HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

FAAE • NUMBER 013 • 2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Monday, February 24, 2014

Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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● (1530)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)): Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), our study on the situation in Syria will commence today.

I want to thank our witnesses for being here today. From the Canadian Red Cross we have Conrad Sauvé, who is the chief executive officer.

Welcome, sir. We're glad to have you back at the committee.

We have Hossam Elsharkawi who is the director of emergencies and recovery for international operations, also with the Canadian Red Cross. We also have Robert Young, senior delegate of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Thank you and welcome to all of you from the Red Cross.

From CARE Canada we have Jessie Thomson, director of the humanitarian assistance and emergency team.

Mr. Sauvé, we're going to start with your opening statement and then we'll go to Ms. Thomson.

Mr. Conrad Sauvé (Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Red Cross): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of the committee members for inviting me here today.

As you have introduced my colleagues, I will go straight to my presentation.

I think it is quite timely that this committee is meeting to talk about Syria today given that, as you know, over the weekend the UN Security Council adopted resolution 2139 calling for additional access for humanitarian workers in Syria.

We welcome the agreement among the UN Security Council members and the unanimous adoption of the resolution, which we hope will facilitate the provision of humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people who are bearing the brunt of the humanitarian situation. In particular we welcome the UN Secretary-General's recognition of the critical role of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, as he indicated in his Security Council meeting.

I'm sure the members are aware, but this is just a little footnote on the Red Cross movement. There is a lot of reference to the Red Cross movement. There are essentially three components of the Red Cross movement. There are 189 national societies of the Red Cross or Red Crescent. The Red Crescent is the Red Cross in many of the Muslim countries, but not exclusively as some do adopt the Red Cross. There is the international federation of these national societies, and there is the International Committee of the Red Cross. So this is the Red Cross family.

I have three main points I would like to leave you with today. First is the critical role played by a national Red Cross society, and, in this case, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. It is of fundamental importance that we not only fund their operations but also support their institutional development so they are able to effectively respond to the crisis and emergencies, within Syria in this case.

Second is the critical humanitarian consequence of conflict, including the inability of civilians to access humanitarian assistance, as well as the need for access and the protection of humanitarian work.

Third is the work of the Red Cross movement as a whole in Syria and in neighbouring countries, which is currently our largest operation globally.

I'd like to start by providing some observations from my time in the Middle East and my meetings with leaders of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. The situation, of course, for people within Syria and for Syrian refugees is very, very serious. I can only imagine the suffering that has continued through these past winter months. In Lebanon there is little infrastructure to receive refugees. Syrians have been living in makeshift dwellings without proper sanitation systems or basic hygiene. As no new camps are being built in Lebanon, the situation for people is extremely precarious. Given its lack of basic structures, I felt almost as though I was visiting an area that had just been devastated by an earthquake. In some cases it looked similar to Haiti after the earthquake in terms of the conditions of people living there.

In Jordan and Turkey the situation was more livable for refugees as camps are being constructed and services are being provided. The Turkish Red Crescent has provided comprehensive support to Syrian refugees including relief, shelter, sanitation, and hygiene promotion to those camps and elsewhere. However, make no mistake that the medium- to long-term perspective is bleak. The possibilities of returning home or moving elsewhere for refugees are extremely limited.

At the core of the Red Cross are the mandate and responsibility to protect and assist victims of conflict. Hostilities can escalate without warning, and in the face of such unpredictable emergencies, the Red Cross attaches great importance to its ability to respond rapidly. This does not happen overnight. Our ability to respond quickly to crises such as the one in Syria is the result of many years of work and investment.

The conflict raging in Syria is one of the most violent in recent memory. Virtually the entire population suffers as a direct consequence of the conflict in one way or another. In violence-stricken areas, the breakdown of essential services such as electricity, water supply, and garbage collection and the destruction of health facilities have added to the misery. Many people struggle to make it through the day because of intense fighting and a severely weakened economy, and they are completely dependent on the generosity of fellow Syrians or on humanitarian aid.

Three years into the crisis, the situation is grim. While bullets and mortars have devastating effects on individuals and infrastructure, they also leave behind institutional failure, the knock-on effects of which are tremendous. To the point, public services have broken down under the pressure of large-scale displacements, and vast sections of the population have no access to suitable health care.

● (1535)

Not only are the wounded not being cared for properly, vaccination rates have dropped, and the chronically ill are not receiving the necessary treatments and medicines that are extremely scarce.

The long-term consequences are predictable: rising rates of mortality, the re-emergence of certain diseases, and permanent disability for tens of thousands. Food production is down, prices continue to rise, and more and more people are coming to depend on emergency food aid. People's ability to make a living, personal resources, and coping mechanisms have been depleted. Millions of displaced people are living in temporary shelters, and children have stopped going to school.

The extraordinary fact is that in the midst of this crisis, the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement is reaching close to 3.5 million people each month. This is only possible because of the presence of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, an organization that has built and continues to support an effective network of volunteers who are risking their lives to deliver humanitarian assistance to civilians on a daily basis. In this sense SARC is a telling story of local resilience that all national Red Cross organizations tell in this case. It's about Syrians helping Syrians.

However the tragic reality is that even in these heroic efforts, the majority of humanitarian needs in Syria are not being met. There are as many as 9.5 million people desperately in need in Syria right now. Clearly the humanitarian situation is worsening. Aid efforts need to be expanded to reach beyond the internally displaced population and there are growing needs among civilians who are still in their homes but without any means of support.

The Syrian Arab Red Crescent itself was created in 1942. In the last decade alone, they have provided humanitarian assistance to hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees. They are a very capable, well-respected humanitarian organization that is being tested every day by a civil war that has been raging in their country for three years. To date one of the more touching statistics regarding the Syrian Arab Red Crescent is that over 34 of their volunteers and staff have been killed in the conflict in providing humanitarian assistance. So you see the challenge there about access. This is within Syria, this is the main organization delivering aid in Syria, but that has been doing it at a very heavy risk. The ability to carry out its work is due to the fact that it's a strong national society to begin with and it's often said that the Red Cross is quick to respond. But the reality is that the response capacity is directly linked to the ability to invest in building local resilient institutions and not only funding emergency operations. And this kind of advanced planning and investment makes us able to mobilize quickly in an emergency situation, be it a flood, an earthquake, or in the case of Syria, a conflict of unprecedented consequences.

Our capacity to ramp up quickly in emergencies is contingent on our partnerships and investments. A significant challenge is associated with the provision of this aid, and I will elaborate on this shortly. Syrian Arab Red Crescent volunteers continue to provide urgent assistance to those affected by the conflict and in need, including distributions on behalf of the UN agencies. So the Syrian Arab Red Crescent is the main distribution group of the Red Cross movement of course, but also for the UN agencies as well. In more concrete terms, this aid translates to, among other things, food assistance to 3.5 million people per month, essential household items to over 2.2 million people, and water and sanitation to 20 million people. Additionally, thanks to the contribution from the Canadian government and Canadian donors, Canada has supported effective humanitarian action through the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement. We've also deployed several international humanitarian workers to assist in their effort.

However much more help is needed to meet the vastly unmet humanitarian needs. The reality is that the effectiveness of our response in Syria is under constant threat, owing to the complexity of the context and shifting political and social dynamics. Because of the way the movement works, we're able to operate across front lines, with both government forces and various armed opposition groups in Syria. The Red Cross movement has access, but not at all times because of constraints such as intensified fighting in urban and rural areas, the deteriorating security situation, and the growing number of administrative and bureaucratic obstacles.

I've talked about the importance of the Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers, staff, and other humanitarian workers. It's critical that they have unimpeded and immediate access to those in need and that medical and humanitarian personnel, facilities, and transport are respected and protected.

● (1540)

Support for the neutral and impartial delivery of humanitarian aid on the ground is essential and the Canadian Red Cross would also like to acknowledge the Government of Canada for calling on all parties to the conflict to provide to provide full, safe, and unhindered access for humanitarian actors.

Let me now briefly turn to the situation in neighbouring countries, which also have been affected by this conflict. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has been providing much-needed support in Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Turkey. The humanitarian crisis in Syria is increasing the fragility of these states. It is important that humanitarian operations continue to be funded but also that the local humanitarian institutions be reinforced by providing core investments. These institutions can help provide a minimum of stability through the delivery of neutral and impartial aid to those who are most in need.

This is basically the same point I'm making with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. The Lebanese Red Cross is a strong institution in Lebanon as well. Again, it's important that we support their core capacity, not just the capacity in humanitarian conflict. I've talked about the 34 Syrian Arab Red Crescent volunteers and staff killed. They were killed while they were under the protection of the Red Crescent, which gives them protection under international humanitarian law. This is the difficult choice in terms of providing humanitarian aid, and they have to make the critical decision before going into or accessing a city where their staff or volunteers may be shot at or killed. Notwithstanding that, they continue to recruit hundreds of volunteers every day in Syria. This is an important institution at this present time in Syria but it will be an important institution after the conflict as well.

In order to expand and to continue our work, first we call for the protection of humanitarian workers, staff, and volunteers and access to humanitarian assistance for civilians of the conflict and the war. We ask you to continue to provide financial support to the Red Cross movement so we can continue this vital humanitarian effort. On this note, it's important to remain flexible as the situation remains extremely fluid. As we commit dollars to these efforts we need to be reminded all the time that the situation can change quite rapidly. Although the needs remain the same, the place where that need might be required could change.

I want to thank you again for this opportunity to speak to you.

I look forward to your questions.

[*Translation*]

My colleagues and I are ready to answer.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sauvé.

I'd like to turn it over to Ms. Thomson.

Ms. Jessie Thomson (Director, Humanitarian Assistance and Emergency Team, CARE Canada): I'd like to thank you, Mr. Chair, and the distinguished members of the committee, for the invitation to speak to you today about the situation in Syria and in the region.

[*Translation*]

I am going to make my presentation in English, but I can answer questions in French.

[*English*]

I returned from Lebanon and Jordan on the weekend so the situation is very fresh in mind, and I'll speak to some of the key issues that I observed during my visit as well as some of the issues we've been monitoring over the last three years.

As Conrad noted, currently some 9.5 million people inside Syria are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, and some 2.4 million more refugees are now displaced into neighbouring countries. Over 130,000 civilians are estimated to have been killed since the start of the conflict with millions more deprived of basic services, livelihoods, safety, and security. The Syrian crisis represents the largest and most devastating humanitarian crisis of its kind in recent years with refugee numbers surpassing those at the peak of the Rwandan genocide. In the face of these staggering numbers we have a collective duty to respond to the urgent humanitarian needs of those affected.

CARE is a non-governmental organization working across humanitarian assistance, recovery, and development in 80 countries with a focus on women's empowerment and gender equality. CARE's response to the Syria crisis has reached more than 356,000 beneficiaries in Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, and Yemen. We're focusing on supporting both host communities and refugees living in urban and rural areas, by providing cash assistance, water hygiene and sanitation support, shelter, food aid, and psychosocial assistance.

Last year, CARE, along with other members of Canada's Humanitarian Coalition, launched a joint appeal that raised approximately half a million dollars. While Canadians who responded to our appeal were very generous, the number of Canadians who made donations was significantly lower than what we see in cases of crises caused by natural disasters. Experience has taught us to expect this discrepancy but it means that the responsibility for financing the humanitarian response will continue to lie heavily on government. To date, CARE has benefited from the generous support of the Government of Canada in support of our operations in the region for a total of $5.2 million, and we are incredibly grateful for this support that allows us to respond to the refugee needs in the region.

I'll speak to three key issues for your urgent attention, and they are: first, the situation of refugees in urban areas and their host communities; second, the importance of self-reliance and livelihoods for Syrian refugees; and third, the specific needs of women and girls affected by this crisis.

To begin, an estimated 83% of Syrian refugees are currently living outside of refugee camps, dispersed across cities and smaller communities throughout the region and mostly living in host communities. In Lebanon, more than 800,000 refugees are now registered with the UNHCR. With a total population of some four million people, this represents a huge number of refugees and is placing important pressure on basic services, schools, rental accommodation, and even the local economy.

In neighbouring Jordan, they now host close to 600,000 registered refugees, representing 10% of the total population. In some areas, refugees represent as much as 50% of the local community. For example, last week I was in Mafraq in northern Jordan where CARE is providing urgent humanitarian assistance to Syrian refugees and their host communities with Government of Canada support. CARE staff told me that the city had a population of 85,000 people before the crisis and now hosts more than 85,000 refugees. As you can imagine, this is causing rent to skyrocket. It's putting pressure on local schools, water, sewage, waste management, and even on low-skilled jobs in the informal economy. Many schools are now reporting class sizes of 50 students per class even where schools have introduced a second shift for Syrian refugees.

Recognizing this important dynamic, CARE is not only providing humanitarian assistance to Syrian refugees, but is also supporting host communities in Jordan and Lebanon. In Jordan, some 30% of our programming targets vulnerable Jordanians from the host community who are also impacted by this emergency. Continued funding in support of humanitarian efforts assisting both refugees and their host communities will be fundamental to ensuring Syrians continue to have access to asylum and protection in the region.

Second, life-saving humanitarian assistance for Syrian refugees continues to be urgently needed with only 13% of the regional refugee response plan funded to date. This has left significant unmet needs across the region.

● (1545)

We must recognize that this crisis is protracted and that refugees are unlikely to be able to return home in safety and with dignity in the near future. To this end we must continue to ensure sufficient funding is made available to meet the urgent needs of the most vulnerable with continued support for NGOs, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and UN agencies.

During my recent visit to Lebanon and Jordan, I met countless families who had lost everything. One mother told me that when they left Syria they thought they would only be in Jordan for a few weeks. Now, two years later, she says she's not sure if she'll ever be able to go home. She's depleted all of her savings, and without a source of income her family is unable to meet their basic needs from one day to the next.

Many families indicated that they're sending young children between the ages of 12 and 16 into the streets in search of informal work in the informal economy in order to meet household needs. With some 65% of children out of school in Jordan alone, the conflict is in the process of compromising the future and prosperity of an entire generation.

Recognizing these challenges, CARE believes that we must ensure that our interventions are increasingly focused on promoting livelihoods, education, and training. The goal is to empower those affected by the crisis and ensure that families continue to develop and maintain skills while in exile to prepare them for solutions, be it voluntary return, be it resettlement to third countries like Canada, or be it local integration where they currently live. This will need to take place alongside programs to address the concerns of host communities regarding the impact of refugees on the local labour market and the local economy.

Finally, I'd like to speak to the specific needs of women and girls affected by this crisis who are often at particular risk due to family separation, lack of basic structural and social protections, and limited availability of safe access to services.

There is a tendency to think that once a woman has crossed a border she is now safe. However, women often face a different kind of violence once they become refugees. CARE has noted with particular concern that families are reporting an increase in the early marriage of girls, which is being used as a coping mechanism by families with the hope of better protecting girls in the absence of male family members, or with the view to lessening the financial burden on the household.

Families are also increasingly keeping girls out of school due to the perceived risks involved in travelling to school and the need for girls to help with household duties at home.

Single female-headed households reportedly struggle to find rental accommodation as landlords are reluctant to rent to an unaccompanied woman because she is perceived to be unable to pay the rent.

Other refugee women have indicated that with increasing financial pressure, unemployment, lack of livelihood opportunities, and pressure on male heads of family, they are facing increased intimate partner violence at home.

In addition, women and girls have specific needs that are not always well addressed by traditional humanitarian assistance. With the view to meeting these specific needs of women and girls, CARE is distributing hygiene kits to women and girls, which include sanitary materials and diapers for babies under the age of two.

During my recent visit, I met women who were collecting these kits, often with a newborn baby on their hip and a small child in tow. They emphasized how important diapers were, as they can be an unaffordable luxury under the current circumstances.

To conclude, as the third-year anniversary of the Syrian conflict approaches, we must recognize that this is a protracted crisis and we need to start thinking about durable solutions for refugees, for their host communities, and for those trapped inside Syria. No one organization can meet the massive needs alone. We will need to work together as NGOs, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, donors, host governments, and UN agencies if we're going to be able to meet the basic and urgent needs of the rising number of refugees.

Thank you.

● (1550)

The Chair: All right, we're going to start our first round, which will be seven minutes for questions and answers with Madame Laverdière.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank all of you for this very interesting presentation.

We knew the issues and the enormity of the challenges, but it seems to me that every time we talk about this, we are made more aware of the scope of the needs of the refugees, but also of the communities that welcome them.

My first question may seem a bit naive to you. It is addressed to both of you.

Of course, we must have the capacity to offer different programs and take steps, but if more money were available, what would you do with it?

Mr. Conrad Sauvé: Thank you for your question.

You are correct in saying that this situation is extremely difficult. As I said in my presentation, the needs are great and there are additional ones. Concretely, the Syrian Red Crescent has asked us for $23 million to feed some 50,000 families. That is an additional request. It is very concrete. There is a crying need.

To reply to your question, I would say that indeed, we can distribute more money.

● (1555)

Ms. Jessie Thomson: It is the same for us. We always find it hard to meet all of the needs. CARE launched a campaign to gather $100 million. We have received 25% of that money. There are still needs to be met.

However, we see that funding is diminishing a little, generally. We are a little bit afraid, because when the refugees will have spent all of their savings and have really depleted all of their means of survival, they will be in a truly difficult situation. There is a reduction in funding. It is difficult to continue to find public funding, and that is true on a global scale. Now it is really important to continue to support those who are affected by this crisis. We have to take other steps so as to give them a chance to be self-sufficient and to face all the problems.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Thank you very much.

Yes, the needs are getting greater and resources are diminishing. If we have time during the second round of questions, I would like to go back to the issue of flexibility and sustainability. We have to have long-term strategies, among others for these children about whom it is sometimes said that they are a potentially lost generation.

First, I would like to go back to the matter of access for humanitarian workers and resolution 2139. This is of course good news. However, as we know, a resolution is often only a first step. We also have to do diplomatic work to ensure that the resolution will be well put into effect on the ground. How do you see that? Can Canada contribute to that as well?

Mr. Conrad Sauvé: With your permission, I am going to ask my colleague Hossam Elsharkawi to reply to your question. Hossam worked for a long time in the Middle East during several conflicts.

[*English*]

Mr. Hossam Elsharkawi (Director, Emergencies and Recovery, International Operations, Canadian Red Cross): In our contacts with our colleagues at the Syrian Red Crescent, they certainly highlight the difficulties and the day-to-day, sometimes hour-to-hour, changes on the ground. They remain extremely flexible in how they respond, and extremely honest about the challenges they face. For them, it's the art of the possible to provide humanitarian assistance for that day. I think you correctly pointed out that this resolution is a step in the right direction. It's a first step. The fact that Russia and China have endorsed it is great. I think we know also from our colleagues on the ground in the Red Crescent that pressure like this in the past has made a difference on the ground for them. Despite the issues we know about the Syrian government's position and so on, when they have these private dialogues, one-on-one with the government, to access certain areas, and they have resolutions at hand, and they have certain statements made by either the UN or governments and so on, they are able to leverage that and gain access. It doesn't work all the time, but it does work often enough to give us access.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: It's an improvement.

Maybe I'll have time in this round to come back very briefly to this issue of flexibility because, as you were saying, the needs are always there. But the situation can change, and there's a need to build in sustainability, I would say, looking at the longer term.

What could we do to improve the way we work in both these respects? We can come back in the second round if we don't have time in this one.

The Chair: You have about 45 seconds.

Ms. Jessie Thomson: Allowing for slightly longer-term implementation periods for project funding is very helpful. To date, the project implementation period has been six months. You've got to have everything going very smoothly to be able to deliver on your results in that period of time. Sometimes a year or even 18 months can give you that flexibility to adapt and even put staff on standby when required. If there's an insecure moment in northern Lebanon, we're programming in Tripoli and that can be really essential. Timeliness of decision-making is also really important. If the funding takes a long time to approve, by the time it's approved sometimes the situation or circumstance has changed and the nature of your intervention may change. That can be really helpful as well.

● (1600)

The Chair: Mr. Anderson, sir. You have seven minutes.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): I have two questions that are coming from very different places.

You respond around the world to various types of crises. Can you give us a play-by-play of how you respond and how you set up? For example, can you tell us how you might be set up differently in Lebanon than in Syria? When something begins like that, how do you step into action and into play? Ms. Thomson talked about dealing with refugees. Do you come in a bit later, when organizations like the Red Cross are set up? I'll let you think about that for a minute.

I'd like Ms. Thomson to address the issue of seeing more early marriages. Can you talk a bit about sexual exploitation and trafficking, which seems to come out of these kinds of situations? We haven't heard much about that from our witnesses. We need to hear a little bit about that because we want to do a report that's comprehensive. Could you talk about short-term marriages, sexual exploitation, and, the trafficking issue as well? Perhaps you can deal with that one first and then come back to the other one.

Ms. Jessie Thomson: Sure.

Certainly, it's a very serious concern. One of the key challenges with the Syrian crisis is that it is very under-reported because of social realities and because a lot of the sexual and gender-based violence is happening within families and communities. There's a lot of taboo around those actually being reported. It can be a very difficult thing to get a handle on. But we are hearing from refugees we're working with about the pressure to marry girls off earlier. This practice was found in rural areas in Syria and was a reality. It is proving to be a negative coping mechanism but a way to survive. Families see it as a way of actually helping their girls.

Mr. David Anderson: Are they actually being placed in what are expected to be long-term relationships or are those short-term relationships?

Ms. Jessie Thomson: The early marriages are expected to be long-term partnerships. Certainly, there is concern around sexual exploitation and abuse. Where families don't have livelihood opportunities, where they don't have an opportunity to work, and where female-headed households are without any kind of income, it's very easy for them to become victims of sexual exploitation and abuse. We have heard reports of abuse of refugees who are trying to access assistance and where that may be manipulated. Again, it's really under-reported. We don't have strong numbers because of that. It's more hearsay and reporting as opposed to really concrete information. But it's something that we know is going on and something that we're very concerned about.

Mr. David Anderson: It's one of those things that comes with those power dynamics that exist in those crisis situations.

I'm interested in the first question then. How do you respond and what it is the play-by-play of your set-up in countries when you're faced with a crisis like this?

Mr. Hossam Elsharkawi: On the second question, we are also getting reports of sexual exploitation. It's certainly a taboo subject in the region and therefore it's very difficult to get to the bottom of this. It's a problem that is of serious concern to us. Often these things manifest or show up in the medical services that we run as clinical cases but we know what is behind it is in fact sexual exploitation, rape, and so on. It happens—

Mr. David Anderson: We may stay on this longer than we plan.

What about trafficking then?

Mr. Hossam Elsharkawi: Absolutely. There are reports of that as well. Again, it's under-reported. It's very difficult to get to the bottom of this. But it is certainly an area the Red Cross and other NGOs are paying close attention to. To the extent possible, they are working with the local authorities to bring it up when these things happen and when these things are reported.

● (1605)

Mr. David Anderson: What would be the destination of that trafficking?

Mr. Hossam Elsharkawi: I don't have the details, but there are reports out there that go into a bit more detail than what we have at the Red Cross.

On your second question, it depends. In Lebanon and in other parts of that region, the true first responders are always the local Red Cross or Red Crescent volunteers in organizations. Once their capacity is exceeded, they'll typically ask for help from the international Red Cross, from Red Crosses like the Canadian Red Cross, and this is where we step in with additional resources. It could be financial, material, or expertise. We're doing this in Lebanon right now with the Lebanese Red Cross. We're helping them set up mobile clinics for the refugees along the border areas. We also have boots on the ground now with Canadians supporting the Lebanese Red Cross, if security is guaranteed. And we have that set up in Lebanon.

However, in certain contexts like Syria, it's very difficult to have access, as you know. It's insecure and so on, in which case Canadian support would typically go to organizations like the ICRC, the International Committee of the Red Cross, that are very active, with a long history in Syria and so on, and they have ramped up their operation to provide much through and for the Syrian Red Crescent.

Mr. David Anderson: Are you providing infrastructure for the establishment of camps as well?

Mr. Hossam Elsharkawi: We have not in this context because the UN and other agencies have set up the camps. However, for example, in a camp in Jordan, we as the Canadian Red Cross with three other Red Crosses in Europe are providing the medical facilities. We have set up a field hospital in one of the big camps in Jordan.

We look at needs, we look at gaps, and we look at what we can provide.

Mr. David Anderson: You're talking about Lebanon. Tell me about inside Syria, with the dangers your people are facing.

Mr. Hossam Elsharkawi: Briefly, inside Syria we work primarily through the Syrian Red Crescent. They lead on the ground. They are the lead agency in the language we use and they send their volunteers and convoys and so on. Our support to them has been by providing them with either material or cash to buy the supplies they need. So we've either bought the food for them or bought the medical supplies, and they take care of the rest.

Mr. Robert Young (Senior Delegate, International Committee of the Red Cross, Canadian Red Cross): To add, within the Red Cross and Red Crescent family....We have a couple of more minutes, Mr. Chairman?

The Chair: Yes, continue with your answer.

Mr. Robert Young: The International Committee of the Red Cross has about 200 staff on the ground in Syria. It's a diverse mix of international staff but it's predominantly Syrian. We have a presence in Damascus and field offices around the country. With the Syrian Arab Red Crescent we're able to negotiate our way through various checkpoints on a good day and get to different regions of the country and deliver food, medicine, and other kinds of assistance. But it really has to be emphasized that the situation on the ground is dire in terms of security, and if there's one word we could leave you with today, it's “access”. Humanitarian access is the biggest challenge in Syria today, and clearly, security for humanitarian workers, national and international, is a huge part of that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Anderson.

We're now going to move to Mr. Garneau. Sir, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your testimonies today, and congratulations for the work you're doing in this very difficult region. You said there's not enough money and that doesn't come as too much of a surprise. What about personnel to do the work you do, given the money you have? Is that a challenge for you to carry out your work?

Ms. Jessie Thomson: That's one of the lesser challenges for us, especially outside Syria where safety and security issues are not as concerning. You have a highly educated population across the region, including in Lebanon and in Jordan, so our local staff are amazing. All have expertise in the areas in which they're working and are highly competent leaders within their communities.

We also are working with Syrian refugee volunteers who help us to do outreach to communities. They are the ones who really make the connection with Syrians to be able to access our centres because Syrians are so dispersed throughout cities in Jordan and Lebanon. And those Syrian volunteers are amazing. University graduates, young students, really dynamic young people, and we have more volunteers than we can retain.

● (1610)

Mr. Conrad Sauvé: I think that for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement it's the same point I made a little earlier. We're relying on strong institutions. The Syrian Arab Red Crescent, notwithstanding the fact that 34 of its members were killed, is recruiting hundreds of volunteers every day, and so is the Lebanese Red Cross, which is very active, and the Turkish Red Crescent. We have strong institution organizations there. We've been putting a lot of emphasis on supporting them as an institution, as well. It's not just about delivering programs, but it's their own capacity in these difficult times.

A tremendous amount of support has been given by the International Committee of the Red Cross on the principles in terms of working in these areas. You can appreciate that working in Syria for an organization, for a Red Crescent, or working in Lebanon in an area of civil war and having access to different areas is very sensitive. It requires a lot of training, and it requires total neutrality and impartiality. There is a lot of emphasis there. There's been no challenge in recruiting in all of those situations. Actually what we're seeing, especially in Syria these days, is a willingness for hundreds of Syrians to join an organization that is providing some good work in the face of this civil war.

Mr. Marc Garneau: That's good to hear.

Canada has made quite a contribution in terms of the amount of humanitarian funding that it has provided. I'm interested in how that money makes its way to CARE and to the Red Crosses. Is it a cheque you receive and you decide how best to use it? How does it make its way to you?

Mr. Hossam Elsharkawi: In the past two years, we have received, as the Red Cross movement outside of the ICRC, about $9 million in support that we have channelled to inside Syria and the surrounding crises.

Mr. Marc Garneau: That comes as a cheque, if you like.

Mr. Hossam Elsharkawi: Yes. It comes as a funds transfer to the Canadian Red Cross and we manage those funds based on specific projects, and so on. It's pretty straightforward and a pretty efficient way. We work through our partners in the region, which are the local Red Crosses.

Ms. Jessie Thomson: It's the same for us. We sign a grant based on a proposal that's written with very clear deliverables. Very clear results are articulated in our proposals, and we're held accountable based on those commitments that we make to deliver on those results. Once that proposal is approved, and the grant is signed with the Government of Canada, the funds are transferred, and then we work with the country offices directly to support those funds and spend them in an accountable way, in a way that is impactful, and in a way that we can report back to the Government of Canada on our results.

Mr. Robert Young: I was going to add that for the International Committee of the Red Cross, as Hossam mentioned, we have a direct funding relationship with the Government of Canada. It's actually a wire transfer to Geneva. Before you send us the money—because people sometimes wonder about money going to Switzerland—we issue annual calls for funds every fall, and we tell our donors—who are primarily governments, by the way—what we hope to do country by country, program by program, and activity by activity. Governments and others respond, and we indicate which funds we'll share and do programs jointly with Red Cross or Red Crescent societies on the ground.

Subsequently, as Conrad mentioned, conflicts, in particular, change. We often will do what's called a budget extension—

Mr. Marc Garneau: We won't go into details, because I have one more question, and my time is limited.

[*Translation*]

It is very clear that this conflict is going to last a long time. You said so. Moreover, that is what we hear in the news.

Since this conflict is not going to be settled tomorrow, but will be lasting a long time, how can you approach these problems? Knowing that this may last for years, will you adopt a different approach?

Mr. Conrad Sauvé: Yes indeed. Jessie made the same remark. We have to look at long-term planning, and support capacity. The local organizations of the Red Crescent have to meet emergencies, but this emergency situation may last. We have to support them so that they can maintain this sustained effort. That is the context.

As for the other aspect, even if this situation lasts for a long time, there can be some rather rapid changes. For instance, we want to set up an operation for refugees in a given country, but since the border is blocked off, those people find themselves in another country. Consequently, all of the planning has to remain relatively fluid and flexible. We made that point before. We are not in a development context where we can have a five-year plan and plan the funding for the first, second, and third years. In reality, the context evolves and the needs vary. If there is an explosion and there are a lot of casualties, we then face a more acute emergency situation.

● (1615)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much. That's all the time we have for this.

We're going to move to Ms. Brown for the second round, starting with five minutes, please.

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

As I said, I'm sorry that we have to have you here under these circumstances; it's sad that Syria is not seeing its way back to health.

We had the Mennonite Central Committee here a couple of weeks ago, and of course they talked about many of the same types of programs that you're involved with, in water and sanitation. They talked about the need for education, and the need for helping women and girls.

I wonder, since we have seen the situation in Haiti where a massive number of NGOs flooded onto the ground when the earthquake took place.... Can you talk a little about how the coordination takes place and who does what? That's one of the things I think Canadians are concerned about, when they ask who's doing the job. I think it would be good if we could have a little discussion about that.

Mr. Hossam Elsharkawi: It is not like Haiti where you have this flood of NGOs for various reasons: security, lack of funds, proximity. It's not easy to get to that region. Also, Syria is very controlled inside.

The Syrian Red Crescent—being almost the only relief organization that is functional and that has retained its integrity as other government institutions fragment in the country—has become the coordinating mechanism for pretty much everything that is happening all over Syria.

Within Syria it is not a huge problem. The border areas with Turkey can be, because that is a porous border and many groups, both humanitarian and non-humanitarian, are filtering through. In Jordan, there are coordination mechanisms within and outside the government, and maybe Jessie can speak a bit more on that. In Lebanon, there are coordination mechanisms through the Lebanese Red Cross and with other larger agencies as well that meet regularly to take care of the issues, the needs, and the gaps.

Ms. Lois Brown: We had a witness two weeks ago who talked about how Syria has splintered into several different regions. You have the Kurdish people who are fighting in the northeast, you have different sects who are fighting in other areas. Is there more access to a single area that you or the Red Crescent are able to get into? Are there certain areas that are able to be serviced, or do you generally face the same issues all across Syria?

Mr. Hossam Elsharkawi: The way the Red Crescent is structured in Syria, with 14 branches and 70 sub-branches, they're present on the ground all the time, pre-conflict and post-conflict, in all those affected areas; the volunteers are there, the system is there. They may not have the supplies, and perhaps the training to respond to the changing nature of the conflict, but as soon as these things open up, as soon as there is access, supplies are trucked in. This is what you often hear in the news, that this area has had access. It's not that they've had access in the sense that they're not there; they're there on the ground, except now they have more goods to distribute and relief items to work with.

This is the nature of the situation for the Syrian Red Crescent. Volunteers are coming in each day, but they have to be trained to be neutral and impartial and so on. You don't just show up at the door and all of a sudden you're working for the Red Crescent.

Ms. Lois Brown: Ms. Thomson, you spoke for a moment about being 13% funded. Was that what you said?

At one time, I heard that the refugee situation was only 27% funded. Countries have made pledges, they've been at pledging conferences. What kind of money flow are you seeing? Is 13% all that has come in? And from whom has it come? Canada always says that we call on other countries to pay what they pledge because when you're making business decisions on purchases, or the World Food Programme, for instance, is making...they're buying futures, essentially. So if you're dealing with only 13% of the money that's coming through, how do we have the conversation with those other donors to say let's be realistic about what's available, and how do we move forward?

● (1620)

The Chair: That's all the time we have, but just a quick response, if you could.

Ms. Jessie Thomson: You're absolutely right that we have an issue of very low funding levels. Inside Syria it's only 7% funded; outside Syria it's 13%. Those are fairly recent numbers from the last couple of weeks from the financial tracking system. We have to encourage those donors, especially the Gulf donors that have made big commitments, but haven't necessarily transferred those funds to follow through on those commitments. I think the challenge is that the need keeps growing and the money is finite. So we have to prioritize, we have to coordinate to make sure we're meeting the needs of the most vulnerable, and that we're promoting self-reliance and livelihoods so people can take care of themselves.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Laverdière, then Mr. Dewar.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Can you come back, because we have so many things to discuss? I'd like to talk more about building local capacities and resilience, and things like that. It's all very important, but I don't want to miss this opportunity either. I think the ICRC has a project on water in Syria, about which I'd like to hear a bit more.

Mr. Robert Young: Maybe a simple way to illustrate the principles of neutrality and independence and impartiality is that the ICRC has been working closely throughout Syria with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to provide training to volunteers, as some mentioned, and supplies. In simple terms, in lay terms, it's truckloads of chlorine to keep water plants going and to repair plants. I was looking at minutes of meetings last week out of our delegation in Damascus, and they're talking about spare parts and generators for water pumps in cities across Syria.

I wanted to mention that because once the water is pumping, the water doesn't know if it's being drunk by civilians of whichever faith or whichever ethnicity of this fragmented country. It doesn't even know water pipes will go through a divided city, like Aleppo's homes, and will help everyone equally, so that makes a great deal of difference.

Last year the ICRC trained 60-odd volunteers from the Syrian Arab Red Crescent to a high level so they can do the repairs themselves, so they know how to install pumps and the latest, low-tech, easy-to-use equipment to keep municipal systems going. It's not very glamorous. It's not crossing borders with flags waving, but at a very local level keeping water flowing makes a huge impact on people's lives, and again creates the local capacity we all keep talking about.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Thank you.

I just have two quick questions, hopefully. The first one is perhaps to the Red Cross on the UN resolution, which we were delighted to see pass. How are we going to see that operationalized? What are you hearing?

To CARE, we need to leverage money here, and we can do it at home as well. I'm wondering about your take on the idea of matching contributions. I know it's a bit different. I know the model for humanitarian relief is different, depending on the situation, but does CARE have a position on that? I know many Canadians like to donate and see matching funds from government. We've done that in the past to leverage money.

Mr. Hossam Elsharkawi: We're hoping that the most practical interpretation for this would be negotiated ceasefires that allow humanitarian access to goods, and people to move through, evacuation of the wounded, access for people who want to escape certain regions, and so on. Longer term, we're hoping it opens a window for dialogue. Of course, humanitarian response is never going to be a substitute for a political solution. We're still hoping for this political solution longer term.

In the short term, we're hoping our humanitarian mandate can be accessed, and what we call the humanitarian space can open up a bit more.

● (1625)

Mr. Paul Dewar: Did you get help from the UN to negotiate that?

Mr. Hossam Elsharkawi: The UN is on the ground in Syria, and they're negotiating access all the time. There's been a lot of talk about these corridors, which the Red Cross is not particularly in favour of because they tend to mask the problem, they tend to create a convergence where refugees may flow to certain areas, which we don't want to see. They also tend to give the impression that once you're in the corridor, that's it, you're protected, and if you're outside the corridor people tend to get neglected, so we're not in favour of that type of decision.

Ms. Jessie Thomson: The matching funds are an incredibly powerful tool for raising awareness and engagement with the Canadian public. We've really benefited from them, as CARE and as a humanitarian coalition, in recent years. I would say though that we have learned lessons in slow onset emergencies—sadly, this is a slow onset, a simmering emergency—that even with the matching funds it's very difficult to get the same kind of response as you would for a rapid onset emergency. That was the case in the context of the Sahel, where a matching fund was announced but the results were not particularly massive compared to a rapid onset emergency like the typhoon. It can't hurt, but I think we have learned that it doesn't always work as effectively in these kinds of emergencies.

The Chair: Mr. Goldring, you're going to finish up with probably about two or three minutes.

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Thank you.

On the fundraising between the Red Crescent and the Red Cross, are they completely independent or completely different? Some of the pledges that have been made, have they been from Arab countries? Is there identification of who's putting what forward? There are a lot of very wealthy Arab countries. Have they been contributing a fair balance? Have these been mainly pledges and they haven't delivered on the pledges? Does the funding go into one central organization or is it two separate ones that do their own form of fundraising and get commitments?

Mr. Conrad Sauvé: I'll let Hossam get into the details, but, first of all, they're not two separate organizations. The Red Cross and Red Crescents are all the same organizations that are all part of the federation, they are not separate organizations in that sense. There are 189 national societies of the Red Cross and Red Crescent that are members of the federation. The ICRC is a separate organization and is part of the Red Cross movement. In terms of the participation funding....

Mr. Hossam Elsharkawi: The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, which is Geneva-based, issues an appeal, essentially a request for funding, and a plan of action for things like Syria. Member Red Crosses and Red Crescents contribute financially towards that appeal. Some members sometimes decide to go bilaterally and not contribute through that one pot of money. For example, the United Arab Emirates Red Crescent has set up a camp, and hospital, and so on in Jordan on the border with Syria, deciding not to go through the appeal. There are humanitarian activities that go sometimes outside of the pot, but mostly it goes through the pot.

Have Gulf States contributed? Yes, they have. Have they contributed enough? We still need more money.

Mr. Peter Goldring: But is it decidedly unbalanced on the contributions, or is it just reasonably, some are not keeping the promises that they committed to?

Mr. Hossam Elsharkawi: It's difficult to tell. On a per capita basis, probably many of the richer nations can do more. We hope they do more. The ask is still out there for a lot more money and a lot more support.

Mr. Peter Goldring: On this resolution that has just been mentioned here, I see here that it references another resolution calling some four months earlier for basically the same activity of restraint and access. Have there been more in the past, through the three years of conflict? In other words, how many of these suggested access resolutions and calling for action have had any disciplinary action put forward? And what can you do to encourage these to happen? If you don't have a methodology of encouraging, are there going to be more of these resolutions in the future that haven't been acted on?

● (1630)

The Chair: We'll get a response. That's all the time we have, but I'd like a reply.

Mr. Hossam Elsharkawi: The leadership of the Syrian Red Crescent tells us that when they sit in these private government-to-government meetings, sitting with bureaucrats, and saying, we need to access this area and that area, they are actually able to use these resolutions and statements. Some bureaucrats actually want to do the right thing. Some are afraid, have directives not to do so. The Red Crescent actually uses them in a way as a veiled threat, saying if you don't do this, if you don't give us access, you may be accountable down the line. You will be accountable down the line at some point. Sometimes these things work. It's a hit and miss and we're hoping that this particular UN resolution will be more of a hit than a miss.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you very much.

That's all the time we have. I know we could go on longer. We appreciate both the Canadian Red Cross and CARE for being here today. Thank you very much.

We're going to suspend so we get our new witnesses up and we'll be right back. Thanks.

● (1630)

(Pause)

● (1635)

The Chair: If we can have all the members back to the table, we'll get started.

To our guests, I want to welcome, from the International Republican Institute, Mark Green, who is the president. Glad to have you here.

As an individual, we have Bessma Momani, an associate professor, Balsillie School of International Affairs, University of Waterloo. Welcome to you as well.

We'll start with your opening testimony, Mr. Green, then we'll go to Dr. Momani, and then we'll go around the room and ask questions for the remainder of the hour.

Mr. Green, I'll turn it over to you, sir.

Mr. Mark Green (President, International Republican Institute): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee.

I am honoured to be here today on behalf of the International Republican Institute. We thank the committee for its kind invitation to speak about our work in Syria, and are grateful for this opportunity to share our insights.

Mr. Chairman, tragedy is really the only word that adequately describes the situation in Syria. With a bitter sectarian war now in its third year, jihadist fighters in the ascendancy, and no end to the killing in sight, the conditions could hardly be worse. According to the United Nations, 9.3 million Syrians, or 44% of the population, need assistance; 6.5 million Syrians are internally displaced. Nearly 2.5 million refugees are dispersed throughout the Middle East in tent camps, abandoned buildings, or other makeshift conditions. The latest estimate is that more than 140,000 people have been killed in this conflict. Sadly, the international community has proven largely ineffective in this crisis. No wonder Syrians have little faith in the Geneva negotiations; they have failed to reduce the violence, let alone produce a political solution.

As the civil war has become steadily more sectarian, it has polarized the conflict inside Syria and is having a destabilizing effect outside the country's borders, most notably in Lebanon and Iraq. Equally troubling is the new generation of jihadist converts the Syrian conflict is producing, converts with battle-hardened fighting experience. The intelligence community estimates there are between 75,000 and 115,000 fighters in Syria, including more than 20,000 affiliated with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, an al-Qaeda affiliate. All told, there are up to 11,000 individuals from 74 outside nations fighting in Syria. Most of these extremists come from elsewhere in the Middle East and North Africa. We haven't even begun to understand the long-term impact of their eventual return home and the destabilizing effect they may well have on their countries of origin.

The security vacuum left in Syria has allowed al-Qaeda to establish a new geographic base of operations on the borders of key western allies like Israel, Jordan, and NATO-member Turkey. In short, I cannot think of a more urgent crisis in the world today. If the war goes on for another year or two or three, one is hard-pressed to adequately capture the immense human suffering that will be left in its wake.

As for IRI, we are a non-partisan, non-profit organization that was founded in 1983 along with our sister organization, the National Democratic Institute. Our mission is to advance freedom and democracy internationally by developing political parties, civic institutions, open elections, democratic governance, and the rule of law. We currently work in over 80 countries and maintain offices in more than 30.

IRI empowers men and women working to bring liberty to their lands. We know that they, not IRI, will make their countries free, but as many we have worked with will attest, IRI can help. IRI does not export or implant western democracy. We understand that nations will adopt and adapt democratic methods to fit their own unique historical experiences and culture. It's for this reason that we offer global experiences and knowledge. This has included sharing the Canadian experience through a number of highly qualified IRI staff who call this great country home and a number of election observers who have come from this country, including members of Parliament.

With the terrible situation I've described in Syria, you might think a democracy NGO like ours has no place in the midst of a civil war, however our Syrian program is one of our most active in the entire region. Often at great risk to themselves, the Syrians we work with consistently tell us they want and need our partnership. We have found that there's a strong constituency for democracy inside Syria, but one that is under extreme pressure and deserving of more support.

IRI currently helps in four ways. First, a schools of politics program provides political know-how to grassroots moderate leaders, those who oppose both the Assad regime and radical Islamists. We help them build strong political and civic movements. Second, a democratic governance program helps improve the ability of local councils in opposition-held areas to inform citizens of their important work and to work together in a unified way.

● (1640)

Third is our efforts to build the credentials of women leaders in Syria so that when the “day after” comes, there will be a broad network of women who take part in decision-making. Fourth, we support the Syrian Youth Congress to encourage collaboration among student and youth groups.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to focus briefly on our work with Syrian women, a demographic that has been disproportionately impacted in this conflict. IRI's Women's Democracy Network has trained and supported nearly 500 Syrian women, first by providing tools to ensure that women's equality and rights are enshrined in all levels of transition decision-making, and, second, by building the skills of local women to initiate peace-building and reconciliation efforts. These efforts have led to the development of the Syrian Women's Network, a unified umbrella organization committed to ensuring that women have a place at decision-making tables. SWN coalesces women from opposition and citizen movements that represent a cross-section of Syrians. Currently, SWN is actively campaigning for the release of detainees by raising awareness about the number of detainees, as well as their specific locations. SWN representatives have taken this cause to Geneva several times, and plan to continue utilizing every opportunity to engage decision-makers on this issue.

At the local level, women-led peace-building circles, trained by IRI, exist in eight of 14 provinces. They are another effort to promote women's inclusion in local and provincial decision-making. In a Damascus suburb, for example, a women-led peace circle negotiated and achieved a 20-day ceasefire. WDN also initiated a hotline to Geneva to connect Syrian women with international negotiation and mediation experts.

The goal of IRI's Syria programs is to help emerging leaders represent the needs of Syria's moderate middle, the plurality that subscribes neither to the regime's propaganda, nor radical Islamism. It also ensures that marginalized groups, especially women and youth, can participate fully in decision-making. Many of our Syrian partners have come to view IRI as a lifeline to the outside world. They literally risk their lives to take part in our programs, but they do so because they believe we can help their voices be heard.

Canada has already made a major contribution to Syria's future through its generous $353.5 million contribution to humanitarian assistance, as well as assistance on security and development. Yet, as we would all agree, more help is needed. IRI has several recommendations.

The international community provides extensive humanitarian assistance, but it must do more to recognize the importance of the day after. We must help prepare Syrians who do not aspire to the world view of al-Qaeda and other extremists by providing the skills and resources moderates need to positively impact Syria's transition.

Going forward, to further build the foundations conducive to a democratic Syria, we believe support for local and provincial councils should be increased. These councils can serve as working models of democratic governance in areas outside the regime's control.

As a bulwark against jihadist recruitment, we think efforts in teaching democratic values to young Syrians should be strengthened. We also think additional support for inclusive peace-building is needed so that equal opportunities are presented to all Syrians, especially women, to take part in rebuilding their country.

IRI's chairman, Senator John McCain, recently noted that, “The Assad regime has accelerated its attacks against the Syrian people with more Syrians killed in the three weeks since peace talks began than at any other time during the conflict.”

Mr. Chairman, a negotiated settlement at this point is as elusive a prospect as ever, but it does not preclude efforts to develop democratic values and institutions that are worthy and necessary. We need to give the moderate opposition a better chance to succeed on the day after Assad. At IRI, we believe the best way to achieve this is additional support for democratic governance in the areas outside the regime's grip.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I want to thank you for this opportunity and for your attention, and I look forward to any questions you may have. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

● (1645)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Green.

Now we'll turn it over to Ms. Momani.

Dr. Bessma Momani (Associate Professor, Balsillie School of International Affairs, University of Waterloo, As an Individual): Thank you for the invitation.

I'm very happy you were all privy to the testimony of the humanitarian organizations first and foremost, because that's the most important element in understanding Syria. We've heard a lot of numbers, but the few numbers I haven't heard, I have to reiterate. I hope you don't mind. Of that 130,000, there are 11,000 children who have been killed by this conflict. We have six million internally displaced within Syria. What does that mean? That means they're living outside, in parks, in schools, in backyards. Families of about 40 people are crammed into a single apartment. It is a catastrophe and it continues. These three years have been very hard on the Syrian people, so I appreciate that must be first and foremost on everyone's mind.

If I may, I'd like to talk a little about the dynamics on the ground because it's also very important to know where things stand. The Syrian army is still very much in control of the centre and western parts of the country, they have been refreshed with ground troops from Hezbollah and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. The Free Syrian Army, which the west hoped was to be the secular army that we could support, so to speak, has been in control of parts of the south and most of the north. That said, as Mr. Green has noted, we've seen the encroachment of two new actors, particularly the ISIS, the Islamic State in Iraq, as well as the Islamic Front, which have taken over the eastern part of the country. Both ISIS and IF, one has to point out, are not al-Qaeda, and this is really important. ISIS is perhaps, let's call it an affiliate or has affinity to al-Qaeda. Islamic Front, which is the much larger group, does not and does not pledge allegiance. That's not to say they are the most open-minded people, they are still very much Salafist conservatives, but if they want to grow their beards and have their pants short, that's up to them. The point is, they're not a threat to the west, and I want to point that out.

The Kurds are in control of the northeast. And as was pointed out earlier, based on some of the assessments to you all as noted by Professor Landis a few weeks ago, he did raise concerns about the Kurds. They have gained a lot of autonomy, they are set to claim some sort of autonomy, and I'm going to talk about the consequences on the region, because that's an important part of the fallout of what will happen with Syria. Although I disagree with Landis on this point, the rest of the country is not up to be fragmented. The rest of the country is not homogeneous and is pretty heterogeneous. Look at cities like Hama and Homs. All major religious, ethnic, and sectarian groups are represented. It's not easily divisible per se.

In addition to that, I would like to talk a little about the Free Syrian Army, which, as I said, was our hope; they have been shortchanged. Senator McCain has brought this up, and he's absolutely right. We have shortchanged them in terms of weaponry, while the Syrian army continues to be replenished by the Russians, by intelligence from Iran, particularly its Revolutionary Guard. I have to point out this is not against any international law. Because there is no UN Security Council resolution to prevent them from doing so, the Russians are allowed by international law to continuously replenish the Syrian regime with arms. ISIS and IF have been getting some weapons, much of this is private through individual donors from the Gulf. Some Gulf countries are directly supporting these two factions, but a lot of this is private money. In some cases it is almost a competition between ISIS and IF for the most gruesome videos as a way to get paid by their paymasters. So this is also blazing a new fight online to get donors, and often these donors have very radical views themselves.

The situation of the neighbourhood is something that those who testified noted, and it needs to be pointed out. Lebanon is the size of Connecticut; it has taken the influx of a population that's about 20% to 30% of its own. Lebanon is extremely fractured, it underwent its own sectarian and civil war, very similar to the fault lines we see in Syria. They refuse camps, we did not hear this in the earlier panel. They refuse to have camps, they do not want to have a permanent fifth column based in their country. So we're seeing the craziest things. Many Syrians are not allowed to create four walls because that creates a camp. So we're seeing teepees created throughout Lebanon to circumvent the rules of creating a camp. There are plenty of camps, they're just squalid slums. They're not organized camps as we see in other parts of the region.

● (1650)

Jordan, one of our free trade partners, has taken on more refugees than it has citizens in some cities, as has been pointed out. Putting this into the bigger context of Jordan I have to point out that it's still a catastrophe. Syrian refugees today account for 10% to 20% of the population. Why is there this range? We have everything, from those who have been accounted for, who have been documented by the UNHCR, to many who are making their way through undocumented, crossing through a very porous border, but most importantly, they are not reporting to the UNHCR. They must do this voluntarily to be identified as a Syrian refugee. We're not getting all the numbers. Palestinians still account for 50% or more of the population. Do the math and that means Jordanians are the minority in their country.

What does this mean for Jordan and Lebanon? These are two very taxed economies in the sense that they are very much under high public debt. As you can see, the influx of all this labour that's undercutting local wages means that we have high unemployment. We have inflation because the price of everything has gone up, from food to rent, to all basic goods and services. These countries are both under IMF loans today. That's just an example of how stressed they are.

I'll talk about their political situation because that can't be ignored. Iraq has taken about 500,000 refugees, 98% of whom are Kurdish. They are not feeling nearly the same kinds of challenges partly because they are going into Kurdish communities and they don't have a financial burden per se. Nevertheless, it only strengthens what we're going to see as the resolve of the Kurdish people in Iraq to eventually call for their autonomy, which I will talk about.

In Turkey, 300,000 are in camps and 700,000 are outside of camps. Turkey felt very strong financially three years ago. It had a current account surplus. I don't know if you are watching the financial news but Turkey is in a huge crisis today. It's become an enormous financial burden. The southern part of Turkey is facing the same kinds of issues that we see in Jordan and in Lebanon, i.e., high unemployment, inflation, and very much a sense of resentment. I have to point out that all these countries have been so gracious. The local people have been gracious to the refugees in bringing them into their home in many cases but three years is a lot to expect of anyone. Keep that in mind. These are really welcoming societies that have been so giving but it's been very taxing.

What's the worst-case scenario? I hope we recognize that Syria is not just imploding, it's exploding. If we start thinking about it exploding, the status quo is just not acceptable. Lebanon, as I pointed out, has these fault lines of sectarianism. We've already seen the result of that, which is tit-for-tat bombing. The city of Tripoli, for example, has some of the most awful kinds of fault lines. Literally, there is a street, which, ironically, is called Syria Street. It is now a battle zone. If you cross that street from one to another community you will be killed by sniper fire. That will not end well. The country is slowly on its way to a political collapse. Add to that the economic burden. Jordan is also facing this. The Jordanian population that is native to the country is sick and tired of being the hotel, if you will, for all these international refugees from Palestine, from Iraq, and now from Syria. They are calling on their government and their king for an enormous number of reforms that not only include liberalization, which I would encourage, but more importantly eliminating some of the rights given to some of the other minority groups there. That is not a healthy situation. Kurdistan, the northern part of Iraq, is one of the most enormously successful economic beacons of Middle East prosperity, and it really needs to be encouraged. It is sick and tired of being attached to a dead weight. That's the rest of Iraq today; the central government is a mess, the rest of the country is a mess, and it would only take time for Iraqi Kurdistan to ask for independence.

When do we watch for this? This April we will have presidential elections in Iraq, which I think are going to be very important. Chances are the Malaki government has been continuing its grip on much of the country, and corruption is at an all-time high. Why does this matter for Syria? He's taken this out on the province of Anbar, which has been taken over by ISIS, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. They have an affinity for each other. Now he is asking the Americans to give them as much weaponry as possible to blast Anbar away. I can tell you there is going to be a lot of blowback. If anybody remembers anything about Iraq, Anbar province does not go down quietly.

How can Canada help? Global resettlement. We need to come to terms with the reality that this is a refugee crisis that is not going away. People are not going to go back. How can you know? It's simple. Just look at the aerial pictures that we've seen of Syria today. There are no homes to go back to in many of these rebel areas.

● (1655)

So for parts of Dara'a, in the southern part of Syria—much of the Zaatari camp in Jordan today has many of its people—there is no Dara'a to return to. There needs to be a real global international refugee resettlement, and Canada can help. Canada has claimed that they will take 1,600. Only 200 have come. That is a pitiful amount.

I have to point out.... I have written a book on this, so please bear with me here. The Syrian immigrants who came to this country in the 1800s built parts of Montreal. They are an important fabric of this society. We have maybe 100,000 Syrian Canadians who have businesses, who are open and wanting—I meet many of them in my day-to-day interactions—and who say, “Please, how can I bring my family?” They say, “I do not want a thing from the Canadian government. I just want to bring them here.” We need to start seriously thinking about that and to open our arms, as we did so many times to many immigrants throughout the world.

We need to open our doors to students. That's the best dollar that you can invest in public diplomacy. I've tried to work with an agency called Jusoor to try to get some recognition in my university for Syrian students. It's such an uphill battle. Basically, we need to have a million dollars in a bank account for our university to accept a foreign student. That's unacceptable. We need to do something about that. Again, it's the best form of public diplomacy you could ever invest in.

We need to expedite applications for skilled labour and for family reunification. We need to support the human corridor. I disagree with the previous panel. I think this is unfortunately an important reality. If we want to alleviate the stress on the neighbours that Syria has... we need to start making the Syrian government responsible for the territory that it is going to have to give up for those refugees. Let's not forget that the Syrian regime is very happy to basically kill another 21 million people to stay in power. That's the essence of the problem.

Finally, if we're going to do some things that I think are useful, we need to have the doubling, the matching funds. It is a signal that our government cares. It's not just about the dollars earned. It's to say that, yes, we care. If you just put the numbers on the map, it's absolutely vital that we think about that.

I just came back from Washington recently, where I was looking at how we, as a civil society, can support counter-narratives against hate speech. We need to invest in this. There is an enormous amount of sectarian hatred in the Syrian Canadian community, in the Syrian community writ large. It has spilled over into the Arab community. We can invest money. There are some fantastic programs, which I'd love to talk to people about if they're interested, on how to support counter-narratives to counteract all that awful hate speech, that sectarianism that's brewing in the region today as a result of political dynamics, not as a result of people who have not been able to coexist. Quite the contrary, they've coexisted very nicely for thousands of years.

Thank you.

● (1700)

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

We're going to start with you, Mr. Dewar. You have seven minutes, sir.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Thank you, Chair.

I thank our guests.

Mr. Green, I'm not sure if you remember, but I actually met you briefly in Lebanon. I think it was during the 2009 election, in Beirut. It's good to have you here.

Ms. Momani, you've given us some very specific recommendations on refugee resettlement, on matching funds, and on engaging students. If we were to open our doors and give opportunities particularly to students, as you identified, how would we be able to match up people? It's a very well-educated population, and I think we all know that. Are you envisioning universities hosting students and bringing them in that way and expedite...? Is that what you're referring to in your recommendation?

Dr. Bessma Momani: Yes, absolutely. In fact, the universities are very open to this idea. However, for them to be careful, if you will, about their own balance books, they need to see the money up front, and that's not necessarily the case. In other words, they want to see equivalent cash in a bank account in order to say yes, that a Syrian student will stay with this host family and will eat the same dishes that family is making, and in a dollar figure. It's not necessarily feasible for many people, obviously, to say that they have an excess liquidity in their bank account forecasting for their expenses.

But I think there are plenty of Syrian people—and I've heard from many—who are very much willing to open their doors to host many of these Syrian students whose education has been cut short. If there's any rebuilding effort in Syria in the future, we need them. We need them in education. We need them in engineering. We need them in medicine. There's nothing like the great universities of our country. We could open the doors to those great students and have for them the best top-notch western education that we could provide.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I'm sympathetic, because we've talked about and certainly have encouraged the government to open the doors on refugee resettlement. We've had a great experience in this country with South Asian refugees. I remember well that at the time the government had a limit of 8,000 that they were going to take in, and that turned into 60,000 because people in the community sponsored refugees.

You're hinting at this idea of.... I think the government is always open when there's a suggestion that it won't cost money. Do you believe that there would be an ability to match people up through host families, through family members, to take in...? How many would you consider reasonable?

Dr. Bessma Momani: I think 20,000 is very reasonable. I have to add here that many Syrians have small businesses that are family-run businesses. There's an immediate opportunity right there to actually give many, whether they are students or not, part-time jobs. When we're talking about a way to integrate people into the community, there are many opportunities to bring Syrians into this country, and they would have a host family very ready.

Again part of that is through family reunification because it may not necessarily be your child, but it's your cousin, your uncle, or your aunt. These kinds of family ties go deep in this country where there are approximately 100,000 Syrian Canadians who are very much eager to really help as many members as they can.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I certainly remember here in Ottawa we had Project 4000, and that was 4,000 South Asians, mostly Vietnamese refugees. You see them now fully integrated and terrific citizens, so that's a good point.

Mr. Green, I wanted to ask you a question. You do a little bit of work for the Canadian government vis-à-vis Iran. I want your take on that because we have heard a little bit about Iran. Iran's part of this scenario, and we really have to be serious about it. From your work, and the work you're doing with the Canadian government, what can you give us on this in terms of how to deal with Iran and the crisis?

We obviously have a political crisis with Hezbollah, but a political solution here. How do you engage there, and how do you get them to obviously not do more damage? From your background and your involvement, what advice would you give us regarding Iran?

● (1705)

Mr. Mark Green: Do you mean as it relates to the Syrian conflict?

Mr. Paul Dewar: Absolutely.

Mr. Mark Green: Again, our focus is primarily in trying to identify those areas outside regime control and create some mechanism, some support, for democratic institutions, and begin to bring together those who have a stake in the community survival, particularly marginalized groups such as women and youth.

What we have discovered is that there is a large plurality of Syrians who are moderate, who don't ascribe either to the regime's extreme rhetoric and propaganda or to al-Qaeda, and are looking to create some sense of normalcy in community leadership. Our focus and our recommendation is that we identify those areas and invest heavily in creating the mechanisms while there's still time. Every day that goes by is a bad day. The damage gets worse, the feelings get hardened, and the chance to be able to pull things together for that day we all hope for when Assad is gone gets less and less.

That's really what our focus is. We think that's the right answer for an organization like ours.

Mr. Paul Dewar: In terms of Iran, you don't see anything you're doing presently, the work focused on Iran, that is relevant to Syria. That's a separate equation you're dealing with.

Mr. Mark Green: We're looking at them separately, yes.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I have one last question for you, Mr. Green. I'm very interested in this idea of creating capacities, particularly with women and peace-building.

Have you had any conversations with our government about those kinds of programs and how they are working, or shared that information with our government?

Mr. Mark Green: Sure, and we'll continue to do so. In fact we have put together a proposal to expand the work we're doing, particularly with the Syrian Women's Network, because we think there is a lot of hope and promise there.

It's methodical. No one expects changes overnight obviously, especially in that environment, but we have great hope. So, yes.

The Chair: Mr. Goldring, sir, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Peter Goldring: Thank you for appearing here today.

I notice here Senator John McCain. You must be doing work in the Ukraine too. I know you have been there for election monitoring over the years. Senator McCain was there in Kiev I think a day after I arrived. I was speaking in Maidan in the square the day before he was. It's pretty incredible with 400,000 to 500,000 people out in that square. They certainly do need a lot of democracy rebuilding there as well.

My question is on Syria, first of all to get a perspective on the size of the situation. You say the U.S. intelligence community estimates... and you have a number. Are these all the opposition numbers, and what is the comparable government number? In other words what is the balance of numbers of boots on the ground on each side? Is there some kind of idea at all?

Mr. Mark Green: I don't have that information, but I can certainly get back to the committee with further data.

Mr. Peter Goldring: It would give us some kind of perspective, because we know that the government forces have the big sticks. They have the big guns. The opposition forces don't, so they are at a distinct disadvantage there. The government technically, and I can see strategically, can stand back lobbing shells at particular communities and wearing them out by attrition.

Is there any sense that the opposition is losing ground or losing their effectiveness? This is all part and parcel of what are they're faced with—odds of two to one, odds of four to one, or...?

As well, in terms of all the weaponry, the Syrian government seems to be in no hurry to relieve or cut back the warfare or their efforts.

Mr. Mark Green: I would have two reactions or two answers to the question.

First off, it's important to recognize that it's not a bilateral fight. One of the things that make this so extraordinarily difficult for everyone involved is the fragmentation that's involved and the number of groups. Our estimate is that 74 outside nations have people fighting right now in Syria. You also have changing alliances, which makes it extraordinarily difficult.

Second, with respect to rising and falling fortunes, I will say, as Senator McCain pointed out, that we have seen more people killed in just the last several weeks since, ironically, the peace negotiations began than in any other time in the conflict.

The other piece that's important is that clearly time is not an ally of the rebels. Assad has made it very clear. We've seen the negotiations fail over and over again, in part because there appears to be no sense of urgency on the side of the government, of course, to bring about a solution. The passage of time is something they're comfortable with.

● (1710)

Mr. Peter Goldring: There also seems to be an unlimited supply of weaponry coming in. Would that not be something to approach in some way, with some kind of a weapons embargo or weapons blockade, something to slow it down there? As long as the weapons are predominantly coming in for the government, and the big guns are coming in for the government, it's inevitable. Even if we don't understand the numbers and say the numbers are 50-50, the one side is 90% and the other side is 10% armed; that's inevitable in itself.

Is there nothing they can do to blockade weaponry or slow it down?

Dr. Bessma Momani: That's called a UN Security Council resolution. It's the only way to do that legally. Both China and Russia have continued to basically block that and veto it.

In answer to your previous question, in fact if you look at the manpower of the Syrian army versus the collective opposition—the Free Syrian Army, ISIS, and Islamic Front—the difference is not that much. In fact they are almost equal in terms of what's been left of the Syrian army, because so many defectors have left, if you will.

The challenge, as you said, is the guns. Syria does not only have replenishment through much of the legal channels via the Russians but they also have air superiority, which has become the most devastating thing. They're not actually sending troops to go in battle anymore, because they don't even trust their own troops. They're just basically bombarding things from the sky and they are getting replenished constantly.

The other thing too is that where the Syrian army has been supported by both Hezbollah and by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, those are two militias that actually have a lot of background and history. In other words, they're organized and effective fighters. If you look at the Free Syrian Army, however, they are already ragtag to begin with. They're defectors from the Syrian army. Then you add ISIS and Islamic Front, which are basically based on volunteers. Yes, the volunteers are coming from all across the world, and in some cases through the region, but they are not necessarily a real professional army. Their tactics and logistics are also hampering their effectiveness.

Mr. Peter Goldring: So they're not even bringing in those point-and-shoot missiles, or whatever you call them, that can take down aircraft for the opposition.

Dr. Bessma Momani: You need heat-seeking MANPADS. That's the biggest thing that has prevented I think a real balance of power in this conflict. As many have pointed out, the fear is that they will be used against commercial planes. That's why none of the western powers are giving them.

Now, the Saudis have recently said that they may change their mind on that. As to whether or not that was a leak to the media, as of Thursday or Friday I think it was, in order to get things kind of pushing and moving at the Security Council, maybe; the point is that they don't have the same kind of weaponry that the Syrian army does.

Mr. Peter Goldring: Supposing this conflict ends; how do you then start rebuilding a democratic institution there? What do you start with? You said that you start at the education level. Is that at the university level, or do you go right to the basic streets of a community, so that they understand how their community interacts with their central government, and get them promoting principles and policies and political parties? How do you do it?

Mr. Mark Green: First off, you start now, and you don't wait for when everything is settled and the day after is here. That work needs to begin, and in fact is under way. You do it at the local level. You do it at the provincial level. You go to those areas that are free from Assad's control and begin to create some sort of dialogue about the decisions that have to be made and the basic provision of day-to-day items.

When you have no government at all, no governing structures, nobody has a stake in the survival of the leadership of the community itself. Then you create real despair, and of course despair is the perfect condition for extremism. That's when you have your real problems. But the key thing is that work needs to be under way now. It can't be done after the fact. At least it can't be done easily after the fact. We need to continue doing that work right now.

● (1715)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Goldring.

We're going to move over to the last question of the first round. Mr. Casey, welcome to the committee.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Momani, I was interested in your comments with respect to the refugee effort and where we are and where you think we should be, so I'd like to explore that a little bit. If I heard you correctly, the Government of Canada has set a goal or a target or a limit of 1,600 of which we've seen 200, and you think that a more reasonable realistic goal is 20,000.

I have a couple of questions arising out of that. One, what's your assessment of where we are now? You say we're at 200 of 1,600. So what's your assessment of why we're at 200, whether that represents a reasonable effort, and if it doesn't, how should it be improved? I guess I need a sense of the size of the Syrian descendant community in Canada to perhaps have you talk about that and how we get from 200 to 1,600 to 20,000.

Dr. Bessma Momani: Okay. Just to point something out, Sweden has taken in 16,000 permanent residents. We can do a lot more than 1,600 in this great big country. We've only taken in 200. Now I do want to point out that if a Syrian applies when in Canada as a refugee for asylum, they've been very favourable to that, and the United States as well. But a new article in *The New York Times* just two days ago pointed out, you have to make your way to Tijuana or to Toronto or to any other point of entry and then claim refugee status. That's not the way to go. The way to go is to have a global resettlement plan and actually reunite people along the lines, I believe, of family reunification.

The Canadian Syrian community as I said before has its roots in this country from the 1800s, really very strong and part of the earliest settlers of Arab Canadians who came to this country, some others as well in New Brunswick. I think the history of that is really important.

The last 2006 census said that there were 35,000 Syrian Canadians. We know that's an underestimation. I can go into the reasons why that is, but we know there is a huge underestimation of that number based on some of the findings of organizations like the Canadian Arab Institute and others. We think there are about 100,000 Canadian Syrians, some of whom are third- to fourth-generation Canadian Syrians. Again, many of whom came, particularly in the 1990s, which was another big flow through the investor program, and bought small businesses. They're the ones who have the strongest ties but yet the deepest roots in Canada, if you will, in terms of balance. They have small organizations, have businesses such as convenience stores, etc., that again are in high demand for labour.

I think there's a really great opportunity here to make this feasible for all concerned. God knows, just having been out in B.C., there are plenty of foreign workers there in the service industry. This is a country that is very much bilingual and in some cases trilingual, speaking French as well. There is a lot of opportunity, I think, and we could absorb a lot more. Again Sweden beating us to having 16,000—to me, we could do so much more.

Mr. Sean Casey: I can tell you from attending the meetings of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the fact that Sweden has taken in so many is a source of national pride for them, quite frankly.

Dr. Bessma Momani: Absolutely.

Mr. Sean Casey: Mr. Green, you talked about your organization as having a goal to build up the institutions that are now being torn apart and to be ready for the day after Assad. From what I'm hearing, we're a long way from any assurance that there's going to be a day after Assad, given what's happening on the ground. Where does that leave you, in the event of military success by the Assad regime and the principles that your organization stands for?

Mr. Mark Green: Let me say that if we're not careful, it will be a self-fulfilling prophecy, so if we fail to try to build democratic institutions, dialogue, and participation of women in particular at all levels of government, then we know we'll fail and we won't see a future for Syria. These are tough days. They are not good days. The suffering is immense. The number of refugees you were just talking about is only scratching the surface of what will happen in the years ahead. So we have no choice but to try to build up some semblance of governance in these outlying areas that provide some hope for people, especially for those who have been disenfranchised.

We know it is very difficult to do. It is difficult enough to do in the circumstances in which we find ourselves. It's even more difficult to do after the fact. So that's why we argued that this needs to be begun right away.

We are not arguing that investing in democratic institutions is the answer to the Syrian conflict. We're arguing that it is something that must take place if we're going to get to an answer in the long run. By itself it obviously won't solve all the problems, but if we're able to have some success in building some sense of governance and leadership, maybe then in the future there will be fewer refugees. We know what failing to invest in these programs will lead to, unfortunately.

● (1720)

Mr. Sean Casey: I'll turn back to you, Ms. Momani. You talked about the impact of this conflict on the neighbouring countries and the number of people who have been driven into Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. What is Canada doing and what should Canada, along with our allies or partners that share our socio-economic status in the world, be doing to support the neighbouring countries that have been so disproportionately affected by the displacement?

Dr. Bessma Momani: It's easy to say they need budget support, because clearly they are spending more. One can say invest in the infrastructure, because that's probably the thing that's most burdened. But that's also a challenge, because we don't know for how long and how many more Syrians are going to be coming. I do believe if you want to alleviate the pressure, you need to start moving some of those refugees to third parties. That is the best way to help the neighbours.

You cannot—

Mr. Sean Casey: So we're back to the your first point.

Dr. Bessma Momani: I really do think so. If you want to do something good for the Zaatari camp, stop wasting money on.... I'm sorry, that's not the right word. It's money well spent, but if you really want to get your dollars' worth, get them here and get them out of the misery. Making an extra clinic or an extra something is just putting a Band-Aid on a horrible wound, on gangrene. You don't put a Band-Aid on gangrene; you do something about it. I think we need to be more proactive, because this is just not going away. It's not going away and Syria is not imploding; it's exploding. We can't change the regime. No one wants to change the regime. I understand the geopolitical dynamics of that, but we can do something about expediting the relief effort to bring those Syrians to this great country.

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

We're going to have a bit of a second round, beginning with Ms. Brown and finishing with the NDP.

Ms. Lois Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Green, I'm really interested in the programs you are undertaking to build the capacity of women in Syria. I wonder if you could talk a little bit more about how you go about those programs. As a female parliamentarian, I am always interested in connecting with other women who are striving for a political career. Do you have any programs whereby you connect women in Syria with partners outside the country who can build into their lives just even through encouragement? I'd like to know.

Mr. Mark Green: You have just given a wonderful advertisement for what we're trying to do with our program. We have a Women's Democracy Network that is part of IRI and that is in many ways one of the most exciting programs we have.

And yes, we do: we try to build networks of women decision-makers. It's helpful in so many ways. Part of it is modelling and benchmarking. In societies where women have been nudged aside, ignored, or left out, being able to match them up with those who have become involved—whether it be getting involved in a campaign or actually running for office and serving in office—creates rising expectations and encourages more and more women to make their opinions known and to become more active, so we do.

Specifically with the Syrian Women's Network, we have actually matched up Syrian women with women in other countries to help in the negotiation process, taking on such issues as the detainees, so yes, it's an important part of the work we're doing, and we would love to have you as part of the Women's Democracy Network, because it is I think very promising.

One of the aspects of it that I am proudest of is our view that we shouldn't be turning to women simply for women's issues. That is patronizing in some ways, and of course it ignores the obvious. The reason we believe that women need to be involved is that it's the only way you can fully tap into the strength of your democracy. That's the basic premise of the Women's Democracy Network. In a place like Syria, and in that part of the world, we all have a long way to go, but we've also seen tremendous enthusiasm, progress, and promise when the work gets under way.

● (1725)

Ms. Lois Brown: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I think Mr. Anderson has a question.

Mr. David Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Green, we heard from the Red Cross that 34 members of their community have been killed. Last week, I had a chance to meet with the Pakistani opposition leader, and they've had hundreds of their campaign workers killed. What are the danger spots for your people, where are they threatened, and how are you doing?

Mr. Mark Green: Well, the people who come to work with us, to be trained by us, and to reach out to work with our people take their lives into their own hands whenever they come for our training, so they're always putting themselves on the line. That's why we think it's so important to focus our efforts in those areas that are beyond the reach of the Assad regime and begin to make connections there, but it is a very dangerous business.

As I mentioned, some people think a democracy promotion organization can't work in a zone or a setting like Syria. What we've found is this tremendous pent-up demand and this tremendous enthusiasm. There is a moderate middle that is in many ways unrepresented and even lost. We think there is enthusiasm, but every time they get involved, sure, they're taking risks.

Mr. David Anderson: He's going to cut me off here, but I'm just wondering what public institutions are left that you can work with in the country.

Mr. Mark Green: Well, it's local councils. It's council by council in each of those areas, so it's not a nationwide group; it's working on the local and the provincial level.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Dewar, sir.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Thank you, Chair.

Just to wrap things up, Ms. Momani, I wanted to ask you about Turkey. You mentioned it. Should we be providing support for Turkey? We haven't done any bilateral yet.

Second, in Lebanon we saw a coalition government come together after 10 or 12 months. It's caused some concern—I'm certainly concerned—about who's in the coalition and about the reluctance to abide by non-intervention clauses. I'm talking about Hezbollah. Can you touch on that? Do you have any comments on the coalition?

If there's any time, Mr. Green, could you comment as well?

Dr. Bessma Momani: I think the priority dollars still belong to Lebanon and to Jordan. Turkey, yes, is definitely a lot more challenged because of an enormous amount of capital outflow due to investors running away from the current political crisis, but I don't think it's nearly as acute. Their camps tend to be a lot better, by the way, and they have paid for a lot of it on their own. So one has to really commend the Turkish government for doing a lot. I still think Lebanon is abysmal. Lebanon is horrible.

The other issue that I think people don't want to talk about but is an enormous reality is the refugees inside Syria, in the Yarmouk camp—which is primarily Palestinian refugees who have been there from the 1948 war—they are basically forgotten. They're ignored by the UNHCR. They can't actually go to a UNHCR camp. Their jurisdiction is UNRWA but UNRWA is tapped out and has no funds for this crisis. So they're extremely vulnerable. They're the ones we're finding making their way, crossing borders, by some of the worst means to try and take a ship to Europe. They're the most vulnerable inside the country in fact, as well.

Can I respond to the Day After project? IDRC has a great project as well that they have funded. Many of them include a lot of great Syrian women leaders, including the Day After project. I know many of them as well that are funded by USAID.

Talking about institutions, citizen journalism has taken on a brand new form. It's phenomenal. The youth of that region have really taken on a lot of impressive roles. Civil society is still quite strong, ironically. So I do not worry about the day after; I worry about today.

The day after actually, and by that I mean after the fall of Assad, there are Syrians who are ready to kick in and do something about their country. They're highly educated. Women are more educated than their male counterparts. This is very much a society—like much of the Middle East—where there are more women educated than men. So again, they're ready. They just need the opportunity.

● (1730)

The Chair: Thank you to our guests. Thank you very much for being here today.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Chair, before we suspend, I just wanted to move the motion for the estimates, if I can do that before you gavel.

The Chair: Sure, before gavel.... Thank you very much.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Thank you.

Chair, there is a motion that we're now getting in front of us. I just wanted to move the motion and it's basically pro forma about having the Minister of Foreign Affairs appear before the committee regarding the supplementary estimates before March 6, and that's simply because of the deadlines on estimates. So I just wanted to move:

> That the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development invite the Honourable John Baird, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to appear before the Committee regarding the Supplementary Estimates (C) 2013-2014 before March 6, 2014 and that this meeting be televised.

The Chair: We're going to need to get some time to talk about this then, so I'll have to carve out some time at the next meeting. Is that what we want to do?

An hon. member: Yes.

The Chair: Okay, let's have a discussion.

Thanks, everyone. The meeting is adjourned.