



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

CIMM • NUMBER 031 • 1st SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, February 1, 2007

—
Chair

Mr. Norman Doyle

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

Thursday, February 1, 2007

•(1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, CPC)): I would like to call our meeting to order.

Good morning, everyone.

On behalf of our committee, I want to welcome our witnesses today. They are here to speak about refugee issues and private sponsorship. I want to welcome witnesses from the Mennonite Central Committee Canada, the United Church of Canada, and the Elected Sponsorship Agreement Holders.

Welcome to all of you. We have about an hour and forty minutes to deal with your statements or to deal with your issues. We'll begin with opening statements. After you finish your statements, of course, committee members may want to make comments or engage you in questioning and what have you.

I will turn it over to our witnesses for opening statements. Thank you.

Mr. Ed Wiebe (Coordinator, National Refugee Program, Mennonite Central Committee Canada): I'm Ed Wiebe, and I'm with the Mennonite Central Committee in Winnipeg.

Mennonite Central Committee Canada has been a sponsorship agreement holder—or SAH, as we call them—continuously since the inception of the program in 1979. We operate the program out of five provincial offices that connect with more than 600 rural and urban congregations throughout Canada. We estimate that about half of those have been engaged with this program at one time or another.

There continues to be good support for and good interest in the program. However, given the many other opportunities that groups and individuals have to participate voluntarily in other things, and given the challenges in the program currently, we cannot assume that private sponsorship will retain its prominence if it does not very soon start to also show its relevance and responsiveness again.

Canada's private sponsorship program started with a designated class group out of Southeast Asia in the late 1970s. It was the so-called boat people crisis at the time. I don't think anyone at that time imagined how long and how successful this program would become, resettling literally tens of thousands of additional privately sponsored refugees to Canada.

Those were the golden years, but that first group was also an exception. They were accepted en masse. Although exceptions continue today, the program deals mostly with refugee populations where the merits of each individual's case must be assessed.

For the local sponsorship groups that raise the money and settle the refugees in their communities, this shift in complexity is not really important. It's not something they spend a lot of time on. They just want to make a difference in someone's life in a measurable, effective, and hands-on way, but due to current frustrations with years of waiting and numerous case rejections, they are becoming frustrated, rapidly losing faith that this is still a responsive and effective mechanism. We are seeing much smaller arrival numbers, while the upfront costs that we incur and the effort that is put in to produce those results have escalated exponentially.

One of our concerns as a sponsorship agreement holder is our own lack of direct contact with refugees at the source, with the environment they live in, and with the groups directly working with them out there. While we hear compelling third-party voices advocating on behalf of situations and individuals here, we are concerned about the cries abroad that are muted by distance and other barriers.

Last spring, I and six of my colleagues from Canada and two based in Africa spent several weeks exploring refugee protection issues in Kenya and South Africa, including many NGO visits, visits with UNHCR hubs and branch offices, and also visits with the respective Canadian high commissions in each of those countries. Something that stands out was a comment we heard several times from NGOs involved in resettlement. They noted how difficult it must be for Canadian SAHs to assess refugee cases exclusively from within Canada when they find it incredibly difficult to do that right at the source.

That echoed what our MCC staff heard or did in Thailand. They used to say to us during the Southeast Asia years that it was difficult for them as well. They were working in identification and assessment of cases and other humanitarian assistance at the time. They helped us assess cases, and they also gave us valuable insights and reports into specific issues, trends, and biases they were seeing on the ground. Such a more integrated assessment approach greatly aided our ability at that time to sponsor those most vulnerable, but, as noted, that was also a designated class movement.

When we then started to work with Central American refugees who were assessed against the full refugee definition, for the first time on a large scale we were also faced with having to assess based on the credibility of the individual claim as well. It was at that time that sponsorship agreement holders entered into a new era.

• (1110)

As both a relief and development NGO and an SAH, MCC feels it is important for us to focus more energy on field-based assessment. We are confident that we are now doing a vigilant and effective job on our in-Canada role, and that is something we will be vigilant about and continuing.

Staff training and competence have been greatly increased, and we acknowledge the support and training provided by the refugee sponsorship training program, which CIC funds. It aids our own efforts in being competent, yet our acceptance rate is still only around 50%. CIC has cited this as a major reason for the current program problems. We should remember, though, that such statistics are based on cases submitted between 30 and 40 months ago. I can't imagine a school pointing to a poor test result of a student in grade five who is currently acing grade eight.

We would also like to draw your attention to the fact that Canada accepts only about 80% of cases referred by the UNHCR, which has extensive field operations to do refugee status determination. So even if we use our 40-month-old rejection rate, UNHCR achieves only a 30% better rate—and I would remind you of the millions of dollars they spend in doing those determinations.

Currently, MCC is exploring what it would take for us to move back into more overseas case identification and referral. We are just starting an informal pilot approach in one refugee-producing region, but entering into this on a larger scale would require significantly increased internal commitment and resources. Identification and referral overseas would, though, allow us to better address the full needs of the refugee populations in regions where we may have some capacity to make a difference. However, any of our efforts are going to fail if visa offices continue to be inadequately resourced, if long processing times are not addressed, and if the prevailing negative attitude toward private sponsorship continues in Canada's missions abroad and within CIC itself.

How can we increase our work and resources overseas successfully in protecting more refugees when processing times are measured in years? Does our plan make any sense when new cases will be placed into the back end of the current long backlog? We would be wasting any newly developed resources and capacity overseas in ways that our board and supporting sponsoring groups would not accept. We need a commitment from this committee to make the backlog issue and the clearance of backlogs a priority.

We would also encourage government to look at ways in which it might support NGOs in broader new approaches—for example, looking at the models of Canadian cooperation like the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, which is an excellent example of cooperation. I'm sure there are other types of program delivery overseas that could be explored.

It was also quite noteworthy on our Africa tour how genuinely UNHCR and others invited more dialogue on partnerships. It wasn't merely a pitch for money either.

As one last point before our conclusion, we recognize also that not all SAHs have the capacity to adopt or have an interest in adopting approaches overseas and so on. Therefore, we may need to look at different types of sponsorship agreements that would be appropriate for the capacities of different SAHs.

In summary, what I've been talking about and asking for is, first, making the backlog of private sponsorship cases an immediate priority; secondly, exploring and developing new types of overseas partnerships that recognize and support SAHs that have capacity and interest to explore those; and lastly, considering different sponsorship agreement models, building on the international capacity that some SAHs could bring to this program.

Thanks for your attention.

• (1115)

The Chair: Thank you.

I now invite the representatives from the United Church of Canada, Sarah Angus and Heather Macdonald, to make a statement, if they wish.

Ms. Sarah Angus (Member, Justice, Peace and Creation Advisory Committee, United Church of Canada): We come here today believing in the potential of this humanitarian admissions program, the private refugee sponsorship. We believe in its ability to engage civil society.

Resettlement affords a durable solution to refugees. Private sponsorship in particular facilitates newcomers' integration into Canada and the necessary adaptation of the host community.

Ms. Heather Macdonald (Program Coordinator, Refugee and Migration, Justice and Global Ecumenical Relations, United Church of Canada): But we are deeply troubled by the backlog and the processing time, and we feel the program is at the point of collapse. It needs an overhaul and systemic change, far more than what is being addressed at this moment, and there is a deflection of all problems at the feet of sponsors.

The United Church believes that responding to desperate refugees is our moral imperative. We want refugees in need of protection, or a durable solution, to arrive in Canada. We emphatically would absorb visa-office-referred cases, if only they were made available to us.

As it is, we spend hours assessing congregational submissions so that only "good" applications go forward. The department is asking us to screen even more intensely and to further restrict our numbers—in effect, discouraging private sponsorship.

Submitting applications for refugees with family members in Canada is not wrong. The Geneva Convention definition does not define a refugee as someone with no relatives in the country of resettlement.

We feel that the fixation the government seems to have with our referring cases to this program is much akin to—and I don't know who may have seen the *Yes Minister* series, when Sir Humphrey Appleby would not let the patients go to the hospital because he wanted it to stay clean and pristine. At times, we feel that is the impression we get about the refugee program: they don't want refugee referrals.

Ms. Sarah Angus: Sponsors do not submit refugee sponsorships to keep busy, to give false hope to refugees, or to waste visa officers' time. We want the program to work, and we're deeply frustrated by high refusal rates that come after years of waiting and often changed circumstances in the country of origin.

Sponsorship is one of the few routes to protection. Refugees cannot present themselves to Canadian missions abroad; they must be referred to them by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, by Amnesty International, or by a sponsorship agreement holder. Therefore, sponsorship agreement holders are a vital support to Canada fulfilling its international responsibility to refugees.

Over the last 27 years, sponsors have brought hundreds of thousands of refugees to Canada. We have invested time, energy, and our own funds in helping them integrate into Canada. We offer 24-hour support to these newcomers in our communities of expected resettlement, which span the country and are not just in large urban centres. We also advocate for sponsored refugees and help them access appropriate social services.

For our part, we screen cases and consult with partners, whether churches or agencies, in refugee-producing countries and countries of asylum. We visit refugee camps and we visit urban refugees. Our priority is to protect individuals and provide durable solutions to groups of human beings who are otherwise warehoused and forgotten.

Visits abroad are informative. We encounter some excellent visa officers, but many others view the program and view us with a lot of suspicion. Missions abroad are not well resourced to handle private sponsorship, and it seems that private sponsors must bear the brunt of bringing refugees to the program.

• (1120)

Ms. Heather Macdonald: In Canada, we've watched asylum and resettlement being reinterpreted. We're told now that changes like the safe third country agreement, which is a reinterpretation of the Geneva Convention, would allow for enhanced resettlement, yet numbers of government-assisted refugees remain stagnant, and years have been added to the private sponsorship process. Add to this the extended family members, as those of us who are inundated with appeals know, who have no access to Canada.

Asylum and immigration are now limited, protected, so it's no surprise that people with valid protection needs turn to private sponsorship or the provincial nominee programs. Admission policies that deny labour and demographic needs as well as humanitarian responses are short-sighted: family reunification and humanitarian programs are also the source of good immigrants, yet Canada, unlike Australia, has no special additional humanitarian program for people who are in refugee-like situations but have family in Canada.

It's also worth noting that Australia admits the same number of refugees—but in the course of months, not years.

Ms. Sarah Angus: Migration will be a major issue in this century. We want and need this program to work better.

The United Church has several recommendations on this issue.

First, invest financial and human resources to reduce processing times and to address the backlog. A humanitarian program that takes three to four years is not humanitarian.

Another suggestion is to make visa-office-referred cases available in a timely fashion. The United Church has sponsors waiting to help today, but sadly, we can't get enough VOR cases or a way of working that meets our needs.

Hoping to model change, the United Church piloted a visa-office-referred project. It worked well, and at its conclusion we committed to taking at least 20 VOR referrals annually. The problem is, there has been no delivery on this by CIC, and we can't work alone.

Ms. Heather Macdonald: We ask you to support sponsorship agreement holders in their professional development and to support the ongoing training of our hundreds of sponsors across the country, including support for eligibility training. This has begun with CIC. It needs to be broadened.

Sponsorship agreement holders want to continue to name refugees in need of resettlement, help Canada meet its global responsibility, and bring in additional numbers. However, I personally believe that the latest move—the even more intense screening—is a form of role confusion. I see it as my role to encourage our church to respond to refugees, not discourage them. I am having to say no more than I can ever say yes, and I have no visa-office-referred cases to refer them to.

Ms. Sarah Angus: The United Church requests that you regard us as allies, not adversaries. Consider how many private Canadians were, are, or could be involved, and the difference it makes to the tenor and receptivity of the host community, Canada. Sponsorship is hands-on; it's civil engagement that extends to all parts of the country, costs the government nothing, and builds the cosmopolitan democracy of our future. This is how we learn about ourselves and others, and it's how we learn to embrace our differences.

We also urge you to adapt immigration and refugee programs to meet Canadian needs. We need some equivalent of an assisted relative class. There also needs to be room for unskilled labourers, like the ones who built this very country.

Ms. Heather Macdonald: And, please, make the private sponsorship program work. We believe that the department and the sponsorship agreement holders share a common desire to make it work, but we ask you, our representatives in Parliament—especially those of you here today—to hold us to it.

The program has domestic integrity; it's got global credibility; it's Canadians acting responsibly to build a better tomorrow. It's intercultural engagement that works.

Thank you for your attention.

● (1125)

The Chair: Thank you for that very interesting presentation.

I now call upon Carolyn Vanderlip from the Anglican Diocese of Niagara, and Martin Mark III from the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto. Welcome.

Mr. Martin Mark III (Coordinator, Refugee Sponsorship, Catholic Crosscultural Services, Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto, Elected Sponsorship Agreement Holders): Hello, everybody. My name is Martin Mark III, and this is my colleague, Carolyn Vanderlip.

We are two of the representatives elected by 89 sponsorship agreement holder organizations, or SAHs, from across Canada to represent them on the NGO-Government Committee on Private Sponsorship of Refugees program.

The committee, which also includes representatives from Citizenship and Immigration Canada, was formed to allow for a productive exchange of ideas to improve the program's operation, to enhance communication and coordination, and to identify and recommend solutions.

The private sponsorship program is an amazing demonstration of sincere generosity and goodwill from a wide diversity of organizations: faith groups, ethno-specific organizations, development organizations, and human rights organizations right across Canada.

We resettle refugees to both small communities and large cities, and participation in the program is internationally well recognized as a factor in fostering hospitality and acceptance of newcomers among average Canadians, average citizens. It is multiculturalism at its best.

The program enhances Canada's humanitarian commitment toward refugees. Private sponsors in Canada resettle more refugees than the entire programs of many other resettlement countries together. Approximately \$44 million is spent annually by private sponsors, while the cost to the government is minimal in this program.

But we believe that this wonderful program is in jeopardy and in crisis. A backlog of more than 14,000 or 15,000 people has resulted in processing times of three, four, or five years, or even longer. This is not effective protection for refugees who need a solution now.

Sponsoring groups are becoming extremely discouraged and can easily use their time and resources elsewhere for one of the many other worthy causes demanding their attention. Still, there is capacity and enthusiasm in the sponsoring community to do even more. The U.S. and the UNHCR have approached Canada to take more Iraqi

and Palestinian refugees, and the government is looking to private sponsors for help.

Group processing will continue this year. We want to help, just as we have by responding to emergency requests and special programs such as those for Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and the Karen, but many of us already have our resources, both financial and human, committed to cases in the backlog. We don't know when, or even if, they will arrive, and if we overcommit ourselves, we risk a default in our sponsorship agreement.

Last year CIC asked sponsors to limit their undertakings to fewer than 4,000 persons per year for the next three years to allow them to clear the backlog. CIC committed to processing 6,000 or 7,000 persons, no different from previous years.

You know, asking humanitarian organizations to cut back on the number of people they are helping is an extremely difficult request, but for the future of the program, sponsors limited their submissions to even fewer than what was asked; CIC made final decisions on even more than they committed to. This should result in a decrease in the inventory.

Ms. Carolyn Vanderlip (Coordinator, Refugee Sponsorship, Anglican Diocese of Niagara, Elected Sponsorship Agreement Holders): But sponsors will not continue to limit their submissions severely without seeing a stronger commitment from our government and more progress.

When we met with Minister Solberg, we requested that CIC commit to processing 9,000 persons per year. Otherwise, even after last year's progress, it will take not three but another ten years to clear the backlog.

We also recommended that the target range of 3,000 to 4,000 persons be increased to allow for more landings. The upper range was subsequently increased to 4,500.

But in recent years, CIC has had difficulty meeting the lower end of the range. Without more resources, increasing the upper end will make no difference. The department says that the program's high refusal rates are because sponsoring groups are not submitting the right cases and are using the program as a back door for people who are not refugees but who have relatives in Canada and no other way to be reunited with their families.

Although CIC has the authority to suspend or revoke the agreement of any sponsorship agreement holder who's not following the terms of their sponsorship agreement, they have taken no action against any SAH for knowingly or deliberately submitting cases that do not meet refugee criteria.

Micheline Aucoin, the director general, stated in a letter to SAHs that,

Family reunification is a legitimate use of the PSR program, *providing* the applicants overseas are refugees first and whose only durable solution is resettlement to Canada.

We wholeheartedly agree. Why would sponsoring groups choose to submit cases that would be refused, resulting in increased refusal rates, larger backlogs, and, worst of all, giving false hope to desperate people? Sponsorship agreement holders assure us that the need for protection is always the main criterion in selecting cases.

Janet Siddall told you that sponsors freely admit that they are responding to people in their community who are asking for help bringing their family members from abroad. As long as newcomers have brothers and sisters, parents, uncles, aunts, and cousins left behind in refugee situations, sponsors will be approached to help bring their relatives to safety.

The UNHCR recognizes the importance of family resettlement. Their selection criteria for the Iraqi refugees they will be referring for resettlement will include refugees with family members in the resettlement country.

Family separation in refugee resettlement is inevitable. As you know, private sponsors recently sponsored many government-referred cases of Karen refugees from Burma who have spent years in refugee camps. Great care was taken during the selection process to prevent family separation. Yet private sponsors are being approached to bring family members from other camps. These family members are also refugees, and sponsoring them into Canada provides them with protection.

This is often referred to as the echo effect. The beauty of our Canadian private sponsorship program is that it can respond to requests to sponsor both refugees referred by visa offices and refugees identified through organizational contacts overseas, human rights organizations, or family members already in Canada.

We don't claim that sponsors have always done a perfect job of screening, which is something that even the most highly trained visa officer can't claim. But many sponsors have participated in eligibility training provided by CIC. There's a better flow of information about CIC, giving them better screening tools and information about eligibility, country information, and changing country conditions, etc. Frankly, there is also a much greater awareness of the need to screen.

But cases in the pipeline were submitted before sponsors had these tools. The program is haunted by the past, causing negative perceptions within CIC and overseas visa posts. We want to move the program forward. Focusing on the past will not produce positive outcomes for anyone, whether sponsor, refugee, or government.

Thank you.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you.

Those were very interesting presentations. Thank you very much.

We'll now go to questioners and people who want to make comments on our committee.

We start our seven-minute round with Mr. Karygiannis.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Good morning, and thank you for coming to the committee. Indeed your work is of interest.

One of the things that got my attention was the United Church saying, with Sir Humphrey Appleby in *Yes Minister*, that if you build hospitals, people will come. Also you were saying that if we have a refugee system that works, certainly people will apply to it.

I'm wondering if you would comment on this. Also you said that some of the visa offices were excellent, but some view you as adversaries. Could you please let us know which visa posts saw you as adversaries, if you remember? This is very important for the record, as you've stated that some of them have...and some of your recollection of what happened at those visits.

I also understand that some of you met with the minister on October 1 and put forward some recommendations. Am I correct? Could you please elaborate on that? Or if you didn't, what would you like to see done?

The Chair: Anyone who wishes to make a comment on that may do so.

Ms. Heather Macdonald: I would be willing to name the one particular post that I found was excellent when I was last there; it was Kenya, about a year and a bit ago—very helpful, very receptive. I was bringing a delegation of young leaders from our church, and they were shown the program. It was explained to them.

I was in Cairo in the past, where the treatment was quite different, and I'll let my other colleagues say what they've experienced at some of the posts they visited.

Certainly the perception seems to be that somehow we are doing things wrong. Even before a visa officer is put in place, they go with the attitude, "Well, the private sponsorship program is the lowest priority and they really don't know what they're doing", so they start looking for the wrongs in it. When you look for wrong, that's what you see; you don't see the right. So that's really what I think we're encountering.

Perhaps Ed and then Carolyn and Mark—

• (1135)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mrs. Macdonald, was it only Cairo, or was there another post where you encountered difficulties—before Ed and your colleagues—?

Ms. Heather Macdonald: Well—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: I don't think you should be afraid to name the posts.

Ms. Heather Macdonald: Cairo was not a pleasant experience. A couple of years ago, Kenya was not a pleasant experience, but more recently it was. I was impressed by the potential of some of those visa officers; I was really heartened. Colombia I also found helpful, but—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Let me name some posts and maybe you can nod your head.

Islamabad.

Ms. Heather Macdonald: I have not been to Islamabad.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Damascus, Sri Lanka.

Ms. Heather Macdonald: No, I haven't been there personally.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: New Delhi.

Ms. Heather Macdonald: No.

Mr. Jim Karygiannis: Okay.

The Chair: We're going to try to keep it as informal as possible, so just feel free if you have comments to make on anything you hear one of our committee members bring up.

Mr. Martin Mark III: Thank you.

Very briefly, to address this issue about the visa post approach, without evaluating data, Iraqi refugees are going mostly to countries covered by the Canadian visa post in Damascus, and the other visa post is in Ankara. The acceptance rate in Ankara is around 70%, while in Damascus it's around 30%. That shows that if we get Iraqi refugees in big numbers from Damascus, the impression is that the assessment is not fair.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: What would you like to see done in Damascus to achieve a fair assessment?

Mr. Martin Mark III: I believe that if we had open communication with CIC to make sure we assess the cases in the same way—or the case management, case review—we'd be ready to take into consideration the submitted information and go through cases, at least on par. We could have a fair procedure at every visa post, regardless of the attitude of the visa officer.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Mark, what I'm getting is that it's piecemeal between posts. One post assesses one way and another assesses another way. There is no overall structure or guidance from the minister's office in how to deal with refugees and how to deal with you. Am I correct in that?

Mr. Martin Mark III: That's right. I think the status determination of the refugees and those who need an assessment for resettlement has a lot of subjective elements. So it's definitely very difficult to assess in the same way in different visa posts.

In big numbers, however, we must say that there is definitely a significant difference, and the Damascus and Ankara examples show what I mean. I'm not claiming that everybody who is in the process should be approved. What I'm saying is in fair procedure, transparency and accountability have to be issues we address, and then we will be satisfied even with refusals. That's not the problem.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Should the minister's office, through the particular ADM who is looking at this, set out goals and guidelines and give procedures that all the visa posts should follow? Should they consult with groups such as yours, because there are other groups out there—be it other private churches or stakeholders—that have been doing this for a number of years?

In view of the inconsistency you are talking about, should there be a guideline that all visa posts should be following? There's a book that says this is the person who qualifies to emigrate to Canada and there's a guideline on how to go about doing this. What I'm hearing from you and what I've witnessed—and I'm sure members of this committee certainly will vouch for this—is that every post deals differently.

Should there be a guideline where it says that this is what you've got to do—with no ifs, ands, or buts—and this is how you must deal with groups that are interested in this?

Mr. Martin Mark III: I think that would be an excellent approach. The last NGO-government committee even started to talk about how the NGOs could share information about country of origin and its human rights and refugee situations with CIC and then we would be on the same page.

I definitely believe that more communication should open up, and if guidelines and accountability and transparency issues were put in place, it would definitely help.

• (1140)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: You talked about a meeting. Was that a meeting with government officials?

Mr. Martin Mark III: Yes, we are on the NGO-government committee on refugee sponsorship.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: When was that meeting, sir?

Mr. Martin Mark III: The last conference call was a week ago.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: And a year, two years or three years ago, was there any movement toward more communication, and has it changed now with communication building up and things getting better?

Ms. Carolyn Vanderlip: I think as far as the committee goes, it's been in existence about 13 years, or something like that, so it's a longstanding thing. Communication over the years has been good. The committee together has achieved a lot of good things.

I think recently we have been working on developing a stronger relationship, and there has been, as I mentioned in my presentation, more information coming from CIC to sponsors about what the country conditions are and what CIC's view is of certain refugee populations, which helps us when we're trying to determine eligibility.

What Martin is saying is that we should also be feeding—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: One quick question: has your communication with the department over the years been better, or has it hit a stumbling block somewhere along the line in the last year or two or three years?

Ms. Carolyn Vanderlip: Well, I've only been on the committee for three years. We probably hit stumbling blocks from time to time. Overall, I'd say our communication is not bad, but I would certainly like to see it better. We do work a lot on operational issues day to day, but I would certainly like to see us working on some of these higher levels we talked to you about today.

The Chair: Thank you. That was eight minutes, but that's fine.

Who do we have next?

Madame Faillle.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faillle (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome to our committee. Many of you have been here before.

I have been a member of this committee since 2004. I've had an opportunity to discuss the refugee problem with several of you. I have with me some departmental figures from July 28 last. It appears that world wide, there is a backlog of approximately 14,500 cases, with many of the applicants from Africa. Out of a total of 8,454 cases, nearly half are from Nairobi and the other half from Damascus. Asia is the second most important region in terms of the number of sponsorship applications received, specifically the Islamabad office, as my colleague mentioned.

Ms. Vanderlip, you mentioned earlier that you had met with departmental representatives who expressed views on certain regions. Would you care to share with the committee the directives issued or the concerns of the department with respect to Africa and Asia?

[English]

Ms. Carolyn Vanderlip: I'm sorry, but I need you to clarify that question because I don't remember speaking about directives for specific regions.

Ms. Meili Faille: Okay. You mentioned that the department has explained their views to you and that it's helping you to apply for sponsorships. So what are their views of Africa and Asia?

Ms. Carolyn Vanderlip: Oh, okay.

My colleagues might have to help my memory a little bit. Let's see. We had a communication about the southern Sudanese about a year ago from the department, basically telling us that in the future they didn't see a need for resettlement because of the repatriation that would be going on in that region, and also because of the backlog. So if we were to submit a case, even a year ago, when they sent that directive to us, it wouldn't be seen for quite some time, and probably by the time the department looked at the application, the repatriation would be well under way. And even had the case been eligible when submitted, it would not be eligible by the time they got to it. That, of course, is one of our concerns; because of the long processing times, country conditions change and applications that were eligible at the time they were submitted are no longer eligible three, four, or five years later when circumstances have changed.

• (1145)

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: Therefore, in view of the delays, there is a greater likelihood that because of ongoing repatriation programs, applications for resettlement will be refused or groups will simply abandon their efforts. That is the main reason, is it not?

[English]

Ms. Carolyn Vanderlip: The program can't be responsive. As my colleague was saying to me earlier, nobody can predict three or four years from now where there's going to be a need for resettlement, yet we're submitting applications today. We know there's a need for resettlement today, but we certainly can't predict three or four years from now that there will be. If we didn't have this backlog in processing times, the program could be much more responsive.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: However, the delays are so lengthy that in some countries or regions, people are repatriated to their country of origin before their application can even be processed.

Who participates in these meetings? If disputes do arise, do you manage to come to some kind of understanding with the department in order to address problem and challenges or find solutions?

[English]

Ms. Carolyn Vanderlip: It's interesting that you ask about attendance on the committee. On the SAH side, we are elected for a three-year term, and we can go for a second term if we wish. I'm in my fourth year now.

On the CIC side, the problem I and my colleagues who have been on the committee before me have observed is that people change from meeting to meeting. We find we're constantly starting from square one. It's very difficult to make progress when we see new people at each and every meeting. There are really very few people who have been constant. I realize that people do change positions within the department, and some of that is inevitable, but it certainly makes it very difficult for us to make any kind of progress when you have to explain the issue from square one to somebody new. This has been a major problem.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: The delays surrounding sponsorships are nothing new. After the events of 2001, greater emphasis was put on security. However, has Citizenship and Immigration Canada taken any steps to address some of your concerns? You mentioned resources. For example, there is a backlog of 4,000 applications at the Nairobi office. Have you seen any progress or at least a determination on the part of the department to assign some resources to these particular offices?

[English]

Mr. Ed Wiebe: If I could start with that one, having been on the committee before, I concur with what was said about membership. We had quite solid membership on the CIC side during those years. They would explain when there was a change in their membership so we wouldn't be surprised by new members we weren't familiar with. There was collegiality and a commitment to that during those times. I can't speak as much to the current status, but that was our experience at that time.

The Chair: Okay, that's seven and a half minutes.

Mr. Siksay.

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

I want to thank you all for being here today. I really do believe this program is a great example of policy and program delivery in Canada. It's something I think we've been honoured for by international organizations, by the United Nations. I want to thank you all for your commitment to it, under some difficult circumstances, as you've made very clear.

I want to ask Heather, and maybe Sarah, to say more about the visa-office-referred program you put in place. It sounds to me that you were trying to do an end run around the criticism you were constantly hearing and come up with another model that addresses the concerns. But it also sounds like the department hasn't seen fit to run with it. I'm wondering if you can tell us more about the model and the response you had.

•(1150)

Ms. Heather Macdonald: It was a model. It was small-scale. We committed in the 25th anniversary year of sponsorship to taking 25 cases that were referred by this office as a way of honouring the beginnings of the program.

We were able to do that. We were receiving numbers of cases from both Kenya and Bogota; hence I had very good relationships at that time with the visa officers. We took them in numbers of six or seven at a time. We matched very carefully and appropriately across Canada. We had community profiles matched to refugee profiles. We were documenting it and evaluating it, as I understood the CIC was.

We had some worries that we might lose everyone to secondary migration and wondered how we would handle that. That proved not to be the case, actually. We did lose one or two. We had some medical problems that weren't noted in the profile, but it was a wonderful program, and it whetted the appetite. People just came out of the woodwork to help.

I do remember checking with some colleagues in the department about this time a year ago, before we did a promotional piece in our in-house magazine, our observer mandate, stuff like that.

Can this continue? I was assured it could continue. I put the campaign out and was greeted with all these wonderful applications in the fall. I cannot get any other visa-office-referred cases. And in our church it's getting critical. We have many caught in the backlog. We now have this surge forward. I can't offer any visa-office-referred cases, and frankly, we're looking at it and wondering why we should be investing resources. This isn't a good use of our time. We should move on.

I have been involved in the program since 1979, as has Ed. I'm deeply committed to it, but if my supervisor says there's nothing there to commit to, I have to move on.

Mr. Bill Siksay: My goodness, that's pretty serious stuff.

Ms. Heather Macdonald: It is serious.

Mr. Bill Siksay: At this point, if you're somebody who's been that directly involved for that long and you have run up against that kind of a brick wall—It sounds as though you've been trying to accommodate the concerns you've been hearing.

Ms. Heather Macdonald: Yes. In my annual report to CIC, I said that we would take a minimum of 20 visa-office-referred cases a year. We are working to our ultimate goal, which is that 50% of those in our program would be named by sponsors, that they would be sponsor-referred in Canada. The other 50% would be referred by the visa officers, who would give us cases that needed a home.

We are open. We're involved in the care and group processing, but we're not so committed to a group processing model, because they tend to come in clumps, so we have to react quickly. We would like a steady flow. We're there to do our screening, to do our training, to get the profiles, and to do some clustering of groups together so they get support.

I think there's something there, and I don't understand what the problem is.

Mr. Bill Siksay: You've had no feedback from CIC about what the problem is. Were there questions raised with the initial program?

Ms. Heather Macdonald: No. What I have heard is that they can't give the United Church special treatment, and I'm saying that I'm not asking for special treatment. Make it available to every SAH in the country. That's all I've heard.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Martin, you used an interesting statistic. You said that there was \$44 million that private sponsors put into this kind of resettlement work annually, and that's at the current levels. Can you say a bit more about where that number comes from? I gather there would be a potential to increase that dramatically if the numbers were increased.

Mr. Martin Mark III: Yes, thank you. Generally, when a sponsor wants to submit an undertaking, then we must meet the criteria. One of the criteria is that we show that we have all the funds available, that we can take financial responsibility at least for one year, and in some special cases for two or three years, for the newcomer upon arrival. Even in the program we bring these people in as landed immigrants, and they are able to work, and I'm very happy to see that in most of our SAHs, 70% to 80% of the people become taxpayers within a year or even less. Still, this money has to be put aside, and we must make sure that we meet this CIC criteria.

There is public data that says that once I submit a sponsorship application for one single individual, I am liable for \$9,500. For a couple, it's \$15,200. So basically these funds are frozen and waiting, because once we submit a case, we have to put this money aside, and we cannot use it for anything else, because you never know when the refugee will come. There is not even an estimated time when the person will be here, so we must be ready.

This causes a huge problem in the system, that all our human resources are committed, and all our funds are committed to this. We take it very seriously. It's very unusual to have a default or breakdown through a fault of the sponsor. So I think this commitment makes it very hard for us when there is an average processing time of three or four years.

•(1155)

Mr. Bill Siksay: So is the \$44 million figure you used just the money the sponsors have to put aside, or does it include things like the other assistance they would offer in terms of locating furniture or volunteer time? Are those things extra or on top of that as well?

Mr. Martin Mark III: It's an extra, so we don't even calculate the time and all of that. Well, I'm a paid person and a lucky person because I'm paid for what I love to do, but everybody else in our archdiocese in Toronto is a volunteer. They are doing these things free of charge, which are not counted.

Mr. Bill Siksay: In terms of the delivery of a settlement program, that figure is lowballing it in a sense. In terms of making a commitment to refugee resettlement, we're really saving the government a significant amount of money in terms of delivering a very successful program.

Mr. Martin Mark III: Definitely.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I welcome to the committee the various members and groups you represent. A lot of your statements have certainly been insightful. I think, as Mr. Wiebe mentioned, there are certainly challenges in the program. When we look at the underpinnings, there's no doubt this could be a win-win situation for both sides, so to speak, and for the refugees as well—and there's no shortage of refugees, that's for sure.

I appreciate the fact Mr. Wiebe mentioned, that he has 600 rural congregations and quite an infrastructure that could perhaps be utilized better. It would seem that when you have that kind of facility, we would certainly want to cooperate and work with you to use the efficiency that's already there. I want you to know that I personally appreciate what you're doing and agree with you that this is one class or category that can be improved significantly. I realize the backlog in itself is a problem, because it's pretty hard to measure up to something that occurred three years ago. Most people would like to react within the year or within months, as it would make it much easier. So we understand that. But I also appreciate that you have been discussing these matters with the immigration department of Canada and that they are looking at some ways to tackle this. I guess one way is by putting more resources into that.

The other issue, I guess, is the refusal rate. I suppose a refusal rate of anything approaching 50% is obviously very high, and I gather you're going to do something in terms of education and trying to make sure the understanding is there so that the rate will be lower. But of course a lot of these applications are in the pool.

Coming down to my question, the program obviously has some positive aspects to it and it could work, but there are some strains happening that may put the program in jeopardy, and you need to turn it around. Part of the refusal issue perhaps relates to the family reunification case, and I know you say you've accepted 50% as referrals of refugees from the government side, which wouldn't necessarily pose you any problems.

But there is, I gather, a desire in the community to bring in family members who are in the refugee class. Is that perhaps causing a bit of a problem in the system, or has it caused some of the problem with the three-year backlog and the refusal rate? And does the policy perhaps need to change somewhat to accommodate the desire of your community to bring in members of the family class who are in the refugee class? Flowing from that, sometimes it's perhaps not that easy to find who is or isn't a refugee when you're proceeding from that angle.

Does anybody want to comment on that? Perhaps Mr. Wiebe.

• (1200)

Mr. Ed Wiebe: I think there's a strong commitment from sponsorship organizations to protect refugees. As you have heard, refugees also have families in every case; we cannot get away from that. Our first mandate, priority, and interest is to protect refugees. This happens to be an overseas program we're working with, and the applicants aren't right here. It makes it difficult—that distance, assessment, and the extra resources we spend on our side to ensure that we are in fact dealing with protection cases. They may also have family elements to them. We recognize that and it's fine; we have a commitment to families as well.

We also have to remember that the assisted relative category is gone in Canada. It used to exist. We've talked about it to CIC. The

NGO and members on the committee have brought it up. We brought it up during the years I was on the committee, and there was quite a strong reaction against instituting such mechanisms—no family or assisted relative category, is what we heard.

There are other mechanisms to deal with that aspect in a humanitarian flow, where the family separation issues may be stronger than any other elements, but that is not our primary consideration. We start with the protection issues.

We don't want to lose people simply because they have family connections. We want to bring those refugees who happen to be family as well. That's fine. On what losing the assisted relative category has done, I talked about our in-Canada resources that we spend upfront before we make a decision. It is exactly that. We get a tremendous amount of mail, e-mail, and knocks at the door. I think your constituency offices reflect that as well.

It takes us a long time to assess whether to proceed on the basis of refugee protection, or if we have to say no because it doesn't have enough of the refugee elements in there for us to proceed. You've heard the comments about how difficult it is to do that, because these are people right in our midst who are making these appeals. They appeal again. We recognize they don't have other mechanisms. The definition of family class is tight. We don't have other mechanisms.

We hope there will be exploration by groups such as this on how we can meet those challenges. All of us around this table face them, and they affect us in different ways. It has come back upon us, fingers pointed at us, that we're a family class movement; that's our motivation. It is not. It is refugee protection. People need to have families.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Rather than move toward referral of refugees to communities such as yours so they're pre-approved, pre-screened, and all you need to do is integrate them, do we need to allow for a family class to accept the realities on the ground? Should there be some movement in that area?

Flowing from that, if it were a matter of refugees simply being referred to your community, would that be acceptable to you? They could be expedited very quickly. They wouldn't have that screening process and the rejection rate because they'd be pre-approved. As I said, there's a large pool of refugees who are available for settlement throughout the country.

Mr. Ed Wiebe: I think the program started and continues to have that additional component available to private sponsors—and that is strongly held in the community. For some, those kinds of cases are more compelling. The cases they wish to name feel more compelling because they have connections overseas as well. They feel that if they refer people when they know the situations, based on connections they have in certain areas, they are compelling cases to bring forward and would easily get the resources around them here in the communities where they might settle.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, sir.

We'll now go to our five-minute round.

Mr. Telegdi, please.

●(1205)

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Thank you very much, all of you.

Mr. Wiebe, when you mentioned the boat people, I thought of Dr. Frank Epp, who was a journalist and author, and I believe he was secretary of the Mennonite Central Committee Canada at the time, if my recollection is correct, and he made the motion to start sponsoring refugees. All of you do wonderful work.

I was thinking about what you said, that we're good at resettling whole groups but not quite as good at resettling small numbers from here and there. I all of a sudden thought of what happened with the Hungarian refugees. It's the 50th anniversary of my coming to this country. It was an excellent project, and Canada did well by it.

I think of Rahim, from the Ugandan refugees. That was one of those mass movements, if you will, that was very well-handled with minimal damage.

I think of what happened to the boat people. They had a much tougher time, and it took a much longer time. I know that during the Kosovo wars, we just bent over backwards, we went over, we were very proactive. We could hardly work fast enough to get them over to this country. There was really a political will.

Committee members should think about—I spent three months in a refugee camp, actually three refugee camps, and they were a lot better than the conditions I have seen in a lot of the refugee camps now, some horrific conditions. What we have to get our heads around is the longer people spend in refugee camps, the more psychological damage they will suffer. Many of the camps are very unsafe. Security, nutrition, boredom, crime—it's a very unnatural setting.

If we're going to take refugees, which we should, then we should think about, even from our selfish perspective, that we want to get them here as quickly as possible. If it's a question of family reunification, if we get somebody over here to Canada and they're employed and everything else but they have a very close relative overseas, it's really debilitating to them. I'm sure many of us have had people come into our office virtually crying, trying to get their mother or their daughter into this country. I always found it incredibly heartbreaking listening to these stories and, quite frankly, feeling their pain.

You mentioned *Yes Minister*. I have been on this committee for eight years and we have had seven ministers. This year we've had two ministers in less than a year. In *Yes Minister*, the characters change, but the storyline is much the same.

I think we have to embrace particularly what you are offering, because it hardly costs the government any money and it involves a huge voluntary sector in the settlement. If you want to spread out people across the country, it's a great way of doing it. Do it with families.

I wonder if you could comment on maybe the last number of years, things being...because I hear the same story every time we get into this situation, and I keep hearing it over again. I wonder if it would be helpful if you as an association could, and not individually but as an association, make rankings of the various visa posts. I

know it's difficult coming in here and saying this one is good, that one is bad—a course evaluation, if you will. For those posts that have good experiences, and you mentioned Kenya as being one of them—maybe practices there should be passed on to some of the other posts.

I wonder if you have a comment on that, if you could possibly do that, and communicate with the committee, because I think the committee will have to set some—

The Chair: The witness will hardly have much time, Mr. Telegdi. We're over four minutes; however, go ahead.

We're flexible and we want you to have time to answer.

Are you finished, Mr. Telegdi?

●(1210)

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: That was it. That's my question.

The Chair: Okay.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: I wondered if they would rank the post, as an association, and make notes that the committee members can refer to.

The Chair: Anyone at all?

Ms. Heather Macdonald: That's the question?

The Chair: That was kind of a general preamble, Mr. Telegdi. They're trying to figure out specifically what the question is.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: The question is, do you, together—so you don't identify Mennonites or United Church members or Catholics, or whatever else—have some kind of association where you actually rank the post, share experiences, and make that available, like a course evaluation, as to what the problems are and how it can be improved and which are the examples that you want others to emulate?

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Heather Macdonald: I think we could consider doing that, but I would say again that visa posts, visa officers, like refugees, are human beings. There are personal idiosyncrasies. Some of it has to do with the rotation of staff. Some of the staff are wonderful, and the post seems wonderful while they're there. And maybe to pull back even from that, I think it's perception. Somehow, for people in the department, they do not understand how or why we work. They don't understand the voluntary nature of the program. If they could somehow see us as allies, that we can work with them, rather than people who are always doing the wrong things and the convenient scapegoat, I think that would go a long way.

The Chair: Right. Thank you.

Madame Faïlle.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faïlle: Do you have anything further to add?

[*English*]

The Chair: Just one moment. We're making a mistake here. I'm sorry about that. I thought we were still on the seven-minute round.

I'm supposed to go to you, Mr. Jaffer.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I know I'm not as good looking as Madame Faille, so I can see why you overlooked me, but thank you anyway.

I want to start out by saying that I've been a member of Parliament now almost 10 years. It's hard to imagine, the time has gone so quickly. I think I have the scars to prove it, although I might not look like I've been here for 10 years. But I've continuously seen the problems get worse in immigration, from the time I came here to now. I think everyone around the table here wants to see improvements, but I think we've hit it on the head, and I think about what Jim said when it came to coming up with criteria, maybe, for immigration officers—and, Heather, you just spoke about the sensitivity when it comes to CIC officials abroad.

When we are dealing with refusals that come to our offices—often when you have tight criteria in place for officers, it seems that they can use those almost as an excuse to check and say no, for whatever reason. I almost think we need to deal with the sensitivity training side that you're talking about, to try to deal with opening up the attitudes or the changing of attitudes of some of the CIC officers. I think you've hit it on the head when you say we need to take a leadership role in working with settlement groups and others to be able to deal directly with some of these groups. That's something we've started to do a little bit with some of the new funding that came out for settlement agencies in the last budget, but there needs to be, obviously, more done on that basis.

Specifically, when it comes to these high refusal rates of private sponsorships from sponsorship agreement holders versus a government-assisted refugee program, I would like to hear from you why you think that is. It might be an issue of resources. It might be an issue that—I think, Sarah, you mentioned it when you mentioned the issue of non-skilled workers and how they've helped to build this country—there almost seems to be a barrier for those particular types of people. That also may be something tied into the refusal rates.

Can you clarify that particular issue, of how you see the refusal rates between those two areas?

Ms. Sarah Angus: To give you all a bit of background on where I'm coming from, I'm part of the United Church, but also, as a result of going on a refugee exposure trip with Heather, which Heather facilitated, to Kenya in the summer of 2005—Prior to that, I was involved in the sponsorship of refugees at McMaster University through an organization called WUSC, World University Service of Canada. I'm now, essentially, a junior program officer at that organization and helping to support local committees raise the funds and overall make the sponsorships a success. WUSC sponsors about 50 refugee students between the ages of 18 and 25, per year, to universities and colleges across the country, as a way of reaching out to the Canadian public, to Canadian youth, as a way of mobilizing them around refugee issues and really getting them involved. I'm a product of both WUSC and the United Church's interest in that.

I'm on a very steep learning curve, I have to admit, because I'm constantly learning about this, and I don't know all the background. I haven't been on committees for 10 years. I was just—

•(1215)

The Chair: So are we. We're learning every day.

Ms. Sarah Angus: I was astounded to learn that the rate of acceptance is only about 50%. In comparison, where I work, the rate

of acceptance is 100%, but that's because we have extremely strict criteria as to who we allow into our program.

We deal, to a large extent, with two refugee camps in Kenya: Kakuma and Dadaab. Most of them arrive in the camp at the age of eight. The people we accept have to be between 18 and 25. They have to have graduated from high school, and they have to have strong English skills. We have very rigid criteria. Because of that, we have a really high acceptance rate.

As a sponsorship agreement holder, which WUSC is, I've seen what a positive impact this program can have in terms of mobilizing and engaging Canadians. I find it extremely frustrating that it's stalled so significantly across the country for most of the other sponsorship agreement holders, because I've seen how it works. Now I'm seeing how it doesn't work.

I don't know if I've answered your question, but hopefully I've given some perspective.

Ms. Carolyn Vanderlip: Maybe I can add a little to that. I think you're looking at—

The Chair: That's it—

Mr. Rahim Jaffer: She can answer. I think it's—

The Chair: Oh, yes. I mean, sure, no problem. I thought that was it.

Go ahead.

Ms. Carolyn Vanderlip: Okay. I attribute the difference between the 80% that was cited for UNHCR-referred cases and the 50% for private sponsored cases to a few things. One that we've already mentioned is the length of time it takes to process our cases. UNHCR cases are processed quite quickly; ours can take three or four years, and things change. Quite frankly, sponsors also have a better awareness now of the need to screen, and they have a better ability to screen because they have been given the tools to do so. A lot of us have been through the eligibility training that CIC sponsored. I mentioned the better communication we're getting.

We are doing a better job now. But we're not seeing that because they're still looking at cases that are three to five years old—before we had those tools. That is having a big impact. We're saying we really need to get out of the past, but the program is still haunted by what has happened before. This is why we need to clear the backlog, so that we can truly move forward.

Ms. Sarah Angus: Can I add one other point?

The Chair: Sure.

Ms. Sarah Angus: I think one of the reasons my program at WUSC is a success is that a sponsoring group of students submits an application to sponsor a refugee in November and the refugee arrives in September. There's obviously pre-work that WUSC does, but the turnover is very quick. So there's an immediate engagement. It's possible to make this work, but it needs some work.

The Chair: Sure. Thank you.

Madame Faille.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: The refugee question is a very interesting topic. Earlier, someone mentioned Canada's efforts to take in Iraqi refugees. I don't remember who brought this up. I believe it was you.

I recently heard that there were approximately sixty Palestinian refugees living in Iraq along the Jordanian border who had been accepted. However, the journalist informed us that families were going to be separated and that the oldest members would be left behind. Eighty-seven of the Palestinians being abandoned along the Jordanian border were senior citizens.

Can you give us a profile of the applicants referred to you and can you tell us if you have witnessed similar cases where families were separated and human drama unfolded?

• (1220)

[English]

Mr. Martin Mark III: Thank you very much.

I worked with Diane Dicks from Vision Canada on the Iraqi refugee-related issues for quite a time. The Iraqi community is very active in trying to see possibilities to sponsor.

Unfortunately, until last week there was no receptive approach from the government side. But last week it suddenly changed, and we are very happy about that. Hundreds of cases were referred by UNHCR, from regions such as Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan—mostly Iraqis, but also including Palestinians from Iraq. The private sponsorship community is very open and very cooperative with the government. We are more than willing to do whatever we can to sponsor these people.

Yes, we hear about the problems, when they cut families in pieces.... But one of the strengths of the private sponsorship program is that the private sponsors can jump up and down at the CIC to see that family reunification happens. Honestly, in several cases, when we have had so-called linked cases and we know in advance that there is a family member who is elderly, or there is a person who has special needs, medical considerations, then CIC is really good at taking that into consideration.

I think that is exactly our role, that a private sponsor is there to make sure that Canada, through this wonderful resettlement program, doesn't hurt family unity. We do something good, but we need to be there.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: I see. Thank you. I believe I have no further questions. Do I have any time remaining?

[English]

The Chair: Yes, you do. We're going to tighten up a little because we have to adjourn a bit early, as we have three items on the agenda.

But you've got two minutes left. Go ahead, if you wish.

Ms. Meili Faille: No, you can go ahead.

The Chair: Ms. Grewal please.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Thank you all for your presentations.

I've got a couple of sharp questions for all of you, so please feel free to answer.

What, on average, are the processing times for refugees awaiting private sponsorships? What areas in the world have the longest times?

Mr. Martin Mark III: Once you submit a sponsorship undertaking it goes to the local CIC office, which approves it in 30 to 60 days and then sends it to the visa post. From the visa post, they send out a form, the IMM 6000 package, which the refugee has to fill out and send back. When it arrives at the visa post, that is day one. If you consider that day one, then the average processing time right now is 37 months until the decision is reached.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: What areas of the world have the longest processing time?

Mr. Martin Mark III: The longest is African visa posts, the Canadian visa posts in Africa. Pretoria has a 46-month average processing time and Abidjan is the worst, with a 49-month average processing time. And that's only part of the process, from the point at which the visa post receives the forms from the refugee and they reach a decision. Before and after that, we still need time to prepare the refugee to come to Canada.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: What factors have contributed to the long delays in bringing privately sponsored refugees to Canada?

Ms. Heather Macdonald: I would say just the applications; there have been many applications put in. I do believe that the visa posts all along have been underresourced, humanly and financially, and that has to be addressed.

There is this feeling across the country of people wanting to help, to respond, but now I'm having to say in so many cases, no, you can't respond, that isn't a strong refugee claim. It's very hard when you see an Afghan woman alone whose husband has been killed and I tell the congregation, maybe this isn't a strong refugee claim.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: What remedies does your organization propose to address some of these concerns expressed about the program?

Mr. Martin Mark III: It's an excellent question, because this is actually one of the issues. There are no real remedies in the program. In the inland protection, with refugee status determination in Canada by the refugee board, at least with IRPA you have the appeal division, and there are different ways to go. But practically, in overseas protection there is no remedy we can go to. The only way would be by the Federal Court, by submitting the application for leave and judicial review, but it doesn't work because you need a lawyer here and you need to contact the refugee in the camp, or whatever. So it's really a hardship.

As for case management or case review, this doesn't work at CIC, unfortunately. At least that is the general experience of sponsors. Whenever we ask for case management or case review at CIC, it basically doesn't bring anything.

• (1225)

Mrs. Nina Grewal: What concerns do you have regarding the decision-making process used by visa officers regarding private sponsorship of refugees?

Mr. Martin Mark III: Generally, I think in Canada at the refugee board there are some very important or crucial safeguards implemented. In Canada you can have counsel help the refugee. In the international protection, the law doesn't provide this to the refugee, and this is an issue to address.

The second is that in Canada, once you go through the refugee determination process—and I was there—they record the voices every time, which helps for further transparency and accountability. We don't have this overseas. These are things that could help.

The last thing is the sharing of information. Lately, as my colleague mentioned, CIC has been more open in sharing information about country conditions so that we are on the same page. For instance, on the Iraqi issue, until last week we got dozens and dozens of refusals, and I'm sure now there's been a change of policy. It's not only refugee law, but there's also politics involved, of course. Because of this, we hope that acceptances in Damascus will go up.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: How many applications for private sponsorships of refugees do you estimate are made on average annually?

Ms. Carolyn Vanderlip: I'm just flipping through to see if I can find the actual number. For 2006, it was around 5,800 persons, which was actually quite a bit lower than previous years. It's been as high as 10,000 persons over the last five or six years.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Have government sponsorships of refugees increased or decreased in recent years?

Ms. Heather Macdonald: They're pretty much the same.

A voice: They've remained constant.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: They're constant.

Mr. Ed Wiebe: One of the issues with the government sponsorship is that there is a quota. They need to fill the 7,300. Visa posts need to deliver that number. If there are high numbers at posts or not enough resources, the private sponsorships wait behind, because they have to attend to the government-attested numbers first.

The Chair: We have to try to get four more people in here.

Mr. Siksay, please.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Thank you, Chair.

There's another class, the source country class. I wonder if you, as sponsorship agreement holders, have any particular experience with that class and how it functions in the refugee system that you could share with us.

Mr. Martin Mark III: Thank you for the question.

Actually, in IRPA there is this excellent category called the source country class, which means that Canada recognizes that in some countries, the refugees, even within their own country, qualify as refugees as internally displaced persons. Unfortunately, I have to tell you that the source country clause doesn't work.

Immigration Canada didn't change the list of the source countries. At my last visit in west Africa in October, I realized that, for instance, in Sierra Leone, which is a source country on the list, the average acceptance rate is 0% right now. That shows basically the Canadian average.

It's not only the sponsorship agreement holders. The “group of five” and the community sponsors also submit a big number of sponsorships. They read this public document that shows that Sierra Leone is on the source country list.

They are allowed to sponsor a refugee who is in a refugee-like situation within his own country—that is, Sierra Leone, the Sudan, Congo, Zaire, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Colombia. Unfortunately, while they haven't changed the schedule since 2002, in the last five years this category doesn't work. Why? It is important, number one, because these are the only countries where Parliament did allow the refugees still to access directly the Canadian visa post for protection. In other countries, since IRPA, the refugee is not allowed to ask for international protection and resettlement, only in these countries. In these countries, though, it doesn't work. That means the system doesn't work and it needs to change.

Finally, on the IDPs, the internally displaced persons, lately UNHCR, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, announced in October that they want to take it within their mandate. It's a similar mentality that not only international refugees should be protected but also IDPs. I think it would be excellent if Canada could follow that. Never mind where that country is. If a person is in a refugee-like situation within his or her own country, they should qualify for resettlement.

•(1230)

Ms. Heather Macdonald: May I just jump in quickly? We had two cases in the last year in a source country. Because of the death threats they were facing, it was an imminent risk and we tried to sponsor them to Canada. We were told by the post that it couldn't move fast enough so they had better leave, and that they could not exit from a source country. They were told to go to a neighbouring country and wait it out.

Mr. Bill Siksay: So there was no mechanism at that post to deal with the urgency of their circumstance.

Ms. Heather Macdonald: On paper, yes, but in reality, no.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Can you tell us which country that was?

Ms. Heather Macdonald: Colombia.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

We have a couple more questioners: Mr. Sweet and Mr. Alghabra.

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

This is the first opportunity I've had to be here on this committee. Thank you all for your good work. You know from the times we've met before that I really appreciate the work you do for Canada, as well as the global investment you make.

I just want to clarify a couple of things for the record. To be very firm, do you think that since the assisted relative category is long gone, the pendulum has really almost swung and that there's a prejudice toward the reuniting of families?

Ms. Carolyn Vanderlip: There is a perception that private sponsors are putting forward cases that are family members but not refugees. Therefore, those applications are looked at with suspicion, when in fact people can be refugees and be family members. UNHCR recognizes this, and it's absolutely natural that for private sponsors who have taken the visa-office-referred cases, for example, there is the echo effect that I mentioned.

I was speaking to a small private sponsor just recently. It was a small volunteer organization. Last year, they received 25 applications that they were looking at sponsoring. They accepted and processed two; they screened out 23. So it's not that sponsors are not screening out cases. It would have been much easier for them to just put through all 25 cases and not do the work of screening and having to be the bad news people telling the family members no, but sponsors are being very diligent.

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Mark, you mentioned something I wasn't aware of. Just educate me. Are you saying the private sponsorships that happen do not contribute to our United Nations obligation?

Mr. Martin Mark III: No. What I'm saying is that Canada, as part of the international community, is obligated to make refugee status determinations in Canada. What we are doing now is an additional humanitarian commitment, because once you go outside your country and still give protection, that is something that is not obligated by international treaty. It's an extra.

Mr. David Sweet: All right.

And you were talking about the review of cases. You feel that when you've asked for a case review, there has in fact been no legitimate case review whatsoever. Is this in most of the visa offices, or are there particular ones?

Mr. Martin Mark III: Actually, as a member of the NGO-government committee on refugee sponsorship, I have quite a good overview of several sponsors who submitted their applications to Ottawa, to the case review of CIC. They send the files from the visa post, and finally the case management here does the case review. Unfortunately, more than 99% of files are negative, which means they don't even go into detail to assess the cases. They don't even teach us by saying what the reason is for rejection. There is generally no positive outcome at all. It's really unfortunate that this is the only remedy or way we have, but it doesn't work.

Mr. David Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Alhabra.

Mr. Omar Alhabra (Mississauga—Erindale, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank you all for coming here this afternoon. This program is very important, and I want to commend you for all of your excellent work.

I'm trying to put my finger on the fundamental problem here. Is there an administrative problem? Is it political will, regardless of parties and colour? I'm not talking about who is in government.

We're talking about 15,000 cases of backlog. I'm trying to figure out first if there is an administrative problem. We have a broader quota for how many immigrants come into this country. Within that quota we have a quota for refugees, and within that quota for refugees we have a quota for private sponsorship. It appears that the number of private sponsorship applications tend to be, understandably, greater than the assigned quota. Every year we have a backlog, so of course the backlog continues to grow.

Is the issue here one of the actual quota itself? Should it be greater? Or is the issue one of application processing that is not going at the right pace that it should be going at?

•(1235)

Mr. Ed Wiebe: It's processing the applications that are volunteered by the private sector, which doesn't actually have a quota. It's always termed "targets". It's a range.

Mr. Omar Alhabra: I agree. That's a better term.

Mr. Ed Wiebe: CIC would say they match their resources to the targets that are out there. For government-assisted, as I said before, there is an actual quota that each mission has to meet. They have to get so many government-sponsored out of their region to Canada within that year. But private sponsorship has targets attached. We generally do between this and that. As was stated before, in terms of actual visas issued in the last number of years—and they can probably correct me—we often only meet the bottom end in terms of actual visas issued.

Mr. Omar Alhabra: So the issue is not with the targets, then, although it would be nice if the targets were bigger. The main issue is the resources dedicated to processing.

Mr. Ed Wiebe: The resources have fallen behind. They have diminished to the extent that they have fallen behind, and that's created backlogs. Part of it is not just numbers of visa officers but the number of posts that do it.

Nairobi, for instance, has to attend to 16 or 17 countries, so the cases that come to the visa officers are so different and they have to make field visits to so many different places that it's a real burden.

Mr. Omar Alhabra: That's what John said, too.

Ms. Heather Macdonald: I would say also that the program was designed to be responsive to mass numbers. Over the years it has changed. The system hasn't changed, but it's become far less resourced. There are fewer of these posts around the world.

I really do believe that our visa officers, the staff, are underresourced. There should be more of them. They should have more resources available. We have some responsibility, and we maybe have put in cases because we see the humanitarian need. We are now cutting back and screening. But no matter what we do, as long as that backlog is there and not systemically addressed, nothing is going to work.

Mr. Omar Alghabra: I heard earlier that the UNHCR applications tend to have a faster turnaround. Is that accurate?

A voice: Yes.

Mr. Omar Alghabra: Why do you think that is? Are they processed differently, or are they processed through the same visa officers?

Mr. Martin Mark III: The UNHCR applications are processed differently in both those ways. First of all, the UNHCR submits the profile to CIC to see whether they are interested in this type of refugee, and second, the average processing time in that case is about 12 months.

You can predict in 12 months the refugee situation, but you cannot predict it three, four, or five years in advance.

Mr. Omar Alghabra: I'm just curious. Why does the UNHCR have a faster turnaround than private sponsorship?

Mr. Martin Mark III: It is because of the processing.

Ms. Heather Macdonald: It is because of priority access.

Mr. Omar Alghabra: Are they processed by the same missions, or are the UNHCR ones processed here? Okay, you indicated they are processed by the missions.

We have a briefing note that says you met with the minister on October 18 of last year. How did the meeting go? Did you get any commitments or direction from the minister?

Ms. Carolyn Vanderlip: That was for the elected SAH representative, so Martin and I and our colleagues on the NGO-government committee met with the minister.

We felt that the meeting went really well. We made basically the same recommendations: that the processing be increased, that we get rid of the backlog, and that we move the program into the present rather than be haunted by the past that we're speaking about.

He obviously didn't make any commitments as we sat there with him that day, but we did also recommend that the targets increase—that the target range increase—and he did subsequently announce an increase.

• (1240)

Mr. Omar Alghabra: He did.

Ms. Carolyn Vanderlip: He did, but we're only meeting the bottom end of the range, so I don't see how the top end of the range is going to be relevant or is going to make any difference at all unless the resources are increased to meet that.

Ms. Heather Macdonald: I would say increase the minimum, not the maximum.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Alghabra.

I want to thank the witnesses for your presentations today. They were very interesting, indeed. We had a lot of great questions and comments, so I want to thank committee members again. You've given us some great information. I'm sure the committee will benefit a great deal from all that and use the information whenever we can in our deliberations.

Ms. Meili Faille: Can we ask another question?

Can you provide us with the statistics, to today, as to how many private sponsorships there are? The data I have is dated July. I think by December 31 they probably have a big picture of what their targets are.

The Chair: Okay. We'll leave that with the clerk and the analyst to get that information for you.

Many thanks, and we look forward to seeing you again some time, I am sure.

We'll just let the witnesses leave the table, and then we'll go into additional business.

We do have three items that we want to deal with, and some of these might require a little bit of time. So I am going to go immediately to the clerk, who will give a report on the steering committee meeting we had today.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. William Farrell): The Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure agreed to—what I'll be reading into the record right now—

That the committee undertake a study entitled "Loss of Canadian Citizenship, 1947, 1977 and 2007".

That the Hearings be televised if possible and that the Committee sit on the following dates:

Monday, February 12, 2007 from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Minister and Senior Officials from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration

Monday, February 19, 2007 from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Interested groups and/or individuals

Monday, February 26, 2007 from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Interested groups and/or individuals

That Members provide the Clerk names and contact numbers of interested groups and individuals no later than 12:00 noon, Tuesday, February 6, 2007.

The Chair: Thank you.

Discussion?

Mr. Karygiannis.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, there was a motion from me, and I think all our colleagues have a copy of that motion—

The Chair: Yes.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: —and I think the motion the subcommittee has come up with certainly addresses some of the concerns I have.

I was wondering if we can take my motion—and certainly I'm looking for the advice of the committee. Take the preamble, leave the first two words...“countless Canadians have lost their Canadian citizenship under Section 8 of the Citizenship Act.” I'd like to change it a bit, “WHEREAS the Committee asks the Minister of Immigration to tell us what she's done to advise Canadians what measures have been taken to ensure that these Canadians regain their citizenship”. And certainly the dates—be it Monday or Tuesday—we can look at, and I'm not sure if we need the three dates. Maybe we can do two dates, one for the minister, one for stakeholders.

We've got to move on this immediately, and if we've got to move on this immediately, we've got to make sure that we're able to respond to people and certainly work with the minister or work against the minister, whatever the situation is, for us to be able to advise Canadians what they're doing.

• (1245)

The Chair: Okay. Well, we have the three dates set, and if we don't need these dates, fine. If we can do it in two, fine. Whatever comes out of the steering committee—we might have to even go an extra one. Who knows? But we have three set, so maybe we'll just leave the three in place right now.

But what I'm understanding, just to make it clear for committee members, is that—

Okay. The member is asking that the first two parts of his motion that was submitted would—Okay, we'll read it now, what we want.

Mr. Agha.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Samy Agha): The amendment reads as follows:

WHEREAS countless Canadians have lost their Canadian citizenship under Section 8 of the Citizenship Act.

AND WHEREAS the Committee asks the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to advise the Committee what measures are being taken to ensure that these Canadians regain their citizenship.

The Chair: Okay.

Would that be okay? That the committee is asking the minister to advise Canadians what measures are being taken to ensure that Canadians regain their citizenship? It's only a very slight change.

All in favour of that?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Just before we go there, are we appending something to that?

The Chair: No.

The Clerk: What we're doing is we're amending the steering committee report. We're putting this preamble with two “whereases” just before what I read in. So it would start off, “WHEREAS countless Canadians”, etc., “WHEREAS the committee asks the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration”. So it would be those two paragraphs and then the whole steering committee report.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Okay. That means the second paragraph changes.

The Clerk: I know, but—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: I mean, versus having three meetings. Can we not take it down to two meetings? We need to move on this, and people who are interested stakeholders....

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I would like to speak to that, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Let's deal with this first, and then we'll go with the number of meetings we're having.

Are all in favour?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Sorry, if you're appending the two together, if you're passing it as a whole, we need to deal with it as a whole. If you're just going to pass the preamble without the whole—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: And I said that. I asked for two meetings versus three.

The Chair: The number of meetings we're going to have is really a separate issue from what we're doing here now.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Chair, it's not a separate issue. The fact of the matter is, this is being appended to the whole subcommittee report, and we should talk about that little bit before we vote on it.

The Chair: This is an amendment to the steering committee's report. So this is a separate motion that's open for debate.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: May I make a friendly amendment? We can put in there that two meetings be held and then the steering committee decides if we need any more.

The Chair: Well, let's deal with one at a time, and the first one we're going to deal with is what has already been put before the committee.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, since I put that motion forward, may I get a chance to amend the amendment I put forward?

The Chair: Yes. Are you consenting to withdraw this?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: No. I'm saying that instead of having three meetings, we have two meetings, and if the steering committee decides that we want any more meetings, then we go ahead with it.

The Chair: Okay, let's deal with that after, the number of meetings. But we have this in front of us right now and I want to deal with this particular part of it.

Is it agreed that we amend the steering committee report by adding these two “whereas” preambles before?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: The only thing is, we haven't accepted the subcommittee's report yet or even talked about it.

The Clerk: That's what the committee is doing. It's amending the steering committee report.

The report is in front of you, and all you're doing is trying to amend it. So if you don't agree to this “whereas”, we go back to the —

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Could we discuss it?

The Chair: You heard the steering committee report.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Before you vote on a motion, you first discuss the amendment, before you discuss the final—

The Chair: We've already heard it. Now, are we going to amend it by putting in these two “whereas” preambles? All in favour?

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: Now, do you want to amend anything else in the steering committee report as to the number of meetings and what have you?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I have two questions on that, and I'd like to speak on it.

I like the idea of saying that you have the minister at one meeting and witnesses at the other meeting, and then the committee can decide if they want to go beyond that. So you have two meetings.

Secondly, I'm wondering why the meetings are placed on a Monday as opposed to our regular meeting days, which are on Tuesday. We had set up an agenda of where we're going through with certain priorities, and if we have new things coming in, we either push back those priorities or take this and put it behind. So my sense would have been, why not proceed on a Tuesday and two meetings? If you want to do it sooner than later, depending on the availability of the minister—which would be another issue, I guess—you'd have two meetings arranged in the next reasonable while, bearing in mind the minister's schedule and what else we're doing.

I think it should be two meetings, and just push everything back and deal with this issue if you want to. But do we need to have a Monday meeting?

• (1250)

The Chair: Mr. Telegdi, please.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Well, we have a schedule that's already set out, and the committee feels that we want to make sure that those important issues aren't delayed.

We're faced with a situation where tens of thousands of people—I think it's much more than that, but we'll find out—have their citizenship under threat; it's questionable. Members are getting calls in their offices about the citizenship issue, and I think it's important that we meet that real challenge, because citizenship, as has been outlined by some of the newspaper stories, ends up costing jobs. No jobs means no money. No money means not paying mortgages and losing houses. That's the unfortunate case of Mr. Teichroeb, which was documented.

By having these meetings we accomplish a number of things. We give the minister a chance to tell us what she's doing. We also try to get from the officials a fairly good grasp of what the numbers are in terms of who is at risk, and we can get that by having at least one person in from CIC. I think it's important that we have one person in from CIC.

The Chair: I think it should be mentioned as well that we kicked around an awful lot of dates this morning at our steering committee meeting. A number of people could not make the dates that we had set and we substituted with more dates. We didn't want to postpone one of the items that we had in our regular agenda.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: We also noted that at these hearings you need to have three people, in terms of receiving witnesses. But it's an urgent issue and we want to move on it as quickly as possible, and essentially that's what this is about.

The Chair: Okay, you have a follow-up comment, and then I'll go to Mr. Karygiannis.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Are we speaking about potential amendment to the subcommittee thing? Maybe I'll just do it quickly and suggest—

The Chair: No. What we're talking about now are the two meetings versus....

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I'll settle the question by amending the subcommittee report to say that the meeting should be two meetings, subject to the committee deciding if more are necessary, to be held on Tuesday following the order in council appointment meeting on February 6, and everything else should be moved back of that.

That's the motion I propose, and I'd like to call a vote on it.

Mr. Omar Alghabra: Are we having a debate?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I'm moving that motion, so we should deal with the motion.

The Chair: The motion is that we go with two meetings instead of three.

The clerk needs it in writing too, Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Bill Siksay: I can speak to the proposed amendment.

The Chair: You had your hand up.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Once we have the proposed amendment I'd like to hear it.

The Chair: Is it reasonable to go to the next one while we're waiting for this to be done up? No?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: I'm not sure if this is in order or not, but whether it's two or three meetings, we have to deal with this in a speedy manner. I do want to thank the parliamentary secretary and the steering committee for addressing this issue.

• (1255)

The Chair: Don't forget that you did bring it up.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: I know.

The Chair: We wouldn't be in this.

The Clerk: I'm glad I'm retiring.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I propose that the meeting suggested by the steering committee be two in number, unless this committee decides otherwise, and that they take place on Tuesday or Thursday immediately following the February 6 meeting.

The Chair: Mr. Siksay has a word on that.

Mr. Bill Siksay: I think the steering committee was proposing that this was an important issue that we needed to get to, but we didn't want to delay any of the other studies we had already committed to. That's why we were suggesting extra meetings. So I'd like to urge people to stick with the committee's original report.

We also suggested two meetings to hear from groups, because there are quite a few different categories of people affected by this situation. We know right off the top of our heads that we have enough people to appear on each of those different aspects for two meetings. So I don't think it's unreasonable to talk about three meetings, and I don't think it's onerous on the committee to do that.

The Chair: Mr. Alghabra.

Mr. Omar Alhabra: I've yet to hear a fundamental reason why we can't have additional meetings. I know it's much better for us to stick to our original schedule, but what's the real objection? If we know we have two urgent cases to look after, whether it's the Citizenship Act or the refugee problem, what's the harm of adding two additional meetings?

The Chair: Okay. That's the end of it.

Are you finished, Mr. Alhabra?

Mr. Omar Alhabra: Thank you.

The Chair: You've heard the motion.

(Motion negatived)

The Chair: So we have to—

The Clerk: Now we have to agree to the main steering committee report, as amended.

The Chair: All in favour of adopting the steering committee report, please signify.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Chair, I'd like to move an emergency resolution seeking unanimous consent from the committee.

The Chair: We have that before us right now.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Could we deal with that now, and freeze the clock so that we can deal with it?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Bill Siksay: It's an emergency motion on the situation of the hunger strike at the Kingston Immigration Holding Centre. I think there's a proposal in the motion that might bring some resolution to that, so I'm hoping folks will agree to deal with it now.

The Chair: You are asking for unanimous consent to present this motion right now and to freeze the clock at 1 p.m.

Okay, does Mr. Siksay have unanimous consent to present this?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Could we have the motion read, please?

The Chair: Yes. It will be read.

Does—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Before we have unanimous consent, can we—

The Chair: We have to have unanimous consent for him to present it first.

All in favour of allowing Mr. Siksay to present his motion, please signify. Does he have unanimous consent?

There is no consent.

The Clerk: So he's giving notice now.

Mr. Omar Alhabra: People's lives are on the line.

Mr. Bill Siksay: I will give notice on Tuesday, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay.

The meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

**Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.