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—
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Mr. Norman Doyle

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, CPC)): Good afternoon, everyone.

This meeting will come to order as we continue our study on Iraqi refugees. As you can see, it's a very full agenda.

For the first hour we're welcoming the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. We have Micheline Aucoin, director general, refugees branch, who was here last week; Bruce Scoffield, director, operational coordination, international region. From the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, we have Catherine Godin, director, humanitarian affairs and disaster response group. From the Canadian International Development Agency, we have Françoise Ducros, director general, Europe, Middle East, and Maghreb branch.

Welcome to all of you. I think Ms. Aucoin is going to have the opening statement on behalf of the group.

I would invite you, Ms. Aucoin, to begin with your opening statement, please.

[Translation]

Ms. Micheline Aucoin (Director General, Refugees Branch, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I also thank the committee for its interest in this very important issue.

As you have said, my name is Micheline Aucoin and I am the Director General of the Refugees Branch at Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC).

I am joined by Bruce Scoffield, Director of Operational Coordination in the International Region of CIC; Catherine Godin, Director of the Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Response Group, from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT); and Françoise Ducros, Director General, Europe, Middle East and Maghreb, from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

Together we will be happy to take your questions at the end of the presentation.

The Government of Canada continually monitors refugee conditions around the world, including the latest developments in Iraq, in consultation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Canada appreciates the gravity of the situation in Iraq and is very concerned for the estimated 2 million Iraqis who have left Iraq for neighbouring countries, as well as the 2.4 million others displaced within the country.

CIC's field staff, who are in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, have regular contact on the ground with refugees, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and officials from other resettlement countries. They have witnessed the evolution of the refugee situation first-hand, and have been reporting their findings back to CIC national headquarters on a regular basis.

Earlier in the conflict, the UNHCR and the international community expected the displacement to be temporary, and that Iraqis could return home, in the foreseeable future, from neighbouring countries providing protection.

As time went by, the protection environment in the countries of first asylum deteriorated and by late 2006 the UNHCR began identifying the most vulnerable in the population and those in need of resettlement to a third country.

Discussions between CIC and UNHCR officials, both in the region and in Geneva, have been ongoing on the role that resettlement could play in this declining protection environment.

In addition, senior CIC officials travelled to Syria, Jordan and Turkey earlier this year to discuss with the UNHCR and NGOs how Canada's resettlement program could best support the UNHCR's resettlement strategy.

We have been working within our legislative, policy and budgetary frameworks to assist Iraqis displaced by the situation, and to help them resettle in Canada as refugees or, when appropriate, to enter under other immigrant categories.

Given the severity of the situation, and in an effort to speed up the process, Canada agreed to accept simplified UNHCR referral procedures for the majority of Iraqi refugees. Canadian visa officers overseas continue to assess all refugees referred on a case-by-case basis, to ensure the applicant meets all legislative and security requirements, and to be sure that the settlement to Canada is, indeed, the best and most logical choice for the individual and his or her family.

•(1535)

[English]

In addition, members of this committee will have heard the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration recently announce measures to assist families affected by the humanitarian crisis in Iraq. She has instructed CIC to give priority immigration services to Iraqis and those from Iraq in surrounding countries who have close family members in Canada.

Our visa office in Damascus is giving priority to applications for permanent residence under the family class. This measure already applies to spouses and common-law and conjugal partners, as well as dependent children, and has now been extended to parents, grandparents, and other orphaned family members from Iraq sponsored by Canadian citizens and permanent residents.

In addition, our case processing centre in Mississauga will examine the eligibility of Canadian citizens and permanent residents on a priority basis to sponsor Iraqis affected by the war.

Mr. Chair, our efforts in Iraq are not new. Canada has an active resettlement program for Iraqi refugees who have sought asylum in neighbouring countries. Through our refugee resettlement program, Canada resettled almost 3,000 Iraqis between 2002 and 2006.

In 2007, CIC's resettlement target in the Middle East was 2,140, including 1,150 government-assisted refugees, GARs, and 990 privately sponsored refugees, PSRs.

In response to an appeal to assist those countries currently hosting Iraqi refugees, Canada announced last April that it would accept up to 500 additional Iraqi refugee referrals this year from the UNHCR.

We expect more than 2,000 Iraqis will have arrived in Canada by the end of this year. This number includes Iraqis who have applied as family class, refugees, and skilled workers.

In response to the situation unfolding in Iraq, we are significantly increasing our 2008 resettlement target for the Middle East to 3,350 people, of whom 2,080 are GARs and 1,270 are PSRs. We will be allocating almost 30% of our total resettlement places available to Iraqi and other refugees displaced by the war.

Given the magnitude of the displacement and its impact on neighbouring countries, it is important that the international community participate in resettlement efforts. CIC will continue to work with the international community to find long-term solutions for refugees.

At the same time, it should be noted that Canada operates a global resettlement program that in 2006 alone resettled refugees from more than 70 nationalities. And with a total of 100,000 resettlement spots available throughout the world, resettlement can be a solution for only a small fraction of the refugees. We welcome this committee's thoughts on additional steps Canada might take to find solutions to this and other refugee situations.

Of course, resettlement is not the only way Canada can provide assistance to Iraqi refugees. CIDA is active in the region, providing reconstruction and humanitarian assistance and responding to appeals by organizations such as the UNHCR.

We will continue to monitor this situation closely and we will explore more options to further meet UNHCR resettlement needs with respect to Iraqis in 2008 and beyond.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. We are happy to take your questions now.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your presentation. I'm sure our committee members have some questions and discussion they want to get into.

We'll go with our first seven-minute round to Mr. Karygiannis, and then to Madame Faillie.

•(1540)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Thank you very much for coming to enlighten us and give us some background on what's happening.

I have one question. There was a backlog in Damascus. Did you put in extra staff and efforts to clear that backlog in the last 365 days, and if so, how many people?

Mr. Bruce Scoffield (Director, Operational Coordination, International Region, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Mr. Chair, I can tell you additional staff are currently in Damascus, working to help us deal with the number of cases that have been received there.

I don't have with me today the total number of what we call temporary duty officers who have been in Damascus in the past year, but we could get that information and provide it to the committee.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Thank you.

Have you considerably reduced the processing times in Damascus in family class and parental class in the last year, and if so, by what percentage?

Mr. Bruce Scoffield: The processing time for family class cases in Damascus at the moment is such that 80% of them are finalized within 10 months. I don't have a 2006 figure to compare with the 2007 figure. Again, it's something we could provide.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: So if I were to say you have shortened your processing time by about 20% in Damascus, would you disagree with me?

Mr. Bruce Scoffield: I certainly would confirm we are trying to reduce our processing times.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: In other words, you cleared the decks in the last couple of months, anticipating that we were going to deal with Iraqi refugees.

Mr. Bruce Scofield: I would say we are trying to reduce inventories, especially of family class. We are trying to process spouses and children within the six-month timeframe that the government—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Scofield, I'm going to ask this again. You cleared the decks; you got extra staff in there anticipating that the Iraqi refugees would have to be dealt with. Yes or no?

Mr. Bruce Scofield: Mr. Karygiannis, you're characterizing the situation in a way I have no knowledge of.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Okay.

When a UNHCR case is presented, after somebody applies for UNHCR status and receives a group-of-five sponsorship from Canada, and it is cleared in Mississauga and is sitting at the post in Damascus, what is the length of time before that individual is to be seen?

Mr. Bruce Scofield: For a privately sponsored refugee from a group of five, or from a sponsorship agreement holder, 80% of the cases are finalized in Damascus within 17 months.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: What is the United States doing better than us that they can clear the cases within a month?

Mr. Bruce Scofield: I'm not able to comment on how the U.S. processes its immigration applications.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: If UNHCR deemed somebody to be a refugee and that individual has family in Canada and there's a group of five sponsorship, do you still look at occupation, education, or the points system?

Mr. Bruce Scofield: Not points. We don't use a points system in assessing any refugee, whether they are referred by the UNHCR or are sponsored. What we look at is whether or not that person has a well-founded fear of persecution, and whether or not they meet the other requirements for being resettled as a refugee, including if resettlement is the appropriate option, if they don't have the possibility of local integration or voluntary repatriation.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: So a woman who has been raped in Iraq and has a group-of-five sponsorship, has family in Canada, and has gone once and was refused and has reapplied with more material... would she likely be a good case to make it to Canada?

Mr. Bruce Scofield: I couldn't speculate on—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: And who is also a UNHCR convention refugee?

Mr. Bruce Scofield: I can certainly tell the committee, Mr. Chair, that in May this year we issued instructions to all visa officers to take into consideration UNHCR's advice that refugees from central and southern Iraq, that is, not from the Kurdish area in the north, were to be considered refugees on a prima facie basis. While this doesn't bind visa officers, we ask officers to take seriously that opinion. The result has been a very significant increase in the acceptance rate for Iraqi refugees at our processing office.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mrs. Aucoin said that you're also looking at expediting family class—parents, grandparents, partners, spouses, and dependent children in the surrounding area. Did I hear that correctly?

Mr. Bruce Scofield: Yes, it's for Iraqis who have been displaced into the region covered by our visa office in Damascus. So that includes Jordan and Lebanon.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Will your dealing with these Iraqis increase the intake from Iran or any other cases or countries that the Damascus office covers?

• (1545)

Mr. Bruce Scofield: It's for Iraqis sponsored under the family class, where the relatives of the people in Canada are in Syria, Jordan, or Lebanon.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: What's your inventory right now at CPC Mississauga?

Mr. Bruce Scofield: I can tell you the inventory in Damascus of family class cases. I'm afraid I don't have an inventory number for CPC Mississauga, but I can tell you that what we're essentially doing in Mississauga is to expedite sponsorship applications for Iraqis when they are received. In other words, these are being decided right away. They're not going—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: They're flagged?

Mr. Bruce Scofield: They have to be identified. We ask people to write Iraqi—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Iraqi program?

Mr. Bruce Scofield: Yes.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: And what's the inventory right now in Damascus?

Mr. Bruce Scofield: The inventory of family class cases in Damascus—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Including grandparents, partners, and spouses.

Mr. Bruce Scofield: Well, I have the figures for all family class cases.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Can I have a breakdown?

Mr. Bruce Scofield: I'll have to provide you that breakdown later, but there are a total of 246 persons, constituting 180 applications presently in process at the office in Damascus. Those are family class applications.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: For Iraq?

Mr. Bruce Scofield: For Iraqi citizens, yes.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Would you be kind enough, please, to provide this committee with your numbers for Mississauga?

The other thing I want to ask you is what steps are you taking to advertise this program within the community? Are you advertising in the Arabic papers? Are you advertising in the Iraqi papers? Have you reached out to the CAF, the Canadian Arab Federation, to the Iraq federation? Have you reached out to those groups?

Mr. Bruce Scofield: I haven't been involved in communicating with stakeholders on this issue.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Did anybody else among the panellists deal with that?

Ms. Micheline Aucoin: A media release was issued by the minister.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Can I suggest, Ms. Aucoin, that you take that media release and communicate it to the Arab papers and to the Muslim papers, as well as to the community itself?

The Chair: We're out of time, but answer if you wish. Then we'll go on to Madame Faille.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Can we have that commitment?

Ms. Micheline Aucoin: We will take this proposal back to the department.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Faille, for seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Citizenship and Immigration Canada officials have explained to us what is going on in Iraq. In terms of the number of people allowed to resettle in Canada, this country has committed to a target of 6,400 people.

If the government were to increase the number of Iraqi refugees, should it first review the number of refugees settled in other regions of the world?

Ms. Micheline Aucoin: In fact, each year the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration announces targets for refugee programs sponsored by the government and the private sector in the department's annual report.

Ms. Meili Faille: Did the number increase in the last report?

Ms. Micheline Aucoin: The number of refugees sponsored by the government remained unchanged for 2008, that is between 7,300 and 7,500, and the number of refugees sponsored by the private sector increased: for 2008, the number is now between 3,300 and 4,500.

Ms. Meili Faille: In studying the situation, I understand there have been problems with private sponsorship from the very beginning. Approval rates were very low and processing times very long. However, the latter seems to be improving.

Have approval rates been changed?

Ms. Micheline Aucoin: In the last six months, approval rates for Iraqi refugees has risen to 85%.

Ms. Meili Faille: What explains the change?

Ms. Micheline Aucoin: Our officers overseas must make sure that applicants satisfy all the criteria. This means that people must be refugees and bereft of all other sustainable solutions in the near future.

Early in the conflict, those who fled to Syria enjoyed temporary protection, either in Syria or Jordan. Resettlement, therefore, was not perceived as the only durable solution available. Now that the

protection environment has eroded, the situation has changed and we do not really expect there to be a sustainable solution in the near future for refugees located in Syria and Jordan.

• (1550)

Ms. Meili Faille: Is it possible that refugees eligible for our programs have collaborated with the United States by offering information or assistance? It is possible certain Iraqis may be perceived as U.S. collaborators who are now at risk?

Over time, has the level of risk changed?

Ms. Micheline Aucoin: Some of these people may have worked with the Americans. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees, the UNHCR, has identified 11 categories of persons it believes to be at the highest risk. These people must resettle.

One of the 11 categories includes people who have worked with the Americans or other members of the coalition. Because of this, they are perceived as being at risk.

Ms. Meili Faille: In your opinion, has the department undertaken studies on the approximate number of additional people Canada could accept without compromising integration efforts? Was is Canada's ability to accept more people?

Ms. Micheline Aucoin: That question goes above and beyond the issue of refugees. Are you talking about the integration of all immigrants including refugees or the integration of refugees only? That is much broader than the issue of Iraqi refugees.

Ms. Meili Faille: In any case, you have conducted studies on Canada's capacity, program costs, as well as future costs.

Ms. Micheline Aucoin: Of course.

In the case of government-sponsored refugees, there are costs because the federal government provides an income support program during the first year, as well as basic primary services.

It is clear that if the government were to increase the number of sponsored refugees, the budget for the income support program for refugees would have to be increased accordingly.

Ms. Meili Faille: All right.

Given the current surpluses, we would have to be able to calculate the cost of adding one person to the program. As such, if we were to allow an additional 500 people to resettle here, would you be able to calculate how much that would cost?

Ms. Micheline Aucoin: Yes.

Ms. Meili Faille: I know that in the beginning, you were concerned over the UNHCR's ability to refer candidates to you and whether or not you would be receiving a sufficient number of references to meet Canada's target.

Is this still the case? If not, as of when did you meet these quotas, your targets?

Ms. Micheline Aucoin: Yes, indeed.

Over recent years, the UNHCR often had difficulty meeting recommended targets for resettlement.

Early this year, when we launched the recommendation program for Iraqi refugees, capacity was very limited. The UNHCR has, nonetheless, been able to increase its capacity, and ultimately make recommendations for resettlement in all countries.

For now, it is no longer a concern.

Ms. Meili Faille: And for the month of October, did you reach your targets?

[English]

The Chair: Go ahead, wrap up.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: You can just tell me the month, and give me an indication. At this time, what is the rhythm or impact; have you reached your objectives for October, November or December—

Ms. Micheline Aucoin: Yes, for April we had asked UNHCR to refer 500 or more cases. Recommendations began arriving in June. To date, we have received more than 1,300 recommendations from the UNHCR.

•(1555)

Ms. Meili Faille: Therefore, there are 1,300 out of 1,400 who wish to—

Ms. Micheline Aucoin: No, in fact it is out of 500.

Ms. Meili Faille: Ah! It is 1,300 out of 500. Therefore we have more.

Ms. Micheline Aucoin: Yes, the UNHCR gave more recommendations. Many people have only begun arriving in the recent months. Their files will be reviewed next year.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Madame Faille.

Ms. Chow.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): In the 1979, 1980, 1981 period, there was a large number of boat people who came in through a special refugees program. Do you know how many Southeast Asian refugees in total—ballpark, it doesn't have to be precise—came in during that period?

Mr. Bruce Scoffield: That particular period, 1979—

Ms. Olivia Chow: It was to 1982, or thereabouts.

Mr. Bruce Scoffield: —to 1981, was really the beginning of the private sponsorship program.

Ms. Olivia Chow: That's right, but in the entire program, how many were there?

Mr. Bruce Scoffield: This is very much a ballpark estimate, but I believe the total number over the life of the Indo-Chinese special class was around 150,000 refugees. In addition there would have been people sponsored in the family class.

Honestly, it would be better for me to get that number and submit it to the committee.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Sure.

What percentage would it be? Around that period, I remember there were a lot of people stuck in refugee camps or in boats, and

there was a special program. Do you remember how big the problem was at that time? Were they in the millions?

Mr. Bruce Scoffield: I can't say I actually remember that program, as a civil servant. But my knowledge of the program is that there were between two million and three million people displaced from Indochina, beginning in the late 1970s and carrying on through until the end of the comprehensive plan of action in 1995.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Our response at that time was a substantial percentage, because 150,000 in that period is a good percentage of the two million at that time.

What kind of special program was it? How did it work? I see parallels, because I see that in terms of the number of Iraqi refugees we're looking at 2.2 million or thereabouts, and at the rate we're going, with 1,400 here or 2,000 there, in total, we will never reach the 150,000 number. How did that special program work in that time, during that period?

Mr. Bruce Scoffield: The first thing for me to say is that a very large number of people who were resettled, were resettled over a very long period of time, from 1979 to 1995. It didn't all start at once in the first year.

There was a special regulatory class created, called the Indochinese designated class, that set out criteria for the processing of Indochinese refugees, which, at the beginning, simply required that the applicant be a citizen of one of the affected countries, who had left that country after a certain date and who was presently in the region, in Southeast Asia, under the care of the international community.

Over time, it was recognized that such very general criteria were in fact encouraging more people to leave Vietnam, people who in fact were not at risk. As a result, the international community agreed on what was called the comprehensive plan of action, which mandated UNHCR to make individual refugee status determinations for all Indochinese refugees. Countries like Canada agreed to only resettle persons who were recognized by UNHCR as refugees. So there was a change to our approach. That would have been about 1989 when that change happened.

Ms. Olivia Chow: During the period when the regulation changed, the Minister of Immigration at that time—I think it was Barbara McDougall—established a program that said we would set up a certain target for the number of refugees that we would, over the life of that period, accept from that area. Did it say that if the government would sponsor x number, and then the churches and the synagogues and private organizations can then sponsor y number, collectively we will then get this number of refugees into the country?

•(1600)

Mr. Bruce Scoffield: There were different targets at different times over the period. In the very early days there was a commitment, I believe, by the government to match one for one.

Ms. Olivia Chow: I remember that one, yes.

Mr. Bruce Scoffield: That didn't last a long time because the generosity of Canadians proved so enthusiastic that the government wasn't able to continue that commitment.

Over that period of time, we managed the arrival of refugees in the way that we do today. Parliament was informed every year of the annual plan, and the government made commitments with respect to the number of refugees that would be admitted in the year to come.

Ms. Olivia Chow: In all, how many private sponsorships were there? I remember there were a lot of churches, synagogues—they all got into it. So there were a huge number of sponsorships in that period.

Mr. Bruce Scofield: Absolutely. I would have to go and get that information and submit it to the committee. But it was an extraordinary effort on the part of Canadians all across the country.

Ms. Olivia Chow: This is a semi-public, political question.

Do you think if that kind of challenge is given to Canadians, that given the dire conditions a lot of these Iraqi refugees are now in, in camps that are in terrible conditions, the government would be willing to say that if the private organizations—you're worried about this question—if the public opened their hearts and minds and pocketbooks and homes to allow these Iraqi refugees to come into the country, and they sponsor...? Would the government also be willing to accept that number, whatever the number might be, and attempt to sponsor even 50% or 30%, or some percentage of it, and allow that kind of sponsorship to be expedited into the country?

Mr. Bruce Scofield: I believe that's the sort of question you would need to ask the minister.

Ms. Olivia Chow: I have one last question. Is it a problem to do it as far as the department is concerned? If there is a political will, is there any logistical problem?

Mr. Bruce Scofield: Certainly whatever the government chooses to do with the number of refugees who are to be admitted in Canada, we'll have to take into consideration the capacity of whether it would be our offices abroad to process the cases or the settlement organizations in Canada to receive them.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Ms. Chow.

Ms. Grewal.

Ms. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for your time.

According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, this year Canada is among the top countries for accepting refugees from Iraq. By mid-November we had welcomed almost 661 refugees. Is this number accurate?

Ms. Micheline Aucoin: Yes, Mr. Chair. In fact, actually, as of now, more than 900 refugees have come to Canada so far this year. So that does put us among the top resettlement countries again this year.

Ms. Nina Grewal: I believe by mid-November the UNHCR referred 1,361 Iraqis to Canada for resettlement in 2007. What is the process by which your department decides which of these individuals to accept or deny?

Mr. Bruce Scofield: The process is one that is the same for refugees whether they'd be sponsored by a group in Canada or

referred to us by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. A visa officer assesses the case under the Canadian statutory and regulatory requirements, so a visa officer has to be satisfied that in fact this is a person who has a well-founded fear of persecution. In addition, the officer has to be satisfied that resettlement makes sense, that this person doesn't have another option for what we call a durable solution, that is, they don't have another country they can go to nor can they return to their own country. Finally, the visa officer has to be satisfied that they will be able to support themselves within a reasonable period of time after arriving in Canada and that they do not pose a risk to the health, safety, or security of Canadians.

• (1605)

Ms. Nina Grewal: How does the UNHCR decide how many Iraqis to refer to Canada?

Mr. Bruce Scofield: That is based on consultations between the Government of Canada and the UNHCR. They refer the number—usually, at least—that we ask them to refer.

Ms. Nina Grewal: How much financial and material aid has the Canadian government sent to Iraq and its neighbours to assist Iraqi refugees, displaced Iraqis?

Ms. Françoise Ducros (Director General, Europe, Middle East and Maghreb Branch, Canadian International Development Agency): It has sent \$5.5 million, of which \$2.5 million was sent through the International Committee of the Red Cross, \$2.5 million to the UNHCR, and a smaller fund of \$500,000 was sent to OCHA. This was sent in a pooled fund, all of which was to deal with humanitarian aid in the region and in surrounding countries, with the UNHCR for the Iraqi refugees outside and displaced persons inside through the International Red Cross.

Ms. Nina Grewal: The rest of my time, Mr. Chair, I'll pass on to Mr. Komarnicki. Thank you.

The Chair: You have three, almost four, minutes. Go ahead.

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

I want to continue on the question of how Canada is doing in comparison to other countries. I gather reasonably well, from what you said. But given the magnitude of the situation there, even if you doubled or tripled what we're now doing, it still would not be a significant dent in, so to speak, the number of refugees who are there. Is that correct?

Ms. Micheline Aucoin: Yes. In the sense that there are 10 million refugees in the world right now, throughout the world there are about 100,000 resettlement spots that are available. So it's quite clear that resettlement will always be a solution for only a small portion of refugees.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Then of course another issue is financial contribution to either reconstruction or meeting the humanitarian needs in the country or countries nearby to alleviate the situation. How has Canada done in that regard?

Ms. Françoise Ducros: Canada has given a commitment of \$300 million, which was made in 2003, over six years. We have disbursed \$285 million to this point. Of that, \$50.5 million is in humanitarian aid and other parts of it are to other reconstruction and development initiatives.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Another question has to do with the use of private sponsorship. Ms. Chow raised that already.

I guess the idea behind this is that, for value, you may be able to bring more people in for fewer dollars. Has someone looked at what is the best bang for the buck when you have a limited quantity of dollars to deal with? Where might it best be applied? Has anybody thought about that? Are there any theories about where it might go to achieve the most benefit?

Mr. Bruce Scoffield: I think I would try to respond to that, Mr. Chair, by saying that we think both programs—the program of government-assisted refugees that we receive referrals for from the UNHCR and the privately sponsored program—are important, and they meet somewhat different needs.

The UNHCR looks at the entire population and tries to prioritize resettlement based on agreed characteristics—for example, someone being a victim of torture or someone being a woman head of household. The privately sponsored program is one where people are largely identified through links to communities already in Canada. Of course, that certainly is very helpful when they arrive in terms of their settlement prospects.

We are increasing in the region the number of refugees, under both programs, who will be resettled.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: But just dollar for dollar, do you find that the private sponsorship of refugees is a lesser demand than government-sponsored refugees or not?

Mr. Bruce Scoffield: Well, there's one very important difference: the government is not spending federal settlement dollars in that first year after arrival to assist the refugees sponsored by communities, as those costs are being borne by the sponsors.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: And that would free up dollars for other types of work in this area as well.

Another issue that many people have raised is the length of time it takes to process refugees. Is part of that to do with security concerns or security checks? Is that a particular issue or not?

Mr. Bruce Scoffield: Certainly this is a caseload of people that requires very careful scrutiny in terms of security and other background issues. CIC works very closely with their partners, such as the Canada Border Services Agency, to make sure that each case is given very thorough scrutiny. And yes, that does take a fair bit of time.

• (1610)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: That completes our seven-minute round.

Now I will go to Mr. Telegdi for five minutes.

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

So 4.4 million—that's quite a number.

You said we took in 900 this year. How many did we take in last year?

Mr. Bruce Scoffield: In 2006, a total of 261 privately sponsored refugees and 92 UNHCR-referred government-assisted refugees from Iraq were resettled.

That's 353, if my math is right.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: And the year before?

Mr. Bruce Scoffield: I don't have 2005 figures, I'm afraid. We could provide those to the committee....

Oh, we have those.

Ms. Micheline Aucoin: That would be 84 government-assisted refugees and 412 privately sponsored refugees, for a total of 496.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: So we're not making a huge dent in the numbers.

What I'm wondering about goes back to the Kosovo conflict. At the time the crisis arose, the government made a decision outside of the numbers and said we were going to open it up to...5,000, was it?

Mr. Bruce Scoffield: I believe the initial commitment was for 5,000, but I think a few more than that ultimately did come under that special program.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: But I guess the point I want to underline is that the decision was made mid-term. It wasn't planned for. It was made when the—

Mr. Bruce Scoffield: The response to the outflow of people from Kosovo was certainly quite an extraordinary step. In fact, these were people who didn't come through the regular program of arriving as permanent residents in Canada. They came only with temporary status. Many of them did later regularize that status, but some didn't. Some returned home.

It was a decision that Canada took in consultation with the other members of NATO and within the UN to respond to the very extraordinary crisis that was occurring in Macedonia, a country that was on the point of civil disorder and collapse because of this massive influx of people out of Kosovo.

So a decision was taken collectively to evacuate for a temporary period of time these tens of thousands, even hundreds of thousands, of people. There was no long-term commitment to give them permanent refugee protection. That was something that was left to states to decide on their own how to handle.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: But once Canada took that decision, the Kosovars decided whether they wanted to stay permanently or temporarily.

Mr. Bruce Scoffield: Canada gave that option to the people.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: So if anybody who came wanted to stay, they could.

Mr. Bruce Scoffield: Yes.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: What was the total number of Kosovar refugees involved at that time?

Mr. Bruce Scoffield: I don't remember the exact number, I'm afraid.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Maybe you could get us a number, because I want to look at the percentage.

But the point I want to underline for the committee is that the government had the capacity; the government can make those kinds of decisions irrespective of what the goals are for the year. The ones we took in were quite outside the numbers that were put in as the plan for the year. So I look forward to that one.

For those who might have been involved, there was very much community support right across the country to take in Kosovar refugees.

We hear a lot of frustration from NGOs and church groups in front of this committee that they are ready to sponsor a lot more refugees than the government allows them to. It seems to me that when you have one of these crises, we really should be much more open to private sponsorship.

I think that gives you an indication of the kind of support they have. Instead of trying to keep the numbers down, let the volunteer groups drive those numbers. We have a major disaster happening, with surrounding countries becoming totally destabilized because of the scope of the problem.

•(1615)

The Chair: Ms. Aucoin.

Ms. Micheline Aucoin: The target for the PSR program has been raised two years in a row now—the upper end of the target last year and the lower end of the target for 2008. So that leaves some flexibility for an increased PSR program.

The Chair: Mr. Karygiannis.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Scofield, the department's website shows 20% to 30% per month, and all that stuff. On the government-sponsored refugees it shows 17 months. On the government website it says 80% in 22 months, and the private one is 80% in 22 months.

Can you provide some clarification? Is it for 17 months or 22 months?

The Chair: That's from a previous question that was asked of Mr. Scofield, so I will allow it to go.

Mr. Scofield.

Mr. Bruce Scofield: The numbers I cited are based on the cases processed from January to November 30, 2007. I believe these are more up-to-date figures than what's presently available on the website.

The Chair: Okay.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: So your figures are more up-to-date than the website?

Mr. Bruce Scofield: The website is updated periodically throughout the year. This is for the 11 months from January to November.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Carrier.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ): Good afternoon.

Ms. Aucoin, in your presentation, you say that following a request made by the UNHCR, 500 additional recommendations were approved this year. Therefore, an additional effort has been made.

How does this additional effort made following the UNHCR's request compare with that of other countries? Have we done our part? Should some countries do more? I would like some clarification on this.

Ms. Micheline Aucoin: Eighteen countries in the world have resettlement programs, and the vast majority of them have announced that they will be increasing their targets for Iraqi refugees in the year to come.

Obviously, the larger resettlement countries are the United States, Australia and Canada. Sweden has also made a special effort for Iraqi refugees. The entire international community is trying to do its part. We are also trying to convince other countries which, for now, do not have resettlement programs. We are trying to convince them to get involved in resettlement.

Mr. Robert Carrier: I believe that refugees residing temporarily in Iraq's neighbouring countries are going to benefit most from resettlement. What about the documents these people may have kept to prepare their files? Do they often find themselves in the difficult situation of being dispossessed of any information that could be used in preparing their application?

[*English*]

Mr. Bruce Scofield: Mr. Chair, certainly we recognize that refugees are not like other immigrants. We can't expect them to have all the documents that would normally be required to process an immigration application.

Frankly, what's required is for the officer to believe that the person in fact has a fear of persecution if they were to return. So documents can sometimes be useful, certainly in establishing identity, but they're not normally crucial to that decision.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier: The UNHCR's request for financial assistance of \$123 million is addressed to several countries. Overall, the UNHCR has received approximately 75%. Canada's contribution is \$2.1 million. I suppose that this sum is not allocated to refugees alone, but also to CIDA.

Is there a fair breakdown in contributions among the different countries? Since the total amount requested has not been attained, are steps being taken to urge countries to increase their assistance?

•(1620)

Ms. Françoise Ducros: I want to make sure that I understand your question. You want to know whether or not Canada's contribution meets the country's request?

Mr. Robert Carrier: Yes. We have the breakdown, by donor country, of financial contributions made in response to the UNHCR's request. We know how much several countries contributed. How is our contribution defined? Was it the result of a consensus among several countries?

[*English*]

Ms. Françoise Ducros: I might answer it, just because the information is in English.

There was a total donor mechanism coordinated through OCHA—the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs—of humanitarian aid, including for refugees. In 2007 that amounted to \$223 million. Canada's percentage of donations given through that mechanism was 2.1%, which is roughly in accordance with the proportion that Canada would put forth.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Carrier: You agree that the total amount of assistance requested was not met. You are aware of this. Has anything been done about this?

Ms. Françoise Ducros: I will have to check and give an answer later on.

Mr. Robert Carrier: How is Canada contributing to resolving the problem of refugees? There is refugees assistance and overseas assistance. What kind of efforts are being made to coordinate the two? Has a coordination committee been struck?

Ms. Catherine Godin (Director, Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Response Group, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade): Mr. Chairman, I can answer that question.

The Government of Canada's approach is that all departments that not only have an interest in the matter but jurisdiction over refugees have a say in the matter. We make sure that all of our expertise is pooled.

The three main departments that you see being represented here today are CIDA, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and the Department of Foreign Affairs. Efforts are coordinated equally with respect to refugee policy implementation, as well as resettlement policy and humanitarian assistance in dollar terms as provided by CIDA. The role of the Department of Foreign Affairs is to oversee this coordination.

This coordination is part of a long-term effort. It is undertaken each time the UNHCR brings together its contractual parties or its executive committee, which meet each year in February, June and October. This coordination is exercised regularly, and all departments contribute to the effort. This way, everybody's voice is heard, and everyone's priorities are raised.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Godin.

We're out of time on that round, so I will go to Mr. Komarnicki for five minutes.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I'm actually going to defer to Mr. Batters, who will then give the balance of the time, if there's any, back to me.

Mr. Dave Batters (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Chair, I'm going to ask a quick question and then defer the rest of my time to Mr. Komarnicki.

Through you, Mr. Chair, to the officials, thanks for appearing before us today.

I'm wondering what it would take if someone was referred by the UNHCR or someone had applied under the private sponsorship program.... If you're an Iraqi citizen fleeing that country because of the violence in that country, how would a visa officer determine that you weren't eligible for settlement? What I'm getting at is, how can you possibly be denied admission to this country if you're an Iraqi

citizen and you were referred by UNHCR or you're applying privately?

• (1625)

Mr. Bruce Scoffield: Mr. Chair, regardless of how the case comes to our attention, whether it's the United Nations that ask us to look at it or whether it's a group in Canada that sponsors it, the law requires that visa officers make an independent assessment of whether or not the individual meets the eligibility criteria. For example, for a refugee, we determine whether that person has a well-founded fear of persecution based on one of the five grounds—political opinion, membership in a particular social group, religion, etc. In addition, a visa officer has to assess whether or not that person has a reasonable prospect of another durable solution; that is, can they be repatriated in the foreseeable future, or do they have a possibility of local integration? It's also possible in some cases that individuals have more than one citizenship, and to qualify under the law you have to have a fear of persecution in all of your countries of citizenship.

But beyond all of those criteria, as I mentioned earlier, there are other factors that the law requires be assessed. The officer must be satisfied that the refugee will, in a reasonable period of time, between three to five years after they arrive in the country, be able to support themselves. In addition, there is a fairly rigorous assessment of health, security, criminality, and other issues that could be of risk to Canadian society, to the Canadian public.

It's possible for any one of those grounds to be a basis for a refusal.

Mr. Dave Batters: The figures I have in front of me indicate that an approximate acceptance rate of 80% exists for both government and privately sponsored refugees. So your response was a good one.

In the last category, in terms of health and safety, I can see how maybe some people would be rejected on that basis. Any Iraqi could make the case, though, legitimately, that whether it's persecution.... They fear suicide bombings in their country. They fear going out in the marketplaces. In the rest of the cases you spoke of, I could see no reason why these people would be refused admission to Canada.

All that being said, I'd just like to say I think the department is doing a great job, and certainly greater than its proportional share. Canada is doing greater than its share of carrying this weight.

I'm going to defer the rest of my time to Mr. Komarnicki.

The Chair: You have one minute and 15 seconds, Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I'll hone in on one particular question.

Mr. Telegdi was talking about private sponsorship and how community groups and church organizations want to increase their sponsorship amount. I know that previously in the committee we heard about some of the problems with attempts made to get relatives or families through as refugees. Some of those issues have been sorted out. But that said, and along the lines that Mr. Batters was talking about, there are a good number of refugees who would easily qualify as refugees without many questions.

Is there anything negative that you see in terms of administrating or enlarging upon the sponsorship class to allow the community groups and the church groups that want to become involved in sponsoring refugees to say "Here's a pool you can draw from"? Do you see anything negative in doing that, or anything that would perhaps hinder that?

The Chair: Please give a brief answer.

Ms. Micheline Aucoin: The simple answer is no.

The Chair: That was three seconds, so I guess we'll just go on.

Thank you, Mr. Komarnicki.

We have two minutes. Ms. Beaumier, briefly.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier (Brampton West, Lib.): Thank you.

I'm wondering why it takes 17 months to process a refugee claim. Refugees are obviously in dire straits. They're living in refugee camps. When you're giving me the criteria for this and you're saying the officer can decide whether they will support themselves in five years, it sounds to me more like a regular immigration almost point system criteria they're using, and I don't find that acceptable. I don't find 17 months acceptable.

Mr. Bruce Scoffield: Certainly we recognize that we need to process refugee applications as quickly as we can. There are really two factors that influence the length of time it takes to finalize a case. One is the relationship between the number of applications that come in and the number of applications that we are allowed to finalize within the targets that are tabled in Parliament every year. When you have more applications coming in than you are allowed to finalize, inventories build up and cases are processed on a first in, first out basis, so it takes a certain amount of wait time in that situation.

The second factor that affects the processing times is the complexity of the issues that have to be dealt with. It is the case that for people from Iraq it's very often quite a complex process to assess their background, their security issues, and so on that may be relevant to them. The government takes that responsibility very seriously, and it takes the time it needs to make that background assessment.

Both of those factors can contribute to the length of time it takes to finalize any individual application.

• (1630)

The Chair: You can have one more brief question and a brief answer, and we'll have to cut it off there.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Are you basically saying that the 17 months is to assess the criminality?

Mr. Bruce Scoffield: No, that's not what I said. I said there were two factors that affect, in this case—

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: There should only be one.

The Chair: Sorry, we are out of time.

On behalf of the committee, I want to thank you for coming here today. You have provided an awful lot of good information for us. I'm sure we'll be able to use that information when we're deliberating and writing our report. Thank you very much.

When the witnesses leave the table, I would invite the Canadian Council for Refugees to come forward, the Fraser Institute, Mr. Bissett, and Amnesty International. Come forward to the table, please.

We'll break for 30 seconds or a minute to give these people time.

• _____ (Pause) _____

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• (1635)

The Chair: On behalf of our committee, I want to welcome the Canadian Council for Refugees, Elizabeth McWeeny, president, and Glynis Williams, who is a member.

From the Fraser Institute, we have Martin Collacott, senior fellow. Welcome, sir.

As an individual, we have James Bissett. Mr. Bissett, welcome.

Also attending is Alex Neve, secretary general of Amnesty International Canada. Welcome to you, sir.

I think you all have statements you want to make. It's up to you, of course, how you want to proceed. I'll go first of all to Mr. Neve of Amnesty International Canada.

I would ask committee members now to please turn your attention to Mr. Neve, secretary general of Amnesty International Canada. I'm sure we're all anxious to hear what he has to say.

Mr. Neve.

Mr. Alex Neve (Secretary General, Amnesty International Canada): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I certainly welcome the opportunity to be here today.

It is fitting, and I suppose tragically and ironically so, that we are here on the day following International Human Rights Day, which yesterday marked the 59th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Of course, the very sad truth is that in the face of the ongoing and widespread violence that has devastated Iraq over the past four and a half years, a staggering crisis of displacement has been unleashed, a crisis that has resulted in massive violations of many of the rights enshrined in that declaration.

The numbers, and I know you know them, are overwhelming: approximately 4.2 million Iraqis displaced, 2.2 million of them within Iraq itself; at least 2 million more in neighbouring countries, the majority in Syria and Jordan. At the very least, 1.4 million Iraqi refugees are in Syria. Some reports suggest that by the end of September that number may have climbed as high as 2 million, and anywhere between 500,000 and 750,000 in Jordan.

Syria and Jordan certainly carry the bulk of the burden but are not entirely alone. There are, for instance, some 50,000 Iraqi refugees in Lebanon, where there are growing concerns that many are being arrested and imprisoned when found to be in the country without lawful status.

Just to give us all a sense of proportion, that equals approximately 7% of the population of Syria and 10% of the population of Jordan. That would be equal to Canada hosting between 2.2 million and 3.3 million refugees ourselves.

Syria has now taken action to curtail the flow of refugees. On September 10, Syria imposed a visa requirement on Iraqis. Following that change, the number of Iraqi refugees crossing the border into Syria dropped from about 2,000 per day to only 100 per day more recently.

The willingness of Syria and Jordan to receive such an influx of refugees is highly commendable and stands, sadly, in sharp contrast to other of Iraq's neighbours. Notably, Saudi Arabia has maintained a closed border to Iraqi refugees and has announced plans to build a wall along the border. Saudi security forces are deployed along the border in order to intercept those trying to cross.

Who are the refugees? There is a disproportionately high number of non-Muslim religious minorities in the refugee population, including Christians and members of the Sabean/Mandaeen faith. There are large numbers as well of Sunni Muslims who have fled from predominantly Shi'a neighbourhoods in Baghdad. It is crucial not to forget the plight of Palestinian refugees from Iraq, who have been relentlessly targeted in the fighting and in human rights abuses in the country. Some 15,000 Palestinians remain in Iraq, about 2,000 of whom are living in desperate conditions in makeshift camps in the border region between Iraq and Syria.

My colleagues, Amnesty International researchers, have travelled to Syria and Jordan three times this year to carry out research and conduct numerous interviews with Iraqi refugees. Their stories of violence and human rights violations that forced them to flee Iraq are heart-wrenching. Here are two very short examples.

AA, a 45-year-old shop owner was abducted by armed men in civilian clothes on November 23, 2006. During the four days of his abduction, he suffered various forms of torture. These included being beaten with a cable and a stick on various parts of his body, having electric shocks applied to his ears, and having holes drilled into his right leg. His back was also cut with a knife dozens of times. Those scars were still visible when Amnesty International delegates met with him about seven months after the incident.

In October 2005, four masked and armed men forced their way into the house of a Sabean/Mandaeen family in Baghdad. The children and father were beaten and shackled, and their mother, who was five months pregnant, was forced into another room. There, one of the men kicked her in the abdomen and burned her left arm with a cigarette, and then raped her. The man knew she was Sabean/Mandaeen and said that he wanted her to lose the baby. She lost consciousness. When she awoke, she was in the hospital and learned that her pregnancy had been terminated because of injuries suffered during the attack. The family fled to Syria. Twenty months later, when Amnesty International researchers met her, she was still receiving frequent medical treatment and the burns on her arm were still visible.

• (1640)

Those are just two stories among countless others.

What of the challenges and hardship that continue for refugees once they have reached safety in neighbouring countries? Certainly one very serious challenge relates to entry and legal status.

Until the end of 2006, Iraqis entering Syria received a three-month visa, which could be extended for three months at any Syrian

passport office. At the beginning of this year, that changed to a one-month visa upon entry, renewable for two months. Refugees must thereafter leave the country and re-enter, obtaining once again a one-month visa, starting the process all over again. A vast majority of refugees do not do this, fearful, understandably, of what would happen to them if they returned even briefly to Iraq. They choose instead to remain in Syria without status.

In Jordan there is not yet a visa requirement, but that is imminently expected to change. Under Jordanian law, only Iraqis with Jordanian residency, or a limited number of other exceptions, are permitted to enter the country. As a result, again, the vast majority of Iraqis in Jordan are without status; they face the constant risk of arrest and deportation and live in endless fear of that happening.

Second, there are forced returns to Iraq. Syrian officials have acknowledged to Amnesty International that a number of Iraqis have been forced back to Iraq, apparently primarily because of having committed criminal acts. Through our research, though, we're concerned that many Iraqis have been forced back to Iraq when they have found themselves in a situation of disagreement, for instance, with an employer, a co-worker, a landlord, or other Syrian nationals. We have also documented a widespread practice of Syrian officials forcing Iraqis to pay bribes when they are found without a valid residency permit.

There have been forced returns of Iraqis from Jordan as well. There is a disturbing report of a group of six or seven Iraqis forcibly returned from the Treibeel border crossing between Iraq and Jordan in December 2006. Their vehicle was then reportedly stopped by insurgents, who then beheaded all but one of the occupants.

A third concern is access to food, housing, and employment. When Iraqis enter Syria, their passports are stamped, banning them from employment. A growing number of charities and UN agencies do provide assistance, but many refugee families have described to Amnesty that they've gone without food aid for lengthy periods. Most, therefore, do take paid work illegally and have become a very cheap workforce for employers.

There is also concern in both Syria and Jordan that a growing number of Iraqi women and girls are becoming involved in the sex trade. Some Iraqi girls have been forced to engage in prostitution by their families as a way of meeting daily needs.

Then there is education. There are apparently no restrictions against Iraqi children attending school in Syria, but only 70,000 at most do so. That is exceptionally low, given the high number of Iraqi children in the country. Part of the problem may be facilities; existing school facilities are overcrowded. UNHCR is building six new schools in Damascus. The Syrian government estimates that at least 91 new schools are needed.

In Jordan, access to education has been very restricted. That changed about three months ago with an announcement that Iraqi refugee children could attend public schools. Some 25,000 have now registered, but even with the new facilities in Syria and the greater access in Jordan, it is expected that the vast majority of Iraqi children will not end up going to school. The fear within families that this will lead to arrest and deportation is simply far too strong. UNHCR and numerous agencies have begun raising the alarm, therefore, about the prospect of hundreds of thousands of marginalized Iraqi refugee children growing up without education.

Next is the international response. The bottom line is that this crisis has far surpassed the ability of regional neighbours to cope. UN agencies are strained beyond capacity as well, and the wider response of the international community, including Canada, to a humanitarian crisis that was, after all, provoked by an international armed conflict has been, to say the least, woefully and shamefully inadequate.

The UNHCR's funding appeal has been reasonably well supported, although shortfalls remain. It's important to note, though, that only a small percentage of refugees have registered with the UNHCR in Syria and Jordan and will therefore benefit from that aid. Only 125,000 in Syria, for instance, have registered; that's only 10% of the estimated refugee population.

Syria and Jordan have estimated that the cost to those governments of providing proper protection and services for the refugee populations they shelter approaches \$1 billion in each country. Both countries have received very little financial aid—in fact, next to nothing.

• (1645)

Beyond money, there is, of course, the growing concern about the failure of governments outside the region to assist through resettlement opportunities for refugees in need of that option. Resettlement will, admittedly, be required or appropriate for only a small percentage of refugees in a crisis of this sort. Most are not interested in resettlement. What they want is to be able to go home. But even given the limited but critically important role that resettlement plays in refugee protection, the numbers for resettled Iraqis are appallingly low, and until recently they were actually diminishing rather than increasing.

The UNHCR, for instance, reported that 1,425 Iraqis referred by UNHCR for resettlement were accepted in 2003, and that number had shrunk to only 404 in 2006. My colleagues from the Canadian Council for Refugees will talk to you more about Canada's role.

Lastly, let me say a very brief word about the third aspect of the world's response to refugees from Iraq. I've talked about money. I've talked about resettlement. What about the treatment afforded to Iraqis who make it to Europe and North America and make refugee claims on their own in those countries?

The response has hardly been more generous. While Iraqi refugees in Canada do benefit from a moratorium on deportation to Iraq, others in other countries are not so fortunate. Many European states, including the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, have returned Iraqis to northern Iraq and even, in occasional cases, to southern and central Iraq.

So what is needed?

Clearly there is a dramatic and very urgent need for a comprehensive global human rights action plan for Iraqi refugees, a plan that ensures the following: 1) that multilateral and NGO efforts to provide assistance to Iraqi refugees and internally displaced Iraqis receive adequate and sustained funding; 2) that front-line states, particularly Syria and Jordan, are provided with the financial support needed to ensure they can provide the level of protection and assistance required; 3) that more generous opportunities for resettlement become available so that vulnerable Iraqis who are not safe or adequately protected in the region can move to other countries; and 4) that there is a common commitment from all countries in the region and around the world to refrain from forced returns to Iraq.

Canada can and should play a lead role in ensuring that an action plan of this nature is adopted as early as possible.

• (1650)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Neve.

We'll now go to the Canadian Council for Refugees. I believe Ms. McWeeny and Ms. Williams will be sharing a 10-minute statement.

Go ahead.

Ms. Elizabeth McWeeny (President, Canadian Council for Refugees): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

My name is Liz McWeeny, and I am president of the Canadian Council for Refugees. I have 25 years involvement with the Canadian humanitarian resettlement program, including the private sponsorship program.

The CCR is an umbrella coalition of over 180 member organizations committed to working for refugee rights and refugee protection both in Canada and abroad. We have been deeply concerned for some time with the dreadful plight of the Iraqi people who have fled Iraq to neighbouring countries and those still stuck in the border areas of Syria and Jordan.

In September and October of this year, I attended the annual UNHCR NGO consultations in Geneva and was also present during the UNHCR executive committee meetings where the crisis in Iraq was the subject of many discussions.

The scale of the crisis affecting millions of Iraqi people is beyond anything we have witnessed for a very long time, and it's currently the largest forced displacement of urban refugees anywhere. Please note that these are, for the most part, urban refugees, and the predominant majority are not in camps.

It threatens the stability of the host countries, especially Syria and Jordan, whose populations have increased by more than 2.2 million. The huge number of refugees places an enormous strain on the hosting countries and therefore on the entire region. Imagine, if you will, a city the size of Montreal receiving a population of refugees of over a million people. This is the situation in Damascus.

At that same set of international meetings in Geneva, it became apparent that no single answer will be sufficient and that a comprehensive global response that reflects the magnitude of the problem is required in order to avoid a huge humanitarian disaster. So far, the international community's engagement has been quite generous, but insufficient to come anywhere close to meeting the needs.

Most recently, and in consultation with the members of the Iraqi Canadian community, we have developed a document called "Iraqi Refugee Crisis: Call for Increased Canadian Response". You have a copy of this before you today.

It provides a framework for a series of made-in-Canada initiatives that engage both government and civil society. I call your attention particularly to points 3, 4, 5, 6, and 8, which speak to the need for additional resettlement places as a means to protect the most vulnerable, as well as encouragement to Syria and Jordan to maintain their asylum space.

Canada has an excellent reputation in the international community, especially in relation to refugee issues, a reputation of which we can be justly proud. Other states highly respect our leadership in international responsibility sharing, and this crisis for Iraqis should be no exception.

The Canadian people have always played an important role in Canada's response to refugees, and we are here today to tell you that we are receiving a strong message from the grassroots about the strong desire of Canadians in many parts of Canada to contribute to a generous response to Iraqi refugees.

The CCR urges you, in the strongest possible terms, to consider implementing the strategy before you. Through our generosity in our domestic and international initiatives, Canada could and should, by example, lead the other states and have them be confident to step up to the plate.

I now invite my colleague, Glynis Williams, to share with you her experiences and provide some more information.

Ms. Glynis Williams (Member, Canadian Council for Refugees): Thank you, Liz.

Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

We want to address this committee on the tragic situation of Iraqi refugees. For over 20 years I have worked in this private sponsorship of refugees program and also with asylum seekers here in Canada.

The organization where I work, Action Réfugiés Montréal, is an active member of the Canadian Council for Refugees. Between March and July of this year, I was on a deployment with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees in Damascus, Syria. The work was primarily interviewing Iraqi refugees being considered for resettlement and completing the resettlement forms for Canada, the United States, and other resettlement countries. During that time, I interviewed almost 100 families or individuals, for a total of 300-plus people.

As committee members, you will no doubt become numb to hearing and reading about the staggering numbers of Iraqi people in flight, and particularly the situations they have fled, but statistics do

not tell of the enormous suffering that too many have endured. What I can share today is what I heard in the interview room from which emerged consistent stories of both targeted and generalized violence. A number of people have been in the neighbouring countries of Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria for many years already. It's hard to realize that some people have been sitting for five years already, waiting for us to wake up to this calamity. The UNHCR and governments kept hoping that the conditions would improve and that people could eventually return home. In this time, very little has been offered in terms of material support, and resettlement, as you've already heard, has been very minimal.

During the spring of this year, 2,000 people a day were crossing into Syria, and most of them were coming to Damascus. Except for Palestinians, there are no refugee camps, meaning that the regular infrastructure must absorb all these new arrivals. It's a staggering challenge for a developed nation, and it's overwhelming for a poor country. When you consider that most of these people are seriously traumatized from the experiences that have forced them to leave Iraq, it compounds the difficulty.

I'm just going to make some observations on the people I spoke with.

Iraqis living in Syria and Jordan are forbidden to work, even if they could find employment, so most have been living for years on savings that are now vanishing. There is evidence that extreme poverty is forcing some women and young girls into prostitution and other kinds of exploitation. Young kids are forced to work for very little money. Men are afraid of being picked up by the police and deported if they're stopped on the street or found working illegally, so they are forced to send their children instead.

This is so counterintuitive, but there are Iraqis inside Iraq who are sending money to sustain family members living in neighbouring countries of asylum, and they often are staying within Iraq risking their own lives.

Iraqis place a very high value on education, sometimes even leaving children behind temporarily inside Iraq in order to sit final-year exams. UNHCR, as you've already heard, has launched a financial appeal to encourage and assist children to go to school. Perhaps we will see more kids in school, but the same issues remain about vulnerabilities of being detected and deported.

A report was done by World Vision on Iraqi refugee children living in Jordan, and it showed that 39% have been the victims of violence themselves, or they have witnessed it in their immediate family. Going to school is therapeutic for kids. It adds routine and normalcy in their young lives. It's essential that this education be supported.

The closing of the borders of Syria and Jordan effectively imprisons people inside Iraq, those who want to flee. Syria and Jordan have done this as a result of the inadequate support they have received from the international community.

Of the 90,000 Iraqis who were registered with the UNHCR in Syria when I left in July, 10,000—and I repeat, 10,000—had cancer. Too many of those 10,000 are kids. I've come to believe that the only thing worse than being a refugee is being a refugee with medical needs.

Kidnappings for ransom are a growth industry, with enormous sums of money demanded. Even if the ransom is paid, the child or the adult might still be killed. One child told us that he was held with 10 other kids in a room, all of them blindfolded and bound. Kidnapping can last for hours to weeks. Some victims are killed. Some bodies are never returned.

• (1655)

As Alex Neve has just reported in one of his moving stories, the violence inflicted on people is absolutely horrendous. The electric drill is the signature of one of the militias. That's what the holes were in the right leg of that gentleman he spoke about.

Minority religious groups, namely Christians, Mandaeans, Sabaeans, Yazidis, and Palestinians have particular vulnerabilities, and there are very few safe places left within Iraq for them to flee.

The refugee camps where Palestinians are held in border regions are unsafe and the conditions inhumane. Seven people have died in the Al Waleed camp in the past 18 months, with two children dying in the last couple of weeks. One child died of rickets, a vitamin deficiency. This situation for Palestinians is desperate.

Canada can do so much more. The CCR urges members of this committee to implement the suggestions outlined in our call for an increased response to the Iraqi crisis. It is time for us to take action, and we thank you for this opportunity to share.

• (1700)

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

Mr. Collacott, you're next.

Mr. Martin Collacott (Senior Fellow, Fraser Institute): Thank you, Chairman.

Canada has a strong tradition of providing assistance to refugees and we should continue to do so. By the same token, we have to look carefully at the scope and the cost of the assistance we are providing and determine how we can apply our resources in the most effective manner.

Therefore, before I make specific recommendations on how we might assist Iraqi refugees, I want to have a brief look at the overall picture of what we do for refugees. A significant part of what we spend in this area goes to resettling in Canada about 10,000 people a year from overseas, in most cases with the assistance of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, particularly in the selection process. Far more resources, however, are used in the processing and support of people who arrive in Canada and make refugee claims.

John Manion, a senior and distinguished public servant, who held the post of deputy minister of immigration, secretary of the Treasury Board, and associate clerk of the Privy Council, and should therefore know what he's talking about, testified before a Senate committee in 2001 that he thought the refugee system was using up a major part of the \$4 billion he estimated the Canadian government was spending annually on immigration and refugee programs. All together on those we resettle from abroad and those who are successful in making refugee claims in Canada—and there were about 32,000 in 2006, and that's not counting another 10,000 let in under humanitarian or compassionate grounds—we probably spend about

98% or 99% of all the money we spend on refugees around the world.

There are, however, hundreds of times as many refugees, internally displaced persons, and other persons of concern to the UNHCR who are overseas. In 2006 these numbered over 30 million, including 9.9 million refugees and 12.8 million internally displaced persons. Yet Canada contributed, I believe, less than \$40 million a year in 2006 to take care of them. That comes to less than \$2 a person. You may ask why there is such an imbalance. Why do we spend so much on the relatively small proportion we bring to Canada or who make successful refugee claims here, and why do we contribute so little to the many millions in refugee camps overseas? There are probably a number of factors; I'll mention two.

One is that as refugee support groups develop and evolve, many of them shape their existence around helping refugees to settle in Canada. Quite a bit of research has been done on this in the United States but not in Canada. There was an interesting paper in 1999 called "Show Me the Money", put out by the Centre for Immigration Studies. It describes how non-governmental organizations in the United States begin by providing services on a voluntary basis to help in the resettlement of relative refugees. Then, particularly after the passage of the 1980 Refugee Act in the U.S., the government there began providing funding to these organizations, and they in turn began lobbying the government to bring in larger numbers of refugees from overseas to ensure a steady intake of such refugees in order to justify the money the non-governmental organizations were receiving and to be able to retain the staff they'd hire. The situation in the U.S. is probably roughly comparable to that in Canada.

Originally, when we began taking refugees in large numbers after World War II, we basically responded to specific crises. An example was the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, and there were also the South Asians who had to leave Uganda in the early 1970s. But then we eventually established annual targets for refugees settled in Canada, whether or not there were any particular crises taking place. This was no doubt welcomed by refugee agencies that wanted to be assured of continuity and predictability in government funding. This explains why many organizations that are by no means opposed to helping refugees overseas have an obvious interest in saying that significant numbers are resettled in Canada.

Another consideration that probably plays a role in the disproportionate amount of money we spend on refugees in Canada is that it is always satisfying to see and get to know first-hand those we are helping. This is an understandable reason from a humanitarian point of view, but it is nevertheless neither reasonable nor fair that we spend such very large amounts on a relatively small proportion of those who need help and so little in relative terms to the vast numbers overseas.

I'd like to make a number of proposals. One is that we provide most of our assistance to Iraqi refugees, to those in bordering countries such as Jordan and Syria as well as to IDP, internally displaced persons, in Iraq deemed by the UNHCR to need assistance. Dollar for dollar, our money will be much better spent among the many than among a relatively small proportion who might be resettled in Canada.

• (1705)

Second, those we bring here—I believe we've already agreed to take 1,400—should be included within the government's annual targeted ranges, which for 2008 are 7,300 to 7,500 government-assisted and 3,300 to 4,500 privately sponsored refugees to be settled from abroad. As I mentioned, the annual targets were instituted to provide a degree of continuity and predictability for planning purposes.

There is no reason, however, that the number of refugees we do resettle from Iraq should be over and above the announced target ranges. I recommend they be included within them. Those we do bring in here should have a strong case for being resettled as convention refugees, as well as for having a reasonably good chance for succeeding in Canada. If they have relatives here, they're obviously going to get more help in resettling, but we shouldn't bring them here simply as a means of circumventing normal immigration requirements; they should have a well-founded case for being seriously at risk on convention refugee grounds.

Our final recommendation is in terms of whom we select. We should exercise particular care when it comes to choosing those considered to be among the most vulnerable. It's very appealing from the humanitarian point of view to give priority to the most vulnerable, but if we bring them here, it's important that they have a reasonable chance of success. Unfortunately, many of the most vulnerable who are brought to western countries have major problems. I think if we want to put priority on them, we should find ways of helping them where we are, not putting them into a very difficult situation in Canada.

In summarizing these points, I recommend, first, that we contribute a significant amount of money to the UNHCR specifically for the care of Iraqi refugees and other persons of concern in the area, and that we not consider resettling in Canada a number significantly above our targeted ranges.

I have some final points.

I think it's necessary to point out that Canada has nothing to apologize for when it comes to the level of assistance we provide to refugees and refugee claimants. Sometimes we're told by refugee advocates we're not doing enough to help refugees, but the facts suggest otherwise: in terms of bringing refugees in from abroad in 2006, we took 10,700 out of the 71,700 resettled from overseas by 16 western countries, which on a per capita basis is three times our share.

With regard to granting refugee status to asylum-seekers in Canada, Canada has not only by far the highest acceptance rates in the world, but in terms of numbers, on a per capita basis we take in four to five times the average of other western countries for permanent resettlement. We also have arguably more generous

resettlement terms than any refugee-receiving country for permanent resettlement. If we're not giving enough to the UNHCR to help refugees in camps overseas, we are certainly spending far too much on a dysfunctional refugee system for dealing with asylum-seekers here.

Regrettably, though, instead of trying to reform that system, very often refugee activists are lobbying to make it even more porous. If they're successful, for example, in having the Canada-U.S. safe third country agreement with the United States declared null and void, we can expect an even greater influx of refugee claimants into Canada, accompanied by major increases in expenditures by various levels of government. While we're told that the safe third country agreement has severely restricted access of asylum-seekers to the refugee determination system, the number of such applicants actually increased from 19,737 in 2005 to 22,868 in 2006. The total number of refugees admitted from overseas, as well as those who made successful asylum claims in Canada in 2006, was one of the highest in the past decade. The safe third country agreement needs to be strengthened, not done away with.

There is just one final point. Recently we had a major influx of refugee claimants from Mexico. It's a clear indication that we don't have control over who comes in here. In the first half of this year, we had over 3,000 refugee claimants from Mexico; that's four times the number of nationals of any other countries who made such claims, and it constituted more than two-thirds of all the claims made by Mexicans around the world. The only country, in fact, where Mexicans were even considered as refugee claimants was the United States, and they only made half as many claims there.

• (1710)

There's no reason why our refugee system should be flooded and clogged by claimants from Mexico. We should have safe country of origin and safe third country provisions, as other countries do.

If we spent only a small fraction of the hundreds of millions, probably billions, we expend on processing and supporting refugee claimants, many if not most of whom would not even be allowed to make claims in other countries, we'd have more than enough money available for a very generous increase in our contribution through the UNHCR to assist Iraqi refugees.

In the circumstances, what we should be doing, therefore, is not only looking at how we can best help Iraqi refugees, but how the money we spend on refugees is being used.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Collacott.

Obviously, we're not going to have a whole lot of time for questions, and obviously we had too many people on this evening, but we have a tremendous amount of interest from people who want to testify and what have you.

Mr. Bissett, you have 10 minutes.

Mr. James Bissett (As an Individual): Thank you very much. I'll try to be fairly quick because I realize time is running short.

I want to thank the committee for inviting me to come here this afternoon. I've spent most of my public service career dealing with refugee issues of one sort or another. I go back, Mr. Telegdi will be interested to know, to the Hungarian refugee movement—I used to be in Toronto trying to help them get settled—to the Czech refugee movement, and all through the Ugandans, the Chileans, the Indochinese. I've learned through this long career that refugee policy, particularly, is a sensitive and very complex issue. It requires a lot of thought.

For example, you had asked, if these people appear, why aren't they simply accepted as refugees? Most of the Iraqi refugees in Jordan and Syria are not considered by the UNHCR as refugees as such. Because they are fleeing armed conflict does not make them a refugee under the UN convention, and rather than make individual decisions, the UN simply offers them temporary protection because they're fleeing armed conflict. They treat them the same as refugees and they treat them as people of UNHCR concern, but the specialists will tell you there's a difference between a convention refugee and people who flee armed conflict or earthquakes or natural disasters. You have to prove individually that if you were returned, you would be persecuted.

We, Canada, have to cooperate fully with UNHCR policy, and their policy is pretty clear. Their first priority is to try to repatriate the refugees or the people of concern who get out from refugee-like situations. So the UNHCR will not be anxious for large numbers of Iraqis to be brought out of Jordan and Syria for resettlement. They will hope to repatriate them to Iraq. Even today, as you know, there are busloads of Iraqis being returned to Iraq, and the Iraqi government is encouraging them to return to those areas where there is peace.

The second priority of the UNHCR, if they can't return them to their home country, is to resettle them in the countries of first asylum in the regions from which they have escaped. In other words, if they can't send them back to Iraq, they would prefer to see them resettle somehow in the neighbouring countries.

The third, final, and last resort is resettlement in third countries. It's not a preferred solution of the UNHCR for countries to go into Syria and Jordan and take out very large numbers of Iraqis. There's a long story behind that, but it stems from the Indochinese movement, when many countries took large numbers of Indochinese refugees. They did so, and as a result of that, more and more boat people left Vietnam under hazardous conditions, many of them drowning, because they knew if they got out to Thailand or Hong Kong, they'd get a free trip to New York or Ottawa. So there was an international meeting to advise countries to be very careful about third country resettlement.

From the end of the Second World War right up to 1985, Canada did not consider itself a country of first asylum, so we concentrated all our efforts in being a country of resettlement. We saw our role as going to the countries of first asylum and sharing the burden by taking the refugees out of their camps and bringing them to Canada for resettlement, and we did an excellent job on that. Indeed, in 1986, we got the Nansen Medal from the United Nations for our efforts.

By 1985, however, we started to become a country of first asylum ourselves, and as a result of that, we can no longer do both. We can't become a country of resettlement and a country of first asylum. If you look at our last-year figures on the number of refugees we received here, the government brought in about 7,416 refugees from camps abroad. There were an additional 2,976 privately sponsored refugees, but 19,935 were asylum seekers who had been found to be refugees.

I have one final point. It's a question of cost. It's very difficult to get an estimate of the costs of the asylum-seekers in Canada, but I estimate it to be around \$2 billion per annum. Now the budget of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to look after 30-some million refugees or people of concern is half of that.

● (1715)

One final point on Iraq. I have heard that there are U.S. reports that—and the department should be here to hear that—Christian Iraqis are having a very difficult time getting registered with the UNHCR and are therefore referred on to immigrant countries that might take them, like Canada. The problem is that the locally engaged staff working out of the embassies in Amman and in Damascus are not favourably disposed to letting the Christians who are fleeing register with UNHCR. That's something the committee might want to look into.

The Chair: I have to stay on schedule, if I can, because we have a meeting immediately afterward. So maybe four minutes to each of you, each party. It's not a lot of time, I know, but that's about all we can do. Four minutes to each of you to make your point, if you can. A couple of minutes, and a couple of minutes for the response.

Mr. Karygiannis, first of all.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Collacott, you talked about refugees and what they do or don't do for Canada, if they are positive or not. I get the sense that you are trying to discourage people from coming to Canada to seek refuge. Would I be correct, sir?

Mr. Martin Collacott: Not discourage everyone, but it is clear that we have a lot coming here who wouldn't be considered refugees by any other country. So there are some problems, but I wouldn't say to totally stop people.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: On this side of the panel, I'm going to speak for two members. I'm going to speak for myself and I'm going to speak for my colleague, Andrew Telegdi, and maybe some other people might want to speak to it.

I fled a situation in a dictatorship in Greece—the generals. I guess fleeing to Canada and seeking protection in this country might have caused me to be called a refugee.

I know Andrew fled the Hungarian Revolution.

So these are two prime examples on this side, sir: a member of Parliament for 14 years and a member of Parliament for 19 years. I guess the money Canada spent on us was well spent.

Mr. Martin Collacott: I'd like to make one more comment.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Sure. Let me finish.

I agree with you that sometimes it's better to resettle people in the areas where they can be resettled. If, however, they have family and they have resources, and if they have church groups or organizations that can look after them, it's those organizations that are putting out the money. So I'm sorry, I tend to disagree with you, sir. If an organization is going to look after refugees for two or three years, if they're going to be able to settle in Canada, and if two of us—and I'm sure others around the House of Commons—are prime examples of what refugees can do in Canada, hooray for Canada for letting us in.

And there, sir, I'm going to close it off.

Thank you, sir.

• (1720)

Mr. Martin Collacott: I don't have a problem with some people coming in, and I might mention that some of my in-laws were boat people from Vietnam. On the other hand, we have some rules or lack of rules in place that tend to get the system flooded.

We don't have any first-country-of-origin rules, and that means we won't even consider people who come from countries with a good human rights record and a democratic record. Other countries do. We take 20 nationalities no one else will consider. People from New Zealand, Denmark, Australia, or in the U.K. can and have made claims, so we should have some measures there.

We don't have...and the only arrangement we have for safe third country rules is now being challenged. If someone has come through the U.K. or France, they can make a refugee claim. We let them make their claim. We should have those rules in place so we can concentrate on people who are likely to have a legitimate claim, as you and Mr. Telegdi had. We are clogging our system, though, with all sorts of people who should never even be allowed into it.

These are the issues I'm raising.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Faïlle.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faïlle: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Firstly, I'd like to thank Mr. Neve, from Amnesty International Canada, the Canadian Council for Refugees, as well as the two former Canadian ambassadors who are testifying on the subject of refugees.

Mr. Bissett, the allegations with respect to locally-hired employees are rather serious.

Has anything been done within the department with regard to the allegations?

[*English*]

Mr. James Bissett: No. I'm simply quoting a U.S. journalist who has just come back from Iraq and has reported in the media that there was a major concern, particularly in Amman, that the locally engaged Muslim girls working for the UNHCR were rejecting out of hand or pushing off Christians who approached the UNHCR so they could get registered, and then referred it on to U.S. Immigration.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faïlle: In Iraq, the multinational force is now being led by the United States. This group oversees the protection of certain Iraqi citizens living in Iraq. The situation in Iraq is complex. Some Iraqis fleeing Iran are in Iraq, and there are Iraqis fleeing Iraq, and some refugees are leaving Iraq to head for Egypt.

We have focused primarily on Jordan and Syria. What other issues in the Middle East are likely to influence Canada's intervention, Mr. Neve?

[*English*]

Mr. Alex Neve: Indeed, it's very important to remind us that while Syria and Jordan are obviously bearing the burden, and the toll on those two countries is immense and the needs are extremely critical, there are other countries in the region that are bearing the brunt as well.

Lebanon, I think, is one that is starting to receive a greater amount of attention now. There are some 50,00 Iraqis in Lebanon. Again, there is a lot of the same concern that the vast majority who are there are without status and are fearful of being detected and deported. There has been a growing pattern now of Lebanese officials taking Iraqi refugees into custody. Several hundred are now imprisoned in Lebanon, and there are concerns about deportation.

I pointed to Saudi Arabia, which is on exactly the opposite side of the equation. A country that, one might assume, should be playing an incredibly generous role in providing some protection here is doing very little, has closed its border, and is talking about building a wall. It would be very important to see countries like Canada putting pressure on Saudi Arabia to do more.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faïlle: Is there any other issue? The Iranian issue emerges in several ways in Europe. Almost each week, discussions in England are being held on the Iranian question.

Do you believe that Canada is balancing this concern with that of the role played by the United States? Under the UN Convention, there are people in Iraq who have been identified as persons in need of protection. Mobility of these people within Iraq is very limited. The multinational force provides them with a certain level of protection.

The situation is complex. What are the stakes for Canada? We are trying to explain why Canada's effort is insufficient. Could there be another underlying issue?

• (1725)

[*English*]

Mr. Alex Neve: I would only agree with you. The complexity you've described is absolutely correct. Certainly, the preoccupation of the international community now and the situation in Iran is perhaps distracting, especially at high political levels, from the kind of focused attention that should be given to dealing with the plight of Iraqi refugees.

Canada should be playing a role in cutting through the politics and standing up for the humanitarian principles.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Chow, go ahead, please, for approximately four minutes.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Chairman, I don't think Canada should turn its back on Iraqi refugees. I don't want future generations of Canadians looking back at this time and saying that we, the Canadian government collectively, responded to this humanitarian crisis with apathy and neglect.

Canada actually opened its doors to 150,000 Southeast Asian refugees. May I say that the Conservative government at that time—it was Joe Clark, I believe—responded to the crisis of the boat people. I remember it very, very clearly.

I have a question for Amnesty International, Mr. Neve. Is that the kind of program you're looking for, aside, of course, from the financial support we need to give to the NGOs, to Syria, to Jordan? All of that is a given. Perhaps the mandate could be given to UNHCR to do the interviews, to assist, to open doors, and to motivate the Canadian people to both do the private sponsorship and pressure the government to say that if we can do the sponsorship privately, you can also accept these people. Some could also be sponsored by the government.

Is that the type of program you're looking for, and if so, how big a program?

Mr. Alex Neve: I think it's a powerful reminder of what Canada is capable of. The numbers were remarkable at their peak: something in the range of 3,000 refugees per month were coming into Canada. In a span of about just 12 months, in 1979 and into 1980, about 50,000 Indochinese refugees arrived in Canada.

Canadians are proud of that chapter of our history. We've been commended internationally. There was reference to the Nansen Medal, which was awarded to Canada. We got the Nansen Medal for our remarkable international leadership in responding to that crisis.

Whether it needs to be exactly the same numbers, I'm not the expert who is able to say that. We know that much more is needed. We know, when we look back in history, that Canada is capable of generosity, efficiency, speed, of remarkable partnerships between government and civil society and church groups. Why can't that happen now?

The Chair: I'm sorry to cut it off there, Ms. Chow, but I do need to get a couple of minutes in for Ms. Grewal.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Collacott, recently you suggested in the pages of the *Globe and Mail* that rather than accept displaced Iraqis, Canada should instead provide support for refugees in Iraq and its neighbourhood. Can you please elaborate a bit on that statement?

Mr. Martin Collacott: Yes.

My reason for that emphasis was that I think our dollars will be far better spent. They'll go much further. And I think we should make a substantial contribution to helping those in the area. If we bring some here—we've already committed to bringing in, I believe, 1,400—we will benefit relatively few and we'll spend a lot more on them. Currently what we're doing, in general, is spending, I estimate, 98% to 99% of what we spend on refugees on people in Canada. And it makes one feel good to see them firsthand, but I don't think it's using our money most sensibly in terms of helping refugees.

So, yes, we should make a substantial contribution. Maybe we bring in a few people, but our money should be spent where it does the most good, and that's helping people in Syria and in Jordan, and maybe some internally displaced people in Iraq.

Did I answer your question?

● (1730)

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Yes, that's fine.

My question is to Amnesty International and the Canadian Council for Refugees. Does the argument that the vast majority of Iraqis require temporary protection rather than permanent resettlement have merit? I'm curious as to the response from the witnesses from Amnesty International and the Canadian Council for Refugees about this contention. Can you please comment?

Ms. Glynis Williams: Thank you very much for that question.

It's very clear that there are numbers of refugees who will never be able to return. There are three durable solutions, and we've already heard what those three are. One is voluntary repatriation. That is an abandoned position for the moment. This is a tragedy that has been unfolding over five years now. By any terms, that is becoming a protracted refugee situation.

The second is local integration. But in countries that are not signatories to the convention, in which it is impossible to work, there is no ability for them to blend in, and the numbers are so high that it's not going to be a durable solution for everyone.

Then there's the final category. The UNHCR, yes, does recognize the Iraqis coming out as *prima facie* refugees. The refugees who are being referred for resettlement by the UN High Commission for Refugees are people who are in need, for whom those two durable solutions will not work now and will not work in the medium or even the long term. There are people for whom the trauma they have lived through, the vulnerabilities of who they are, the persecution they have already experienced—and these are all people who have experienced individualized persecution. Every refugee whom we referred, whom I interviewed, had already endured individual, targeted persecution, and that persecution was expected to be there in the future. It doesn't matter what country we are talking about, that's the category of people we refer for a resettlement.

Canada has a role to play. There are huge medical needs. I mentioned that. That is a place that we can respond to. Medical needs does not mean that person will always be a burden on this country. There are many medical-needs people who will move on to be completely successful. We need and can do so much more.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: Very briefly. A very short one.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Of the two million displaced Iraqis, how many, in your opinion, will never be able to return safely to Iraq?

Ms. Glynis Williams: I'm not an expert. I can't say how many of the two million. All I know is that the numbers that we are talking about that are being referred now aren't anywhere near...[*Inaudible—Editor*].

The Chair: Thank you.

I see that people are lining up to ask questions and to get a word in, but we really have to move on.

I do want to thank you on behalf of our committee for sharing your knowledge with us today. Eventually we will write a report, and certainly your work will be taken into consideration.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: I have a point of order.

We could extend the meeting for a few more minutes to get in some more questions. We're going to be going to 6:30 anyway, so...

The Chair: I don't think we should do that, because we'll have to open it up for everyone and it could get out of hand. We need a full hour to get into four motions and another report.

Thank you for being here today. We look forward to writing our report.

Thank you.

Just to inform members, I'm going to have to switch around the agenda a little bit and go with motions first, because the console operator informs me that there's a problem with the microphones. He can only open two at a time; he has asked, therefore, that we suspend before going in camera so that the equipment can be reset.

But of course the motions are public, so we will go with the motions first and keep it public the way it is right now, and then we will go in camera to consider our report.

I think all of you have the four motions before you.

The first motion I'm dealing with here is one that's coming from Mr. Karygiannis:

Further to its Second Report to the House on the loss of Canadian citizenship presented in the House on December 6, 2007, the Committee recommends that the government extend Canadian citizenship to all children born abroad of Canadian parents who were themselves born abroad of Canadian parents, provided that, when these children reach the age of twenty-four years, they confirm their intent to maintain Canadian citizenship and renew that confirmation every five years thereafter; and

That the Chair present the report in the House no later than December 12, 2007.

I'll go to Mr. Karygiannis to speak to his motion.

• (1735)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, this is very simple. During our deliberations of lost Canadians, this topic came up time and time again. I was surprised that it was not reflected in the report that went to the House, so I'm putting this forward. This is regarding children of children of Canadians, individuals like Joe Taylor's children, Don Chapman's children, my child who was born abroad. Should she have another child who is born abroad, the parental rights and the birth rights of my grandchild certainly will be affected.

So I'm bringing this in order to make sure that the spirit of the lost Canadians that we've talked about is reflected. Because there's some concern that some people might use Canada as a means of getting a passport, I'm saying that the confirmation should be done every five

years and thereafter. If people know they have to confirm every five years, then they will be in Canada in order to do so.

The Chair: Mr. Telegdi.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Mr. Chair, I think there's a real danger in trying to do a Citizenship Act on the fly. As a matter of fact, we have the result of a Citizenship Act that has two acts and some 20-odd amendments to it, and it's almost like a barnacle being placed upon a barnacle being placed upon a barnacle. It gets so confusing that it takes a constitutional lawyer to figure it out.

Ultimately, I think what we have to do is have a Citizenship Act starting from scratch to eliminate all the complexities and difficulties. Citizenship should be relatively simple.

In terms of Mr. Karygiannis' motion, I think we can talk about that when we're dealing with the legislation. He mentioned Joe Taylor's children. Mr. Taylor is not covered by the bill that's before us on lost Canadians. That's why Mr. Taylor got a subsection 5(4) of the Citizenship Act... He's not covered, because he's pre-January 1, 1947. The other people who aren't covered are the Mennonites and their Mennonite marriages that, again, go before January 1, 1947.

I think there is a fix, and the fix would be very simple if we allowed first-generation Canadians born abroad a chance to get the same status as a Canadian born here. The way you have that happen—and I refer to Mr. Karygiannis' daughter. She has spent time in Canada, I imagine a substantial time in Canada, and that would qualify her to be considered as such.

The reason I say that is—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: A point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: It's not a point of order.

Mr. Telegdi.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Mr. Karygiannis, maybe you could bear with me and let me get my point across.

The point is, Mr. Karygiannis and I are naturalized Canadians. We were born abroad, but since we became naturalized Canadians, we have the right to have children out of the country, even though we were born out of the country. This would put a person who was born abroad in that category, in the same kind of situation as if they spent substantial time in Canada, and that would even the playing field.

What we have right now—and this is very difficult for those people who read the letter from the Mennonite Central Committee of Canada—is a Citizenship Act that passes on citizenship indefinitely. The way it does that is that the second generation can maintain citizenship until the age of 28. While they have that status, if they have a child, the second generation expires after the age of 28, but the child goes on, and then they have a child, and then this thing goes on indefinitely. I don't think that's something we want to see happen. I would like you to take a look at what I was suggesting, and I hope to deal with this in light of the rest of the legislation when it comes up.

I hope Mr. Karygiannis will withdraw this, because to me that's not a fix.

•(1740)

The Chair: Do you want to withdraw it right now, Mr. Karygiannis?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, since we're going to be discussing this in the spirit to come up.... We all agree that this is a flawed situation. However, let me, for the record—

The Chair: It is an unusual situation.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: It is a very unusual situation. As a matter of fact, it's a very unusual situation that the analysts did not—and I realize there was an analyst shift over the summer—put in the spirit of our conversation of last year. The report came to us on Thursday morning for a vote on Thursday afternoon, and it was pretty well bamboozled when that situation came about.

I will withdraw it—

The Chair: You will withdraw that until...?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: —and we will discuss it when the appropriate time comes.

The Chair: Okay. Good. Thank you, Mr. Karygiannis.

I'll go to you for your second motion:

That the Committee send for a report from the government regarding the status of transfers of funds to the Province of Ontario pursuant to the Canada-Ontario Immigration Agreement, and regarding analogous transfers to the other provinces.

Mr. Karygiannis, do you care to speak to your motion?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: It's self-explanatory, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Okay.

Does anyone else care to speak to that?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Okay.

This is the third motion:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Committee recommend the government immediately serve notice and then proceed to abrogate the Safe Third Country Agreement with the United States of America.

This is Ms. Chow's motion.

Ms. Chow, go to it.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Chairman, I believe there is an amendment coming, which I will regard as being friendly.

I move this motion because the Federal Court recently struck down the agreement, and it means that if we continue to not allow refugees to claim their status outside Canada—in the United States—we will end up spending a lot of taxpayers' dollars in fighting this case and making an appeal. I believe there is a very friendly amendment to bring the department in to talk about this, which is fine. What I don't want to see is an appeal that would go to the Federal Court and then go to the Supreme Court, and many years later we'll probably eventually lose, but in the meantime there will be lots of hardship for refugee claimants who are not able to claim to be refugees outside Canada.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Chow.

Mr. Karygiannis.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: I would like to make a friendly amendment that we ask the officials to come in and give us a briefing on this.

The Chair: Okay. There is an amendment on the floor.

First of all, how would you feel about that amendment, Ms. Chow, to have the officials come in and brief us on this?

Ms. Olivia Chow: Sure. Prior to having this motion, I don't mind having the staff discuss it.

The Chair: Could we put your motion in abeyance until we have officials come in to brief us on it, and then you could resubmit your motion?

Ms. Olivia Chow: There is a date that the Federal Court set. We have to deal with this before a date. I think it's some time in....

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: January 14.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Oh, we may not have time.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: There were two dates. They asked for submissions from each of the parties by December 17, and then they can respond to each other's submissions before January 14, at which point there will be a judgment or order issued.

•(1745)

The Chair: Okay. So do you want to take a chance and have the motion voted down, or do you want to take a chance—

Ms. Olivia Chow: Why don't we do two motions? Mr. Karygiannis can request the department to come and brief us. Given the timeline, we may have to proceed with this.

The Chair: Well, it's a little bit out of sync here, because I think we're dealing with the amendment first, but I will allow some wide-ranging conversation on this.

Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: All that date does is establish the parties' response, which will result in a court order or judgment of some kind that will be pretty much in line with what the judge has stated. There may be some changes—they will be minor—but I don't think it would be inappropriate to hear the department officials on what's already before us and have you make the motion at any time in the new year, or as soon as we get back, if we can't do it before then.

It's not going to change anything, because that date is just a chance for the parties to respond, for the judge to actually make the decision, and then as a response to that.

The Chair: Ms. Chow is in agreement with that.

Okay, thank you. So we'll just leave that alone for the time being. We'll leave it in abeyance until—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: But you have agreed to bring officials in front of us?

The Chair: Yes.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Okay. That's unanimous, then.

The Chair: I don't want to pass over Madame Faillie here.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faillie: In the past, there was also the United Nations High Commission on Refugees, the UNHCR, which is partly responsible for following up on the agreement. Guests—

[English]

The Chair: I'll leave that between you and the clerk to try to make some arrangements as to who would come before the committee to tell us about all that.

Thank you.

We'll consider the fourth one, Ms. Chow:

That the committee adopt the motion adopted on December 6, 2007 with regard to War Resisters as a report to the House and that the Chair present this report to the House.

Ms. Chow.

Ms. Olivia Chow: I think the motion we passed last time we were—

The Chair: Ms. Chow, a point of order, first of all.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Okay.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I got a copy of that motion yesterday. Is that correct?

The Chair: Yes. This is in the specified and acceptable time limit, is it not?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Andrew Chaplin): We're on committee business. This pertains directly to committee business and there would be no notice required.

The Chair: You're saying there's no notice required on this because it was pertaining to committee business?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I'm not quite following that.

The Chair: I'm not quite in the loop here either.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I see. It's arising out of committee business; therefore, you don't need to worry about the notice requirements. Is that you're saying?

Ms. Olivia Chow: Yes, that's what he said.

The Chair: Let's find out officially here. If people want it to be official, we'll have the clerk do it. We've got plenty of time, I think.

Ms. Olivia Chow: We missed the rules pursuant to Standing Order 108(2).

The Chair: Okay, here we go:

That 48 hours' notice be required for any substantive motion to be considered by the Committee, unless the substantive motion relates directly to business then under consideration; and that the notice of motion be filed with the Clerk of the Committee and distributed to members in both official languages; and that the period of notice be calculated from the time the motion has been distributed to the members of the committee by the Clerk of the Committee.

Is that in keeping...?

Go ahead.

The Clerk: The order of business we're under is committee business. So this, causing a report, relates directly to the business of the committee and is therefore—

The Chair: Good.

You heard the motion, that the committee adopt the motion as a report.

Ms. Chow, Madame Faillie, and then Mr. Karygiannis.

Go ahead, Ms. Chow.

Ms. Olivia Chow: It was just friendly support of what we did last week. It seems so long ago. The motion we passed didn't have Standing Order 108(2). I think that's the intention of the committee and that's why it's here.

The Chair: You have it as a report to the House.

Madame Faillie.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faillie: In fact, I do not want to speak. I assumed you were asking members of the committee to vote.

• (1750)

[English]

The Chair: I didn't quite get the translation of that.

Ms. Meili Faillie: I said you were calling the vote.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Karygiannis.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: You should add in there that we should be reporting to the House by December 12, just in case the House rises tomorrow.

The Chair: Is that part of your motion, Ms. Chow?

Ms. Olivia Chow: Sure.

The Chair: Mr. Trost.

Mr. Bradley Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): I have a question. This is such a short report, if we're going to call it that. I'm fairly new to this committee, but on my other committee, dissenting reports from minority parties are always allowed. Is that the practice on this committee?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Bradley Trost: If one member wanted to issue a dissenting report on this, would it be possible?

The Chair: Yes, it would, except that you would not be able to get it in within the acceptable time limit that you're looking for here, given the fact that there's a set of rules that pertain to a dissenting or minority report going in.

What is the timeframe on that? Would it be 24 or 48 hours? What was in the routine motions that we adopted?

Ms. Olivia Chow: You can allow a minority report to be tabled.

The Chair: Minority reports would be given, I thought, 48 hours.

Ms. Olivia Chow: That was put in because the concern was that people didn't have enough time to read the motion to respond. Given that we debated it last week, you would have enough time to submit the minority report anyway. There's all night tonight.

The Chair: That wasn't adopted, that 48 hours. So what is the standard time?

The Clerk: There isn't one. It's up to the committee.

The Chair: Okay, it's up to the committee.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, we have an amendment on the floor for December 12. I'd like to put the question on that.

The Chair: Yes, that's in order.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Put the question.

The Chair: Is there any more debate on the amendment that it be presented to the House by December 12?

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: On the main motion:

That the committee adopt as a report the motion adopted with regard to the War Resisters as a report to the House and that the chair present the report to the House....

(Motion as amended agreed to)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: That's to "report to the House by December 12". So the main motion—

The Chair: It's already done.

Concerning a dissenting report, the committee generally makes the rules on a dissenting report. It wasn't adopted in routine motions, so it would have to be done by the committee here today.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: So today, if I'm not mistaken, would be the 11th.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: And the 12th, if I'm not mistaken, would be tomorrow.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: So if those facts are correct, it would be almost impossible for you to have a report filed before tomorrow. Secondly, to do a dissent of any kind would require translation. Certainly it shouldn't be the 12th. A dissenting report should probably be filed by Friday, at the latest, or Thursday.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: We had the motion on the floor. The motion was duly voted. Why are we even entertaining this?

The Chair: Order, please.

The motion is done, but we're talking about the dissenting report right now. That's generally done by the committee.

Mr. Telegdi.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Mr. Chair, dissenting reports are not supposed to be longer than the report, so we're not talking about a monstrous job. I'm sure the capable hands of the parliamentary secretary can lift it off in a minute, as a former lawyer—and as an existing lawyer, for that matter.

The Chair: How long is the report?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: The dissenting report I guess should be limited to two pages and filed on or before Friday.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: It's one or two pages.

The Clerk: Effectively, it's only a paragraph with boilerplate on top and bottom.

The Chair: So it's a paragraph.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: I appreciate that the report that the House has taken upon itself to make is very brief, but the dissent would have to set out the basis of it, which would take a little more than just a statement. So I think it would be reasonable to limit it to—

• (1755)

The Chair: Why not have it reported...? It would have to go back again, but would Thursday be okay?

Ms. Chow.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Yes.

An hon. member: No, the House will be rising tomorrow.

The Chair: The House is not rising tomorrow.

So Thursday is fine? Okay.

Then the motion would have to be adjusted to say it would be presented by the 13th.

Let's try to be reasonable on this.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, let's be specific here. The 12th has passed. The parliamentary secretary wants to go to the 13th. So if you want to do that, we will say that the report is to be tabled in front of the House before the recess, not later than the 13th.

If we recess tomorrow, it will be your responsibility, sir, to make sure that it gets tabled tomorrow and their responsibility to bring forward the—

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: So we then amend the motion to reflect what Mr. Karygiannis says.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: As opposed to the 12th, it would read—

The Chair: It would read "before the House adjourns", or no later than the 13th.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: But no later than the 13th. That's fair.

The Chair: Okay.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Chow. You're a very reasonable person.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Is there a limit on the number of pages? Two pages?

Ms. Meili Faille: It cannot be longer than the report itself.

The Chair: We'll now go in camera to deal with the second report of the subcommittee.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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