize all of the things they needed.

In some parts of the world it's not easy to make a phone call and have everything faxed in; someone needs to go in and stand in line for you. As for taking information online, not every region has very

easy access to the Internet, meaning that people have to pay more, or else they don't really have it, or if they get that information, it needs to be updated constantly.

I really think the visa officers play a very valuable role in actually counselling people and saying, "Well, okay, in this region, or in Newfoundland and Labrador, they are looking for doctors to work in the outport areas", where medical students were being paid to agree to work for three years.

So I think there are ways in which the regions would know what sort of skills they need, and if people are already anticipating there is a shortage of 400, and people are accommodating those skills, then they come in, and all they would need to do would be minimal training. But I think it has to work both ways.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next, we go to Mr. Temelkovski.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you all for coming out and giving us your presentations.

I'm going to turn to Eileen. Eileen, in recommendation 7 of your presentation, you mentioned a common data bank of university and college programs to determine equivalencies. Are you thinking of what Lloydetta said in terms of people having difficulty getting their transcripts?

Ms. Eileen Kelly Freake: What I was thinking about is that when we want information right now from any university across Canada, when a client is trying to register out of one university to go to another, and movement like that, it's so difficult to get through the process of actual assessment. What is the expectation here? If we had a common data bank, we could know exactly what the criteria were and would have more clarification in terms of entrance criteria and what courses and credits were acceptable. This would be really helpful in terms of credential assessment. Right now, there are so many centres, and if this were all there, it would be so accessible to everybody.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: So you are promoting one-stop shopping for credentials?

Ms. Eileen Kelly Freake: Yes.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Okay.

Ms. Eileen Kelly Freake: That's going to be difficult; it's going to be very challenging.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Yes, that's going to be very difficult.

• (0905)

Ms. Eileen Kelly Freake: Very, very difficult, and there are so many people with so much ownership in all of this, but we have to look at it holistically, if we are going to make some changes.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Lloydetta, you mentioned in recommendation 5 that.... I'm not sure if I'm reading it right. Are you saying there is some obstruction or that people are not qualified in agencies to deal with immigrants or with people of different cultures?

Ms. Lloydetta Quaicoe: Well, I think the difficulty is that most of the people working in the job-finding clubs or employment and career counselling are local Newfoundlanders. I am speaking within the Newfoundland and Labrador context.

We have people who have come from countries that have been at war, for example. Just saying to someone, well, you need to go back and retrain.... The job or career counsellors need to know that people are coming from a particular country where they studied in English. For example, I came from a British colony, so English was the official language. So if I'm going to a job-finding club or somewhere to look for work, for them to tell me that I have to go back and do a TOEFL, when I already have a degree written in English, shows their insensitivity to my country of origin.

I think these are some of the issues we face. Or if they say to someone who has come here and has permanent resident status that they have to go to university and pay the international fees, they need to be sensitive to the fact that, okay, the gentleman has a family, a wife and two children, and has only limited income. If he goes back to university, they are telling them they have to take a student loan. So they take a student loan and pay the international fees, and they are trying to juggle going to university and paying fees to get the same degrees they already had when they were in the country of origin.

These were some of the issues that some of our membership were facing. We realize there needs to be some more education upfront in terms of cultural competency among the people running the job-funding clubs. The job-finding clubs here, I guess, cater mainly to the mainstream population, but we are thinking that needs to change as our population becomes more culturally and ethnically diverse.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: All right.

Donna, I think you mentioned that a job bank should be started at a visa post. Is there nothing like that going on right now?

Ms. Donna Jeffrey: Not as I understand it. They check off all the points they have and they end up here in Canada, but there doesn't seem to be a job bank or advice. As I say, I'm particularly concerned about those who come on their points that Canada says they need. I've dealt with these families, and they come here from cultures where the man of the house is the breadwinner. I mean, that's the culture of my time, too, as a senior citizen. The culture of the country they come from is that the man of the house is the one with the job. So when he had a very good job wherever he came from, there's nothing worse than to come here and find, "No. No. No."

I have seen family breakdown. I have seen mental problems. I have seen medical problems. When the two years is up, the wonderful family that should be contributing does have to go on social assistance. It's a problem. So I feel there should be something there, even to say to them, "Look, you might not get a job in that field, in that province".

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: One last quick one, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Very quick. You're over by a minute. You've picked up some bad habits.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Could an HRSDC person help at the visa post, something like that?

Ms. Donna Jeffrey: I think so, yes, something like that.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Temelkovski. You used to be so good. I used to use you as inspiration.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: I used to be younger too.

The Chair: That was only a couple of weeks ago.

Mr. Jaffer.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

Thanks to all the presenters this morning. I see some familiar faces, of course. It was nice to hear your submissions.

I want to follow up with you, Mrs. Jeffrey, on what you were saying about the resistance that you often find or have seen with, say, the medical profession or others in allowing for accreditation. This is an issue that obviously is a concern to all of us, because there is an identified need for doctors in this country.

One of the ideas we've heard as we've been travelling is that some of the provinces have gone ahead to try to make available at, say, medical schools in their province a certain number of spaces for foreign-trained or international-trained doctors, so they can get residencies a lot quicker. Often one of the challenges when they come here is that if they're taking certain exams, there often are no real spaces for residents. We have challenges to get our own medical doctors through residency positions.

This seems to be a very interesting idea, to be able to at least have the money put up by either the federal government, for instance, buying a certain amount of spaces for international-trained doctors, or provinces doing that as well. I'm just wondering if you see that as something that would be a positive step, or if you know whether that's part of the challenge doctors are facing here in this particular part of the country.

● (0910)

Ms. Donna Jeffrey: No, I quite agree with you that this would be a step forward. There's even the cost for our Newfoundland doctors who have to fly out to Toronto or Halifax to write the exams. It doesn't make any sense that the exams couldn't be here, because it does put an extra expense onto them. It mounts up. There are so many obstacles, and I've seen so much frustration, when we need doctors desperately. Canada's going to run out of them, and we're wasting the potential.

I know, from some of my children becoming doctors, that they say if they could go around with the doctors, almost like in an apprenticeship, and have them mentor them, through observerships and a number of other ways, we could get them into the system and use them instead of....

As I say, I've gone through it, and I've watched the agony of these families and the feelings of, "I will never get through". Or they just change professions.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: Sure, the idea of apprenticeship is something that can fit into that sort of scenario as well.

This question is open to whoever wants to answer it. It's a question more about the idea of retention of immigrants or refugees coming to this part of the country. One of the biggest things keeping people in certain parts of the country is first of all economic viability. If they can find jobs and at least start getting on with their lives, that's one incentive to stay.

But one of the other issues of community groups that are trying to help integrate many people into the various regions is the amount of community support out there. One of the challenges we have is that many people choose to go to Vancouver, Toronto, or Montreal, as opposed to some of the other regions in the country where there's often a lack of community support or an ability to integrate with people who are familiar to them. Obviously it is a challenge many regions have.

I am curious about the retention of people coming here. Are they actually staying in this region, or within a year or two are they leaving to go to places like Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver? What sorts of things can we do to help change that?

Ms. Lloydetta Quaioc: I think that's part of my second recommendation, after the one Mr. Temelkovski was talking about. I mentioned funding reputable ethnocultural community groups that are knowledgeable about the resettlement needs in their communities, to enable them to better assist immigrant families, especially the ones that are not government-assisted.

There has to be some infrastructure in place. For example, I am involved with the Multicultural Women's Organization, and I think Donna is involved with the Refugee Immigrants Advisory Council. When people come, if they actually have employment in the province, they will stay and be part of the ethnocultural community. But due to lack of recognition of their credentials and experiences, they have to leave because they have to work.

As I said, in many cultures people are not used to getting handouts and not working. They come and want to work. They have the ability, the capability, and they want to work. It sounds like a vicious cycle, because it's so much tied to them being able to get work. If they are able to get work, they settle down and have a community. We've had so many—a mosque has gone up, a Sikh temple, the Hindu temple, and a synagogue.

So we've got so many things here already. But our main problem is that people can't find work. They know they have to support their families. They came here to get a better life and give their children a better life so the next generation can be better. Then they leave—that's the result. But if they find work, no matter how small a group it is.... Over the weekend I spent some time with a small African group. We were able to meet, support one another, and help. But those people had jobs, so they were here.

We know that about 60% or 70% of the African population leave because they can't find work. They leave to go to work somewhere else. I think they know it's overcrowded in Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver. The main reason they go is for work, because they know they can still be part of a community, even if it's a small one. We have diversity here in Newfoundland and Labrador; we just don't have a large number representing each ethnocultural group.

So I really think if we can solve the employment problem, we'll be another Montreal. We'll have a lot more people staying here, because I really think they love the province. Lots of people are friendly, and it's a place they would like to stay. But we really need to look into this issue of recognizing international experience.

Thank you.

• (0915)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Beaumier.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier (Brampton West, Lib.): Thank you. All of us on the immigration committee are here because these are the issues that have been important to us. I've been working with refugees since I was 17 years old. However, I'm going to give you a little bit of a different approach today, because we've listened to hearings for the last couple of weeks.

We talk about how it's because of racist attitudes that a number of people don't get employed. However, racism will always exist, and you won't always hear it coming from mouths who have white faces. We're talking about culture. I dare say that Rahim, who came here as a child with immigrant parents, as a refugee, Meili, Lui's kids, and my kids are more culturally different. It's harder not for me but my parents to understand where they're coming from. So it doesn't matter how many immigrants come into this country; eventually, in the next generation, it's all going to be Canadian culture. No matter how hard we try to hang onto our kids, they're going to be the Canadians of today, in spite of everything we want to do.

Now we're dealing with a couple of issues. I think in sciences we may be able to have a standard that is more easily qualifiable, but when we come to education in the humanities and education where we're dealing with older people, with families with problems, I think we have a more difficult time. What do we do?

I'm going to give you an example. My mother is 84 years old, and she's a product of her generation. However, she's probably quite progressive compared to many others who were raised in that generation. She was desperately ill a year ago. In the hospital in Toronto she had wonderful nurses. I didn't have problems understanding any of them, but it was terrifying for her because she couldn't understand what they were saying, no matter how slight their accent was. What do we do to facilitate those...?

We have a responsibility to doctors we're bringing into this country. However, we have a responsibility to the children of immigrants who we brought in a generation ago, to provide medical spaces for their kids as well. This is an almost overwhelming problem that we have to deal with. Talk about credentials being lost in war-torn countries. When someone comes here from a war-torn country, we can't let them be a brain surgeon based on their word—and I know that's not what you're advocating.

So how do we serve the people who are here, many of whom are children of immigrants, and accommodate the new people coming in? We have a conflict here. How do we meld the two?

Mr. Nick Summers: I'm talking generally. I understand where you're coming from with regard to the issue of the nurses, shall we say. The fact is we're not going to solve that kind of a problem.

I think you also gave the answer to your own question with regard to where do we go for the next generation, because, as you said, the next generation will be a meld anyway. I see this with my kids; I'm sure you see it with yours. There is much more acceptance of a multicultural society among the young than there is among those who grew up in a very homogenized society.

When we talk about the problems of racism, etc., we're talking not so much about that sort of thing, but there's that residual problem where if an employer is faced with somebody who is a person of colour, with somewhat less good English, and with somebody who is white and grew up here, with perfect English, they're going to go with that person, and they're not necessarily going to look as closely at the skills. It might be the person of colour is the better person for the job, but they're not getting through the door because of their colour and because they're not able to put things exactly as or as well as the other person.

You also mentioned the elderly. I think something we need to look at, especially in light of the minister's announcement later today that they're going to expand the program for parents and grandparents to come to Canada.... We are going to have more and more people coming to this country who are elderly. What are we doing about them, and how are they going to fit in? It's the reverse; they're going to have the same problems.

• (0920)

Ms. Lloydetta Quaicoe: I would also like to say that the face of Canada is really changing. I think 52% or so of people born outside of Canada are in Ontario.

When we think of people who are working in the service professions offering services to Canadians, that Canadian population is getting more diverse by the minute. So you will have nurses or doctors who will be working with people from their own cultural background or people from diverse countries. I think it's a good thing that they're there to offer those services, because it has been the reverse. There were many times, 30 or 40 years ago, when people who were here before us went to doctors they couldn't understand, because they spoke with a British accent, or a Scottish accent, or a Welsh accent—and people survived.

It is a little bit difficult now, but I think that is going to pan out later as the population becomes diverse. We do need people who are diverse providing services to the diverse population. That would be my response to that.

The thing, too, about saying that we couldn't let people be brain surgeons if they come from another country—we don't know. I think Donna mentioned the whole idea of mentoring, job shadowing, doing training with other doctors. We are not actually advocating that doctors come in today and they are in the operating room the next day. But should they have to wait for 7 years, 10 years, or 12 years, or change their profession? That's what some counsellors are telling them, "You're not going to ever be a doctor in Canada, so why don't you learn how to use a computer or something?"

The Chair: Thank you very much. When you're having fun, you run out of time.

I just want to close with a couple of comments and a couple of questions that I would like to have a response to, not today, but to think about and come back to us.

I think the doctor showed that non-recognition of credentials for internationally trained physicians has more to do with provincial governments that want to keep the costs under control, because when they need doctors they find a way of quickly accrediting them. I know half the physicians in my community are internationally trained. The problem is there are mixed messages.

I've been on this committee for quite a few years, and this is the second time in two years that we've been going around this. We often talk about Australia and why they do it better than we do. The problem we have is, we are in a rut because we do so much of our trade with the United States of America, whereas the Australians have to deal with a more multicultural trading relationship. As we expand our markets, China and India particularly are becoming the tigers. They are going to surpass the U.S. in the next 40 years in having the world's biggest economies.

I think we have to look at this as an excellent business opportunity, to value international experience, because if you have international experience, you can do business with all these other countries. At the government level we should probably be doing a lot more selling that to business—you know, get with the times. You are dead on about the kids being a hell of a lot more inclusive than their parents. We probably have the most inclusive kids in the world in Canada.

The question I have is, right now we have a 60-40 split between economic immigrants and family class and refugees. Should that be switched? I would like to have a response—not right now, but go and talk about it. Should it be 50-50 or should it be 40-60? We have studies or experiences that show that people who come here as families are much happier with the jobs they get, versus the ones we attract here because they are professionals and they can choose their experience.

A second question is, should the economic class include trades? We've got a huge shortage of trades. I was just talking to my neighbour on the weekend. We've got a huge shortage, in Ontario anyway, of elevator mechanics. It's huge. And we've got all these elevators.

The last question I want to leave you with is this. As you know, we're working on the Citizenship Act. There are other workshops where we will be talking about it, but one of the things we are looking for is a preamble to the Citizenship Act to reflect the new reality of Canada. We're also looking for a new citizenship oath. Take a look at the present oath and take a look at the act and come back with some suggestions. We would really love to have some poetry created around it.

I would like to thank you all for sharing your time with us. I see we will be having some of you back later. Thank you very much.

We're going to suspend for a few minutes while we have the next group of people come up. Thank you.

•(0925) _____ (Pause) _____

•(0935)

The Chair: I'm going to start our next session on family reunification. As you know, there are some announcements coming that are going to be reasonable news, and when we get the official version, Colleen will be able to read it into the record.

Anyway, the first person we have making a presentation on this will be Ms. Mackey, for seven minutes—and when you get close to seven minutes, I'll give you a signal to wrap up. She is a settlement social worker with the Association for New Canadians.

Could you please start?

Ms. Janet Mackey (Settlement Social Worker, Manager of Refugee Claimant Services, Association for New Canadians): My name is Janet Mackey. I've worked in the field of settlement and integration of refugees and immigrants to Canada for more than nine years.

One of the main tasks I've found myself addressing in my work with my newcomer clients is family reunification. It is one of my main tasks because reunification is one of the main issues that will determine whether a newcomer will settle and integrate into their new communities.

Upon arrival in Canada, newcomers have many issues to deal with. First they need to ensure their basic needs for food, shelter, clothing, and health care are satisfied. Then they experience culture shock in adjusting to a different language, different laws, different customs and behaviours, different food, and different weather. Many have been traumatized by the experiences they have come through as refugees, such as torture, persecution, and forced migration. Newcomer clients come to me seeking counselling, guidance, and assistance for anxiety related to these things. But the primary reason newcomers suffer within Canada has to do with unresolved family reunification issues.

My clients come to Canada as refugees and beg me to help them to reunite with their family members who remain overseas. As Canadians, we identify our family as spouses and children. Other relatives are considered our extended family, our mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins.

However, to a newcomer this division of family does not exist. Family is family. The knowledge that any of their family members have been left behind, in danger and without the basic needs of life, makes newcomers feel desperate. They long to assist them and bring them to the safety of Canada that they now enjoy. When they find that they are unable to help these relatives immediately, they feel a tremendous and overwhelming guilt that prevents them from focusing on any activity to their own benefit. This is known as survivor guilt, and the only cures I have found are successful reunification with family members or a durable resettlement solution overseas for family members who are in danger and without the basic needs of life.

These difficulties have already been acknowledged by Citizenship and Immigration Canada. In section B of the "Operational Procedures for Processing Non-Accompanying Family Members of

Convention Refugees and Humanitarian Protected Persons Abroad", under the one-year window of opportunity, it states, and I quote:

The rationale for this policy is based on the need to improve the processing of refugee families by implementing facilitative measures that help reduce separation periods. The following factors demonstrate some of the challenges faced by resettled refugees and the need for this initiative.

In the early periods of their arrival, refugees have limited income and often do not have sufficient resources to pay for family class sponsorship in addition to not being able to meet income requirements. Many resettled refugees have the added financial burden of having to repay large transportation loans. When family class sponsorship is not an option many refugees turn to the private sponsorship community in an attempt to secure a private sponsorship for separated family members, which in turn increases the number of representations for assistance made to the sponsorship community.

The one-year window of opportunity program truly is one of the best policies that has been established in recent years, as it responds to the need for refugees to be reunited with family members as soon as possible in an effort to reduce the extent of separation anxiety and survivor guilt and in the hope of facilitating a newcomer's successful settlement and integration to Canada.

However, I believe the one-year window of opportunity should be extended to include a broader definition of family. Currently this program is being used to facilitate the newcomer's reunification with spouse and dependent children only, and it is available only to persons who include their spouses and dependent children on their original immigration application.

At the time my clients apply for resettlement they are often told that if their spouse and children are not physically with them, their information should not be included on their applications and that they will have to apply to bring them to Canada once they are in Canada. This is bad information, because if they do not include this information on the original application, they will not be eligible to bring their family in under this program—and I hear this complaint on a regular basis.

The spousal eligibility requirement is also problematic because the spouse must have been a spouse at the time of the original application. In refugee situations, resettlement applications can often take years to complete, so if my clients have met and married their spouses after they made their applications, it's possible that they may not be eligible to bring them to Canada. Their fortunes will be determined by the quality and timeliness of information provided to them by the overseas officers.

•(0940)

When a newcomer wishes to be reunited with a family member other than a spouse or a dependent child, a refugee must turn to the family class sponsorship. This process requires my clients to be working and earning enough to support themselves and the family members they wish to sponsor.

So if my clients arrive in Canada and they cannot read or write in their own language and they have no English or French capability, their chances for family reunification become very slim. Their only alternative is to forego the language training and settlement programs that are available to them, leave the smaller cities that would be more suitable for their integration due to the level of community support they would receive, and head to the hard-labour jobs, like working in slaughterhouses in Brooks, Alberta, for 14-hour workdays, because they will make a higher wage.

It would be impossible for a newcomer to afford family sponsorship while living in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, considering that a yearly income from a minimum wage job is \$12,480. A potential sponsor is required to have an annual income of \$24,745, as identified in the guide to family class sponsorship produced by Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

If newcomers are able to find and work two full-time jobs, only then would they be able to remain in their original city of resettlement. When and if newcomers are able to secure such employment, they must have the fees required to have a sponsorship application processed. Just to give you an idea, to sponsor one adult costs \$1,525 for the processing fees, not including the cost of medical examinations, visas, passports, or travel to Canada.

It's by no means an easy process. It's too long as well. My clients are coming from African countries and Colombia, and the process can take anywhere from 16 to 46 months.

My recommendations to this committee are as follows.

The definition of a family member must be extended under the one-year window of opportunity to include parents, dependent siblings, and de facto dependants. In cases where a sibling is older than the newcomer in Canada and can act as a parental alternative, special consideration should be given and a decision should be made to reunite the siblings, as it would be in the best interests of the young person.

One-year window-of-opportunity processing should be further expedited so that family members can be reunited in less than one year. A new refugee family reunification category should be established and implemented to allow refugees who are resettled in Canada to reunite with their family members sooner. This process should be an expedited process meant to reunite the newcomer with a family member with whom family ties can be established. Such a process should not take two years. This category would be in keeping with Canada's commitment to the humanitarian and compassionate treatment of refugees. The existing family class sponsorship categories are only satisfactory for those persons who are not from refugee-producing countries and do not have the worry of their relatives' safety or basic needs of life. It is not suitable for the processing of refugee family reunification applications.

Processing fees should be reduced, or ideally eliminated, for refugees to enable them to apply sooner. Quality assurance initiatives must be established to ensure that overseas officers provide refugees identified for resettlement in Canada with complete, factual information regarding the family reunification process. A special task force should be established overseas to prevent unofficial advisory sources in and around the refugee camps and refugee processing posts from interfering with official information and processes.

And finally, if young refugees are to be resettled in Canada on their own, a program must be developed to provide the young people with supportive living arrangements in which they would have a parental surrogate to provide them with guidance, support, encouragement, and life skills training that would allow them to cope and survive in Canada until such time as they can be reunited with family.

Thank you.

• (0945)

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Next we have Mr. Summers.

Mr. Nick Summers: Thank you.

We have prepared a brief report, which I gave to the clerk earlier, on one aspect of the issue of family reunification, that is, excluded members of family, and I will refer to that in a moment. But certainly, the CRR, the Canadian Council for Refugees, wants to make submissions with regard to a number of issues that relate to family reunification.

First off, we do recognize that there are compelling reasons to improve our treatment of the situation of family reunification, given the clear social benefits, clear economic benefits, and because in part Canada has a legal obligation to be doing this under various conventions that we have signed.

One of the major roadblocks to family reunification has been numbers. I was just at a meeting in Banff a couple of days ago where the minister spoke, and he talked of Canada's immigration being a large airplane with 250,000 seats, and when it's filled, nobody else gets on.

Mr. Chair, you referred to the 60-40 split at our last session. This is a big problem with family reunification. There are only so many spaces, and the humanitarian class, which includes family reunification cases, is only 40% of the total. When you take out all the various aspects of that, it doesn't leave a whole lot of room to move on this.

We look with interest to see what the minister will be announcing later today. He apparently will be coming up with some way that parents and grandparents can be brought to Canada in a more expeditious manner. It will be interesting to see if this is done by increasing the total number—in other words, adding seats to that plane he spoke of—or whether or not he will be tinkering with the 60-40 split. We are concerned that it will not be more new spaces, because if you tinker with that split—especially if these extra spots for parents and grandparents come out of the 40%—then somebody else is going to get squeezed out. So we think that has to be looked at carefully.

We talked about one of our concerns with family reunification in a previous appearance before this committee. I won't spend a lot of time talking about the issue of reuniting families of people who have been accepted as Canada's refugees. We have submitted a paper to you before that we prepared called "More than a Nightmare: Delays in Refugee Family Reunification", dealing with this problem, but I would commend that paper to you again and suggest that a review of it would be a good thing.

Basically, the problem is that it's taking three, four, five years in order to bring people to Canada. Our law says that family members of accepted refugees can be brought to Canada, reunited, and yet we are taking forever to do it. Our recommendation has been and continues to be that because in the vast majority of cases there is no problem with these people being reunited, we should bring them to Canada and process them first rather than make them wait in refugee situations.

Another issue that we have spoken with you about before, which is talked about in the paper we presented to you, I believe, back in December 2004 when I appeared in front of you in Ottawa, was a study of the impact of Canada's refugee legislation on children. In our current law a child who is recognized as a refugee has no right to be reunited with his or her family. A parent is accepted and can sponsor his or her children, but that same child who comes here unaccompanied cannot bring his parents here. This seems a great inequity and a great hardship on children. The rationale for that, as we understand, is the government doesn't want people sending their children to Canada in the hopes that they will be accepted. We don't believe this is a legitimate fear, and the consequences are too harsh to justify that. Children should not be separated from their families.

Something I would like to touch on is the private sponsorship program, which is not, strictly speaking, a family reunification program but has tended to become one, because it's really the only avenue for many people.

● (0950)

If someone is here in Canada and is not eligible to bring their family over, either because they're not recognized as refugees or because they came to Canada in some other way, one of the only ways people can bring their family out of refugee situations is to get a local group, a church group or a community group, to assist them in doing a private sponsorship of refugees. In a study we did called "No Faster Way", we talk about the problems of processing private sponsorship applications, which is taking many years and causing a great deal of hardship. Again, I recommend that study to you.

A further problem with family reunification is the increasing requirement by government that people do DNA testing in order to prove that the people they want to bring to Canada are indeed members of their family. In principle, this sounds like it's not a problem—if they really are family members, it will show up in the test. The problem is that DNA testing is very expensive and is often not available in countries where these people are located. I'm aware of one situation where somebody was told they would have to cross a war zone to get to where the DNA testing was done.

It makes no sense. Canada only recognizes a certain number of places as being allowed to do DNA testing. By its nature, DNA testing has to be done on site, because you can't just send a sample in.

I would like to deal with the excluded families issue. When somebody does not mention a family member on their application, they are barred from adding that person later on. You might think this is in the interests of certainty. But the problem is that people don't always know that there are family members out there available to bring to Canada. People are coming from situations where they may think family members are dead. One person had a child he didn't know about till he was here in Canada. There is a lifelong ban on these people. You can never add them, and this is a tremendous hardship.

I ask you to read our paper.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next we have Mr. Tong Kom.

Mr. Liai Tong Kom (Co-Sponsor, Basilica Parish of St. John the Baptist, Roman Catholic Episcopal Corporation of St. John's): Yes.

Ms. Laurel Doucette (Parishioner, Basilica Parish of St. John the Baptist, Roman Catholic Episcopal Corporation of St. John's): Would it be possible for me to speak before Liai? This would provide an introduction to what he's going to say.

The Chair: Certainly.

Ms. Laurel Doucette: My name is Laurel Doucette. I'm a member of Basilica Parish. The brief you have in front of you was prepared by Frank Fowler. He was unable to attend this morning. He is the chair of the Basilica Parish committee, which along with the Roman Catholic Episcopal Corporation has undertaken to sponsor Liai's family.

Our principal concern arises out of the time that has elapsed since our sponsorship application was accepted by Citizenship and Immigration Canada on July 9, 2003. On October 22, 2003, we were advised from Nairobi by the Canadian High Commission, Immigration, that a preliminary review of the file had been completed and that an interview would be held in Kampala. The interview has yet to be scheduled.

The family we have applied to sponsor is a widow, 36 years of age, and her five children between the ages of one and 14 years. Agoth Adut Ajiek is the sister-in-law of Liai Tong Kom, who was admitted to Canada as a refugee from Sudan three years ago and continues to reside in St. John's. He has been an active member of the Basilica Parish community and has assumed responsibility for providing support and assistance to his extended family as they wait in Kampala, Uganda, in hope that they will soon join him in Canada.

In order to provide Citizenship and Immigration Canada ample assurance regarding the obligations of sponsorship, the Roman Catholic Episcopal Corporation has assumed the position of community sponsor of this family, with the Basilica Parish and Liai Tong Kom signing as co-sponsors. We believe we have all of the necessary resources to support this family as they resettle in Canada. We consider it unfortunate and counter-productive that the children of this family have now spent two of their formative years in straitened circumstances as refugees in a foreign country, when by now they might have been a year into their resettlement in Canada.

Liai.

● (0955)

Mr. Liai Tong Kom: Thank you very much for giving me a chance to talk before you.

I think there is no more left to say apart from what has been said by Laurel. I would only like to give you the situation of these children in the place they are now staying.

These children are really helpless. They don't have anybody that is helping them where they are staying today. Their mother is an uneducated lady. She doesn't know any language that she can use to communicate with other people. In the area where they are staying, people consider anybody who is in the western world to have a lot of money. So if someone from the west needs anything to be done, he has to pay a lot of money to the people. That is what is really facing them. If a child is sick and I have to find someone to take the child to the hospital and to translate, that fellow will need me to pay him money. And for anything they have to do, I have to find somebody and pay him some money, and then he has to go and translate. This is what is really facing me.

I do not know what I can say apart from that. I know that the immigration law has been saying that people who could be brought into the country must be known first. I believe all immigration laws could not apply. I believe they cannot apply to my brother's children because they are all under eight, and as they come in, they will easily adapt to Canadian culture and they will feel no ill effects.

One of the things I have faced—and I have told you before—was one time when there was a child who had caught malaria or diphtheria. It was the middle of the night. The mother didn't know what to do. So she called me and she told me what I had to do. I had to call a taxi driver. I had the number of a taxi driver there. I had to call a taxi driver to take her to the hospital, and I had to be the translator on the phone. That is what I had to do. This is why you see all these costs. These are the costs that I have had. I had to be a translator. She had to lock the other children in her home. She had to lock their home and she had to go to the hospital while I was on the phone translating to the doctor and translating to the driver.

And when he went there it was really something very bad. The child was admitted to the hospital. She had to spend the night there and her children were locked in her home. So I had to spend the whole night on the phone checking her, and I didn't have a way to check that the children were at home. In the morning I had to call somebody to go to the hospital, to get the key and go and open the door for the children.

So when I see all these things, I don't know what to do. I'm really helpless, and I don't have any power. I have written to the minister of immigration asking whether he can help me.

They don't have any problem. If they could come in, the people at the basilica would take full responsibility. They are ready to help them any time they come in.

I don't know what I have to do. That is the situation I'm living in now, and my sister is really in a very bad emotional state. She doesn't believe now that she needs help. She is always telling me that when she is not talking to me on the phone she wishes that she would die along with all her children. She has lost two children already from hunger. After we speak on the phone, she is still in as bad a situation as she has been in before. I don't know after all what I have to do.

So this is my situation. This is the what I am living with. It's every day, doing translation. The girl is sick, and I have to help keep her in a good emotional state so that she will not worry a lot. She will be helped to come in. I don't know how long I have to keep on doing that.

Thank you.

• (1000)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Could we please have Ms. Jeffrey?

Ms. Donna Jeffrey: I wish I could say something concerning Liai before you time me. May I?

The Chair: We have you down for family reunification.

Ms. Donna Jeffrey: Yes, family reunification.

The Chair: That's right.

Ms. Donna Jeffrey: Okay. Again, as in the last presentation, family reunification was granted two years ago. Unfortunately, it has become worse in family reunification.

When it comes to the time, it takes far too long when as sponsorship holders we begin the process of sponsoring family members. As was mentioned before, it is generally for family members. A number of years ago it took two years minimum. I find now that it takes three years. This is unforgiveable in terms of the emotional damage done to the people waiting here and for those in extreme circumstances.

Two weeks ago I was notified that a family that was actually sponsored over five years ago is coming this Wednesday. It was to be a case of family reunification, but it is too late now, as the family member they were originally coming to see has died. I heard very little from the visa post. We are supposed to hear three times from the visa post on how these are coming along, and I heard only once.

I have dealt with quite a number of refugee camps and have collected reports regarding the conditions in these camps. The countries these refugees have fled to for safety are where they tend to suffer further, often due to corrupt officials. The conditions in these camps are deplorable. Rebel soldiers often infiltrate the camps, rape, and kill. Unfortunately, within the camps, among all the people who are trying to do their jobs, there are always some who are undermining their work.

Almost always in the many refugee camps scattered across Africa, locals from the country where the camps are will be hired. Some of the locals very often use their power to issue orders and give false information. For instance, when a family is told they can only bring a small family, not a family of nine—in other words, there are seven children—the refugee believes the official. Frankly, too many of the refugees I have come to know very well are terrified of government agencies and officials. Are we surprised? What have they experienced?

In their great fear regarding the trafficking of children, the UN declared that if a child's name was not on the list, the child would not be allowed to come. The children would have to stay behind. The parents are here with three children because they said only a family of five could come, so the decision was made to leave four of the children back in the camp.

Canada, being a nation that pretty much does whatever the UN says, or for that matter whatever the Americans or any other legal and large international body says, hasn't challenged the quality of the implementation of their decrees. It is not wrong to be fearful regarding the trafficking of children. However, unfortunately, in the effort of trying to eradicate it, they throw out the baby with the bathwater. It ends up doing far more harm than good. The innocent should be protected instead of being harmed.

Here we have a case that is happening now. For the family back in the refugee camp, there are four children who have been there now for one year without their parents. Their parents are here. There is an absolute refusal on the part of the UN and Canada to bring those children here. The children, by the way, are ages nine to fifteen. Why can't they come? The answer is set in stone: they were not listed, therefore they must stay in the camp.

• (1005)

Who is suffering the most? Of course, the parents are suffering, but it is the children who are suffering the most. Their parents are here and three of the children are here, and these children are still there.

The UN and Canada have declared that the rights of the child are paramount. Perhaps it is fitting that I highlight, in child-friendly language, some of the relevant declarations.

Children have the right to live with their parents. Children have the right to live in a family that cares for them. Article 18 on the Convention of the Rights of the Child says children have the right to be raised by their parents. Article 24 says children have the right to the best health care possible, to drink safe water, to consume healthy food, to live in a clean and safe environment, and to be able to have access to information that can help them stay well.

As I mentioned before, what happens in camps? For a thirteen-year-old girl, I knew what would happen. She has been raped. We are now trying to get her, the family, to Canada. I started out with it as a sponsorship, and actually, just recently, that has been changed.

I also had to have DNA.... The geneticists here, locally, said they would do it and we, or the family, wouldn't have to pay. I mean, \$1,000 is a bit much. They are doing it for free.

With the family still over there, the sponsorship was going to go through, but as recently as Friday afternoon past, it was changed and they are going to come another way. But I don't know how soon it will be, and it might not be soon enough.

If the family does come this other way, it means, then, we have to find money. I believe it's \$600—and I know there's someone in the audience who can correct me on that. It's \$600 or more to pay for them. Where does this money come from? We shouldn't hold them up because of that.

But this is the issue with this trafficking, the fear of the trafficking of children.

• (1010)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Our final speaker on this panel will be Ms. Quaiocoe.

Ms. Lloydetta Quaiocoe: Thank you. Good morning again, and thank you for giving us the opportunity to present at this public hearing on behalf of the Multicultural Women's Organization of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I will preface this presentation by saying a few words about our organization and then focus on the family reunification issue and the inherent problems associated with CIC's policies on family class immigration. After formal conversations with our members, and consultations with immigrant and new Canadian families, we would like to concentrate on three areas where we feel the system needs review, namely definition, discretion, and delays. And in accordance with the guidelines for preparing a submission to the House of Commons, I will conclude with some brief recommendations.

The Multicultural Women's Organization of Newfoundland and Labrador is a voluntary non-profit organization founded in 1982 and governed by an elected volunteer board. It has representation on the National Organization of Immigrants and Visible Minority Women of Canada. Its mandate is to identify the cultural, social, economic, and educational needs of women and their families from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds and to develop strategies to meet those identified needs.

Our organization's objectives are to enhance and to heighten public awareness of the status of immigrant, ethnic, and visible minority women and their families and to promote positive and healthy relationships between the ethnocultural and local communities. We provide social support and networks for immigrant and visible minority women and youth in the process of adjusting to Canadian society. We accomplish this through a community development project in partnership with government and community organizations. We are currently implementing a multicultural community awareness program, MCAP, for immigrants and resettled refugees, focusing on crime prevention through social development.

On the issue of family reunification, we want to direct your attention to CIC's policy document and the annual report to Parliament on immigration 2004. The news release by the former immigration minister stated, and I quote: "Our immigration plan for 2005 will help Canada's economy grow, while promoting family reunification and refugee protection." That was dated October 28, 2004.

Our understanding is that if CIC is interested in promoting family reunification, then aspects of the current policies and eligibility requirements do not support the process. For example, in sponsorship cases involving marriages or adoptions, officers must be satisfied that the relationship is genuine and not undertaken simply to obtain status or privileges in Canada. These decisions are left to the discretion of immigration or visa officers who are not always culturally competent or sensitive to the cultural norms or values of applicants. There needs to be a change in the overall attitude towards family class applicants, because even though they're labelled non-economic class, these immigrants—spouses, parents, grandparents—contribute to the Canadian economy; the money that would be sent out of the country to support family members could now be spent in providing living expenses and necessities within the country. We've seen the cost of phone cards to call family members.

Furthermore, these family members provide cultural and social capital by meeting the needs of working families, caring for children so adults can work, paying taxes, and contributing to the country's economy. The family members play an important role in passing on the cultural values and heritages of Canadians as well as the overall well-being of the household. There must be some value to this that yields economic benefit.

On the issue of the definition of the family in family class, we feel the system favours the western European concept of family, thereby discriminating against Canadians from non-western European cultural backgrounds. If my younger brother dies, his wife and children become my dependants, because he married his wife and she became part of our family, consequently his children are my children and responsibility.

Under the current system, those children would not qualify to come to Canada under the family class category unless their mother died and they became orphans. Even though these children would be dependent on me for their schooling and other necessities of life, they would have to lose their mother in order to be eligible for me to sponsor them to Canada.

We would like to request that CIC revisit this policy around the definition of family, because in the cultures represented by many immigrants from Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean, family does not fit the narrowly defined nuclear family model currently used as the criterion under CIC's family class category. The extended family is very much a part of the culture of immigrants coming to Canada. As the source countries of immigrants change, some of the policies that govern these new Canadians.... Canada is a multicultural society that thrives on cultural diversity. According to CIC's policy on adoption, the visa officer "will approve the application for permanent residence if he or she believes there's a genuine parent-child relationship".

• (1015)

For years, Canadians of western European descent have been allowed to go abroad to adopt and bring in children from Cambodia, China, Romania, and Vietnam who are not related to them. Immigrants from Africa who want to bring children of their extended families are either refused because they don't meet the family class criterion or they are asked to pay for costly DNA testing. The high cost of DNA testing and the time it takes to process this procedure creates a barrier for families who want to reunite with their relatives. How can the genuineness of sponsoring a child who is related be measured over the child who is of no relation to the sponsor?

On this question of determining genuineness, sponsors for family reunification have to provide documentation of birth and marriage contracts to be eligible to apply. In some cultures and small communities, the birth of a child is not registered as it is done in Canada. Similarly, not all marriages are conducted in the courts or church. Requesting sponsors to produce Canadian standard documentation creates difficulties for sponsors who are married according to a traditional law and custom and are required to produce a legal piece of paper confirming their relationship. The unavailability of these documents casts suspicion on applicants, as immigration officers assume they are not genuine, thus prohibiting family reunification. Officers need to be culturally competent in

these issues because the extended family network is so crucial to the development of core family values and adjustment to a new country.

In addition, arranged marriages have been part of people's lives for hundreds of years. The western concept of a love marriage is foreign to certain cultures. So how do you get a spouse to prove a genuine love relationship to an immigration or visa officer? Trying to establish prior relationship is left to the applicant, who has to gather photographs and letters from character witnesses within cultures where it is taboo and disrespectful for two people who are going to be married to be seen together in public.

Thirdly, on delays in the process of reuniting families, there are considerable delays in reuniting families under the family class sponsorship program, as we have heard already, due to the amount of paperwork and details required. Sponsors whose first language is not English or who are not familiar with the system have those additional language and cultural barriers. The procedure, the application forms, and process for assessing this family class sponsorship are extremely complicated and intrusive. There's a lack of information and guidance necessary to complete the applications to the satisfaction of CIC officers. The delays as well as the money involved make this a costly enterprise for new immigrants.

There are also difficulties for reuniting families of resettled refugees. Although they are permanent residents, if they do not have the allocated amount of money, they are at a disadvantage. People on social assistance cannot sponsor family members, even though that person they sponsor will likely be able to work and share in the household responsibilities with the sponsor. And again, the one-year window is too short, as by the time resettled refugees get their foot in a new country—learning a new language and social and political systems, doing a job search, etc.—it is well into the fourth or sixth month before they find out that they can sponsor their families. They need the information and assistance when they arrive, even at the airport, to submit the application and start the process of bringing the members they have left behind, some in very bad need, as we've heard, in refugee camps.

Resettled refugees are usually told to utilize the group of five program to sponsor their family members to come to Canada. The main difficulty with this process is that it takes a long time to build up friendship and trust with people in a new country who will want to take on such a responsibility. Just this morning, as I was driving here, there was a CBC story of someone waiting for seven years to bring their mother and sister into Canada.

I'll just close briefly with the following recommendations for Citizenship and Immigration Canada: to make the family class criteria more culturally sensitive to immigrants' needs; to revisit its policy around the definition of family to make the process more inclusive; to revise application forms to be more easily read and user friendly; to provide local immigration personnel to assist in explaining and completing forms; and finally, to review the benefits against the cost of DNA testing by families on low incomes.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Just before we start a round of questioning, I'll point out to the panel that half the members in our committee are immigrants, and we have two refugees in the House of Commons—one is myself from the Hungarian revolution and Rahim Jaffer who is from Uganda. The other members of the committee here are either first-generation Canadians or they have a huge amount of empathy for immigrants to this country. Colleen has been an advocate on this since she was 17 years old, and that goes back only a couple of years.

• (1020)

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: It was just a couple of years ago, actually, so I don't really have that much experience.

The Chair: Okay.

We will start with Mr. Jaffer.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

And thanks, all of you, again, for your presentations. Some of them obviously are very heart-wrenching.

I want to start with Mr. Summers.

Under the current law, you mention that refugee children often get separated from their parents, and I think this is something a lot of people aren't aware of. I am curious about why that happens and about what happens to the children when they come here. Obviously there have to be some challenges in trying to integrate them and to get them proper homes and so on.

Maybe you could just address that and expand on it slightly.

Mr. Nick Summers: Well, there are a number of ways in which children may end up unaccompanied in the system. By children, we are talking about those under 18 years of age, so some of them are able to get themselves to Canada. In any given year there are a couple of hundred unaccompanied minors who become part of the refugee process, and they are assigned representatives. Sometimes they are members of social agencies within the city they are located in, or there may be somebody who is a distant relative who steps forward to assist them.

There are also orphans. They are in refugee camps. We are talking about war zones; we are talking about areas of famine. People die and children are left alone.

On the inequity that I talked about before, we recognize the need to unite families, yet when we have a child, we don't offer them the same thing. Many children don't have families, and that is why they come unaccompanied.

We also have situations, and it is not that uncommon, where families become split up and they get spread out, and it takes years to find husbands, wives, children. If a child is in Canada and has been recognized as a refugee, we say to that child, "Well, sorry, but we are not going to let you bring your parents here, and we're not going to let you bring your brothers and sisters", despite the fact that if the situation were reversed, we would allow the family to be reunited. We just see that as a terrible inequity.

On the rationale that we don't want people sending their children out into the unknown in the hopes that they will get accepted somewhere and then they can drag them behind them, there is no proof that this has ever happened, and it seems a cruel thing to do.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: I appreciate that clarification.

My next question is for Liai.

You mentioned that you had written the minister's office and you tried to get some clarification on how to bring these children here—I think it is your sister's family? There were actually people at the basilica who were obviously interested in helping to sponsor them coming here.

What sort of response have you received from the minister's office? Is there any indication of what is happening? Is there a sponsorship being processed, or what is the current status of the situation?

Mr. Liai Tong Kom: Actually, I have written to him more than one time, and the Basilica Parish itself has been in contact with him several times, and we have not gotten any information from him. The only information we had was that he had written back to the parish priest and told them that he had found their letter and they were working on it now.

That is the other immigration minister who left office recently. That was all he said, and there was no information after that.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: It seems that it should be something that could be sped up, obviously, if there are people willing to sponsor and there is the support of the basilica as well. I would think that could be sped up, but obviously there are some challenges in the system where it's not getting addressed.

I would be interested to hear, hopefully, where the status is or what the minister's office...I know we have had some changes on that, but maybe we could look into that, as well as members of this committee.

I just wanted to know where that was at, and I appreciate that.

Did you have anything else you wanted to add?

• (1025)

Mr. Liai Tong Kom: Yes, I want to add something. You will see my worry when I tell you this. It is exactly as I have explained before. I have been living in worry all the time. However, I thought that when I arrived in Canada I would live in peace. Unfortunately, I am not living in peace. I am really living in a world of dilemmas. I don't believe I am with the people.

The people in the basilica are always trying to comfort me, and I have not yet come to grips with myself.

When I call these children and talk to them, they cry on the phone to me that they should not lose their life again when they are hearing my voice. I have nothing to say to them. I don't know how to explain the situation to them.

The people in the basilica have really taken on this responsibility. They are even providing food now and they are renting the house for them. I don't know what I can say. That is the situation for me and my friends.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we are going to go on to Madam Faillie.

Ms. Meili Faillie: Yes. I could use some help this time. I'm playing tricks now. If I go back to Chinese, no one else here will understand. I'll give you a break; then you guys will have to give me a break when you come to Montreal.

I still need to understand this question. I've been working as a volunteer in the community as well, since I've become a member of Parliament. I started the office with one officer working on immigration. Now I have two and a half. I added half of another person, part time, working on immigration cases. Basically what I've heard today is something we, as members of Parliament, struggle with on a daily basis. There are 308 MPs and there are 308 people working on immigration and family reunification—this definition—and the problems we are facing administratively are just horrific.

Sometimes we win some battles. It takes a lot of time, and I can imagine that someone who is not in the system could be lost very quickly in the whole system. Last Thursday I wasn't able to announce it to the committee because the person had not yet arrived, but Thursday night the plane was delayed, and the people came in.

I have for the tenth time had one refugee person waiting, for at least three years' minimum, for her children. We helped this family and supported them in trying to hide their children, made sure they were in security, and at the same time tried to get them processed and through their medical and security checks. So I fully understand what the people are going through.

At the same time, in my riding—which has a low percentage of immigration, but still some immigration—we're facing families being separated for nine years because of this question of having a genuine relationship. We have cases of people who want to bring in their own children, adopt their children, and some children who were not born legally into the original family. We've also had to face the DNA testing as well. Even Canadians who want to foster children outside of their original family have difficulties in buying into the fees required to go through immigration.

So when we look at the lifespan, we're asking someone to come to Canada and spend eight to ten years just being processed before they can come in and begin to integrate. I think there are big problems with the whole concept of what we define as a family.

Unless someone else has something to add...I didn't have a specific question on that because I deal with it on a daily basis, but I hear what you're saying and truly understand that.

•(1030)

Mr. Nick Summers: Could I make just one response? At a conference I was just at, David Manicom, director of operations for the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, was addressing the problem of overseas processing, and he made a very interesting comment. He said it doesn't matter; his officers could be 200% more effective, he could have twice as many officers, but no more people would be coming because it is a numbers game.

The problem, as I see it, is not... Certainly there are processing problems, but until Canada accepts that on a humanitarian basis you

can't put a cap on how many people can come at any one time, we're going to have these problems. If we're serious about it being a humanitarian issue—that families should be reunited, that people should be together—then we've got to stop saying we're only going to be humanitarian until we hit the quota and then that's it. We need to have an open-ended system.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next is Mr. Bill Siksay.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you all for your presentations. And thank you, Mr. Tong Kom, for sharing so personally this difficult situation that you and your family are facing. I know it's often hard to do that in a situation like this, so I appreciate your coming this morning.

Where do you start? All of these issues are well known to us. We deal with them daily in our constituency offices, and we know the issues. When Ms. Mackey described the situations facing newcomers to Canada—basic needs, culture shock, post-traumatic syndrome—and then said family reunification was the worst of all, it really puts it in stark reality. As though other things aren't bad enough, this is even worse. We all know this from examples in our own ridings. Ms. Jeffrey told us about a family who's been waiting five years, and now the person here in Canada has passed away. It's just unbelievable. It's a horrible story, but we have heard others exactly like it.

I think Mr. Summers is right. I think it's a quota issue. It seems to me that there is incredible goodwill in Canada towards doing the humanitarian task. We are proud of the work of private sponsor groups like the church organizations and other groups of fine people. That's why we won the Nansen Medal. We talk about how proud we are of this accomplishment, yet there still seems to be this reticence to recognize the important need out there.

Are those of us who work with immigration and refugees, church organizations or other community organizations that sponsor people, unrepresentative of society at large? Is that your impression? Is there something we are not communicating well enough? How is it that we aren't keeping the pressure on to make our response to the refugee situation even stronger and to protect the programs now in place? Are we somehow different from the other folks in Canadian society?

Ms. Donna Jeffrey: We have just finished celebrating 25 years of sponsorship. Often, we are paying for the family for the first year. We are very careful of the families we sponsor. We know the situation, and we know what the truth is with these families. It is often family reunification, but sometimes it's a person we know about through people in the area of the refugee camp they're staying in.

People the government sponsor can get here very quickly. But for those of us who use our time and money to look after these people, it's getting longer instead of shorter. What's the problem?

Mr. Nick Summers: It's not that we are different; it's that we're better informed. When you talk to people who have worked with refugees, people who have actually looked at the situation, it's a rare person who is satisfied that we are doing all we can. Unfortunately, we live in a country where most of the population is poorly informed about immigration and refugee matters. I refer you to *The Globe and Mail* of last Friday. There was an atrocious article full of misinformation, full of out-and-out falsehoods. That's what people are hearing. Unfortunately, part of the problem is the general attitude of people. There's a fear of the unknown, a fear of foreigners, and we have to work to change that.

• (1035)

Mr. Bill Siksay: I wonder if you might comment on how we might define family in a way that would work from a legislative point of view and that matches the reality of our lives. I have had a little experience trying to do this in the House with a private member's bill that would allow an extended definition of family once in a lifetime. Unfortunately, it was voted down in the House just recently. So that attempt didn't work. But I'm wondering if you have any advice to offer about what a helpful definition might be.

Ms. Lloydetta Quaioco: Well, there's the family and the extended family, and family, I think I mentioned, has been narrowly defined as just the spouse and dependent children. In the case of his sister, those children are really his children. So we have to see that the family is not so narrow and inclusive—just that person's spouse and that person's own biological children.

We do have a precedent for this, because people adopt children who are not their biological children, and they come in. So why is it that we can't extend that narrow definition to include our extended families—you know, children? As I said, my brother's children, if he dies, are my responsibility. I would have to school them over there. I would have to feed them over there and meet their needs until I could sponsor them.

So I think, yes, we can expand that definition to include those family members as well.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I just point out to the panel that the chair voted with Mr. Siksay on that particular motion of his. I think it would help make our system a little more culturally sensitive. I think it will come back.

Ms. Beaumier.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Thank you.

Maybe because I'm older and I've been at this longer, when I listen to what you have to say, I'd like to just bash my head on the table, because I understand where you're coming from. I know the system has to be fixed, and that's what we're here to do.

Obviously, if our numbers are 250,000, they're not at 1%, so increasing the numbers seems to be part of the solution.

But I want to give you some advice. First of all, I don't know if you've been to see your member of Parliament, but that's where you should be—not writing letters, but face to face. Writing a letter to the Prime Minister is something like writing a letter to Santa Claus. I get over 350 e-mails a day. Can you imagine how many letters go into his office? And as compelling as your case is—I want to talk to you

after—it's not unique. You have to understand that writing to the Prime Minister about an individual case.... You might as well stick it in a bottle and throw it into the ocean. That's not a criticism of the Prime Minister or his office; it's just a reality.

So if you haven't been to your member of Parliament.... Your member of Parliament is the one who can fight for you. He can be after the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration every time he turns the corner and do something for you just by having the minister want him to get away. I kind of have that reputation—as you notice, I'm not at the minister's announcement this morning, and I don't think that's necessarily an accident.

Especially if your children are from the Darfur area or from Somalia, I mean—

Mr. Liai Tong Kom: No, from southern Sudan

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Okay. But what are all the headlines? Sudan, Sudan, Sudan. I think politically you've got it made if you just use your political oomph and do it.

We're talking about increasing the numbers. Now, instead of defining what a family is, should we allow for a flexible...? Right now we've got children under 21 or those who are in school and are dependant. How can we include children such as Mr. Tong Kom's? We've got to leave it open-ended, but we can't leave it too open-ended. Give me a possible redefinition of the family class.

• (1040)

Ms. Lloydetta Quaioco: I was asked to attend a meeting a couple of months ago, after the tsunami, with I think Citizenship and Immigration Canada, where some people came over and were talking about the issue of speeding up the process because these people were in a disaster area. And they extended it. They said they could come—their brothers, sisters, their family members, anybody that was affected. It was done.

They waited for a crisis. And some situations are crisis situations, especially in war-torn countries. They are crisis situations, but they are not recognized. But when the tsunami hit, all of a sudden it became an important issue and it was a crisis issue, and all those little things were put in place to make them come quicker, to extend it.

I think that should be the norm, because these areas are crisis areas on a continuous basis.

Mr. Nick Summers: I think the problem is that you can't put it into a particular definition. I liked it when you used the word “flexible”, because what we need is a guideline that is based in reality, not based on one culture's view of what a family should be.

There are certain relatives that are obvious—children, spouses, parents—but you have to have a guideline that says where there is a genuine relationship of dependency, that is a member of your family. That's going to be different in different cultures, in different parts of the world, and in different circumstances, but unless we have a system that can look at that and give a person the chance to show that relationship of dependency, we're going to have problems.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Allowing for not just blood relatives, but soul relatives, who sometimes may be more relatives than blood relatives....

Mr. Nick Summers: Certainly I have seen situations where a child is taken in by a neighbour or by another member of the community because the parents are dead. They raise that child, but by our definition, they're not family.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we have Ms. Guergis.

Ms. Helena Guergis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks very much again for being here. I appreciate it, and as Colleen has alluded to the great experience she has had over the years working on this issue....

Of course, as I've already said this morning, I am a new member. In a short while, I have come to realize—and I will say it again until I'm blue in the face—that we have worked at this for many years and we have heard so many different recommendations, and I really find myself getting frustrated as a new member. Why can't we just get on with this and put some of these great recommendations into place?

I'm wondering if we do have any of that information yet on the minister's announcement today that perhaps one of them can read into the microphone. Maybe it's some good news.

But I have just one quick question here. A couple of you have alluded to *The Globe and Mail* article. We talk about the misconceptions out there, and I agree with you wholeheartedly. I hear that on a daily basis, even walking around my community, so many misconceptions even about those who are sponsoring immigrants, those who are on social services who want to sponsor their family members, with people saying, "Are we just bringing people in to put them on social services?"

Can you please give us some information today that will take that misconception away, to help us out when we're spreading the message in our own ridings?

Mr. Nick Summers: I'm not sure what we can give you other than what we've given you already. As I said to Mr. Siksay, the people here have made the effort to learn the truth. That's really all it is.

If you come to realize what the real situation is and what we put people through, then you can't help but be sympathetic towards it, but unfortunately, we have a media that goes for the sensationalists and doesn't check its facts. Just to give you an example, in *The Globe and Mail* story, they consistently referred to Mr. Singh as being a refugee problem. He's not a refugee. He's an immigration problem. He's a justice system problem. He was finished with the refugee system in 1993, but they consistently label him a refugee problem, which labels all refugees and makes people think refugees are crooks and con artists. That's just one example.

The CCR has been after the government, and every minister we meet, every new minister, promises, "Yes, we're going to work with you to improve the image of refugees and immigrants." It never happens. The money or the will is not there. The political impetus is not there. I don't know what it is, but that's what we need. We need a concerted campaign between government and NGOs and the refugee and immigrant community to do a PR piece, to basically improve people's knowledge and information.

• (1045)

Ms. Janet Mackey: Also, for refugees coming to Canada, these people often use work as a coping mechanism. If they can work long hours, they don't have to think about the situations they've left behind. They don't have to think about how they're going to cope with their future, how they're going to cope with the torture they've been put through, how they're going to cope with losing their family members, losing their home country, losing everything.

They want to work. They're grateful to this country for everything they've been given, and they want to contribute to the economy. They don't enjoy sitting at home. They want to be working. Quite often, I think the CCR has put out a lot of material that speak to that, the myths and misconceptions surrounding refugees.

Ms. Helena Guergis: Is it possible for you to give members' offices some of that information, so that we can have it on our information deck?

Mr. Nick Summers: They certainly could, or I could refer you to our website; it is all there. If you go to our website under "What's new" or "Documents", either one will give you a list of the materials published in the last couple of years. One of them is a pamphlet called *Facing Facts: Myths and Misconceptions about Refugees and Immigrants in Canada*, which is a good précis. It is about a year out of date, so there are probably a few new myths since then, but it

Ms. Helena Guergis: Thank you

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Temelkovski.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thanks to everyone for coming out.

Helena mentioned the misunderstandings of refugees' plights and that Canadians misrepresent them overall. Maybe you can tell us some of the benefits given or supports provided to refugees when they come to Canada, including the services supported by the CIC, and for how long.

Ms. Janet Mackey: Basically, a government-assisted refugee or a sponsored refugee would be met at the airport once they land in Canada. They would be assisted in finding permanent accommodation, but they would be put in temporary accommodation until such time as they could find permanent accommodation.

They are provided with language instruction in one of the official languages, should they not speak one of them. They are provided with orientation to the laws of Canada and orientations to their communities.

They are assisted with actually making connections with the services they would need in the community—medical services, or any kind of health care, including mental health services. They would also be connected with community members under the host program, where volunteers from our communities are connected with newcomers, so they can make friends and learn more about the culture.

They are provided with assistance in looking for work, preparing for the labour market, preparing résumés, and gaining interview skills for the job market.

There are programs developed for children and youth to help them with school work.

There are often social programs. My organization has social programs for women and men to help them get out of the home and forget for a little while some of the trauma they have experienced.

I am starting to draw a blank, but they are assisted for one year. Basically, information is usually provided within the first six weeks of their arrival, so all of the information they require for their settlement is essentially provided within the first six weeks.

Beyond that, government-assisted refugees are provided with support for a year. With sponsoring groups, it could be for as long as a lifetime; the sponsoring groups really get in there and provide support. To be honest, the settlement organizations working with refugees and immigrants are providing services beyond the one year they are contracted to do, simply because we become their family; we become their connection to this country, because they have no family here. As Canadians, we depend on our family members if we run into trouble; we become their family.

● (1050)

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Do they run into trouble, like financial trouble? I am assuming they are immediately—

Ms. Janet Mackey: There are tremendous financial burdens on newcomers to Canada. They have to repay their immigration loans, their transportation loans, medical expenses, and those sorts of things.

They also have to worry about the family members back home; they are often trying to support the family members back home. So they have to balance the minimum social assistance that each province provides to a newcomer, taking care of their own needs, and hopefully having enough to send back home. Sometimes they go without so they can send some money home to their families.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: What level of English would they gain within a year?

Ms. Janet Mackey: It depends on the individual and where they start from. If you're talking about somebody who isn't literate and can't read or write in their own language, then basically it's going to take them longer to learn English or French. But if you're talking about somebody who is university educated, can read and write in their own language, and is determined to learn a new language, they'll learn very quickly. A person can possibly learn English in a year if they have the basics.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: If that's all they do.

Ms. Janet Mackey: Yes, but there are some people who are very determined. People who are professionals and want to get back into their own professions—doctors and engineers—will focus. They will study at home and practise. They'll get out and practise with other people in the community.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Is the funding adequate for the refugee or family resettlement program?

Ms. Janet Mackey: Do you mean for refugee resettlement, or language?

● (1055)

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Well, for both.

Ms. Janet Mackey: I think there could be some changes in the programming. There are some individuals who need longer orientation periods. If a person is fairly together and used to moving around a lot, they'll probably acclimatize to a culture and a new community a lot quicker than others. But if they've never been outside of their own village, it will take them a lot longer to actually absorb the information they're being given.

The information is supposedly given once. If you're in a state of shock and you're in the honeymoon period, where you're just so excited to be safe in this country and not have to look over your shoulder all the time, you don't necessarily take in all the information that's given to you in those first six weeks. So it's necessary to have the information repeated, to have behaviours modelled, and to actually see someone else displaying or putting on the behaviour. Then you can understand what you're expected to do—like shopping, saving money, and budgeting. It's very foreign sometimes to get used to the currency and shopping for food here. Most people are used to shopping on a day-to-day basis, instead of shopping for a week, trying to budget, and freezing food to make it last longer. So it takes a lot of coping.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: I think Canadians have the opinion or view that refugees are a burden on society, and they're financed at a higher level than Canadians who are born here. Would that be...?

Ms. Janet Mackey: Again that's the lack of information Nick was talking about. Basically a newcomer is given no more than any other Canadian person on social assistance. Canadian-born people—for lack of a better term—who are on social assistance actually have more resources at their disposal than a newcomer because they have family to depend on if the social services don't extend far enough. They probably get clothing and hand-me-downs, and family to get hand-me-downs from. They have someone to help bring them to school, or they are aware of the services that exist in the community.

A newcomer may just have the clothes on their back. They're given a minimal amount of clothing when they first arrive in the country. They get \$375 per person to outfit themselves for their lifetime, unless they're able to save a little bit from their social assistance to buy some underwear and socks, and some warm sweaters for the winters in Canada—and get used to the winters in Canada. It's very difficult. They don't have the resources.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I guess we've run out of time, so I want to thank the whole panel for your input. I would just mention that you also have a very important role to play in advocacy. When the newspapers print inaccurate stories, go after them as a collective. When they do something good, you might want to set up a prize for good reporting.

Thank you. We're going to suspend for two minutes.

● (1055)

_____ (Pause) _____

● (1100)

The Chair: We're going to resume, if everybody can come forward.

I'll indicate when you get close to your seven minutes so you can wrap it up. If you have a brief, you don't have to read the whole thing, because we've got it as well. You can summarize and highlight. A lot of times I find that when I make a speech for the House, it always goes faster when I do it in my office than when I give it in public. A really important point of this session is the exchange of questions back and forth.

Ms. Wong.

• (1105)

Ms. HuaLin Wong (President, HuaLin Wong Immigration Consultant Limited, As an Individual): Thank you.

My name is HuaLin Wong. Just to give you a brief background of myself, I've been working and volunteering with refugees and immigrants for about two years now, and I'm a member of the Canadian Society of Immigration Consultants. But I'm really here today as just a concerned citizen. Having worked in this field for a little while, I've seen some problems and things I think we could improve on.

If you notice on the first page, entitled "Introduction", there is a picture of the human rights monument in Ottawa. I was in a conference in Ottawa in February for the United Nations Association in Canada, and as I was walking by I took a few pictures of it. The monument in Ottawa is dedicated to the fundamental concepts of personal freedom and respect for the dignity of each individual. It challenges us as Canadians to cherish and promote these enduring human values and ideals, and it symbolizes Canadians' commitment to live in harmony in a society based on fundamental rights. These fundamental rights are perhaps the reason we are all here today, to try to further promote these values and work toward a more inclusive society.

I will be giving this presentation today with my good friend and colleague, Remzi Cej. There are a few things that Remzi and I would like to concentrate on, and I don't think seven minutes will cover all of it, so we've selected certain topics to talk about.

The first thing I'd like to speak about would be the new citizenship act. On the back of my parents' citizenship card from the early 1980s there's a letter of Canadian citizenship, which in part says:

From this point forward, as a Canadian citizen, you will share fully in the rights and privileges enjoyed by all Canadians. At the same time, you assume the special responsibility of protecting and preserving the principles of democracy and human freedom which are the cornerstones of our nation.

The oath of citizenship, in conjunction with the changes that Bill C-18 has proposed, in essence contains the rights and responsibilities that come with Canadian citizenship: loyalty to country; allegiance to country; respect of our country's laws, rights, and freedoms; and upholding of our democratic values.

Most importantly, what should be added is what is written on the back of my parents' citizenship card: "preserving the principles of democracy and human freedom which are the cornerstones of our nation". If we lose those cornerstones, then we lose the essence of being Canadian.

Remzi.

Mr. Remzi Cej (Student, As an Individual): Some of these guiding principles on citizenship, as recommended by the report of

the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, include the equal treatment of Canadian-born and naturalized citizens; and no probationary citizenship status, which would be a certain time between the time when a citizen would become a permanent citizen, without any rights that come with...rights come with citizenship, but they also come with responsibilities that citizens should be aware of.

With this last statement, what should be mentioned as well is that not only do citizens have rights and responsibilities to their government, but also the government has that right and responsibility to care for its citizens, and with this comes a very topical issue that's been on the news and in the media, and unfortunately, not in a very bright view.

Since September 11, 2001, our nation seems to have been very much affected by the terrorist attacks, and in response has passed some laws that are contrary to the rights enshrined in the charter. I think most of us here in the room would know of the Arar case, a case where a Canadian citizen was deported illegally to Syria, where he was tortured. Following that, lately we have been hearing of Muayyed Nureddin, who is a Toronto geologist who was arrested in Syria as he was crossing from Iraq.

• (1110)

It's very disturbing news that these citizens, who are guaranteed freedom and guaranteed protection by their government, are not being protected. There should be a preamble on the rights and responsibilities of Canadian citizens to protect its citizens, to ensure that these people don't simply become Canadians and contribute to society without society contributing back to them. So the government that has given them this privilege and this responsibility should in turn help them.

Continuing with this is the security certificate section of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. As we all know, this is the 20th anniversary of section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Section 15 guarantees equality for every person in Canada, and this includes refugee claimants, refugees, immigrants, citizens of Canada—anybody who is living here. So this would be a Canadian-born citizen or a naturalized citizen.

Since the September 11 attacks, the restrictions on national security have eroded this principle of equality, as highlighted in section 15 of the charter. Subsection 15(1) guarantees protection from discrimination, saying:

Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

These were seen to have been breached in the past few years, especially since the September 11 attacks.

To continue with breaches of the charter, paragraph 10(a) of the charter says that on arrest or detention, everyone has the right to be informed promptly of the reasons for their detention on arrest. The four men who were detained—actually, there were five, the “secret five”, but one was freed on bail a few months ago—were detained without any charges. On simple notions of national security, they were not told what their charges were, what they had committed, or why they were being held in prison.

We need to remind ourselves of the concepts of freedom and equality as Canadians. If the most valuable text in Canadian history guarantees equality for every single person in Canada, then why have we enacted laws and procedures that discriminate against certain groups of people, including male Arabs and Muslims, who are being detained and specifically focused on?

MPs Alexa McDonough and Joe Comartin have put forth a motion in Parliament that calls for Canada to comply with the UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. In it, they also call for a provision to:

provide leadership, in partnership with other levels of government and civil society, to end the racial profiling, attacks on civil liberties, targeting of Arab and Muslim individuals and communities, and other ethnic and religious minorities across Canada, through a plan of action and allocation of appropriate resources

There should be only one way to strip Canadian citizenship, and that should be as it is now contained in the Citizenship Act. That is, a person can be stripped of his or her citizenship only if he or she has obtained it in a fraudulent way. I believe this is how it should be, and it should be kept in the new Citizenship Act. This is what my colleague thinks as well.

HuaLin.

• (1115)

Ms. HuaLin Wong: I'm going to speak about the refugee appeal division, or RAD. We know that the standing committee has already recommended that RAD be implemented, but we feel that this is much too important an issue not to mention here today.

The biggest problem with the refugee determination system, of course, is the absolute inability to correct mistakes and bad decisions. When the new IRPA came into effect in 2003, the act included an appeal division and reduced decision-makers from two IRB members to one. Now a refugee claim is decided by a single IRB member, and we still have no appeal division. The problem is that once an error has been made, there is nothing that can be done. A judicial review is sometimes granted if there has been a legal or procedural error.

The only thing that can remedy this situation is for the government to step up and implement the refugee appeal division that has been written into law. RAD is a method of review to recognize and correct wrong decisions that can be made by the single IRB decision-maker in refugee cases. RAD has been promised since 2001, but as of yet, close to four years later, it is still sitting somewhere in limbo.

A government based on democratic principles simply cannot pick and choose which parts of the law it wishes to put into practice. RAD has been written into the IRPA and it must be implemented. To not do so is to deny refugee claimants a fundamental justice, a chance to be heard. To make a decision on someone's life without a mechanism to correct errors is to say that IRB hearings are flawless. Without a

second opinion, how can anyone be confident that a refused refugee claimant does not in fact need Canada's protection?

Canada has been criticized by the international community because of our failure to implement RAD. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights showed disappointment in Canada's failure to give refugee claimants an opportunity to appeal decisions that may have been flawed.

Where the facts of an individual's situation are in dispute, the effective procedural framework should provide their review. Given that even the best decision-makers may err in passing judgment and given the potential risk to life that may result from such an error, an appeal on the merits of a negative determination constitutes a necessary element of international protection.

To steal a line from someone whom I admire very much and who's been working in the refugee and immigration and the human rights field for a very long time, “We can appeal a \$15 parking ticket here in St. John's, and yet a refugee claimant's life cannot be appealed”. This simple yet powerful line really shows where the government's priorities are on humanitarian issues. It is absolutely morally reprehensible that a \$15 parking ticket can be appealed and a potential danger to life cannot. There cannot and never should be any avenues cut off when human lives are at stake, especially when an avenue like the Refugee Appeal Division is already written into law.

The Chair: You only have two minutes left, so if you want to summarize....

Ms. HuaLin Wong: Okay. I'll really quickly go through deportations perhaps.

On April 15, 2005, Human Rights Watch released a report condemning Canada for providing the use of security certificates to allow the Canadian government to detain and deport non-citizens based on secret evidence presented behind closed doors without the detainee even knowing what he's being charged with. These detainees, all Arab or Muslim and all men, if deemed to be an imminent danger to Canada's security, will be deported to countries where they would be at risk of torture or ill treatment. The five non-citizens currently detained under security certificates come from countries where torture is very real and is a distinct possibility. The secret five are originally from Syria, Algeria, Morocco, and two from Egypt—all countries that have been known to practise torture.

The Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that only exceptional circumstances can allow for an immigrant to be sent back to a country known to practise torture. This ruling is beyond unbelievable. It has absolutely no regard for human life, the charter, or for international law.

Canada has responsibility under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, conventions against torture, and the fundamental rights and freedoms in sections 7 through 15 of the charter that prohibit arbitrary detention or imprisonment. We are supposed to provide internationally recognized procedural guarantees upon arrest and detention, guaranteed freedom from torture and ill treatment, including deportation to risk of torture and abuse, and prohibit discrimination. We have not lived up to this responsibility.

The government is more than naive and relies upon diplomatic assurances that a person deported from our country will not be tortured. We are being wilfully negligent and unlawful in allowing this to happen. Countries that practise torture lie. Their assurances are meaningless. Federal officials have even asked for written assurances from countries not to torture deportees when negative PRRA decisions have been made. It does not matter what the person's status is or what they have done; the ban on torture is absolute. There are always other options.

Should I stop now?

The Chair: Thank you very much.

You have an excellent brief, and it is unfortunate they didn't have it translated in time, but thank you very much. The members will get it. It is a very, very good brief.

Our next presenter is Ms. Haire.

• (1120)

Ms. Lynn Haire (Newfoundland and Labrador Families Adopting Multiculturally): Good day. My name is Lynn Haire, and I represent 60 families in this province who have adopted or who are in the process of adopting internationally.

The name of our association is Newfoundland and Labrador Families Adopting Multiculturally, or NLFAM. Our members are families in this province who have adopted children from China, Romania, Russia, Kazakhstan, Guatemala, Thailand, Nunavut, and the United States. We have come together both as a support group and as a lobby group to ensure that best practices are used in all aspects of the international adoption experience.

It is in the latter regard that I speak to you today to express the group's views on the Canadian citizenship process. You will notice that there is a section in the written brief on the international adoption process in Newfoundland and Labrador. I refer you to this section for reference only, because of time constraints, and I will jump right to the reasons why NLFAM feels that Canadian citizenship should be conferred upon adopted children at the time their adoptions are finalized in the countries of origin.

These children should be able to skip the landed immigrant application and apply immediately for citizenship. The following points elaborate why we believe this to be a necessary change.

The first one would be the length of the process. The adopted child immigration process is time consuming for families and takes an unacceptable length of time to finalize. The current waiting period of 12 to 18 months to have a Canadian citizenship application processed adds an additional burden on families who have already experienced a very lengthy adoption process.

There are foreign travel difficulties for adoptive families. For families to travel without the child's citizenship in place, there can be requirements for special visas, which can be costly. Travelling with a child who does not share his or her parent's citizenship can also lead to many questions asked of adoptive families by authorities in foreign countries.

Awareness of child trafficking is very high these days, and rightfully so. However, adoptive parents are often subject to suspicion and undue questioning from foreign officials, a situation that could likely be circumvented if the child just had his or her parent's Canadian citizenship in place.

Cost effectiveness should be considered. Granting Canadian citizenship to newly adopted children would undoubtedly reduce both cost to the Canadian taxpayer and workload for Citizenship and Immigration employees. Finalization of citizenship is obviously a work-intensive process, evidenced by the current 12- to 18-month wait. Either there is a backlog of such files or, unimaginably, the investigative work on these children's files is taking over a year to complete.

There is a perceived discrimination against adopted children. If a Canadian family is resident outside Canada and gives birth to a child, the child is not required to go through the landed immigrant process. Rather, the family can just apply for the child's citizenship. We perceive the different citizenship process for biological and adopted children as discriminatory against the adopted child and the adopted family.

Children already fulfill Canadian citizenship requirements. When an adult landed immigrant applies to become Canadian, he or she must meet many requirements in order to be considered for citizenship. For example, one cannot be in jail, on probation, a member of an organized gang, and so forth, and receive citizenship. Such requirements are, without exception, met by young children under a certain age. Most children adopted internationally in Canada are under the age of five.

Additionally, when adoptive applicants apply to sponsor a family class relative, they must swear that the child will not be a burden on the Canadian social safety net for at least ten years. As a result, there is no issue of financial dependency on the state. This is not a factor in determining suitability of adopted children for Canadian citizenship.

Adults who are landed immigrants must wait three years before they may apply for citizenship. Children are already allowed to apply immediately after becoming a landed immigrant. Given that there is no way that the child can fulfill any of the criteria to be turned down for citizenship as long as the adoption is legal, there is no reason why the landed immigrant step cannot be completely eliminated for internationally adopted children.

• (1125)

It is our overall assessment that because there are no further criteria for the adopted child to meet between the landed immigrant and the citizenship stage, the current process is redundant. The volume of files that is now being processed every year for adopted children can be considerably decreased, giving Citizenship and Immigration employees time to work on more pressing and complicated citizenship issues.

One final consideration is that currently the onus is on the adopting family to apply for citizenship for the child after finalization of the adoption and return to Canada. If the family does not apply for citizenship, then the child may not have a citizenship.

A documentary film recently aired on the CBC program *The Passionate Eye* told the story of the Romanian child, Alexandra Austin, who was returned to Romania by her adoptive family. At that time, she was nine years old. She went back without the knowledge of the provincial or federal authorities. She has lived her life in Romania without citizenship. Such cases are rare and completely unacceptable; however, such situations can be avoided if adopted children are granted citizenship immediately upon adoption by a Canadian family.

The United States of America and Australia are two countries that automatically confer citizenship upon internationally adopted children at the time of adoption. These processes have been in place for several years and are working well.

We are pleased that the federal government appears to have become more friendly towards adoption given the recent budget announcement of the income tax credit of up to \$10,000 for incurred adoption expenses. Therefore, we are confident that the concerns presented here today will be addressed, as they have been for adoptive parents in other countries.

In closing, Newfoundland and Labrador families adopting multi-culturally would respectfully suggest that in the new citizenship act the privilege of Canadian citizenship be conferred upon internationally adopted children when their adoptions are finalized. Then, upon entering Canada, the child will be a citizen and will therefore be welcomed wholeheartedly, not only by his or her adoptive family, but also by his or her adoptive country.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we have Mr. Summers.

Mr. Nick Summers: Thank you.

When I was preparing the presentation for the Canadian Council of Refugees, I have to admit I had some difficulty in thinking of what to say. This committee, especially the chair, is already expert in

the field of citizenship. It's a bit like bringing coals to Newcastle. I know you share many of our concerns.

I'm not going to do a long presentation. We haven't prepared a written one for you. We will await the text of a new bill before we do one of those. But we did have a number of concerns I wanted to raise. Most of these are contained in the written comments we made on the last bill, C-18, when we appeared in front of you in November 2002. It's there if you wish to refer to it.

I want to touch on one of the concerns mentioned by Remzi Cej and HuaLin Wong: the equality of all citizens. It is extremely important that the citizenship act not distinguish between citizens who were born here and citizens who chose to become Canadian citizens, especially with regard to human rights and the issue of security certificates, or whatever they would be called under a new act. A citizen, no matter what sort of citizen, shouldn't be able to have their citizenship taken away depending on whether or not they were born here.

I agree with Remzi's comment when he talked about Mr. Arar. I disagree with one thing. He said that Mr. Arar was sent to Syria illegally. The tragedy of it is that he was sent there legally. Canadian officials who participated in this seemed to have known what they were doing and had the authority to do it.

That gets to the issue of due process. We want to make sure that the new act is clear on due process. Citizenship is an important right, and before it can be taken away there should be due process. We should not have a process in the act that gives the government the power to take away citizenship, or to deny it, without due process. Under Bill C-18, the minister could deny citizenship simply because he or she was satisfied that they would not be good Canadians. The criteria were very loose, and there was no way to appeal or object.

We also want to raise our concerns about statelessness. Canada is not a signatory to the convention against statelessness. That is a shame right there. We recognize it. Statelessness is an international problem. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees made it a very important issue. Yet Canada continues to refuse to sign a convention that would do something about it.

In a citizenship act, there should not be provisions that would create statelessness. In previous drafts of the bill, we have seen wording that would result in citizenship being taken away from people, leaving them without a country. Under the old act, a foreign-born child of a foreign-born Canadian would automatically lose citizenship at age 28. We seem to take no note of the fact that they may have no other citizenship.

Those are the main concerns. We didn't want to do a long, formal presentation today, because we thought it was more important for the committee to have a chance to ask questions about our concerns. So I am going to stop there.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next, we have Mary Ennis.

Ms. Mary Ennis (Vice-Chairperson, Council of Canadians with Disabilities): Good morning. My name is Mary Ennis, and I am the vice-chair of the Council of Canadians with Disabilities, or CCD, as we call it. CCD is a national cross-disability consumer organization mandated to address systemic barriers to the human rights of persons with disabilities in Canada.

CCD has been advocating for an end to disability-based discrimination in the immigration system since Disabled Peoples International was formed in 1981. At that time, the Canadian vice-chair of Disabled Peoples International had the opportunity to visit refugee camps in Asia following the Vietnam War. He found the camps to be filled with refugees with disabilities who were stranded in these camps. No countries would take them because of their disabilities.

People with disabilities are frequently victims of prejudice. There are paternalistic and stereotypical ideas about the quality of their existence and their ability to contribute socially or economically to society. A prominent myth is the view that persons with disabilities are an excessive cost to the social and health care systems. Paragraph 38(1)(c) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act is based on this stereotype and the negative attitude that people with disabilities have little to contribute to society except an excessive demand on the health care system.

My colleague, Leslie McLeod, is going to give you some examples of that.

Ms. Leslie MacLeod (Member, Human Rights Committee, Council of Canadians with Disabilities): Good morning.

I am a member of the CCD Human Rights Committee and have been quite active in a number of social justice settings across the country. This is one of our major issues, without a doubt.

The title of our brief could have been, "Stephen Hawking could not move to Canada". There is no question that the immigration act continues to discriminate against people with disabilities, both on a direct level and in the systemic discrimination that is built into it. There is a broad impact of this discrimination on individuals with disabilities who are family members of people coming to this country. I'm sure you are not unfamiliar with these issues.

We believe that legislators have not gone as far as necessary in order to remove the disability discrimination from our act. When it was amended, the section that stated no one would be allowed in if they had a disease, disorder, disability, or other health impairment, etc., was removed. However, the clause that states people can be scrutinized if they might reasonably be expected to cause excessive demands on health or social services fulfills the same aim as the prior flat out discriminatory clause. It is in the hands of folks to determine whether an individual will cost our health or social service systems too much money. We find that to be flat out discriminatory.

Although the new act does allow for children and spouses who have disabilities to accompany a family member who has been granted status, parents and siblings are still left out of that equation. The individual himself or herself who has a disability and is applying as an immigrant may also be left out.

We have a couple of examples, which come from a paper, that occurred in the 1990s but could easily occur today. We have Mr. D,

who became paraplegic because of an automobile accident. He requested political asylum for himself and his family to come to Canada in 1988. In 1991 the application was considered justified, and they applied for permanent residence. Meanwhile, he managed to learn English and validate his previous study and work experience as a professional. In 1992 he was hired by the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations as a revenue clerk. In 1993 an immigration officer noticed his condition as a person with a disability and told him he was no longer eligible as a resident because he was incapacitated, sick, and in a wheelchair. The first medical evaluation disappeared from the files. This was followed by a long series of steps and waiting periods, resulting finally in the granting of a minister's permit for Mr. D and the acceptance of his family members as permanent residents. So here is a gentleman who went through a process, only to have it yanked out from under him because someone identified, "Oh my good lord, he's in a wheelchair. We have to get rid of this."

Another situation, which may be ongoing, is a scientist who was recruited by the University of Montreal in 1992. She is of French origin and was living and working in the United States. She has a disability. She was the first to isolate a serotonin reactive gene, which was a discovery that could be used to treat multiple sclerosis, a disease that affects over 50,000 Canadians. She has had a temporary visitor's visa that she must renew every year since her arrival because the Department of Immigration rejected her application for permanent residence with the argument that her admission would cause, or be likely to cause, excessive demand on health or social services in this country.

There is no question in our minds that there is both direct and systemic discrimination still occurring.

I'm going to move to my colleague to add to it.

● (1135)

Ms. Mary Ennis: CCD believes that immigration officials continue to be influenced by stereotypes of persons with disabilities. That suggests that we, people with disabilities, have little contribution to make to society. Negative attitudes create a major obstacle to social integration for persons with disabilities. Furthermore, the attitude that a person with a disability is a burden on the health care system goes to the issue of human dignity. By this attitude, people with disabilities are devalued and dehumanized. There is absolutely no weight at all given to the individual needs, capacities, or merits of people with disabilities, or the positive contributions that we make to society. Most importantly, persons with disabilities have a fundamental human right to be free of discrimination because of their disability. We cannot forget that.

The CCD urges Canada's legislators to remove all direct and systemic discrimination from Canada's immigration system.

Thank you.

● (1140)

The Chair: Thank you very much. We're going to go to our questions. They are five minutes, and we like to go back and forth. If we can get around twice, it would be really good.

Next is Mr. Jaffer.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks again to all the presenters this morning.

I just had a quick question. I appreciated the brief, Ms. Haire. I think you guys have done an excellent job in putting this together. You make a great case for allowing children who are being adopted to get citizenship immediately.

You cite the United States and Australia, where that is already in place, and you say it's working well. Have you identified any problems we should be aware of, so if we do adopt this, we can learn from their example?

Ms. Lynn Haire: I haven't. I guess you usually hear of problems, and that seems to be the way it is when I read things on the Internet. The problems are the things that are escalated, and you read them also, but I haven't read any problems, and I do make it my business to read everything I get my hands on.

There is the situation of children who grew up without citizenship and got in trouble with the law—nothing more than the average child would do, I guess, when they become a teenager—and got deported to a foreign country they didn't know anything about. The problems that would occur, administrative issues, are small in comparison to those bigger ones.

I haven't heard anything to date of any kind of complaint or issue encountered by families.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: I appreciate that. That was my concern, that they have grown up as small children here and then all of a sudden they don't have status and they are deported back to these countries. That would a huge concern for them, so I appreciate that.

Mr. Summers, you mentioned the issue of statelessness and how Canada, to date, has refused to sign UN conventions addressing this. I was curious as to why that is. What is your experience of why we have resisted that?

Mr. Nick Summers: Well, I can certainly tell you that I've asked many times. I've had different answers, depending on which official I talked to. The argument I mostly get is a bit circular. They say if we sign the convention against statelessness, it then entails a commitment to accept anyone who was stateless into Canada, and therefore the floodgates would be open. Well, first off, there aren't that many stateless people in the world who could get here, but let that be as it may.

The second argument you get is that we already deal with statelessness through our convention refugee process. A person who is stateless is generally mistreated in the country they are in. They don't get the right to citizenship or residence. They are second class citizens, that sort of thing, and they are caught by our refugee system.

You can then point out to them that the one argument is contradictory to the other, because on the one hand they're saying we'll throw open the floodgates, and on the other they're saying that in any event we are dealing with it. Well, if we are dealing with it, then why don't we have these floods of people coming? It doesn't make sense.

The fact of the matter is that the numbers are not an issue. Other countries have signed this. They are not inundated by huge crowds

of people seeking status in that country. It's a matter of basic human rights. The UN has recognized stateless people are a special group of people who need international humanitarian assistance. Canada simply doesn't want to do it. It doesn't want to take on one more obligation.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: I appreciate that clarification. I'm surprised at that myself.

My last question, and there might be a couple of witnesses who want to address it, is the issue of a security certificate, the process in being able to detain, and the sweeping powers the police have after 9/11. We're getting closer, not only on the citizenship cycle—we are expecting, hopefully, some sort of legislation coming forward at some point addressing the citizenship act—but we also have the review coming up on the anti-terrorist legislation in the not-too-distant future. Obviously, that component was added—a lot of the extra powers given to police in the case of detention.

I'm just curious. How would you say we should approach issues of security and the ability of people to have the freedom and equality that many of you mentioned? It's obviously a big challenge for legislators, because while trying to take security seriously, at the same time we want to do our best to protect Canadians, especially in their civil liberties. What would your advice be in approaching it? It seems almost as if we've gone too far. I would agree with your assessment of that, but how should we proceed in going forward here in addressing those issues, both within the citizenship act and in this anti-terrorist legislation?

• (1145)

Mr. Nick Summers: I will respond briefly, but I think my friends here would probably like a shot at it as well.

Briefly, I don't think we do ourselves a service by taking the short answer of responding to terrorism by saying, "We've got to clamp down. Rights are not as important as security; therefore, we're going to ignore or reduce rights in order to solve the security problem." The fact is we do our own society a disservice by going down to that level. If what we have is worth fighting for, then we should respect our own rights in fighting for it.

Terrorism is a problem; criminality is a problem. In the long term, we are not going to solve that problem by denying basic human rights, and certainly in the terrorism legislation and in the citizenship act we have to respect due process. We have to respect our own values, or we hurt ourselves.

Mr. Remzi Cej: I would add that when we were writing this brief, Lynn and I were looking at the charter, which just seems to be one of the holiest documents produced by Canadian politics or Canadian history. It is just amazing to see that all of our freedoms and rights are enshrined in this document, but it is very sad to see that in the last few years this document has been overlooked and hasn't been respected. In light of that, I think it is only a logical explanation that every Canadian, every single resident of Canada, should be treated in the same equal way, without any systematic discrimination or marginalization. In that sense, they should be provided justice, and just as Nick mentioned, we should respect those basic rights enshrined in our charter.

The Chair: I think that is it. We have run over by quite a bit.

Madame Faillie.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faillie: I just want to say that I identify closely with what you are saying. In our society, that is in Quebec, we also have a charter of rights. In fact, it's been around for 30 years, if not a little longer. Therefore, equal rights are values very near to the hearts of Quebecers. You mentioned the preservation of democratic rights. As you can appreciate, that's extremely important to us.

We are categorically opposed to citizenship revocation. We believe that persons who have obtained citizenship must be considered regular citizens who have lawfully secured that citizenship. To our way of thinking, it's totally ludicrous to create two classes of citizens. What Nick said is worth restating: What we have is worth fighting for. We're working very hard to see that this happens.

We are very concerned about the issue of security certificates, in light of the fact that the majority of members of the Arab community are francophones. Quebec is home to a large Arab community the members of which necessarily share our values. When one of our members is affected, we are all affected as well. We believe civil society is firmly behind Mr. Charkaoui and we support him.

As far as the right of appeal is concerned, consider the series of questions that we have put to the minister. I for one have moved a motion calling for the urgent need to establish the appeal section. I'm disheartened by the fact that Canada is waiting for some damning reports before it takes any kind of action. We're more proactive, or more progressive, than that. At least I believe we are. We've been working for years now to address problems that are just now coming to light.

Let me give you an example involving persons with disabilities. I have defended several such cases. One provision that is always invoked is the question of an unreasonable burden. The most disheartening fact is that these families have been selected by Quebec. We face roadblocks, when the truth is that our society would welcome these persons with open arms. It's important to mention that we take a different approach.

Quebec has a special arrangement under the Canada-Quebec immigration accord. One of the benefits of this arrangement is that we can select potential immigrants based on our own value systems. The downside is that some persons whom we would have welcomed with open arms are rejected as potential Canadian immigrants.

• (1150)

[English]

The Chair: That was very good commentary, Madame.

Does anybody want to make any comments on it?

Ms. Meili Faillie: Maybe Nick would.

Mr. Nick Summers: Very quickly, with regard to the issue you raised in mentioning the disadvantaged or the excessive burden, on a positive note, there has been somewhat of a change in the government's attitude towards government-assisted refugees, as they have made an effort in the last couple of years to bring people to Canada who were not always the best and the brightest or those who we always used to go for. We call it cherry-picking.

On a negative note, I might note that the government has used that as an excuse for reducing the number of government-assisted refugees, because they say those people cost more to settle and therefore they don't have as much money to bring in other people.

That's the only addition I would make to your comments, which I otherwise agree with.

Ms. Meili Faillie: Can I say something on the government nominees? On the government nominees that Quebec has had, the numbers are going down, but we had 2,000 convention that were ready to be implemented. These were people coming with families. These people came with money and were willing to invest.

There have been constant delays that discourage people from coming to Quebec. Right now, of course, what we are seeing in terms of higher provincial nominees is a result of encouraging other provinces to do the same as us. As well, people who are willing to come here are being encouraged to go elsewhere. This is not right.

In terms of encouraging refugees, government-sponsored refugees, we've been working hard to keep these numbers up, but other initiatives are competing and putting a lot of pressure on the system we want to have. This is something I would say is worth fighting for.

• (1155)

The Chair: Thank you.

We're now going to go to Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for your presentations this morning. They've been very helpful.

I want to come back to the issue Mr. Summers mentioned about the change in policy for refugees with disabilities or other health issues, who for so long weren't allowed to be considered to come to Canada. I notice that the Council of Canadians with Disabilities mentioned that they started working on this back in 1984. It took a while to get that change in policy, because my understanding was that it happened in recent years as well.

Could you talk to us a little bit about your experience, if you know anything about how that program has worked out and about the problems?

When I met with the Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia a little while ago, they explained that they've often found it very frustrating because they don't get good information on the needs of the people who are arriving. It causes a lot of confusion and disruption when they arrive, when they could have been ready had they had better information. It's one of the problems they're seeing. In terms of the expense, it causes more expense and unnecessary confusion at that point too. They could have been better prepared if they'd had better information from the government.

Do you have any experience of that program? Could you talk about the needs of those folks who are coming for resettlement now?

Mr. Nick Summers: Well, I don't personally know, but I've heard the stories about problems of misinformation, etc., as you have. It's not only physical disabilities that we're talking about. We also get people who are traumatized and in need of psychological help. I know that the towns and cities that have had these people resettled have been scrambling to find the services.

This goes back to something we talked about at the last session. Family unification is settling people and having them stay where they're put. Often the services and the infrastructure aren't in a location and people aren't always sent to the place that has what they need.

But for all of that, it's great to see the government finally starting to select people and not rule them out simply because they have a disabilities.

Ms. Leslie MacLeod: I think that as time goes by the systems that respond to individuals will simply have to do better in knowing the information and having it available. If somebody arrived today, because I happen to work in a disability resource centre, I would be able to hand over an array of services. It's a matter of learning the systems and being able to have that information, as opposed to at any point using that as an excuse not to assist individuals because they happen to come with some type of disability.

Most areas of the country certainly have services and things in place. It's an information gap and that can be filled.

Mr. Bill Siksay: I think it's probably a little broader than an information gap, though. I think one of the needs of folks who are arriving as refugees in Canada is housing. Often if there's a disability issue, the kinds of housing that traditionally have been available to newcomers are also probably the kinds of housing that are least appropriate for people with some physical disabilities. I think some of those issues need to be dealt with as well.

Ms. Leslie MacLeod: That's an ongoing issue in every community. I have been in communication with folks here, so I'm hoping to be able to have some preparation to have appropriate housing for someone who is due to be arriving at some point soon.

This is another issue that we as an organization are fighting for: universally accessible housing and a universally accessible society. It's not a huge piece of work we do. The more we are open within our communities to all of us, the more we will be open and welcoming to everyone. So there are many layers of organizations with many fights.

Mr. Bill Siksay: And the whole need generally for affordable housing across the country for all of our citizens is one where we have been failing dramatically as well.

I wonder if anyone wanted to comment on the issue of dual citizenship and if there are particular concerns around dual citizenship. You mentioned that difficulties Canadians get into overseas sometimes are related to the fact that they have dual citizenship, or it might be related to that. I wonder if anyone cares to comment on this issue.

Mr. Nick Summers: I don't have anything particular to say about it. You are quite correct. The particular situations that have come to the fore have been at least partly due to the dual citizenship, but it seems to me that they were more of an excuse the authorities used to

justify their actions. CCR certainly doesn't have a position for or against dual citizenship. I could give you a personal one, but that's not what I'm here for today.

• (1200)

Mr. Remzi Cej: I think the dual citizenship issue shows its face when problems like the Maher Arar case come up, where the Canadian government fails to work together with the other country and actually assists in the discrimination against a citizen, even if the citizen has no will to return to that place or no will to disclose personal information to that other place.

I came to Canada as a stateless refugee. I came from Kosovo in 2000 and I became Canadian. If I were to receive my citizenship in Yugoslavia now, or Serbia and Montenegro, as it is called now, I would be a dual citizen. But I don't think I would have an issue as to where I belong now. I belong to Canada and this is where my home is.

I think that's how Canadians should see their citizens. They should see them as belonging to the country and providing them protection no matter where they are. After all, even if they have dual citizenship, they still belong to this place, and they should take advantage of all of the responsibilities the Canadian government has for them.

Ms. HuaLin Wong: I want to add something very quickly to that. Under dual citizenship, if you are in the country outside of Canada for which you have citizenship, you are subject to their rules and their laws. That in itself may become problematic, especially in the case of Zahra Kazemi. If we didn't have dual citizenship and we were all just Canadians, it might be easier to show equality for everybody, Canadian born or naturalized, and if you leave the country and go to the country where you originated from, you would be considered Canadian, and not, for example, Iranian.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Siksay.

Next we have Ms. Beaumier.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Thank you. This has all been very interesting. I'm going to do my questions first.

For Leslie and Mary, when the Vietnamese were coming from the refugee camps, Switzerland and Denmark took the lion's share of those with disabilities. I was wondering if there have been any studies—I'm sure they'd be positive—on how they have contributed to Switzerland.

Nick, you're wrong. Just because the RCMP was involved doesn't necessarily make it legal—any more than the invasion of Iraq was legal because you have an army and a big country.

I did not realize until today that we had not signed the UN Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. Maybe that's why we have been deporting stateless Palestinians back to refugee camps in Lebanon and Algiers. That is something I'm glad you brought to our attention.

As to the mysterious five, they're not Canadian citizens. The certificates were issued under provision in 1993. I am in close contact with one of them and have offered to post bail for him.

One of the horrific parts of what's happened is that they've been abused in jail in Canada. The fellow I know has been there for five years. His children have seen him only through a glass, plate glass, and have talked to him only on a telephone. He hasn't touched any of his children, who were very young when he first went in, for five years. His mail is intercepted, and his children's mail is intercepted.

On the other hand, the Americans stand up left, right, and centre, every single day, and say that Canada is a haven for terrorists, that our immigration policy is a threat to their security. We know it is not true, but how do we respond?

The trucking hub of Canada is in my constituency, and many of my constituents depend on free access across the border. It is their livelihood; it's how they feed their families. Increasingly they are being stopped in longer and longer delays on the pretence that Canada is a haven for terrorists. How do we deal with this?

• (1205)

Mr. Remzi Cej: I think the issue is being transparent. What Canadian governments need right now is to be transparent with its citizens and with all of the people of Canada. No one in Canada right now, except for the privileged few in the courts dealing with these cases, knows why these men are being charged.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: The judges have said there's not enough evidence to hold them, but there is nothing they can do.

Mr. Remzi Cej: So we are using these people as scapegoats—to respond to U.S. pressure. I don't think human rights should depend on relations with another country. We are an independent country, and we can take care of ourselves. If this means providing freedom to all of our peoples, then that's what it should be. I don't think we should sacrifice our human rights, our freedom, and our liberties for the price of trade.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: I agree with you. My livelihood, my children's education, and food on the table should not depend on open access across the border.

Mr. Remzi Cej: So does this mean we are accepting that these men are being kept—

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: No, I don't. I offered to post bond for one of them. But what about the thousands and thousands of people who care about feeding their families? How are we going to feed them?

Mr. Remzi Cej: The problem lies in educating the foreign policy of the United States to accept the privilege of human rights. They must accept that freedom is the ultimate and that they cannot place a fellow country at risk because they are threatened by terrorism.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: However, they have exonerated themselves. It's all our fault, you know, 9/11.

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

You might now read over the press release, the media release we got, and then you can announce it at the end of this session, because that is when the minister will be making the announcement as well. That's why they sent you down here instead of being up in Brampton. They wanted to make sure you got to mention the announcement.

I know it comes as a surprise.

Anyway, we have Ms. Guergis next.

Ms. Helena Guergis: Thanks very much.

Basically, I just have a couple of comments, and they're probably directed more toward the disability association, the Council of Canadians with Disabilities.

Considering that here in Canada we really expect our disabled to live a paltry lifestyle, sometimes next to poverty—I find a lot of the disabled in my riding are living day by day, not having a lot of the things they need on a regular basis—there's no doubt that some of the immigrants and even refugees coming into Canada would be better off.

I was hoping you could tell me, what is the relationship when they come into the country? Do they go onto a provincial disability, or do we help them federally? What is the relationship there?

Ms. Leslie MacLeod: There would be an array of potential programs available, some federal some provincial. What disability-related support you will receive depends on where you live in this country. Where you live in this country will decide what income you have, what additional benefits you may or may not qualify for.

But that's the reality for all of us living in this country who have disabilities. And yes, while some folks with disabilities do live in the same kind of poverty that people living on social assistance have or senior women without pensions, etc., other people with disabilities in fact have very good lifestyles and very good incomes. There is no one stereotypical person who has a disability; we come in all sizes, shapes, abilities, and income statuses.

We do have difficulties in the disability-related supports of this country, but that's another issue that we fight on another level, the provision of those things. But fundamentally, we're all people, and I know you agree with that. It's just a last little kick at the fact that we all have the right to have an existence and to live where we choose and how we choose.

I would like to just go back to...Ms. Beaumier talked about what had happened to the people who went to other countries. The simple answer I would give is that they would have been like anybody else. People with disabilities are no different from anyone else. They would have created lives of their choosing and would have moved on from past experiences.

So, yes, there are difficulties, and it's not straightforward, but it's the same for any one of us in this country.

• (1210)

Ms. Helena Guergis: Yes. Thank you very much for that.

My experience comes provincially, working as political staff in a constituency office, hearing a lot of the concerns from those who are disabled, and I've found, often, that in the way we conduct our disabled programs here, we seem to treat them like they're on welfare and not.... I'm just wondering what kind of contributions you make to...I'm sure you do; you lobby regularly.

This is mostly a comment, so that you're aware of what my position is here.

Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next, we're going to go to Mr. Temelkovski.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I have just a couple of issues. I would like to ask Lynn, in regard to the adoptions, should there be any age limit when we grant citizenship?

Ms. Lynn Haire: Well, I can't pretend to be an expert on citizenship right now as it pertains to a regular family immigrating to Canada, but we might look at having the same kinds of age limitations.

I know when a child reaches a certain age they have to go through a process of learning about Canada and writing the test and all that. We might look at something similar to that.

But you'll find that unless it's a family member adopting another family member—and that does happen occasionally, we see that—for the most part, the children are very young. Some provincial jurisdictions have a limit on how old the child can be. They won't let you adopt over three years old. That's provincial. I think it's the rule in Ontario now. So it would be very minuscule, the number of children who would come in over...five would be maximum.

So you might look at something like that, some kind of equivalent to a family immigrating and what would be expected of a child who is of advanced age.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: HuaLin, you mentioned that it would be much easier if we had only one citizenship at a time as opposed to multiple.

Ms. HuaLin Wong: Yes, I felt that in terms of security for our citizens abroad, it would be. And maybe not one citizenship at a time; perhaps on our passports, instead of place of birth, that could be omitted...or I don't know how that would work diplomatically. Perhaps you could have just one Canadian passport when going to a foreign country. If you're a citizen of that foreign country, you are going to be subject to their laws. So if you have a Canadian passport only, and Canadian citizenship only, then perhaps that government and that country would be more willing to respect your rights in terms of our rights here in Canada.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: So would you be in support of somebody renouncing the citizenship of the country they were born in? Because you can do that. Otherwise, you have the birthrights of that country.

• (1215)

Ms. HuaLin Wong: I am not really sure, to be honest. It's a very difficult issue to speak about, because many people would like to keep the dual citizenship. I guess it would be your choice to renounce or not.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: I'm not sure you lose it just by not being in the country you were born in, even if you left it 80 years ago when you were three months old.

Ms. HuaLin Wong: In some places you can. I know in Kazakhstan, if you're out of the country for five years and you don't register with the consulate, you will lose your citizenship.

So citizenship laws across the world are very different, I guess, and are subject to that country. I can't really give you a definitive answer on that topic.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Anybody else?

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Temelkovski, you did well this time. You stayed below the limit. Thank you.

Mr. Cej, I hope you're submitting to your school the submission you made to the committee.

Mr. Remzi Cej: Yes.

The Chair: Good. It's for your master's?

Mr. Remzi Cej: No, my undergraduate degree.

The Chair: That's very good. You can flesh that out and end up with a PhD eventually.

I'll touch on one part of your presentation that I think you should probably expand on. It's the revocation of citizenship. Later on you make a point related to another topic that you can appeal a \$15 ticket. Well, with citizenship revocation, the way it is now, you cannot. As a matter of fact, if you do some background research on it—and I think that will get you to the PhD level—and go back to Bill C-63, which was one of the first recent attempts to change the act back in 1997-98, it had a provision for revocation. They weren't satisfied with the present draconian way of stripping citizenship. They were going to draft phraseology such as “knowingly misinformed”, but I'd say if you just misinformed that would be good enough.

Another one really caught me when I was parliamentary secretary and was responsible for trying to deal with this legislation through the House. They said that if they found something on people who were parents and revoked their citizenship, then at the discretion of cabinet, essentially, they could revoke the citizenship of the kids. I said in the House, this means that if you found something on my parents, coming from where they came from, even though I came here as a kid, 50 years later you could come after my citizenship. So the whole revocation thing is a very dangerous process.

We've had a lot of discussion across the country. Actually, probably the most dramatic testimony I heard was from a university professor from Simon Fraser University who was making a presentation on credentials. All of a sudden, she said, “When do I become a Canadian if my citizenship can be revoked?” She said this is bad public policy.

I suggest to you that you might check this out some more, because it certainly very much falls in line with the rest of the issues you raised. That was a very good piece of work.

Ms. Haire, I saw the same documentary on *The Passionate Eye* as you, and I'm hoping we can get that young woman to come before the committee to testify. But what really bothered me was related to adoptions. Here was a young woman who had a family—I think she had seven siblings—and because the family was poor, the mother agreed to allow a rich Canadian doctor to adopt her. A younger son got adopted out to somebody in Montreal, and those two kids were split.

I was disturbed by the young lady's statement that Canadians shouldn't have been coming over and adopting these children, because they were already in a family. The only problem these children had was being poor. I started wondering about the whole morality of doing international adoptions. I know after the tsunami there was a movement to go and adopt the kids. On one of the programs on it I saw where a doctor living next door to a young boy adopted him after he was orphaned.

I wonder if we are not better off in terms of helping the families—you know, the way we do with the foster parent program, where we actually help the whole family—and what kind of obligations we have, so that we don't go into a country and seize one of its most important assets. It's just an issue that kind of troubled me. I haven't come to any conclusions, but it does trouble me.

• (1220)

Ms. Lynn Haire: I think I would share that feeling of being troubled by that, because, as you mentioned, with the tsunami victims, luckily, somebody came to their senses and realized that the Hague Convention prevents children from being moved in times of disaster, such as war or this kind of situation, since family can come back at some point and say, hey, where is that child? So that is in place, thank God, to protect those children from being just scooped up.

There are legitimate situations where children are orphans, like in China, where their social system results in children being abandoned in bus stations and little girls are by the thousands available for adoption. Then there is the situation in Romania, where the children are in some cases placed in orphanages just because their families can't feed them. Guatemala is closed to Canada right now because of the serious problems with children being stolen from parents or being purchased. The difficulty we have is to sort out a legitimate orphan from a not-so-legitimate orphan, and that's quite a task to undertake.

I agree that giving money to help with foster care is a great option when there is that. Unfortunately, there are enough orphans in this world that we don't need to steal children from parents or buy them from people who have no money and see that as an option.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Before I go over to Ms. Beaumier, I just want to say to you that this committee is pretty non-partisan, and if you look at our reports, that becomes fairly obvious.

I also know that the minister is listening to our deliberations, if you will, and Grant is down here sending him the word, back to the ministry, as to what we have been hearing about the country. Actually, that's reinforced when I look over the media releases we have received.

I'm going to call on Ms. Beaumier from whose riding one of the releases is being put forward to announce to the delegation and others—we haven't got a copy of the release—the substance of the release.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: I will read this with enthusiasm, and with the full knowledge that there won't be any glitches once it's been implemented.

The Honourable Joe Volpe, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, today announced measures to speed up the processing of sponsorship applications for parents and grandparents coming to Canada as family class immigrants. With these new measures in place, it is expected that in both 2005 and 2006, the number of parents and grandparents immigrating to Canada will increase by an additional 12,000 each year. This triples the original 6,000 forecasted for 2005.

Minister Volpe is also announcing that Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) will be more flexible in issuing multiple-entry visitor visas to parents and grandparents. This will allow them to visit their families in Canada while their sponsorship applications are in process, as long as they are able to prove that they are visiting temporarily. Regular security and health screening will still apply and some parents and grandparents may require health coverage to be admissible to Canada.

"Today's announcement will help CIC case inventory pressures in the short term while working with the provinces, territories and communities on finding longer term solutions," said Minister Volpe. "I would like to thank stakeholders and the members of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration for their support of our efforts to improve processing time for the reunification of family members."

CIC has welcomed over one million permanent residents since 2000 and has consistently met its annual immigration targets since that time. However, the number of sponsorship applications for parents and grandparents is growing and more applications are received each day than CIC can process. To address this concern, the Government of Canada is investing \$36 million a year over two years to increase processing of parent and grandparent applications and to cover integration costs once they arrive in Canada.

"We are taking action now to address one of the most pressing issues for CIC and to make our processing system as efficient as possible. Reuniting families is a commitment of the Government of Canada as well as a key priority of Canada's immigration program," added the Minister.

Additional processing will begin immediately. In the coming weeks, CIC will add temporary duty officers and support staff at visa offices with the largest number of applications.

That's it in a nutshell. There's a longer one here—

• (1225)

The Chair: Very good. You've pre-empted the minister by five minutes.

I wonder if any of the delegation wants to comment about the numbers—if these 12,000 should be in addition to the numbers we already take in.

Mr. Nick Summers: That's what I was going to ask.

The Chair: Overall number.

Mr. Nick Summers: The press doesn't make it clear if that 12,000 is on top of the 250,000 or not. I think it's important to note that while 6,000 is the figure for the parents and grandparents who came in this year, the number used to be quite a bit higher. It used to be up around 12,000 or 13,000 a year. That number came down because of the pressure to find room for everybody else under that 250,000.

Unless the numbers have gone up, then saying we're going to bring in 12,000 more parents and grandparents means there's going to be 12,000 in some other category who won't get in.

So I think that needs to be clarified.

The Chair: So what you're saying is you would like to see the 12,000 be in addition.

Mr. Nick Summers: Yes.

The Chair: Does everybody agree?

I think it's only proper that we let Mr. Jaffer, Madame Faille, and Mr. Siksay make comments and address whether they want to see these 12,000 come out of the current numbers or be in addition to the numbers.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: I support it being in addition to the current numbers.

The Chair: Madame Faille.

Ms. Meili Faille: That's it? That short?

I'm working in translation, so let it go to Bill.

Mr. Bill Siksay: You're always working in translation, Madame Faille; I don't understand the delay in your response.

Ms. Meili Faille: I've been quicker this time—shorter.

Mr. Bill Siksay: So you should be quicker and shorter maybe.

I'm pleased that the minister is taking the situation seriously, but I share the concern that this may be at the expense of some other category of immigration. We haven't been meeting the Liberals' own 1% immigration target they've had in their policy for so many years, so I think that is a very important question.

I'm always concerned about money announcements. Often governments like to re-announce the same money over and over again. So I'm curious to know if this is new money that is being proposed or just some old recycled money that has already been announced in some other way in a previous time. I don't want to sound too cynical about the process, because it is a serious issue we have been hearing a lot about as we've travelled across the country. People have been very frustrated that their parents and grandparents haven't been able to join them. I know they are anxious to hear this kind of announcement.

I want to take some credit for this committee having pressed the minister. Minority parliaments are a wonder. Standing committees seem to have much more influence in a minority parliament, and I want us to take some credit for having given this issue some prominence across the country in our hearings recently.

I also want to pay tribute to the work of groups like Sponsor Your Parents that have been lobbying hard across the country to have all of us consider the situation of parents and grandparents. They found out, for instance, that no new applications had been processed in Mississauga for the last two years, and that some parents and grandparents might have to wait 18 years to be reunited with family. When you're talking about the category of parents and grandparents, a lot of them don't have 18 years to wait. So I think this was a really crucial issue that needed to be addressed. While I welcome the announcement, I want those other questions answered.

I just want to say that the minister also announced an expansion of the ability of international students to work off campus—

• (1230)

The Chair: That announcement will come two hours down the road, so we don't want to pre-empt it.

Mr. Bill Siksay: It doesn't say that on the paper that was given to me, Mr. Chair.

I just want to say I'm also a little concerned that that's not going to apply to students in the major centres like Vancouver, where I come

from. Students at Simon Fraser University in my riding are also facing significant pressures about their ability to work off campus and to work in Canada after graduation. I know the international students at Simon Fraser University will be disappointed in that announcement as well. But it is good that we've expanded the ability of students to work off campus and have made that consistent across the country, whereas there was a difference between the big centres and the smaller centres in the previous policy.

I hope the ability to work after graduation will be a consistent policy across the country and we won't have students with differing opportunities, depending on where they're living in Canada right now.

The Chair: Now Mr. Jaffer is asking for more time.

Madam Faille.

Ms. Meili Faille: Now I'm ready—already translated.

I'm always cautious when there are announcements like that. I will believe it when it works. For example, when we had spouses in the last announcement aiming at family reunification, we went through the process once and it worked fine. It was laborious and complex, but we still managed to get one of my constituents back. But on the second one, the file is similar, but it's very complicated. It seems there's no simple process, although the files have exactly the same characteristics. We just went through another person.

So I'm always cautious when there are announcements and when money is being announced. I just read the translated version a few minutes ago, and I think it's very encouraging. But we'll analyze it and consult, and then the process takes a long....

Last Friday, it was a no-no for one of my constituents. So I find it very troubling to see this announcement, but at the same time it's encouraging. So I will take the file that was a no-no, put it back in the yes-yes, and process it.

I always look at it from a human perspective, and there are people we are refusing. It's a burden through the system. If the minister announces that today, I'll believe it when it works. So I'll take my no-no file, bring it to the yes-yes file, process it through, and see the results. Maybe two or three months down the road I'll be able to tell you it's working. I don't want to be too enthusiastic until I've gone through it.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Again I will underline the fact that we have been able to work as a committee in as non-partisan a way as possible. We have arrived at a consensus and have been sending strong messages. The minister has been listening on that basis, so that's one of the payouts we have. We seem to have consensus that we want to see these numbers, in addition to the numbers we now have.

We also want to make sure this is new money. I think it is new money. It looks like new money, but we'd be very disappointed and upset if it were not new money. That seems to be the consensus of the committee. Grant, you can send on that message.

I want to thank you all for your input and just mention that we're looking for a citizenship oath, so write it out and send it to us. We're looking for the preamble.

Mr. Cej, I agree with you in total that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms is our secular holy book. When you have people from every nationality, creed, and race living in a country, you really need that. We collectively subscribe to something to make sure we preserve a country that is very much a model for the world.

Thank you very much for your participation.

We are now adjourned.

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