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# Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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**Monday, April 7, 2008**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Norman Doyle**

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## Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

Monday, April 7, 2008

•(1105)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, CPC)):** I would like to welcome all of you here today as we continue our cross-country meetings.

First of all, I want to thank you, Madam Mayor, for the opportunity to be here and be hosted by your gracious city and for giving us the town hall to conduct our meetings in. Of course, I want to thank your MP, Mr. Telegdi, in whose riding we happen to be.

Thank you, Andrew, for the invitation to be here.

As you're aware, we are the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. We've been mandated to hold meetings on three very important matters that we know you're very concerned about and very interested in as well. These are temporary and undocumented workers, immigration consultants, and the Iraqi refugee problem, which we're all very much aware of.

We're going to meet in almost all of the ten provinces in Canada. We will be finishing up in mid-April in St. John's, Newfoundland. We already met in Vancouver last week, and in Edmonton, Saskatchewan, and Winnipeg. This week we're here in Kitchener, Waterloo, and we'll go to Toronto for a couple of days of meetings, and then from Toronto to Montreal. From there, we'll go into eastern Canada. It's going to be a very busy time for us. We'll be in Quebec City and Montreal and all over.

We're going to be meeting approximately 52 panels of people who want to talk about these very important issues. We are accompanied by officials from the department and from government, and these people, along with us, will be charged with the responsibility of compiling a report. At the end of it all, we will present that report to the House of Commons.

Again, I'm very pleased to be here. Our committee is very pleased to be here. I want to thank you, Madam Mayor, for your graciousness in hosting this.

I would invite the mayor to say a few words here today. Madam Mayor.

**Mrs. Brenda Halloran (Mayor of Waterloo, As an Individual):** Thank you very much.

Good morning, everybody.

Chair Doyle, members of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, and of course, the participants in today's hearings,

thank you so much for coming here today to our city. I welcome you on behalf of council and the citizens of Waterloo.

It is definitely our privilege to provide this location today for one of the two Ontario stops for the committee hearings on citizenship and immigration. I must specifically thank the Honourable Andrew Telegdi, our member of Parliament, who was instrumental in having the first-ever meeting of this committee held in Waterloo, and who also assisted in making Waterloo a location for the cross-country hearings again this year.

It is important that we, as representatives of the people, reach out whenever possible to engage our constituents and stakeholders in discussions on how to improve our policies and processes. This can be difficult for local government representatives, and I'm certain even more so for our federal government partners. That is why I applaud this initiative and wish you the most success today and throughout the remainder of your hearings. This is a very important day for all of us in Canada and I'm really pleased to see so many of you taking the time out of your very busy lives to sit here today and share your information and concerns with this committee. I'm really proud to be a part of it and that Waterloo is sharing a small part in something that's going to be very instrumental for our country.

Thank you, and thank you to all the committee members here today.

•(1110)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Mayor.

It's great to be here. We're looking forward today to having MP Telegdi take us around town later on this evening to show us some of the sights here in Kitchener, Waterloo. I'm looking forward to that.

Thank you. I appreciate it very much indeed.

Mr. Karygiannis.

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.):** I have a request, Mr. Chair.

I know the clerk has been trying to put a schedule together with last-minute requests and last-minute additions. We have more people here than we had requested to come. In some of the situations—for example, the Iraqi refugees—they will certainly continue tomorrow.

I'm just wondering, since some of the folks made a long trip to come here, if we can find it in our hearts to allow them a little bit of extra time. I know we're supposed to go from 11 until 12 o'clock. Maybe we can stretch that to between 11 and 12:30 or 12:45, and give them an opportunity to voice their concerns, versus giving everybody two minutes. By the time you say, "Hello, my name is...", those two minutes are gone. So maybe we can come to some agreement that we give five minutes to everybody who is here to present.

**The Chair:** Yes, whatever it takes. We're going to be totally flexible. We're not here to bring the hammer down if people are going over their time. We'll be totally, completely flexible, as informal as we can be. We're interested, at the end of the day, in cluing up when we have to, but I'm absolutely in agreement with that and I'm sure all members of the committee would be. So the people who are appearing before us today can feel very relaxed about the time and what have you.

I'm going to pass the chair over to Mr. Telegdi in a few minutes. He is vice-chair of our committee, and of course we're in his riding, so I think it would be a good thing to let him conduct these meetings this morning.

I would like to welcome the witnesses here today—and I have indicated that after the welcome the cameras will be gone.

We have as witnesses, from the Iraqi Canadian Society of Ontario, Ghina Al-Sewaidi, who is its president, as well as Falah Hafed, Hessian Mashkour, and Yanar Mohammed; from the Iraqi Federation of Refugees, Jalal Saeed; from the Assyrian Aid Society of Canada, Mariam Georgis; and from the Mandaean Canadian Community Association, Salam Gatih.

Welcome to all of you. I will now vacate the chair and ask Mr. Telegdi to chair the meeting.

•(1115)

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.)):** Thank you very much.

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** Does that mean that Mr. Doyle has switched parties?

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi):** No, he is being non-partisan, as we are on this committee while we are on the road.

First of all, I want to welcome the committee into the council chambers where I spent eight years. I think the rule we had last time was that we were taking some photographs of members for members' use. That still applies from the last time. We want to make sure everybody gets some good pictures from their travels.

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** Do we have the cameras going?

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi):** I have no problem with it, but I don't think we want to argue about it, so....

Let me say to the delegation today on Iraqi refugees that I came here as a refugee in 1957. That was after the Hungarian revolution. Canada's refugee policies were drastically altered at that time to accommodate the influx. Things have changed for the better. Your stories, I know, are going to be very compelling, and we're going to extend the time to accommodate as much discussion as possible.

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** We can bring lunch in.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi):** Lunch is going to be right next door in the room named after one of the original founders of this Mennonite community.

I would ask the presenters to try to keep your comments to about five minutes so we can get engagement from the members. What will happen is that you make the presentations, and then members of the committee will be asking questions or for points of clarification and what have you.

**Mr. Norman Doyle:** If I can interject for a moment, already some of the committee have come and said that they will require a bit more than five minutes, so they're asking our indulgence to give them some extra time. I indicated that we would and that we'll go overtime, if necessary.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi):** A lot of the discussion will help clarify the points as well. We want to see interaction between the presenters and the committee. In case we have any questions, we don't want to be sitting there, when we're doing the report, asking what something meant.

The first presenter is going to be Ms. Ghina Al-Sewaidi, from the Iraqi Canadian Society of Ontario.

**Ms. Ghina Al-Sewaidi (President, Iraqi Canadian Society of Ontario):** I am from the Iraqi Canadian Society of Ontario. I am the president of the organization. I have here with me two individuals. We devised our time, actually, for each of us to speak for about two minutes, and we've divided the issues also. Falah Hafed will start and will speak about the general Iraqi refugee situation. Ms. Yanar Mohammed will be talking about women refugees in Iraq. And being a practising lawyer here in Canada, I will be talking about the legal issues facing refugees already.

So maybe Falah Hafed could start.

**Mr. Falah Hafed (Iraqi Canadian Society of Ontario):** I would like to thank the committee for inviting us here today to discuss a very important issue in Iraq: refugees.

On a personal level, I would like to thank Immigration Canada. Five years ago it did help me, was a tremendous help, when I tried to adopt this child. It did marvellously at that time, five years ago.

I don't feel we are happy at this time with Immigration Canada's dealing with the refugees in Iraq. As we all know, we are dealing with the tip of the iceberg when we talk about refugees and asylum seekers. All the western nations are dealing with 1% of the asylum seekers from Iraq. There have been 4.5 million Iraqi refugees uprooted since the conflict started, and 2.5 million of the Iraqis displaced are inside the country and 2 million are in neighbouring countries, Syria and Jordan.

When I was reviewing the statistics from the United Nations High Commissioner, I was puzzled with the numbers I saw when I compared Canada with Sweden. Sweden is not one of the eight great nations. They are only nine million in population. They took 36,000 in 2007, and that represented four people per each 1,000 people in the Swedish population. Canada, with a population of 33 million, is taking less than one person per 1,000 Canadians. We have a better economy and we have a bigger country, and we are still taking many fewer than Sweden. I feel we need a better answer for this conflicting number.

I also would like to mention some problems I have been hearing about from the refugees in Jordan and Syria. As all of you know, the refugees, when they leave their homes, have not prepared by learning English—they're just trying to save their skins. The requirement by Immigration Canada to have somebody speak English to come here as a refugee is a problem. The other problem they are facing there is that they don't have jobs and they live on their savings. Most of the people drain their savings while waiting for somebody to look after their application. Some of them risk their lives and go back to Iraq to do some work to put food on the table in Syria or Jordan, where their kids are.

The Canadian embassy and the people who are dealing with the refugees overseas, in Syria and Jordan, are asking for documentation—certified documentation, like a marriage certificate or an education certificate—and this kind of thing is impossible for a refugee to grab at the last minute, when some of them or most of them are leaving at gunpoint.

There are a lot of health issues for the Iraqi refugees. I get a lot of letters from my friends and family members. They can't afford to buy medicine for their kids. The economies in Syria and Jordan are very slow, and they have difficulty in finding jobs. They're appealing for help, and we are trying here to help them.

• (1120)

I would like also to mention that Immigration Canada is underusing our community here in Canada. They should do better. If they contact us, we can help. Please pay attention to this point.

We are working on our own. We go looking for the people coming from Iraq to help them, and we can mobilize our community. Last winter, I was driving close to downtown Kitchener when I saw a woman walking on the street wearing traditional Iraqi clothes. It was minus 8 to minus 10, and she's wearing very light clothes. I sent my wife to talk to her and ask her what was going on and why she was walking in an almost deserted area. We found out that she was a newcomer of three days ago. She was looking for a grocery store or something. We convinced her to come with us and we brought her back.

When you bring refugees here, you need somebody else to tell them when they should call 911, when they should go to the OHIP office, and who is going to help them. So please, pay attention to our community so we can help you.

Thank you very much. I think my time is up.

• (1125)

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi):** Thank you very much.

The next speaker is Ms. Yanar Mohammed.

**Ms. Yanar Mohammed (President, Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq, Iraqi Canadian Society of Ontario):** Thank you for having us here.

My name is Yanar Mohammed, and I'm president of the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq. It so happens that I am in Canada right now, which gives me an opportunity to convey to you what happens to the women of Iraq at this point and why there is a need for this part of the world to lend a helping hand.

At this point, what we do in Iraq is try to save women from honour killings. We have opened shelters for women. I don't know whether it's clear on this side of the world, but current laws in Iraq still support the honour killing of women. In the south, in one city only, 133 women were killed in this current year. And these are the official announcements. The real numbers of women killed in Iraq every year are somewhere between 500 to 1,000, all under laws that legalize these killings. They abide by what is called the honour issue.

These women have nowhere to go. In our shelters we are able to take a few, and now we are being pressured by the government. They are trying to make our shelters illegal. These women are leaving Iraq and going to Syria and Jordan. They are part of that population of two million who are starving, humiliated, not being accepted anywhere in the world. There is a population of somewhere between 10,000 and 50,000 women who are forced to sell themselves on a daily basis in order to make ends meet, in order to keep their children alive.

These women need to hear from this country's policies. These women do not deserve this much humiliation from Iraq's policies, which happened because of political issues.

Our organization has gone into the prisons in Iraq, into the prisons for women. What we have found out is that women, while in the detainment centres, are being raped. We have found seven cases of women who were raped by Iraqi police. We raised the issue with the Ministry of Interior and have not heard any answers from them. It has been one year since we raised this issue.

In terms of the trafficking issue, somewhere between 5,000 and 50,000 women have been trafficked to the surrounding countries and are being exploited. Why do I say between 5,000 and 50,000? It depends on the way you identify trafficking. At this moment, the women of Iraq are living in a big prison. They are not being welcomed in many places in the world.

I would also like to mention a few things about youth. If you are a young person, usually a male, trying to move in Baghdad or in another city from one area to the other, you have to have a false ID in your pocket. Otherwise, if you hold the wrong ID, you are detained. You disappear. You do not go back to your parents. If are a Sunni, you do not go back to your parents.

The militia are in control of the checkpoints and also in control of the government. It is very clear over the television now that militia warfare has taken millions of people in Iraq hostage. The youth are being held hostage.

Selwan, for example, applied to become a policeman. He worked there for many months until his conscience could not take any more torture issues. He was seeing Sunnis being tortured in the police centres. Selwan left the police. Now in his area and in the further cities, the Jaysh al-Mahdi is recruiting. This militia, which is recruiting young people, is against the government. Full-scale warfare has taken hold, and Iraqis are being held as refugees in their own cities, in their own houses.

• (1130)

At this moment, because of the time, I would like to speak on behalf of some of the other people in my group.

I would like to mention the issue of the Christians and how they are being sabotaged inside Iraq: the Archbishop who was kidnapped and then killed, the priest who was walking in a funeral procession and was killed by a runaway car, the mass immigration from Basra in the south of Iraq just because the Islamic parties are in control of that city. It's even an exaggeration to call them parties. These are militias who are in control of our cities and they have turned them into a very unfriendly zone for other religions, for the other gender, because women are not really very much supported under their agenda. Other religions are also to be considered in this issue.

I would like to focus here on the acceptance of women being discriminated against in this new era in Iraq. Honour killing articles in the criminal code are still valid, and they still provide the cover-up for the killing of women. Somewhere between 500 and 1,000 women are killed every month.

I would like to tell you this small story. It is a real story that happened two days ago in Sadr City, the same place where the fighting took place two days ago. Nobody mentions the warfare against women.

Zainab was found by herself with a male who is not her husband. She was taken out of the car by the Jaysh al-Mahdi militia. She was stripped naked and forced to walk naked all over the city. She was humiliated just because she is a woman who was found in what was thought of as an immoral situation. They took her back to her house and they told all the family they had to leave the city. Zainab was very lucky she was not killed. This is a big prison for women, for other religions, a big prison for anybody who is not from the sectarian group of the government, which is Islamic Shia.

I usually do not disclose this information. I speak about this as a Muslim Shia, and this should not happen anywhere in the world. But what do I say to these youths, to these women around me, when they ask me about Canada? How it is one of the most developed countries in the world? How it has the highest standards and how they are not accepting immigrants at this point, or they are making it more difficult? What do I say to Eman, who had to live while very exploited as a prostitute, who saw the woman next to her brought back as a bloody body drilled from head to toe by electric drills?

This is the situation when you live like a minority in a country like Iraq at this time. The occupation has brought us very inhumane situations, and unfortunately Canada finds itself in the position where it has to do the cleanup or help people who are unfortunate on the other side of the world. This is the reason I come here to speak, and I'm very fortunate to be able to be in Canada at this point.

Thank you very much for giving us the time. We would like to hear more from you later.

• (1135)

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi):** Thank you.

Next we'll have Ghina Al-Sewaidi.

**Ms. Ghina Al-Sewaidi:** I will be speaking because of the time constraints.

I am a practising lawyer here and I will keep my comments short and to the legal side of the immigration system. I'm happy I'm here today because I have always wanted to share this opinion of mine with respect to the frustration I have when there are immigration applications being processed from overseas.

Because of this frustration I have, I have reduced my intake of immigration applications on behalf of clients. Applications take years. I can specifically mention that I know of a couple of family-class sponsorship applications that have taken over eight years to be processed, even though an appeal was allowed and an error in the application was rejected again. We had to correspond and correspond, and it took months for the embassy—that's in Syria, because most of my applications are being processed through Syria—to eventually respond when I sent them a letter, for example, saying, if you do not respond I'm going to Federal Court, and the Federal Court will be asking for cause and damages. That's basically when they responded.

It's very frustrating for us as lawyers. The same information keeps being asked by the embassy staff over and over—same documents, same photocopies. There is delay by them in answering questions or queries by us lawyers from here. They send correspondence to us with files without names—just file numbers—and we have to write back to them asking them for the name of the client. That's another two months for them to answer back. They send letters dated one date and the envelope dated a month and a half later, and they give the client a deadline of one month from the date of that letter. So again we have to write to them, send them copies of the envelope, send them copies of the letter, and ask for an extension of time. That's a further delay.

They do not review files, it seems. Each time we ask for an update they ask for the same thing, the same standard letter they have. If clients go and ask them at the embassy, at the visa section, what is happening with their application, first of all, the clients say they are not treated as human beings there. They are treated differently from people with other nationalities, and at the same time they tell them, "Go and ask your lawyer in Canada. Your lawyer did not send us what we had asked your lawyer to send." They come to us. We show them proof that we had sent to the embassy what they needed us to send to them.

So really all this is very frustrating. To clean up the situation, that would help immensely with the backlog they have at the embassy, especially with the situation of refugees, because a lot of them do have family here who are willing to sponsor them. They do have family here who are willing to support them, and if the mind was put actually to the application and to the paperwork, we would not have the backlog we have now here in the system.

Thank you.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi):** Thank you very much.

We're now going to go to Jalal Saeed. I want to make sure we have that right.

**Mr. Jalal Saeed (Iraqi Federation of Refugee):** My name is Jalal Saeed. I am working with the Iraqi Federation of Refugees. Also I am a member of the Canadian Council for Refugees. I am working with the Iraqi Canadian Society too.

Actually, I just came back last week from Iraq.

By the way, I get the shakes. I haven't presented too much stuff. There was supposed to be somebody coming to take my place. He was to come today, but he didn't come. Finally, I came just to listen and to say something at our meeting.

Our organization was established in 1991 during the time of Saddam Hussein, when the first war happened. All the Iraqi Kurds escaped to the mountains. There were almost three million people. At that time our organization was started in order to help people. When the Iraqis were starting to escape to Europe or to Canada, our organization was started in order to help the Iraqi refugees in those countries.

I came to Canada as a refugee in 1998. At that time I established this organization and started to sponsor under private sponsorship in Canada. We brought over 100 people to Canada under private sponsorship, by groups of five or by those organizations that were helping under private sponsorship, like the Canadian Lutheran Church and the Canadian Reform Church and the other organizations.

This is my question. Until 2003 the application process was very fast. During one year everybody got the right answer or they couldn't come to Canada during the right time. But after 2003 when there were the big happenings in Iraq with the United States, the applications have taken so long. Even in Canada, the application process, which before was four weeks, now has gone up to eight months or even one year or more. It takes one year just to get the B number from the CIC local. Because this has happened, we stopped this process. This is what has happened.

I'm sorry my voice is not very good, but I just want to say what is happening in Iraq, as I came back last week.

If you ask anybody in Iraq—I'm not talking about the refugees outside of Iraq in Syria, Jordan, and Turkey, but inside Iraq—everybody wants to get out, but they don't know how. Everybody asks me to please help, but how? From children to seniors, everybody asks for help, but how? We don't know where to start. In Kurdistan at that time, we got help from the Government of England. They deported 60 Kurds from England to Kurdistan. We met the president of the Parliament in Kurdistan about the stuff that happened to the Iraqi Kurd refugees in England, but they didn't have a right answer for us. They said, "They are our people, and we cannot tell them not to come back". We found out later that everybody got help from the airport by the Kurdish government. This happened in Kurdistan, in Iraq.

I met people from Basra and Kirkuk and so on. Everybody wants to get out. This is happening in Iraq.

I'm sorry, I can't talk too much.

• (1140)

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi):** Okay, thank you.

Then we'll go to Mariam Georgis.

**Mrs. Mariam Georgis (Member, Assyrian Aid Society of Canada):** Good morning.

I'd first like to thank the committee—and also Canada, I guess—for giving me the opportunity to come here today and speak on behalf of the Assyrian Aid Society of Iraq.

The Assyrian Aid Society of Iraq was created in the spring of 1991 to alleviate the hardships our people were facing due to the Gulf War. Thereafter, branches were opened in the United States, Canada, Europe, and Australia to raise funds for the programs implemented by the society.

The programs implemented before 2003 were resettlement of Assyrians, also known as Chaldeans and Syriacs and hereafter referred to as ChaldoAssyrians, refugees from Turkey and Syria, back to their villages that were destroyed by the previous regime. They provided them with the basic necessities of life, such as shelter, food, and water. They installed irrigation systems and provided farming equipment. They supported the ChaldoAssyrians' education initiatives by building schools, printing curriculums, and establishing dormitories and transportation for students and teachers. They also established health clinics and pharmacies. Through these programs, the Assyrian Aid Society was successful in preventing a mass exodus of the ChaldoAssyrian community and maintaining the diversity of the Dohuk and Arbil governments.

Since the fall of the previous government, the responsibilities of our society have increased as more ChaldoAssyrians were displaced from the conflict regions and took refuge in the Nineveh Plains as well as neighbouring countries due to imminent threat to their personal safety. They have often suffered from some form of attack or loss of life. They represent a wave of dislocation that is part of an ethno-religious cleansing campaign in Iraq. Presently one in three ChaldoAssyrians is a refugee, and figures for internally displaced people in all of Iraq reflect even greater internal dislocation.

Sadly, this tragic picture is overlooked by many, and it is reinforcing the communities' feelings of hopelessness and despair. This in turn is prompting even more flights to neighbouring countries, with the goal of leaving Iraq and the Middle East.

Since early 2007, the targeting that resulted in the massive influx of internally displaced persons in 2006 has only increased. At a minimum, using conservative United States government figures, one in three ChaldoAssyrians is a refugee. UNHCR's 2007 rapid needs assessment indicates they represent 85% of internally displaced persons arriving in governments such as Dohuk. They are classifying them as a returning diaspora.

However, the largely successful ethno-religious cleansing of such areas is part of a massive, deliberate, and focused effort at targeting Iraq's vulnerable Christian population. Over the years the Nineveh Plains has gone through a situation of underdevelopment due to the previous regime's discrimination and Arabization campaign. Thus it lacks the basic infrastructure to sustain its existing population base, let alone take on waves of thousands of internally displaced families. For ChaldoAssyrian Christians, these high-profile attacks only serve to exemplify what they're all facing: murders, kidnappings, rapes, and forced conversions that lead to large-scale dislocation and displacement.

The Department of State was required to produce a report on the situation in the Nineveh Plains. The report effectively summarizes the situation these people are facing and confirms that a great proportion are arriving in the Nineveh Plains. Their security and economic status have suffered dramatically in recent years. Many have sought to escape from central Iraq out of genuine fear of attack, kidnappings, and assassinations.

Currently there are over two million Iraqi refugees, over 350,000 of which are Christians. Moreover, approximately two million of the Iraqi population are classified as internally displaced persons. The Assyrian Aid Society of Canada is concerned most for the situation of the ChaldoAssyrians Christians, not only because we feel they are the most vulnerable, but because their preservation is to the benefit of Iraq as a whole, through the maintenance of the diversity of Iraq as well as preventing the eradication of its indigenous people.

The Assyrian Aid Society greatly appreciates and commends Canada's efforts to aid the Iraqi refugees. While we support the acceptance of Iraqi refugees into Canada, we believe the most efficient and feasible way of aiding these refugees is through preventing another mass exodus from occurring, as well as providing those already classified as refugees with the means to return.

With excessive inflation and poor infrastructure for the existing population base in 2003, escalated targeting, and greater flight to the Nineveh Plains, the area is on the brink of collapse. Supporting the Assyrian Aid Society of Iraq in its endeavours to begin rebuilding this region will not only prevent the flight of the ChaldoAssyrians community, it will also allow those who are currently taking refuge in neighbouring countries to return to their ancestral homeland if they wish.

Our organization's previous experience and Canada's support can help to end this humanitarian disaster and bring hope for a better tomorrow.

Elevating the basic food and non-food item requirements for internally displaced persons can elevate an acute pressure on the local economy and the local population. This will ensure that daily nutritional requirements are met and will reduce the competition for limited supplies that are presently making it impossible to provide for the basic needs of people.

• (1145)

In addition, the provision of basic housing to internally displaced persons can elevate a substantial amount of the pressure faced by the communities of the Nineveh Plains. Members of the ChaldoAssyrian

community desire to and are willing to return to their original homeland, but they need something to come back to.

Thank you.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi):** Thank you very much.

Now we have Salam Gatih.

• (1150)

**Mr. Salam Gatih (Mandaean Canadian Community Association):** Good morning, Chairman, and good morning, standing committee. Thank you very much for giving us the opportunity to be here to present our case.

My name is Salam Gatih. I am from the Mandaean Canadian Community Association, and I am originally from Iraq. I have been in Canada since 1979. I am a Canadian citizen, and I'm proud to be one.

I'm coming here today to tell you about our people, the Madaeans. Mandaean is one of the oldest religions in Iraq. It goes back at least 5,000 years. We used to live close to the Sumerians and the Syrians and the others.

Madaeans are, as we say, the weakest link in Iraqi society. We are peaceful people who are against war. Mainly, we practise religion as one of the followers of John the Baptist. We still do it in the river, the way we did more than 2,000 years ago. Our people are mostly in science, education, and jewellery design.

Saddam Hussein's regime, the war he launched against his neighbours, the destruction he caused, and the situation after the departure of Saddam Hussein have cost all Iraqi people. What makes the Mandaean people the most vulnerable is that they have no government or organization to support them. When they are in Iraq or manage to leave Iraq, they are left open, because the neighbours—countries such as Syria, Jordan, and many others—don't know them. They have no idea who the Madaeans are, because the Madaeans have only lived in Iraq and in the south of Iran. For a thousand years, they never left that country. They know Iraq as mainly a society of Muslims or Christians, but they don't know the Madaeans.

So when they leave Iraq, they are left open, as we say, in the wind. They don't know where to go. There's no support. The only support they have is their savings, the money they have from selling their belongings when they come over. When that is finished, they have no idea what to do, so they are stuck in the middle. Some have families, and they have no choice but to go back to work again and take their chances in Iraq, where some of them have been killed or captured, with ransoms demanded for their release.

I came today to ask you for help, as an Iraqi and also as a Canadian, which I am proud to be. I know that Canada is a great nation that opens its heart when there are humanitarian concerns involving kids and families.

I'm proud to say that during all those years, the only way for our people in Iraq to prove themselves—you cannot raise arms, because we don't believe in war—was to be educated and to be the best. In this case, you'd be respected based on your level of intelligence.

•(1155)

If you kindly—and I'm speaking in general, as an Iraqi—help the Iraqis, concentrate on Mandaeans in particular, because they have nowhere to go. There is no support. There are no organizations. There is absolutely nothing at hand for them, except to look to you, to this peaceful, democratic country that always gives us an example of how we should practise accepting and tolerating each other, and how to prosper through education and intelligence, and to compete through one's personal abilities, not physical abilities.

Kindly, again, I ask you to increase the number of Iraqis to a minimum of at least 10,000. So open your hearts, because 1,000 or 2,000 is absolutely nothing compared with the four million Iraqis who are looking and have nowhere to go. That is what we are asking you, Mr. Chairman and the standing committee: to focus on the Iraqis. I would say even 10,000 is really just a drop in the bucket, but at least it's a good start, so that they will see that Canada has not left them behind.

I remember that when Albanians were in a crisis, and many, many other societies were suffering, Canada was always there. We are proud of that. That's the reason I've lived here for 30 years and I'm proud to be Canadian. My kids were born here, my family is here, and I do everything I can to build my future here in this country. I use this as an example whenever I go to the Middle East, and I always say that I'm proud to come from Canada.

So this is the time to look toward the Iraqis and to help them. That's all I'm asking.

Thank you very much.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi):** Thank you very much.

Now, is there a Mr. Asaad Daihgan next?

**Mr. Salam Gatih:** No, he's from the Mandaean community, so I spoke on his behalf. Thank you.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi):** Well, thank you very much.

My office, in particular, was very personally touched by what was happening in Iraq. I actually found out from reading the paper that nine people with the same name as one of my long-time employees were killed in a bombing, when Chemical Ali was being chased with bunker buster bombs. Instead of his being killed, his aunt, cousins, and their children were killed. We certainly heard a lot about it in my office, in terms of what was going on.

I know this is a difficult plea that you're making, and I want to thank all of you because your presentations were excellent. Given the fact that we have so many Iraqis in Canada already, sponsorship should be a simple matter.

I'm going to now give every member of committee up to five minutes, if they want, and make sure everybody gets to ask a question.

I will start off with Mr. Jimmy Karygiannis, who was particularly strong on making sure that we studied this issue.

Mr. Karygiannis.

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** Thank you, Chair.

Welcome to all of you, and thank you for coming. I know some of you have made a trip from Toronto and some of you were here. As you can understand, there are going to be hearings again tomorrow, and there will be a little bit of crossover.

Just for the record, I and the vice-chair of the committee are both, I would say, immigrants of a special kind in this country, in that we both sought refuge here. We share with you some of the situations you have. I know others of us have immigrated to this country, and we know the hardships that immigrants go through.

As for myself, I have a staff member in my office who is married to an Iraqi and has immediate family from Iraq. I guess I get to hear it every day. Being born in a refugee camp myself in Greece, I realize the hardships in what you're facing.

I've got a couple of questions, and whoever wants to take a stab at it, please go ahead.

Over the years, and over the last year, some of you have expressed concern that one particular religion has been persecuted more than others. So I throw that in there, and whoever wants to address it, by all means go ahead. Give me 30 seconds to finish—I'll throw out the questions and whoever wants to can take a stab at it.

I realize that today we do have a cross-section of religions represented here. I'm very honoured that Mrs. Yanar Mohammed is here from Baghdad, and we are fortunate to have you here to present to us not only what we hear from people who have been here in this country for 50 years, but also first-hand.

So the aspect of the religion is out there, whoever wants to address it.

Mr. Salam, about the number, you said that 1,000 is not enough. Since last year when this motion was brought onto the floor, the minister, in October, moved to allow fast-tracking of family class and/or spouses. This would not have been done unless the motion had come on the floor. The minister, knowing full well we're going to meet here today and probably are going to raise those concerns—and I'm trying to be very apolitical in this matter—raised the bar to 1,000. Now you said that 1,000 is not enough, and you mentioned something like 10,000.

I also want some of you to address the issue of how the community itself and community partners are not engaged by Citizenship and Immigration, for you to be able to be sponsors of refugees.

Mrs. Al-Sewaidi, you mentioned Damascus. Last week we heard in Vancouver of gross incompetency as well as people in Damascus being on the take, by a member that reported it. Do you have anything to add to that?

Those are my questions, and whoever wants to take a stab at it, please go ahead. One is the number, two is the religion, and three is Damascus and what's happening there.

•(1200)

**Mr. Falah Hafed:** Are you going with the number first or the religion?

**Mr. Salam Gatih:** The Iraqi refugees are right now outside, in the surrounding countries. There are around four million people. Some of them have been there for a few years, waiting for sponsorship by other countries. A thousand to four million or four and a half million—it really does not address the problem.

What I'm proposing currently is that the government—with Canada as a country open to the immigration, especially where we're talking about people who are, a lot of them, in educated departments—could increase it to a minimum of 10,000. I'm not saying 10,000 as the maximum, but the minimum should be 10,000, and if there's room to increase it more, that would be the ideal, given the extreme situation in the Middle East and the suffering. People are being hammered from both sides, from inside and outside, in the countries where they are.

So 10,000 should be the minimum they could look at, and accelerate it after that, hopefully.

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** In that respect, sir, would you want to see that extended, should somebody have a sister or a brother there who is single and not covered right now in the Citizenship and Immigration request? Would you like to have the family sponsor that individual for three or four years?

**Mr. Salam Gatih:** Yes, as the Mandaean Canadian Community Association, and I believe the other Iraqi associations, we have families here who would be more than happy to help the incoming refugees this year, to extend our homes and show them where to start, where to go, to sponsor them so they could start working. I do know these people are hardworking people. They left Iraq by no choice of their own. A lot of them are educated. The proof is here right now. Of the Iraqi people who are here, the majority are working people; they pay taxes, respect the law, and they are grateful to be here.

I'll assure you that if we are given the okay, the Mandaean Canadian Community Association will be the first to start giving our assurance and guarantees that we are going to look after the families who arrive here.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi):** Thank you very much.

Next we have Monsieur St-Cyr.

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** Mr. Chairman, some of the members had said they might want to answer on the aspect of religion and on what's happening in Damascus. I'm looking for your indulgence, if you would like to give them an opportunity to address these issues.

• (1205)

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi):** We'll get back to you, Mr. Karygiannis.

Monsieur St-Cyr.

[Translation]

**Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ):** I thank you all for being here today and for your presentations.

For the most part, you have described the lengthy delays in processing faced by Iraqi refugees who want to come to Canada. It is an intolerable and unacceptable situation. Ms. Al-Sewaidi also explained the extent to which the bureaucracy can sometimes be annoying and difficult to deal with. I think that we all pretty much

agree with that. By their inaction and inertia, this government and the previous one have put us in this position.

However, the committee must focus on this point that people raise: the situation is not restricted to Iraqi refugees. In a system that is already overloaded, that works in slow motion and that suffers major failures, any significant advance for immigrants from Iraq will of necessity come at the expense of other refugees facing the same problems.

How can we justify a special program for refugees from Iraq, or speeding up the processing of Iraqi files? What would you tell those who wonder whether people living in extremely difficult situations in Haiti, Sri Lanka or Darfur risk being penalized if special programs are put in place? Would that be acceptable? How do you respond to that?

[English]

**Mr. Falah Hafed:** I will respond to that.

I think the total number of refugee seekers, as the high commissioner said, is about 110,000, all over the world. Canada is taking only 28,000, while Sweden is taking 36,000, and the United States is taking 49,000. I find the Canadian number disproportionate to the economic capability, the population number here, and the size of the land here. I think we should increase the number. Instead of making more refugees move from one place to another place at the expense of the other place, we can just increase numbers of them and get more share.

[Translation]

**Mr. Thierry St-Cyr:** If I understand correctly, you are not asking for a special program for Iraqi refugees, you are not asking for preferential treatment. You want the total number of refugees accepted to be increased and for the whole apparatus to work better. By definition, that would partially solve the problem for Iraqi refugees. Does that reflect what you were saying?

[English]

**Mr. Falah Hafed:** Yes. The fact is that half of this number are Iraqis, in 2007. It's 49,000 Iraqis. If we break down the numbers—I do have some numbers here—the first country producing refugees is Iraq, in 2000. The second one is the Russian federation—I don't have the exact number here in hand, but I can provide you with that. China would be the third, and subsequent countries come after that.

The total number, as I said, is approximately 110,000. We make up about half the total numbers, and when you increase the numbers, you are treating us as special. But if you take 28% of the total, of course our number is going to be very small. Because we're taking people from China, from Russia, and from other countries, we're going to be the last and we're going to have very small numbers.

• (1210)

[Translation]

**Mr. Thierry St-Cyr:** Ms. Mohamed, what do you think?

[English]

**Ms. Yanar Mohammed:** I prefer to look at it another way. If you compare the Iraq situation with that of Darfur or Sudan, there is a major difference in that the Iraqi population had to change into a very deprived and very bizarre humanitarian situation because there was a failure in the international community to stop the illegal war on Iraq. There was an international intervention that has turned our lives upside down, and we see now as the time for Canada to play a leadership role in the international community to start to make a difference in this international intervention, to put Canada on the right track so that it will lead the international community to lead people in other places in the world to a better situation.

We think that what happened in Iraq—turning a population of 25 million into that of a big prison with four million refugees inside and outside the country—was the direct result of the lack of leadership in the international community. Who can fix that situation, other than a government like Canada?

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi):** Okay, we've got it all there. We've gone quite a bit over, but we'll—

**Ms. Ghina Al-Sewaidi:** Maybe I can squeeze in my answer in another question.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi):** Okay.

We've got Nina Grewal. She's actually the only member of the committee who was here the last time we were here in Waterloo.

Nina, welcome back.

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

I would like to welcome all of you. Thank you for coming, thank you for your time, and thank you for your presentations.

All of us know that Canada is a country of immigrants. Immigration has played a significant role in our modern Canada and what it is today. Immigrants will continue to play a significant role in our social, economic, and cultural aspects. Our government, as all of you should know, is pro-immigration. Our system must be equipped to effectively cater to the needs of our country and be fair to all the immigrants who come to our country.

I know how hard it is for prospective immigrants to Canada, because I myself have also lived in a war-torn country, Liberia, in west Africa. The situation is the same everywhere, wherever the refugees are, whether it's in Iraq, in Vietnam, or in Africa.

I have a couple of questions for you. Private sponsors have indicated that they would sponsor more refugees if they could. The backlog of applications attests to their willingness to contribute. What measures could be taken to unleash this untapped potential?

Second, are other countries accepting these refugees?

Could you please answer these two questions first?

**Mr. Falah Hafed:** There are other countries taking care of Iraqi refugees. I've been mentioning Sweden because it is just a marvellous country and has been taking the load off Iraqi refugees. They doubled their quota—if there is a quota. I don't know, but they doubled what they are taking.

As for the numbers in Syria and Jordan, there are refugees there. They are in those countries, but those countries don't have the ability to deal with the numbers. In each of those two small countries, with their poor economies, they have almost a million persons. In their normal life without this number of refugees, those two countries are not able to provide a good health care system or good jobs for their own people. When they get another million, it's going to be very difficult, and here is where the international community has to step in and help.

The countries around Iraq taking the greatest number of refugees are Syria and Jordan. Some are in Turkey and some are in Iran, but they all depend on the western world, which is taking only 1% of the Iraqi people applying for refugee status, and that's all.

•(1215)

**Mrs. Nina Grewal:** And regarding the two million, would you like to answer that?

**Ms. Ghina Al-Sewaidi:** What was your question again?

**Mrs. Nina Grewal:** Of the two million displaced Iraqis, in your opinion, how many will never be able to return safely to Iraq? How do you distinguish those most in need, when over two million have been displaced?

**Ms. Ghina Al-Sewaidi:** I'll leave that to Yanar, actually, because she's more involved directly.

**Ms. Yanar Mohammed:** We can answer it jointly.

At this point my friends in Sadr City are all hostages. Some of them had to find a job so they went to the army. They were told they could not take a job unless they brought a recommendation from Sadr. Now that the government and Sadr are split with each other, the Sadr claims them to be part of his army, and the government tells them, "If you go to Sadr, you will be killed."

So the youth—and I'm speaking here about hundreds of thousands—are split between this and that and are threatened by both sides. Those who were able to make it outside the country are humiliated, but they are alive. If they go back, at this moment they cannot guarantee their lives for the days to come.

As for women, it is getting worse and worse. It's a big prison. I am wondering why, with the 10,000 that have been spoken about here, there isn't a quota for women there. From my experience, 60% of the population are women and are discriminated against. And you're not even a second-rate citizen. Sectarian killings also have another face to them: the systemic killing of women.

If you are in Syria, in Jordan, even in Turkey, and you even think of going back to Iraq—and nobody thinks about it, unless they are deported—your life is not guaranteed at all and you're living in a daily hell.

**Mr. Falah Hafed:** I would like to add one point here. I'm quoting from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres. Guterres said that the UN High Commissioner has clear global criteria on the conditions needed for the voluntary return of the refugees and that these criteria are not met by the situation in Iraq now—this was in March.

**Mrs. Nina Grewal:** Mr. Chair, is my time over?

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi):** Your time is up. We're going to go to Mr. Karygiannis because he didn't get an answer to his question, then we're going to go to Mr. Carrier, and then we'll stop with the parliamentary secretary.

Quickly, please.

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** Do we have five minutes, Mr. Chairman?

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi):** No, we have three minutes.

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** I'm just going to ask the questions again—I know some of them were asked.

Is there any difficulty regarding religion? Is one religion targeted more than another religion? I know today we have a cross-section of all religions here, so if any of you want to answer that, by all means do so.

Is the Shi'ite community, or the Sunni community, or the Christian Assyrian, Mandaean, or Chaldean community being affected more?

I'd like to also ask you to address the issues in Damascus and the difficulty that you have. Maybe this committee will undertake to invite the officials from Damascus in order to really go into the situation.

And about the numbers, sir, you said we should go to 10,000. I know some of my colleagues may say, why from Iraq and not from somewhere else? Obviously Iraq is a place of need right now. So if you could address that, by all means do so.

Thank you.

**Ms. Ghina Al-Sewaidi:** Perhaps I could answer the question about the embassy, because I'm involved with it and it's really very frustrating for me.

It's very, very important that the chaos at the embassy in Damascus be dealt with. What is happening is that people who have been in line for five or six years, even as skilled workers, cannot go back to Iraq and are waiting in Damascus. And they apply with the UNHCR at the same time, causing a double backlog. There are a lot of applicants at the UNHCR and then a lot of applicants at the embassy. I really, really think that the embassy issue—the paperwork, the disorganization of their files and their system—should be dealt with and rectified.

An example is their fax number. It alternates, or changes; it's not always the same fax number. So when I try to send a fax and it doesn't go through, I go on the Internet to see which fax number they are using. They have two fax numbers, which change. I check which one it is, and if the fax goes through, then I'm lucky. If it doesn't go through, then I have to mail the application by registered mail, or express, or DHL to be sure that it will get there.

Quickly again, the reason we should accept Iraqis from Iraq and not people from Darfur or other regions is that there are Iraqi families here who are willing to take care of their families financially. For example, there are brothers and sisters. This used to be in the system earlier on and then it was taken away.

I get a lot of questions from people in Iraq: I want to bring my brother, I want to bring my sister, and I will undertake whatever the

Canadian government wants me to do. I'll put whatever amount of money they want in the bank to secure the fact that these people will not be a burden on Canadian society.

So there should be a special program for Iraqis, as there was in Bosnia when there was a war there. In Lebanon there were problems, and suddenly a lot of Lebanese came here. The organizations were given grants by the Canadian government to support those Lebanese.

What is so different about Iraqis, when they are in a much worse situation than other nations?

•(1220)

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi):** Okay, thank you very much.

We're going to have a question from Monsieur Carrier. They're looking for a lot of refugees in Quebec, so anybody who speaks French has a....

Monsieur Carrier.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Robert Carrier (Alfred-Pellan, BQ):** Thank you for coming to make us aware of the problems experienced by the Iraqi community. Mr. Hafed spoke about the problems that refugees face here when they are accepted. We also need the ability to make refugees feel welcome when they arrive. There is no perfect solution. If we accept more refugees, you might have to be ready to look after them yourselves so as not to create new problems for them when they arrive.

Both of us come from Quebec. We too are trying to make refugees feel welcome so that they integrate into our society. We devote a lot of effort to that, but success is not automatic. Take religion for example. In Quebec, the vast majority used to be of one religion that we have tried to move away from in order to make people from other religions feel welcome. We wanted not only Catholics to feel welcome, but also people from other religions whom we are welcoming to our country. That is not an easy solution.

Yet Ms. Mohamed and Ms. Al-Sewaidi spoke about the problems that exist at the moment. They told us that Iraq has become a prison for women. It is beyond belief that the most powerful country in the world, which has been in the country for five years now, can have created such a situation as a result of its intervention.

My political party is one that prefers humanitarian and diplomatic actions to armed invasion, which does not settle conflicts. I wonder what your opinion is of Canada's efforts in trying to take humanitarian assistance to the refugees. It seems to me that the best solution for the Iraqis would be if they could live in their country, if they could rebuild a peaceful life in their own country, rather than being forced to leave that country for one on another continent. Are you also looking for us to increase our aid there instead of providing the opportunity for more people to leave their country?

•(1225)

[English]

**Mr. Salam Gatih:** I think Canada could view both sides. What's needed at the present time is help for the refugees in surrounding countries. We're mainly talking about Syria and Jordan, which are feeling the greatest effect of the Iraqis there. Turkey and I think Yemen are less affected. I know there are people there.

These people need help because the resources of Syria and Jordan are very limited. There are four million or more people, and they need the help of Canada at least. That's one part.

The other part I think is to reduce the burden on Canadian society to accept a number of people. I think the least we could do right now is to have family sponsorship this year. For example, the Mandaean Canadian Community Association is willing to give you the list of families who are here and who are willing to take care of their families who come, and I believe the same applies to the other communities.

In these cases it's not going to be an additional hardship on Canada to accept these people. A lot of these people who left Iraq without choice are educated, so when they come here they want to work and be part of society.

So I think the answer to the question is that we could do both: assist the refugees because of the limited resources there and, at the same time, sponsor and accept the families who have relatives here who are willing to take care of them and help them integrate into society. In this case we have lived our commitment to help other countries—a great country like Canada.

Thank you.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi):** Thank you very much.

[Translation]

**Mr. Robert Carrier:** Perhaps someone would like to give another answer.

[English]

**Ms. Yanar Mohammed:** Yes, I will need to answer the part where he asked about the intervention and how Canada does not do any military intervention, and the suggestion of whether Canada should provide humanitarian aid for Iraqis.

We have spoken to other governments also, including the Swedish government. We told them that what is needed right now is a civil intervention, checking on the accountability of the Iraqi government, having open eyes, being a watchdog over what the government is doing to the Iraqi people.

For example, have some surveillance of the Iraqi prisons. Do not give grants to the Iraqi government unless they abide by human rights. Do not give them aid unless they write laws that make women equal to men, that make us full human beings. And also, support civil institutions, because that's where the Iraqi intellect and hope lies.

Unfortunately, the strong groups on the ground, which are militant and which are ultra religious, are the government now. They are in control of the government. But the civil society is there and it could be the alternative. It needs to be supported by the governments, by

CIDA. And we do not see much of them inside Iraq yet. That initiative needs to be supported.

The government needs to be under surveillance for its human rights abuses, and especially the abuses on paper—the constitution, which makes women and other minorities inferior by law. That is where civil intervention needs to take place.

That can be discussed further, maybe in another meeting. We invite the Canadian government to take the initiative to invite the Iraqi community to a conference to see what this intervention could be.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi):** Thank you very much.

Now we're going to Mr. Komarnicki.

**Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the time, so I'm not going to ask any questions. I'm going to just end with a couple of comments.

I certainly appreciate hearing from you. I hear from you that you'd like to see Canada playing a leadership role in this issue. It requires compassion; there's no doubt about that.

I hear from Mariam that it's an emotional thing when you're on the ground and seeing this. Having shelter, food, and water is very important.

I know that Canada proportionately does its share in humanitarian work. When we look at refugees, Canada takes about one out of ten amongst all of the countries in the world, and so it's taking a leadership role already in a sense, but it needs to do more. We also provide funding to countries that quite a few millions of people flee to, and we need to continue to do that. I know we've given over \$400 million.

The question would be, as I think Jalal Saeed said, we need to help in all areas, but how? How do we make it most effective? I take that to heart, for sure. And I really appreciate hearing from Yanar about the women's situation in Iraq and how inhumane some of that treatment is. We need to take all of that into consideration in deciding how best we approach it. We probably need to look at this from many levels, not just from one particular level.

I know Canada is doing a fair bit, and the minister has indicated that she'll increase the number—more than double it—to 1,800 to 2,000 Iraqi refugees. I hear what Jalal is saying. He's talking beyond that. So those are the kinds of things we need to struggle with in terms of how we best approach it and on which level to get the maximum effect.

There's a tremendous number. When you look at the number of refugees, it's into the millions. That's why, when you're talking about thousands, it's a drop in the bucket, really. Somehow we have to take all of that into account.

I appreciate your taking the time and being very forceful in your presentation. It's certainly an emotional issue, and I'm glad to hear from those people who are on the ground who have seen and heard what's happening out there.

Thank you very much.

•(1230)

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi):** We're going to be closing off this panel now.

I would like to thank you again, on behalf of the committee, for being here and making your presentations. I can only say that it's in every country's strategic interest that we reduce tensions in that part of the world as much as possible to make sure we have stability. We're aware that Syria and Jordan are very nervous with the number of Iraqi refugees they have there, and they've virtually shut the door.

So we thank you for your presentations, and we'll be continuing these hearings across Canada.

The committee will now adjourn and come back at one o'clock to start the next session on undocumented workers and temporary foreign workers.

The meeting is adjourned.

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