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Mr. Dean Allison

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● (0845)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)): Good morning everyone. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we'll get our study of Canada's response to the violence, religious persecution, and dislocation caused by ISIL started.

I just want to welcome our two guests, our witnesses who are joining us via video conference today.

We have Dr. Bessma Momani, who is an associate professor from the Balsillie School of International Affairs, from the University of Waterloo. Dr. Momani, thank you for joining us again. I know we had a chance to hear you once before in our study of Syria. Welcome back. We're looking forward to hearing from you shortly.

We also have joining us via video conference from Shelton, Connecticut, from the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, Rod Sanjabi, the executive director. Welcome, sir. We're glad to have you joining us here today.

Why don't we just start—

I'm sorry. Go ahead, Mr. Anderson.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Chair, I would just like to make sure that we welcome Mr. Hawn to our committee now that we've resolved our membership issues. We're thrilled to have someone with his broad understanding and great wisdom here.

The Chair: While we're welcoming people, we'll welcome Mr. Van Kesteren back as well.

An hon. member: He's just visiting.

The Chair: Yes, just visiting.

What I'm going to do is turn it over to you, Dr. Momani. We'll have you go with your introductory remarks, then we'll head over to Mr. Sanjabi, and then we'll go around the room and ask questions, back and forth, as is our normal custom.

I'm going to turn it over to you, Doctor. You have the floor.

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

Thank you to the committee. I appreciate the invitation. It's always an honour to speak to you.

By the title of the hearing today, I gather there is an important interest, and I think a vital one, in ISIS's role in kind of trying to reshape the region. Without a doubt, there is plenty to be said about how much ISIS has had very little tolerance for minorities who really have historically shaped the Middle East. The Middle East is a tapestry. In teaching my own students, it's often something that I have to remind them, that the Middle East is multi-ethnic, multilingual, multireligious. Iraq is really one of those nation states that, perhaps, is most diverse, so we are seeing, I think, an awful group rise at a point where a country needs so much more healing, not division.

This is all to kind of re-emphasize a point that everybody knows, which is that ISIS is targeting many of these minorities that make up the milieu of the Middle East, groups known as the Yazidis, the Christians and the Shiites of Iraq. I want to emphasize that, if I may, because I think that's obvious, but what's not obvious is that it targets everyone. I think my hope is to really lay out the explanation for why we need to think about the fact that ISIS is not only targeting minorities; it's targeting everyone and anyone in its wake who opposes its rule, and that includes Sunni Muslims.

We've seen, for example, recently the Jabouri tribe in Iraq, a Sunni tribe, that tried to rise up against ISIS. It didn't want to succumb to its rule. Again, ISIS has been able to come into certain territories because of a political vacuum left by both the Assad regime and the Maliki government previously. In both cases, I would say, initially there was some local support, primarily because ISIS was the devil you didn't know versus the ones in Damascus and Baghdad, which had so much blood on their hands, according to those groups. But as ISIS tries to cement its control, its very perverse interpretation of Islam becomes quickly dissociated with much of the lifestyle that many people follow, and there's a very quick, I think, recognition that ISIS is not an ally but very much a socially perverse system of governance.

That does not mean they are willing to rise against it—which I will talk about—but that does show that there is a growing local concern about ISIS. We need to, if we're going to talk about a western coalition, talk about ways of turning the tide, politically and socially, in these Sunni-dominated areas to ensure that ISIS does not have allies on the ground.

Going back to my example of an Iraqi Sunni tribe, a very well known one called the Jabouri family, ISIS rolled into their city and tried to lay claim. The Sunni tribe did not want to ally itself with ISIS, very much didn't like the way it was treating its women, and ultimately paid a heavy price. Four hundred people from the one family were massacred by ISIS. This is, again, a prominent Sunni tribe in Anbar province.

We see stories of this kind, which don't reach our TV screens, unfortunately, of many such types of local uprisings and defiance of ISIS's rule. A prominent Sunni Iraqi female doctor was murdered in Mosul recently. I could go on and on.

The Kurds have undoubtedly paid a heavy price, particularly in Kobani at the hands of ISIS, but it would be mistaken to think of that without really understanding the fact that the Kurds are predominantly Sunni Muslim. So it is not a sectarian...it has overlays of sectarianism, without a doubt, but really ISIS's rule is one that is targeting all who disagree with its perverse interpretation. Everybody is game. Easy targets, obviously, are the minorities who disagree with it fundamentally, but clearly many Sunnis have paid a heavy price. In fact, of the 1,200 that ISIS has killed, I'd say that predominantly we're still talking about Sunnis that have paid the price for that.

● (0850)

How to counter ISIS? I'm not sure if that's the purview of the committee, but I have to say it includes and needs to be both military and a bottom-up winning of the hearts and minds of locals.

The targeted plan that we have, and that the coalition agreed to about a month back, includes things like establishing a national guard of locals to overthrow ISIS eventually. I think that is an absolutely fantastic idea. The challenge is that training is at least a year a way, depending on both Iraqi Sunnis to be trained and ex-army who have been completely disenfranchised by the Maliki government. It's going to take a lot to tempt them back, although that can be done. ISIS has been able to have some support because it pays salaries. We need to get back into the business of paying these ex-military officers a salary.

Also, we need to think about the FSA, the Free Syrian Army, which has been the so-called second part of this plan of a bottom-up national guard. They are maybe even more than a year away, some might even say a hopeless cause at this point. The Saudis have agreed to train them, but we have been seeing more and more losses on the battlefront in Syria. I'd argue that the FSA has become completely decimated, so it's not really going to be available for much longer to help us in the cause of creating these national guards.

If we don't do the second part of this—i.e., the bottom-up approach—we are going to lose the hearts and minds of the people. That's not only vital for the moral support that we need in the western sense. I might also add that translates to political support far and wide beyond the territory that ISIS controls, but including many of the Arab and Muslim countries. More importantly we need them militarily and logistically in the sense that the second phase of the counter-insurgency strategy has already started.

You can safely argue that much of the military targets from the air have almost exhausted themselves. We've seen a complete decline in the number of targets that coalition forces have been able to hit.

At this point we need the second phase, which is ground level, domestic support. I think we all agree and any analyst who advises otherwise must be very careful. Western boots on the ground would be devastating. It would lose all the hearts and minds. It would spiral into a larger war than necessary and there are plenty of people, individuals, who would be happy to fight ISIS with the proper training and resources. There is an opportunity there, but it must be done by making sure that the narrative of countering ISIS and fighting ISIS is not just about ISIS being a terrorist force that is targeting minorities, which it is, but also pointing out that ISIS targets everyone who does not succumb to its very draconian and perverse interpretation of Islam.

If we keep that narrative, and it's very important that we focus on that, I think we can continue to win the hearts and minds on the ground. I have to emphasize that looking at it only through the lens of minorities, as valid as that is, is not militarily and politically advantageous in the long term for the coalition forces.

I'll stop there.

● (0855)

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

We're going to move over now to Mr. Sanjabi.

Sir, we'll turn the floor over to you.

Mr. Rod Sanjabi (Executive Director, Iran Human Rights Documentation Center): Thanks very much. Thank you for having me. I would only stress before I begin my comments that my work primarily focuses on Iran so the impressions I'll be offering will be general.

Historically it's just worth pointing out a few things. One is that this degree of radicalism is not ingrained. It's not something that's existed for generations. It's largely the result of the investment in radicalization of Islamic education over the course of the last couple of generations by the Saudis and the Gulf states. What I'm speaking about of course is a little bit broader than simply the recent investment over the last ten years in AQIM and ISIS. That kind of cultural substrate is an important thing to keep in mind.

Also, it's worth mentioning that recently Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the former President of Iran, pointed out that in his belief some Shiite practices, including the burning in effigy of the Caliph Umar, whom for Sunnis is some import, and such discrimination has led to the rise of ISIS. To the degree that this represents a widespread belief in Iran—and I can't say that it necessarily does—there is some sense I think among Shiites as well that this is an issue. I'm going to come back to that later.

I'd also point out that this degree of radicalism, as I said before, wasn't evident in the Sunni population of Iraq or Syria prior to 2011 and Bashar al-Assad's rather brutal crackdown and especially also prior to 2003 in Iraq. This takfiri ideology that the professor pointed to wherein all members of society who do not subscribe to the radical Salafi ideals of ISIS are considered to be non-believers and deserving of state violence is a new and very troubling development. I think that's not a very controversial point. So in the current context with ISIS having been expelled from Baiji and the refineries, it's worth noting that the $30 million or so a month it was predicted that they were going to be making is likely to go down. It's difficult for them to sell crude oil. It's much easier to sell refined petroleum products.

I'm not an expert but I think their ability to pay their forces will be significantly diminished and as a result I think their fighting ability may also be diminished over the coming months. From what I know of the Iranian context I can say that careers have been made in the IRGC. The IRGC's role in regaining Amerli has been significant. It's made some propaganda points in Iran. It's worth mentioning that this has had quite an effect in the Iranian context. The IRGC, who no one would have thought in 2009 would have ever had a chance at gaining significant popular support, is now considered to be something of a force for national unity and defence. It's unlikely that Suleimani, the head of the Quds Force, will stay in command for very long. The supreme leader has a record of removing generals from power once they accumulate a certain amount of influence, especially in the IRGC.

● (0900)

It's nonetheless worth mentioning that this has provided a significant opportunity for them. All of this aside, I wanted to comment on the reprise that we hear a lot that there needs to be a political solution in Iraq to address the ISIS presence in Iraq. I think that's true. It's difficult in the context though, because for generations, always, the Shiite population of Iraq was marginalized. The relative radicalization of the Shiite population, especially after—well, radicalization might be strong. Obviously Maliki was unable to compromise. I don't think that will be forthcoming in a meaningful way. What you're more likely to see is a fig leaf and a facade of cooperation rather than anything else.

To finish, I wanted to point to some of the findings of the Syrian COI, the commission of inquiry. They published a report on human rights under ISIS very recently. There are a few interesting points. Victims are consistently describing acts of terror, aimed at—as the professor pointed out—limiting the exercise of religious freedom, freedom of speech, assembly, and association, and this goes quite far. There's testimony indicating that some children have been pressured to inform on their parents. There are a number of reports of ISIS attacking social and cultural events, including weddings. There are plenty of reports—and this has entered the media—of lashings and amputation for offences such as smoking and theft. Victims have described a presumption of guilt until innocence is proven, to the degree that there are legal proceedings.

It's also worth mentioning, yes, minorities are targeted significantly. They've been more or less faced with the choice of assimilating or fleeing. Forced conversion is quite regular, especially among people who have been kidnapped. There are reports of churches having been destroyed, and obviously, forceable displacement has created a massive humanitarian disaster throughout the region.

I'll end there. I'm open to answering any questions, but once again, I would urge you to remember that I am an Iran specialist so this isn't quite my field.

● (0905)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The first round will be seven minutes and then we'll go to the second round of five minutes.

We're going to start with the NDP, Mr. Dewar.

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

Thank you to both our witnesses.

I'm going to start with Ms. Momani. Thank you again for appearing before our committee. You helped us with our study on Syria.

I should mention to both of our witnesses that we are doing a study with the goal of making recommendations. That's to be noted because if there are things that you want to ensure we have in our findings, if you think it wasn't captured in your comments or the questions and answers, please send them on to our committee so we can have that material for consideration for recommendations.

I want to start with you, Ms. Momani. It's interesting that you talked about the importance of how to describe the actions of ISIL and how we should avoid and not fall into the trap that you're laying out that they only go after minorities, yet it's clear they do go after minorities. So I appreciate what you're saying, because it is true that you can't just say that this is a Sunni group who is promoting their brand of Islam. In fact, I think many people would call what they're promoting analogous to a death cult of sorts—you're either with us or we'll kill you.

I also note that even those who are converted end up dying, being killed, or murdered, and we've recently seen that. But what I wanted to ask you about is this connection because of your experience and your background in studying Syria. One of the things that has come out recently is how there seems to be not a direct link but certainly an effect of the Assad regime at the beginning, holding back on targets where ISIL was prevalent. You see this in terms of what happened in Aleppo, where the Free Syrian Army was active and had opportunity, but where ISIL was active there seems to be a strategy by Assad to hold back a bit. For many this seems puzzling, but when you look back you can see how Assad would be playing this out to provide oxygen to ISIL to defeat the Free Syrian Army, which I think in the beginning was more of a threat.

Can you just open that up a bit for us and give us any information on that? I think it's really important. If we're looking at a comprehensive strategy for the region, I think it's important to understand this connection between Assad, his strategy, and how it's affecting ISIL, and of course that spills over into Iraq.

Dr. Bessma Momani: Yes. Thank you.

Look, I think Assad for a very long time was interested in keeping control of Damascus, Aleppo, and the Latakia coast. That's his heartland. If we look at the map of what ISIS controls....

You know, I'm almost skeptical about using the words “ISIS”, “IS”, or “Islamic State”, because it's not a state. They control two or three cities and lots of roads that connect them. They don't particularly control a big, vast amount of arable, livable territory. Much of it is desert. It's not to say that the millions who are under its unfortunate tutelage don't matter; by no means is that the point. But if you look at the map of Syria and Iraq, they've taken the void. They've taken the amount of territory that is mostly uninhabited, mostly desert and not necessarily the most resource rich, although they do have access to a few oil refineries. Most of it is desert, uninhabited desert, and the people who inhabit those areas tend to be more rural, tend to be more conservative. That's why that ideology first took hold.

Initially, at least, they were able to come into that territory because the people on the ground were able to see that there was at least an attempt to govern them, to provide services, to provide electricity. We hear, for example, that in Mosul and parts of Syria, much of the reason for the initial welcoming of ISIS was that they came in and picked up garbage. They provided things like electricity and water. They freed political prisoners from jail. So they were able to initially —again, very initially—get public support. That's why they made such a vast spread so quickly.

I digress a little bit, but the point is that these are really not cities in the classic sense, not populated cities—with the exception of Mosul, which is not easy to ignore. My point is that much of Syria is barren.

Going back to your question about Assad, Assad did not fight ISIS. Some on the ground would be skeptical and argue that Assad and ISIS were aligned. I think that's a bit extreme. More importantly, Assad turned a blind eye and said, look, I don't have enough forces to fight two fronts; let me focus on the secular front, which clearly the international regimes globally are more sympathetic to, such as the FSA, the Free Syrian Army. ISIS eventually, if it does get hold of much of eastern Syria, as it did, is easier to at least garner the international support to counter it.

I think he played it quite well. He was right on that front. But his key goal was to hold on to the centre of the country and the coast, the highly populated areas: Aleppo, the most populated city; the second, Damascus; and then Latakia, because of access to the sea and also its Alawite heartland. Those were all the reasons why he focused on that. That was a tactical and I think a political choice.

So he didn't fight ISIS, and ISIS was able to pretty much spread in Syria very quickly and easily with initially popular support on the ground. That has obviously changed. People have started to see that ISIS is not a saviour against the Assad regime, it's a medieval interpretation of Islam that's even worse than Assad. But that's taken time to get to, and I think that explains why in Syria, at least, we have seen a lot more of this kind of uprising against ISIS than we have in other areas.

I'll stop there.

● (0910)

Mr. Paul Dewar: My time is up, but I just want to ask you: what do you call them? I'm conflicted with this as well. I don't want to call them a state; I think it adds to their legitimacy.

Do you have a quick response on that?

Dr. Bessma Momani: The quick response is that I think “ISIS” is legitimate. “ISIL” is a term that Barack Obama likes, and the administration, because it avoids the word Syria and we know that he is allergic to the concept of Syria. I think we shouldn't fall into that trap.

As well, “Levant” does not translate into anything. It is ISIS. I think that's the simple way of looking at it. “Islamic State” gives them absolutely legitimacy. It's neither Islamic nor a state, so let's stick to ISIS. That's what I would say.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll turn it over to Mr. Anderson for seven minutes, please.

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

To our guests, thank you for being here today. I hope you won't think me rude if I interrupt you. I have three questions that I want to ask, and I think they may take a little bit of your time.

First of all, Mr. Sanjabi, can you tell me a little about the situation with minority communities moving into Iran from some of these areas, particularly from Iraq over the last few years? Has that been an issue for the Iranian government to deal with, and what is that issue?

Mr. Rod Sanjabi: The numbers were relatively small—or had become smaller. A large number of Shiites went to Iran immediately after the U.S. invasion. That number had lowered. It has increased again. I think it's nowhere near the number who are going to Turkey. You have to keep in mind that there is Iraqi Kurdistan in the way. Most of them right now, just temporarily, are in Erbil and the environs. They are primarily in Iraqi Kurdistan and Turkey. That may change, if the conflict becomes more permanent.

Again I'd like to stress that the economic situation for ISIS is not good right now. I think that the human rights situation, and especially pressure on minorities, will increase, short term, as a result of this. It's a kind of rule of history. ISIS will be weakened and will be looking to especially vulnerable communities to make up the deficit.

Mr. David Anderson: I need to stop you there, because I want to lead into another area that has to do with this.

You said that Maliki probably will be unable to compromise and to cooperate effectively, and Ms. Momani talked about the need for a domestic coalition. I wonder whether the two of you can talk—and this may use up our time a little bit—about what that domestic coalition might look like, given the recipe and the mixture of people we have there. I don't need to go through the whole list, but the entire neighbourhood is involved.

What will that domestic coalition look like if it is to be effective? How can we assist in the establishment of it? I guess we want to also talk about Canada's response to the situation. How can we play a role that will be effective there?

● (0915)

Dr. Bessma Momani: I point out that this is already done, in the sense that the way in which the American forces were able to eventually overthrow al Qaeda in the first case, after the 2003 intervention, was by making a coalition with the Anbar province's locals, called sahwa or the awakening, in 2007.

That was basically getting local tribes, putting an Iraqi uniform on them, paying them salaries, everything that Maliki didn't do, which was.... I have to point out that the Americans did a fantastic job of training and professionalizing this force, but then, when the Maliki government came into power and the Americans left, he basically stripped them of all their stars, stopped their salaries, and told them, "You're a Sunni; go home".

We need to reverse that tide; that's the simple way.

The national guard model that the coalition has put together is a fantastic one. You just need to move into that phase. We haven't moved into that phase, clearly, because we're focusing only, so far, on the military strategy, from the top down. By that I mean literally through air support and air power, which is needed—without a doubt you need to do that—but we're not moving into the second phase, and I'm afraid we're not going to be able to train them fast enough.

We need to put more resources into the training of those resources and of those forces on the ground that include the Sunni tribes in both Iraq and in Syria. We need to put money and time into that quickly.

Mr. David Anderson: Can it be done effectively in both countries, or do you focus on one rather than the other, or what do you suggest?

Dr. Bessma Momani: In terms of the political strategy, obviously Iraq is easier, because in Iraq you have the central government's authorization. We have been focusing more on the Iraqi tribes to do that—at least, that's the way the message has been portrayed by the coalition—because we are in essence defying Syrian sovereignty. As much as we hate the Assad regime, by international law it's still the legitimate sovereign.

That means training local groups. I don't think we have stopped training the FSA, but we haven't done a really good job of being complete about it. Now you have the difficulty, though, that clearly the FSA has become less and less powerful over time.

Mr. David Anderson: Let's talk about the role, then, of Turkey and the Kurds in this as well, because I would think they would need to be brought into this. They seem to be one of the more effective fighting forces in the area.

Dr. Bessma Momani: Yes. The Kurds are a formidable force, the peshmerga. They have a history of fighting. They would need to be empowered, definitely.

Part of the challenge of the peshmerga, which are in the Kurdish region of Iraq, is getting Turkish permission, which is really hard to do, understanding their history of allowing peshmerga access into Turkey to get around the fact that much of ISIS territory stands in the way.

Literally, ISIS controls the vast desert between the KRG, the Kurdish region, and the areas of battle, but that can be overcome.

You have to give something to the Kurds, and we haven't done that, maybe behind the scenes. We need to give something to the Kurds that says that they have a purpose in fighting ISIS, not just in Kobani, which is clearly important for their own historical narrative, but more importantly fighting ISIS will mean something for them. There's only one thing that the Kurds want and it is some recognition of autonomy toward independence.

I know we're allergic to the concept of independence. I understand that, but that is really important. I completely understand why the Kurds would say that they are going to be defensive and they are not going to go on the offensive until they are told there's something in it for them.

Mr. David Anderson: We had heard that radicalization is a result of investment in education by a number of people in the area. That is something we probably need to address.

How do we deal with that? Is that the longer-term issue? You shake your head one way. Do you not agree that investment in education has been a cause of a lot of the problems we have here?

● (0920)

Dr. Bessma Momani: No, because frankly, the force of fighters ISIS has is global. They're coming from everywhere. They're coming from Tunisia. They're coming from Canada, dare I say. They're coming from Belgium. They're not coming from just Iraq and Syria. They're coming globally because the radical ideology is online.

It's not necessarily coming through the school system. That's not an endorsement of the school system, but a lot of it is being self-radicalized online, and we need to think about that.

The Chair: Mr. Garneau, to complete the first round, seven minutes, please.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to both our guests today.

Dr. Momani, you talked about the need to win hearts and minds, and you talked about a national guard. You've said that the military side of it was very important as well. I would like to focus my questioning on the other part, which is that ISIS needs three things: it needs people to come to fight for it, it needs money, and it needs weapons.

Mr. Sanjabi talked about the fact that the retaking of Baiji is probably going to have an effect on revenues because of the loss of oil there. I'm very curious about the oil revenue. Who is buying this stuff? We hear about trucks going out through Turkey. Somebody is obviously buying it and it's a source of revenue. There's obviously funding, we hear, from some countries. I won't name them, but they seem to be feeding money to ISIS as well.

I'd like to hear you on both those things. I'd also like to ask about weapons. You need weapons. Yes, they've taken a lot from the Iraqi army and others, but eventually you run out of weapons. Where do they get access to these weapons? Is it on the black market?

If you could both address those issues, perhaps starting with Dr. Momani.

Dr. Bessma Momani: I think a lot has been said about the oil. The number one source of where ISIS gets its money is ransom paid by western governments and western companies. That's really important. You know, oil has been inflated. In fact, there's been a re-evaluation; that $1 million-a-day revenue, a number from oil, was actually reassessed because that was based on oil being sold at $100 per barrel, which is not really the true price. The price is more like $20 per barrel, because it's not refined oil. It's crude and can work in some cheap cars, but it's not necessarily the good stuff, so to speak.

In terms of where that oil is going, it's being primarily sold to Kurdish middlemen. The Kurdish middlemen have been historically buying oil on the black market for a decade, so it's not new. Let's say its simply new people who are pumping it out. Much of that oil goes either into Kurdistan or into Turkey. Keep in mind that it's hard to track, because from some reports we've gotten, some of that literally goes straight into the cars themselves. There's not necessarily a sophisticated pipeline being used; it's literally from car to car to car. So it's hard to identify from the air, which is really the problem.

In terms of fighters, fighters are definitely global, and I think the recruitment process online—at least from the reports I've seen and some conversations I've had with people who understand this a lot better in terms of recruitment of these fighters—they're being self-radicalized online. That is an enormous pull.

I hate to put a stereotype to this, but it is primarily young men, disenfranchised, who are finding all of this violence very appealing. Medieval cutting of throats looks very appealing online to a certain segment of a society that, perhaps, has become jaded and I think no longer sensitive to the kind of violence that we see. I don't want to blame it all on video games, but my point is that there are a lot of factors here in explaining where they're getting this recruitment from.

Weaponry—absolutely a lot of this is from the Iraqi army, from the Syrian army. There are people who are willing to give up their bigger cause for the sake of feeding their family, so there are a lot of people who are willing to trade in this business. Yes, I think there are some weapons being smuggled through Turkey. It's a very long and porous border. The Turks have gotten a really bad rap for this, but it's really not their fault. They don't have the manpower or the surveillance capacity to really man this 800 kilometre or...I lost track, 800-something kilometre border. I mean, it's really porous and long, and mountainous, I should add, which makes it more difficult.

● (0925)

Mr. Marc Garneau: Thank you.

Mr. Sanjabi.

Mr. Rod Sanjabi: It's worth noting the oil revenue was largely supposed to make up for the loss of funding from the Saudis and the Gulf states, because as international attention ramped up, ISIS started receiving less and less funding from private individuals.

To go back to what I was pointing to before, which is relevant to the question of recruitment, it is that these were multi-generational investments into radicalizing the Sunni world, across the Sunni world. Basically, in more immediate terms, yes, the recruitment is largely occurring online and I think there's really not much way of stopping that.

I would also point out that in addition to what Professor Momani pointed to, there are a lot of small refineries in Syria that are under ISIS control, and those have been targeted by U.S. air strikes I understand. I don't know what the capacity from those is, but yes, it is definitely worth mentioning.

This isn't to say that they don't have control of oil wells, but without refining capacity they're not going to be able to sell oil that anyone wants to buy. That's a little bit too sweeping, but generally speaking this is definitely going to lower revenues. As I said, it's likely to result in more pressure on minorities and also on foreigners in ISIS-controlled areas.

Mr. Marc Garneau: Thank you.

I'd like to ask a question about Haider al-Abadi and his supposed attempt to try to find some balance in his cabinet. I realize it is much more than that. Dr. Momani, you talked about the need to go across Sunni tribes, and of course there are different factions of Shias as well. How well do you think he's managing compared to Maliki before him? Do you think there is some hope that there is a perception of balance in terms of the composition of that government and the other outreach efforts?

The Chair: Please make a quick response because we're pretty much out of time.

Dr. Bessma Momani: He's definitely done a lot better without a doubt. He's saying all the right things. He's definitely a better person in his thinking about Iraq. But the challenge is, and legitimately so, the Shias of Iraq have been screwed over for much of history. They paid a heavy price historically, so to bring back a lot of these Sunni tribes feels like an injustice to them.

I think this is where you need Iranian support. Abadi has been able to come to power, because Khamenei made it very clear that Maliki's time was up. That's really important. I think they are still looking at Iran for endorsement. Iranians can be very helpful in making sure that Abadi comes through and in lowering the sectarian language.

I say this all from the fact that the Iraqi Shias have paid the heaviest price in history for much of Saddam Hussein's rule, so I understand why they feel that since they were always the majority, always treated so terribly by the previous government, that the time is now to put all of that international support. Because Abadi also faces the challenge that much of his government is still the old cronies who are very much waiting for the same pay cheque and the same system. He is a very honest and respectable individual, but he's faced with the fact that he's surrounded by a whole bunch of inscrutable fellows.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to start the second round of five minutes with Mr. Hawn.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to both our witnesses.

Dr. Momani, I want to carry on with the training side a little. First, I agree with you about the requirement for an air campaign. I also agree with you about "no western boots on the ground", which means we need regional boots on the ground, which leads to training.

Canada and others were pretty successful in Afghanistan, training the Afghan National Security Forces, so we do have a lot of experience at that. I'm told by people who have been in the region that there are about a division's worth of Iraqi soldiers or Iraqi army who would be relatively easily trained—and that's a relative term—into a cohesive force. That it would take a training force of about 350 or so Canadians or anybody with experience at that to carry that out and in perhaps a period of about six months they would be ready to make a serious contribution.

I'm going to ask a very specific question that you may not be prepared to answer, but do you think that would be something that the Government of Canada should investigate, an additional commitment, a non-combat commitment but an additional commitment to that whole operation?

● (0930)

Dr. Bessma Momani: Yes, absolutely. I think we have a lot to give and I would also point out again, it's a shame, because the Americans did this once already to help the Iraqi army professionalize. How do you run a sophisticated army that lives in a multicultural society? That is one of our great comparative advantages that we don't utilize enough.

I hope the Canadian military can bring some of those really fantastic hard skills of understanding and explaining some of the logistical and tactical techniques that they have been able to perfect, but more importantly, how you have an army that is inclusive and very much comes from a multicultural society. Those are really important factors in a country that has been rocked by sectarianism. There is an example, like the Lebanese army. The Americans have put a lot of money into the Lebanese army to do just that; to elevate this army away from all the sectarian dimensions and that includes training them to talk about defending the nation first and foremost and not succumbing to these parochial identities like Sunni, Shia, Christian, and Kurd.

That's a challenge, but that requires training and I think we are absolutely the best international force to do that because of our comparative advantage as a multicultural society.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Thank you very much.

We talked about the need for financing and weapons and all that kind of stuff. Right now, ISIS or whatever we want to call them, needs financing and right now they're paying a lot of money. We've seen recruiting in Canada and elsewhere where they're offering a lot of money for people to become radicalized or to go and fight. If their source of funds was substantially cut, do you think that would impact the level of radicalization that people seem to exhibit?

Dr. Bessma Momani: They're paying about $1,000 per month to their local forces, and there's everything from.... There are cheaper amounts if you're not in the high-risk force. There are some forces that may be called on to do suicide bombing or to do the grunt work. They're paid a lot more than some of the foot soldiers who are more administrative and backup.

I think there are two parts to this. That $1,000 per month is not going to attract a westerner who is being beckoned to go to fight for ISIS. That's not going to convince them. The radical ideology or the gruesome images are what's attracting them. That's the self-radicalization. But if you're asking if $1,000 per month is enough money to convince a local force, absolutely. That's where you need to pay. You have to basically use the market to your advantage and pay the local national guards enough money so that it no longer looks attractive.

Again, this is a situation where people are really quite desperate for money. This is not all ideology; some of it is just plainly being able to support your family.

That money is going to go down because they are having less access to it. The west is finally not paying some of those ransoms, and there has been a lot more high profile scrutiny of that. We still need to put pressure on the French, who, by the way, still continue to pay under the table. That's the number one source. The French and some of the other European countries are paying to get people out.

They're also using extortion and kidnapping of individuals who may have a relative anywhere in Canada or the United States. We need to do something about that. The number one source of money is ransom and not oil. That, I think, is part of the long-term strategy, if you really want to stop this.

Also I'd point out that, yes, there are sympathizers who were in the Gulf sending money, but it was never the states. I think we need to really make that clear. It wasn't the Saudi government or the UAE government that was sending money. They were individuals primarily in Kuwait, not even in Saudi Arabia, who were sending money. Often this was linked to those YouTube videos. That money was fuelling basically an online campaign whereby donors were given the proof that their money was being put to good use, to kill, for example, this or that individual who's deemed to be the enemy.

There's a lot of this that can be done online. Some of the strategies of fighting hate speech, for example, the holocaust museum in Washington, have done some of the best work on this. How do you counter hate speech online?

There is a technique and a way that we can do this. It includes everything from advertisements and YouTube videos. Before you actually see the YouTube video of this awful beheading, you can get actual ad space that talks about.... You can get a prominent imam, and there are many out there who are dispelling the religious fervour of this, saying, "This is completely unethical. You're not going to go to heaven. You're going to rot in hell." That needs to be on there. That requires finances.

I actually spoke to someone who does this kind of thing and has been doing this quite effectively in other countries. It does work, so there are some techniques that can be used to counter this type of violence such as messaging, but it needs ad dollars.

● (0935)

The Chair: That's all the time we have, thanks.

Madam Laverdière, please.

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

Thank you very much to both witnesses and for very interesting presentations and comments. I think I've taken a couple of pages of notes already, including how to combat hate speech.

As a follow-up to some previous questions, and very briefly, Ms. Momani, you mentioned that the Turkish border is very difficult to monitor, both for petrol coming up and weapons going into Iraq. Is there any way to increase that border protection, and would that be useful at all?

Dr. Bessma Momani: It would be very useful, and I would just point out that Turkey is a NATO member. That's really important. That's a very valuable connection.

The Turks are obviously very concerned, more on their western border with Syria, because that's the most populated in terms of both Turks and Syrians. You can see why they've put most of their investment into monitoring the western part of their border. Their eastern border is pretty much a no man's land, and people do cross very easily, especially locals. Those individuals, on both sides of the border—again, Kurds and Turks—are complicit in this trade. They benefit. There are a lot of middlemen and a lot of warlords who are gaining money out of this.

I think it's important to understand that the Turks would be willing to have.... It's not in their interest and I don't think that despite a lot of the media's unfavourable portrayal of the Erdogan government, which is warranted for other reasons, that it's in Erdogan's interest or in Davutoglu's interest to have this border being so porous. The challenge is simply manning it. They don't have the resources to do that, and more importantly, they are consumed with the threat of the two million to three million Syrian refugees who are going to trickle over their border, and that's on the western side. They are more focused on that.

They've been calling for a buffer zone inside Syria. It's an absolutely fantastic idea. We need to do more to provide a safe space for Syrians in their own country, which I think is vital if we're going to talk about long-term security. I remember testifying to this very same point. You need to put these humanitarian buffer zones within the border of Syria. Doing that will protect the long-term stability of not just Turkey but also Lebanon and Jordan, which increasingly—and I say this having come back from the region just a few weeks ago—are really under strain. We cannot afford to lose those three allies.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Thank you very much. That's very interesting.

I would like to ask one brief question if I have time.

What do you see as the potential dangers associated with the possible expansion of a Canadian military mission into Syria?

Dr. Bessma Momani: I look at it this way. There is a danger in the narrative, because you have the Assad regime that has killed 200,000 people. It's responsible, I think, for the 200,000 or maybe it has blood on its hands for at least 150,000 of that. The reality is that there are many within the region who are very skeptical about the western intervention against ISIS. They say, "Why is it that suddenly you're rushing here because of two unfortunate and horrible and horrific decapitations of these two western journalists, yet the blood of 150,000 Arab Muslims was basically cheap and valueless?"

ISIS has killed 1,200 people. That's not to discount the fact that those are 1,200 people that matter, but in the big scheme of things, people see the real devil here as being the Assad regime. So you're really losing the hearts and minds, and we need to make sure that it's emphasized. I'm all for military support in countering ISIS, but you need to also have this not being in sectarian language. It is not useful for us to talk about us countering ISIS because they're hurting minorities. No. If you do that, you perpetuate the myth that this is a war against Sunni Islam, which is not true. We need to talk about ISIS being a medieval, horrible organization that is at risk of engulfing the region. I would say, having come from the region, that from the Gulf to the Levant, people keep saying to me, "I don't see the threat of ISIS, but I do see the threat of the Assad regime, because the Assad regime is sending two to three million people our way."

That really reverberates if we're talking about Canadian reputation in the region.

● (0940)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Madame Laverdière.

We're going to finish up with Mr. Anderson for five minutes.

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

One of the things we've talked about this morning is the objective of degrading ISIL over time here.

I'm just wondering if you could give us an idea of how you would measure and assess that. If that happens, what will it look like? How can we measure and assess that as it takes place?

Dr. Bessma Momani: What would degrading ISIS look like? Obviously, it would mean having its military units obliterated. There are 30,000 to 40,000 people, which is not a lot in the big scheme of things. You need to stop the recruitment to add to that, because the recruitment, much of it foreign, is making that number go up and up. The recent estimates of the CIA are that it's now at perhaps 50,000, and much of that has been through online recruitment. So you need to stop the recruitment.

I think you also need to change the tide domestically, and that means filling the political vacuum. I would say there are still people who despise the ideology, despise much of ISIS's rule, but who are saying, "If we get rid of ISIS tomorrow, what will come in its wake? Who's going to do the things like pick up the garbage, like provide electricity? More importantly, does this mean that we are now going to be under the rule of both the Abadi government and the Assad government?" That's not necessarily fathomable either, so you need to give them an alternative. That's really important in creating a narrative, and a real political option the day afterwards.

I really focus on this: what's the day after degrading ISIS? If you don't provide sustainable institutions that can fill that vacuum, it will just be another acronym that will fill that space.

Mr. David Anderson: I want to talk a little bit about some of those institutions, other than just the military. In Iraq, do the police and judiciary have the strength to provide effective protection? You said this issue isn't about religious minorities, but minority communities are definitely being targeted and hit with this. Do the police and judiciary have the strength to deal with this?

I guess I'd also be interested in a comment about the Syrian institutions that will exist if ISIL is degraded.

Dr. Bessma Momani: There aren't a lot of Syrian institutions left in the region. They've been gone for four years, and I dare say, they pretty much neglected that region when they did rule.

On the Iraqi front, you asked about the police and the judiciary. I think they're a far cry from being professional forces in both cases. The police have become very much dominated by the Iraqi Shiite as well as the judiciary. This is all Maliki's work, not that of Abadi, who I think has done a good job of trying to combat this. But this has become so entrenched, because we've had, under Maliki, four or five years of ensuring that only his cronies, those who come from his particular ideological orientation within the Shia community.... There are plenty of secular, centrist Shias who don't support Maliki's perspective. I'd even point to some who are not centrist people, like the Sadrists, who don't support Maliki's view. That's another untapped resource in Iraq, which would very much be willing to... in the name of a more national narrative. Maliki is seen as a puppet of the Iranian regime, even within Iraq among some of the more radical Shiite forces, who are very much Arab and not Persian.

I'd let my colleague, the other witness, talk about that because he's much more of an expert on Iranians, as I mentioned.

● (0945)

Mr. Rod Sanjabi: I'm not sure what kind of policy ramification this has. It is somewhat counterintuitive and interesting. It's exactly what Professor Momani was pointing to, which is that, in fact, the more politicized Shiite clerics tend to be more open to cooperation with Sunni forces. Traditionalist, quietist Shiite clerics, who may reject the role of clergy or even the role of religion in government, tend to be more anti-Sunni. That's something to keep in mind.

I don't know exactly how that can be reflected in policy, but it is certainly worth noting that some of the forces that you would think to be more radical, and which possibly even played a role in radicalizing the Sunni population in Iraq, are more likely to be useful, you could say, co-belligerents going forward.

The Chair: To our two witnesses today, Dr. Momani and Mr. Sanjabi, thank you very much for your time.

We're going to suspend just for one second while we change out and get our other video conference set up.

● (0945)

(Pause)

● (0950)

The Chair: Welcome back.

I want to welcome Father Mallon, who is joining us via video conference from New York City. He is with the Catholic Near East Welfare Association and is the external affairs officer.

Welcome, Father Mallon and thank you very much for being here today.

Joining us here in Ottawa we have Mr. Hétu, who is national director for Canada for the Catholic Near East Welfare Association.

Mr. Hétu, welcome here today.

We're going to start with our friend in New York City, Father Mallon. We're going to turn it over to you for your opening remarks.

Father Elias Mallon (External Affairs Officer, United States, Catholic Near East Welfare Association): The area of the world that we refer to as the Middle East is probably a lot more complex than most of us realize. For one thing, its present state did not evolve naturally. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire, which basically had controlled most if not all of the Middle East, basically the victorious parties of World War II, with the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916, I believe, decided to divide the Middle East up in terms of areas of influence. That was basically the dominant rationale for the development of these countries.

If one looks at a map, it's striking how many straight lines exist as borders in the Middle East. A lot of these countries are artificial. For example, the Ottoman Turks were wise enough to divide what we call Iraq now, into three units. In the north there was Mosul, which is where the Kurds are; in the middle there was the vilayet of Baghdad where the Sunni Arabs are; and then in the south was the vilayet of Basra, where the Shiite Arabs are.

The Ottomans knew these people were different. When the Europeans divided the land up, they put these people all together and then declared, well, this is a country, probably with the idea that they were creating a country like Italy, France or Germany, Canada or the United States, where in point of fact, these countries have no history as a unit. They're artificial and they are inherently unstable. When one sees what's going on in Iraq between the Shiites in the south, the Sunnis in the Anbar province north of Baghdad, and the Kurds up in the area of Mosul, if one knows the history of this area, that's not really a surprise. If anything, the surprise is that it took this long to happen.

In addition, in the west—the United States at least—we speak of two Gulf wars. The people over there speak of three Gulf wars, the first being the Iraq-Iran war, which went from 1980-1988, where at least a half a million people were killed and possibly a million. Some two years later there was what we call the first Gulf war, which was to remove Iraqi troops from Kuwait. Then lastly, there was in the west, the second—or for the Iraqis, the third—Gulf war, which started in 2003, and which we were saying ended in 2011. Well, that's not so clear anymore. For years there has been no stability in this area.

Then in 2010, sort of to everyone's surprise, a man named Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in Tunisia and the Arab Spring began. I did some writings about the Arab Spring and one of the things that made me uncomfortable was actually what it was being called, the "Arab Spring." My experience of the Middle East is that the spring is not a good time. That's the time when the rains stop and it gets incredibly hot and things die. In Europe and in North America, the spring is a time when everything blossoms and everything is nice, so the spring is an optimistic time. I wondered if calling what was happening in the Middle East the Arab Spring wasn't ominously prescient of what was going to happen, despite the fact that the people who were calling it "spring" didn't realize that.

What has happened is an inherently unstable situation with artificial countries, artificial divisions, and really, very little sense of national unity.

● (0955)

All of a sudden you have three major wars in Iraq and Iran. Then you have the destabilizing of north African countries, Egypt, and then ultimately the destabilization....I don't know if you can even call it a civil war anymore in Syria. All of this was basically an artificial vacuum and once the artificial thing broke, all kinds of operatives, who more or less were always there, were able to move in and fill the vacuum.

Until recently, in Syria one spoke of a central part—it's not the central part really, but the area around Damascus—that was controlled by the Assad government with considerable help, from what I hear, from the Russians. Most of the other embassies had left Damascus.

The western part of Syria was controlled by many groups of opposition. Opposition people that were constantly shifting, sometimes fighting each other, some of them being secular, some of them being—I'm not sure what it means—moderate, some of them being like the Jabhat al-Nusra, more extreme, but they were named groups.

In northeastern Syria and the area that's called Jazira, nobody knew who was in control there. It was in this area, around the city of Raqqa, that all of a sudden—I don't want to say ISIS appeared—it sort of coalesced. The people who coalesced to form ISIS had been there in the area for a while.

They started to come together and got organized in a way that none of the other opposition groups in Syria had been or still are organized. They were able to, even last year, take over the city of Raqqa and that is basically where they centred from. From there they went into the northwestern part of Iraq, the Mosul, the plain of Nineveh, and have basically wreaked havoc there ever since.

At the end of June 2014, which coincided with the first day of Ramadan, Ibrahim Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared himself the caliph and now we have the Islamic State, ISIS, ISIL, Daesh, but a highly organized and incredibly brutal group of people.

Historically, I don't think that the Middle East has seen this kind of wanton destruction since the invasion of the Mongols in the 13th century, which wiped out the caliphate in Baghdad and destroyed much of the Muslim-Arab culture for centuries.

Now we're back to libraries being destroyed, monasteries and manuscripts being destroyed, and people killed for no other reason than they don't fit in. Also historically, and my dates on this are not clear, but it was just around the time of the Mongol invasion that there was a group called the assassins, which was a Muslim sect who behaved very similar to the Daesh, ISIS, or ISIL, but they were more limited. They were equally wanton in the destruction and killing, but not as organized and ultimately the Mongols destroyed them.

I guess I would end my remarks with that.

● (1000)

For people who are familiar with the Middle East, in a sense this is not a surprise. While hindsight is always 20/20, this wasn't or shouldn't have been a complete surprise. We should have seen that at least the conditions or the possibility for this happening were alive and well in the Middle East. But right now we are faced with a destabilizing influence in the Middle East, the likes of which I do not think has existed since the Mongol invasion.

In the past I maybe sometimes over-optimistically had some idea what was happening in the Middle East and where it was going. Right now I am not sure where it's going, but I am sure that the Ottoman Empire is now completely gone.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now turn it over to Mr. Hétu here for his opening remarks and then we'll start with questions from the members.

Mr. Carl Hétu (National Director, Canada, Catholic Near East Welfare Association): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for the invitation to appear here at this committee. I will speak in English just so that my colleague in New York is familiar with what I'm saying. He understands French, but being far away in New York who knows if he'll be able to hear everything I say in French and there's no simultaneous translation in New York. I'll just do my remarks, but if there are questions in French, I will go with it in French.

I think what Father Elias is describing to us is a region that is really remarkably made up of a great diversity and multi-confessions. There is no other place on this planet where there's such great diversity, where you have Shiite Muslims, Sunni Muslims, and different groups like the Yazidis, a group with a religion that predates Jesus Christ in the region. You have many tribes, clans, Christians of different cultures and areas. It's a great diversity of people and it's a unique place in the world being the cradle of monotheistic religion, the cradle of civilization, the great civilization of Mesopotamia, etc. So the diversity of the Middle East is what kept it, I would say, very unique in a sense. Having so many diverse people who were able to live together through the ages is remarkable.

What we see happening now is the destruction of that diversity, of the multi-confession of that region. In a global world where the world is becoming more and more attached through various means, to see what's happening right now in Iraq is an anti-globalization, if you prefer. It's the destruction of that diversity. One of the victim groups.... Of course anybody, like Father mentioned, who is not thinking like the ISIS or like that kind of ideology will be eliminated in a savage way. The whole population is certainly at risk as we've seen.

In Iraq, since ISIS started to form and build, we're talking about 1.8 million people who are displaced in the country. We forget that in Syria there have been three years of war, entering the fourth year, and it has caused much suffering. We all know that two million to three million people are refugees outside of Syria. There are about 1.5 million in Lebanon, another one million in Jordan, and that's on top of the Iraqis. About one million Iraqis between 2003 and 2010 had already fled Iraq to go to Syria. Then they are moving from Syria to Lebanon. Then we're talking about Jordan; between 2003 and 2010 half a million Iraqis had already fled to Jordan. Those people remain there even though the coalition was built a few years ago in Iraq and some folks went back.

But if you look, a group of people who are suffering very much are the Christians. Our organization focuses on Christians. We help Christians. This is our main concern. Of course, it doesn't mean that we won't support any other groups, but we are focusing on Christians because they have become the target of, and are vulnerable to, all those crimes and hatreds over the last 10 to 15 years. The Iraqi people 10 years ago in 2003 had about a million Christians in that country. According to our own research statistics with the local churches it's down to about 200,000, maybe 150,000. That means the entire Christian population is being evacuated from Iraq.

If you think about it, Christianity started with St. Thomas in the time of the apostles and Jesus, in a time when Mesopotamia was thriving, and here the people who joined this new religion over time created something very powerful, very good, in this area because the Christians' role over there has been very great in terms of education, in terms of job creation, in terms of social services serving all. That's why under many regimes the Christians over time always found a way to survive, to thrive, to participate fully in that society. Their contribution, their knowledge, and their connectivity with us in the west, being part of the larger Christian community in the world, and the west's values and stuff, is being eliminated. This is because often groups like ISIS see the Christians as the west, the western influence, the western theology, the western ideology, the western ways of doing things, and they're being targeted. They have no way of defending themselves. They're not equipped like other folks with guns and tribes, etc. What we're seeing right now is that out of 200,000 Iraqi Christians in Iraq, about 150,000 are on the run. This is what's going on. They're on the run.

● (1005)

So that you know about this, since 1949 our organization has had three offices: one in Lebanon, that covers Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and Lebanon; one in Jerusalem, covering Israel and Palestine; and one in Amman, covering Iraq and Jordan.

Those offices are made up of local people and Christians, working, of course, with a majority of Muslims.

Over those years, working with the Christians, we had to change our entire program this year from development and service to emergency crisis. All our resources have been moved into helping the population survive to wait this out, if you will, until things get better. As Father Elias just told us, we don't know when that's going to stop.

In Syria, at one time there was at least what we call the Free Syrian Army that you could dialogue with, between the Assad regime and the Free Syrian Army. They've been defeated—by whom?—by ISIS and by al-Nusra, groups that disobey al Qaeda.

So who can you talk to in Syria? You cannot talk to anybody any more. Since the Geneva talks last January, there has been no discussion at all between the Syrian regime, the Assad regime, and anybody else to find a peaceful resolution in Syria. In the meantime, there's more chaos, more destruction, and more civilians are being killed; and more Christians, who are in the minority, are about to flee, or are fleeing the entire region. The region could lose part of the diversity it has.

Just to give you an example, about four years ago I talked with the previous Iraqi ambassador to Canada, with whom I had lunch. He was telling me that he was born in a small village in Iraq and that he went to the Dominican Brothers' school. That's where he was exposed to the world, to all the great things the world could give him. Instead of being stuck in his little world where only his clan and his tribe would be important, he realized there was so much more through the Dominican Fathers. He said, “I will work all my life to make sure that the Christians remain in Iraq because they have given me, and people like me, the possibility to understand some concepts of respect, dignity, compassion, and forgiveness, which are so important in this time now”.

So, yes, our organization is working hard to try to keep the Christians there, but people just leave. Right now those Iraqi Christians, a new wave of refugees, are going to Lebanon and they're going to Jordan. Let me tell you, I talked with our offices just last month. We had an emergency meeting in New York, and we have two things happening. There is donor fatigue, because we do a lot of fundraising in the States and in Canada. At first people were very generous. They would give a lot of money. I'm telling you, money came in to us and to many other organizations. But now we go back to the same donors and ask, “Can you help us again?” and now, after three years of war, they say, “Well, how long are we going to do this?” But the problem is that people are suffering more now than they were three years ago, so what are we left with?

That's why I think the role of the government here is very important because that aid would be crucial not only for people to wait this out, but how long is it going to last? Can we remind each other that there are some unresolved issues in the Middle East, one of them being the Israeli-Palestine issue. There are now almost half a million Palestinian refugees still in camps and in many cities in Lebanon. There are still 1.5 million Palestinian refugees in camps in Jordan, on top of one million Syrian refugees, and now another half a million Iraqis. How can a country of six million sustain that?

The same thing is happening in Lebanon. Let's not forget that Lebanon is a democracy, maybe not a democracy like ours, but it serves well the multi-confessional diversity of Lebanon. Despite the violence, they're holding it together. Lebanon could fall. I'm telling you, there is a lot of incursion. There are a lot of battles—as recently as last month—and each time there is resistance to not fall into another civil war. They know about that and they don't want to go back there.

That's why I think it is crucial that the role of our government has a multi-faceted approach. Of course, as Father Elias said, ISIS doesn't want to negotiate. They're brutal and they need to be stopped, but that's not the solution in itself. It is just a means to stop them. I think the government here needs to really focus, with a very strong component besides the military action it has undertaken, to have a component of humanitarian aid to wait things out, yes, but to start helping people to go back home.

● (1010)

Only last month, a few folks from Erbil in Kurdistan, who tried to go to their homes, were really berated by the coalition. What they found was that their homes had been totally destroyed. Everything was gone—their church, their home, their park, their school—everything was destroyed. Whatever was left was mined by ISIS, which had left mines and stuff. As they walked into their homes, people got killed because there were explosives in there.

What I'm trying to tell you is that there is no easy solution. It's pretty tough for people even to go back home, so where's the hope? We need to incorporate how to help people go back home and to have some kind of normalcy in their lives.

In Syria it's the same. Many families are going back to Homs, but the whole infrastructure of the city of Homs is gone—water, electricity, hygiene, distribution of food. They cannot even feed themselves anymore in Syria because it's so chaotic at this moment. It's an emergency famine situation in many neighbourhoods. How are we going to face that?

I will conclude with this. All that's to say that the other component that's important for all of you to consider is also the diplomatic effort. The complexity of this region needs to be understood. We absolutely need to find our best diplomats, our best way to work with the United Nations, with other nations, to really work out a diplomatic solution, because if there's no peace, if there's no diplomatic discussion or alternative, the ulterior alternative will be more war and destruction. And you know what? Sometimes there's a boomerang effect, and it might hit us right back in our faces.

This is the situation as we see it. Our own organization is stretched to the limit really, and not only us. We meet with many other agencies all over the world, and they are also stretched out quite a bit.

Thank you very much for the opportunity once again.

The Chair: Thank you, sir, as well.

We're going to start over here with Mr. Dewar, for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to our witnesses.

Before I begin, I want to put a motion forward at the end of our discussion, just on the estimates. I meant to mention that at the beginning of the meeting, because we need to deal with the estimates. Perhaps I can return to that after our witnesses have been heard, before the committee ends its meeting today.

To both our guests, I want to thank you. You have provided a rich context. I was actually in Erbil in 2007. At the time it was a safe place. It was incredible to see the diversity that you speak of, and our previous guests spoke of, and it's really important for us to note that when we talk about the region, it's a very diverse region and rich in its diversity.

It was interesting also in 2009, here in Ottawa. With some others, I hosted a discussion on what was happening in Iraq and how Canada could help, particularly with the crisis with those minority groups who were leaving. Of course, that was because of the new phenomena called al Qaeda in Iraq who had been targeting some of the groups we've been discussing today.

Some have looked at this and said there were warning signs before ISIS. The manifestation of ISIS wasn't predicted, but the fact of the matter is that this has been happening for quite a while, since 2003. Yes, there was success with the awakening. The problem was, frankly, that the change in government in Washington and the lack of understanding of sticking with the plan was interrupted.

My colleague, Mr. Garneau, and I accompanied Minister Baird to both Baghdad and Erbil. One of the most compelling visits we had was meeting with the Catholic representatives, and also the refugee camps.

One of the things they mentioned to us was in the case of—and I think this applies to the Yazidis who, unfortunately, can't simply move because of their faith, and I think you touched on this. Their faith is based on geography. Anyhow, they mentioned that they can't go back to places like Mosul. They were emphatic about the fact that they want to remain in the region. They have been there for thousands of years. They wanted to see Canada and other donors and supporters help with reconstruction, not for refugee camps but to actually relocate within the region. I think it's a smart thing to be doing, because we don't want to see these historical peoples leave the region.

My first question to both of you is this. How long have you been kind of monitoring what has been happening since 2003? Along with what I've just mentioned, are there other recommendations you have? I think we need to do more than building refugee camps as a stopgap, which is important in the short term, but we have to start looking at longer-term and comprehensive strategies.

What about relocation? If they can't go back home to places like Mosul, should we look in the interim, or maybe medium-term, at relocation help with construction of new places for these people to move to?

● (1015)

Mr. Carl Hétu: Do you want to say something or do you want me to go ahead, Father Elias?

The Chair: Go ahead, Father.

Father Elias Mallon: Yes, I think it's very important. One of the problems in the Middle East is that, yes, there needs to be construction and things like that, but even prior to that, there needs to be the emergence of a civil society there. Otherwise, you just go from movable refugee camps to more permanent refugee camps. Right now all of that region lives under authoritarian governments and they basically don't have the structures of civil society. While the physical needs have to be met—that's clear—there are socio-political things that have to be developed if those countries are going to develop any kind of pluralistic stability.

Mr. Carl Hétu: If we look at the immediate issue, we had a team that went there last week. We go there regularly working with the local church and the way it's happening, there are two things.

First the Kurdistan—since you've been there, I'm sure you will appreciate this—is a world in itself. It really is a totally different, foreign, but within Iraq, kind of society. What that means is that the people who are refugees there now are not Kurds. They don't speak Kurdish. They don't even know the culture of Kurdistan. They cannot integrate into the Kurdistan society. Actually the Kurds don't necessarily want them there, either. We're starting to see some tension.

Last week it came out very clearly. They were very welcoming at first. There were 120,000 to 150,000 people showing up like this at their door. It was quite something to accommodate. Just think about the hygiene itself. Just think of washing yourselves, just the clothes. People got there with absolutely nothing. Within 30 minutes, their life was shattered, last August 7. They just had to flee with just their lives, without even a change of shirts or underpants or what have you. This is how critical it was.

At first, people were really fine, saying, “You can come.” There's an unfinished shopping mall. I don't know if you had a chance to visit it. There were many churches, schools that welcomed all the people. But you know, the Kurds are saying, “Well if you cannot come to our schools”—and they can't because they don't speak the language, they don't have the same curriculum—“you have to get out now; our school has to start.” So thousands of people are now having to find another place to stay.

At that mall, after three months, they've been told that at the end of November they have get out. That's another few thousand people who have to find another place to stay because the Kurds say, “I have to finish my mall here; I have a business to run.” It's like this.

Then there are a lot of privileges among the Kurdish people. They're helping their people and their friends. The others, well, you get the crap. Then you'll get that aid from organizations like ours or others that are there to help out through other means. So already there are tensions. We see it on the ground.

The other thing is that the people want to go back home. At the same time, they know they can't. What we see happening is that right now there is a need with winter coming up. Of course the winters there are not like here. But nevertheless when you're used to 40-degree weather and then you're moving to a freezing point, it's hard. People have no clothes. They have nothing and we need to equip, so that's a temporary thing.

Do you want me to...?

● (1020)

The Chair: Yes, we have to move over to the next.

Mr. Carl Hétu: No problem. That's good, sure.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to move over to Mr. Anderson.

Thanks.

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

I just wanted to get your reaction. Someone said that this ISIL activity is not about the persecution of minority communities. How would you react to that statement?

Mr. Carl Hétu: I don't think it's about the persecution of minorities. It's about the persecution of anybody who doesn't think like them. Unfortunately, it looks much worse to minorities because they cannot defend themselves. Not being able to defend yourself, you have to flee. That's what happened in Mosul. That's what happened in Qaraqosh in August where all those 120,000 people left. They had no way of protecting themselves. So it looks very bad. It looks like they're attacking minorities because they happen to be there. But the next day, it's going to be another group of people. Even many Sunni tribes that were supporting ISIS are now becoming the victims. Their mosques are being destroyed. That was not part of the deal.

Mr. David Anderson: How do you see, then, the organization against them coming together? We had a discussion in the last hour about the necessity of trying to establish some sort of reliable fighting force against them. We talked this morning about trying to re-establish civil society, and you can't do that without order. It's difficult to set up a decent police and judiciary system unless you have some structures as well.

How do you see that happening in the area? Where is the leadership going to come from, and what is it going to look like, the group that's going to be able to push back in this area?

Mr. Carl Hétu: There has to be a concerted effort, not only by the Iraqi people. If we look at the last three years, when Maliki took control of the Iraqi government, his whole premise was revenge on the Sunni Arabs who had persecuted the Shiite for so long. That created a bit of the mess we're in.

Now that there is a new government, there is an awareness that there is a bigger threat out there and maybe that will force people to sit down and talk to each other to develop some kind of cohesion among themselves. Maybe it's going to be hard for them to do it. If there is a solution to be found and a civil society to be developed, it has to be done by them. Perhaps it can be done with our aid, but not by imposing a western kind of approach on a very Middle Eastern historical way of doing things.

They need to develop their own security, and I think they realize now that the historical fight between the Kurds, the Shiites, and the Sunni Arabs needs to come to a stop somehow. There needs to be resolution. However, ISIS is in the way, so there needs to be aid, and I am a strong believer in the United Nations. There are a lot of mechanisms that can be put into place to at least host those discussions and those talks. The military implication is there. There need to be talks in the meantime about finding a long-term way to get a civil society to establish itself. I don't know if others have something to say on that, but that's my view.

● (1025)

Mr. David Anderson: You talked a little bit about financing, and we talked earlier about educational institutions being financed over a multi-generational period, resulting in radicalization, and then the Internet being used for that as well as fundraising. I'm just wondering if you can comment a bit about the role of education. How do you see yourselves? You talked about some people who have seen a broader view of the world because they've gone to your seminaries and schools. What is the role of education over the next five to 10 years in trying to deal with this issue of radicalization, or is the radicalization coming primarily from western countries, which is not going to be dealt with successfully just in the Middle East?

Mr. Carl Hétu: It's a very big question because, when you look at education in a normal setting, education does its job. You know, “I want to become a doctor, a nurse, or an engineer. I want to help society, I want to contribute, and I want my family to be able to live well, my kids to go to school, my handicapped child to get the proper services.” Everybody aspires to that. In Iraq, it's the same thing. Most families aspire to that.

When you're being denied those rights, that's when you turn to other action to find a source of money and resources to aspire to that. Sometimes what happens is that you end up in the ranks and files of groups that promise you all kinds of things. It's a well-known fact. A group like ISIS gives a lot of promises to different places and villages, and the Sunni Arabs in particular, who were not well treated under the Shiite Iraqi government.

When ISIS comes about, promising some kind of freedom, more resources, and more aid for their families, people are tempted to do that. It's not that they want to do terrorism; it's not that they want to go and kill people. They just want a better life for their village, because it has been denied that by another regime. Somehow they get caught up in this. It becomes bigger than they are, and they lose themselves into what is becoming a very brutal group called ISIS.

In that sense, this is more what's happening. How to counter that? Well, once again, it's discussion, resources, and aid. Right now all the kids who have left as refugees from Mosul, Nineveh plain, and Qaraqosh do not go to school. There is no school at all for them. That will be a loss of a group of people who can't have education, and it will have an impact on them.

Mr. David Anderson: I am going to run out of time here shortly, but I'm just wondering if you can give us an idea of what practical access humanitarian relief organizations currently have to the populations in northern and eastern Syria and in northern and western Iraq. I'm just wondering.

We've had discussions here before about the government running interference on delivery of relief supplies, which are being hijacked and redirected, and I'm just wondering what access you have and how easily your supplies are being delivered where they need to be.

The Chair: We have just one minute left. That's all.

Mr. Carl Hétu: Okay. Traditionally, our aid goes through the local church. We trust them. We trust them on the ground. They're local. They know everybody in their towns. Everybody knows them. The trust is there, and they have a very good system to evaluate the needs of each family, and they know the families.

That system, whether it's in Syria or in Iraq, has always had a very good success rate for helping out where it's really needed, so there's no movement of aid into the wrong hands or anything like that. As much goes to Muslims as to Christians, so in that sense we have a very good, well-coordinated group of people on the ground, and we're really proud about that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That's all the time we have.

We'll go to Mr. Garneau for seven minutes.

Mr. Marc Garneau: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to first thank both the witnesses for being here.

Father Mallon, you spoke historically about why everything is in turmoil in that region, starting all the way back at the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and you confessed in the end that you weren't sure where it was going.

Obviously, we are intervening in that area and that means we have to have a plan. Where would you like to see it go so that somehow at the end of all of this we can have not just a few more years of quiet and then have it start up again in some other way but rather that something long term actually happens? I'd be interested in your thoughts.

Father Elias Mallon: I think what you mentioned is extremely important. A lot of times I get the feeling that a lot of effort is going into restoring the status quo ante. That is not sustainable.

What needs to be done...and I also have to say that we have to be very careful. I was being interviewed once recently and I used the expression “military solution” and then I stopped myself and I said, ”No, that's an oxymoron”. There is no military solution. Military action can provide a space, some quiet, and an opportunity, but the solutions have to be in terms of infrastructure, civil society, and education.

For example, one of the things that are very lacking throughout the Middle East is the concept of citizen, and that's the basis of pluralistic society. Until that is developed, we talk about democracy, but democracy without a notion of citizenship can end up being the tyranny of the majority, which we have seen in places.

So I think, first of all, we have to realize that the control we have over that region is quite modest at best. We have to keep a safe place —that's clear—and that may take military action, as long as we realize that's not the solution.

Once we have the safe place for society to develop, we need a civil society in which every citizen is equal and every citizen has an equal stake, and that is not the case in the Middle East now. Excuse the sexism, but it's every man for himself. So that has to change. There's no tradition of that. It's not like France after World War II, which went through a terrible destabilization but could go back to a society that had existed. That is not there in the Middle East. We're really starting from point zero.

The other thing is that we should not simply assume that the countries that we inherited in the Middle East are the countries that are going to remain. It's easily possible that there would be a reconfiguration of borders and political units there. We have to not necessarily promote that—no, that's not our job—but we have to be aware that it might very well happen.

● (1030)

Mr. Marc Garneau: Thank you.

When I had the opportunity to be in Iraq in early September with Minister Baird and my colleague Paul Dewar we had an opportunity to talk to the deputy minister of foreign affairs and we had a rather interesting discussion. I'm saying this by way of observation. He was interested in the concept of federalism. He said they were very familiar with the fact that Canada has a federal system. I found it interesting that this was being explored given, as you pointed out earlier on, the fact that there are Kurds, Shias, Sunnis, and many other minorities. I found that encouraging.

While I was there we went up to Erbil, and Paul and I and Minister Baird met with Chaldean Christians. I have to say that the Chaldean bishop was extremely eloquent and very forceful in telling us about the need for help because they had fled the Mosul area and they were in dire circumstances. I'm not sure if we went to the mall that you referred to but it was a building right across the street from the church where we met, and we met some people who were evidently in great distress. They were not even in the schools, which were temporary at that time.

Then we went to the Baharka United Nations camp and got some sense of the scope of the challenge because many more camps are needed and are not even funded currently. Yes, we talked about long term at the beginning, but in the short term, what is your assessment, Mr. Hétu, about the need for humanitarian aid with respect to this displaced population in the Kurdish area of Iraq.

● (1035)

The Chair: Mr. Hétu, you have about one minute to answer that.

Mr. Carl Hétu: Thank you.

There are a few things. A lot of food is being provided by the Kurdistan government, the Iraqi government. The food comes in packages. It's not exactly what you always need. There's no baby food, baby formula, things like this that would help the youth. I mentioned a school. Thousands of children don't have any elementary or secondary schools, so we're investing right now to establish a temporary school system in the Kurdistan area for all those people.

A major problem is medical, dealing with the trauma, but people are sick like anywhere else in the world, so we're providing access to all the doctors who were in the other place. They are giving their time freely but they need to be established in a place to provide that, so there's a lot of attention on the medical, also housing and getting ready for winter: heating, blankets, clothing, better shelter. Those are the main points we're aiming at short term.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to start our second round. We're going to have time for two quick interventions. We'll start with Mr. Van Kesteren and then finish with Madame Laverdière.

Mr. Van Kesteren.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Thank you, Chair, and thanks to the committee for this opportunity. I have served on this committee but it's been quite some time. It's a fascinating discussion.

I want to direct this question to either one of you. I wonder about this. You mentioned what's happening: the conflict, the history, and how we've come to this point. It appears to me that—it's obvious to all of us—this is not primarily an issue in the Middle East. It may have exploded there but we're seeing problems in northern Africa, West Africa, East Africa, and in Sudan, of course. There seems to be something else. I often wonder if we aren't addressing the elephant in the room and that is precisely this.

I've had the chance to travel extensively in Turkey and I've made some strong connections there. I serve on a Canada-Turkey parliamentary association. The reason that I'm passionate about those things is that Turkey plays such a large role. It had the capacity at one point, and I think still does, being primarily the only other democracy in the region other than Lebanon, to some degree, and of course, Israel. But when I was travelling with one of my Turkish friends, he referred to the Christian west and the Muslim countries, and I corrected him. I said it's not that. It's the secular west. We established long ago that we would allow secularism to be the platform on which we base our society. Is not this really a conflict between that struggle, the struggle of control, of releasing that? Of course, if we study Islam it's inclusive throughout society and isn't this really a struggle whereby they realize that if they allow that secularism to creep into their society they're going to lose that control? I wonder if either one of you could comment on that.

Mr. Carl Hétu: I'll let Father Mallon answer first.

Father Elias Mallon: I'm not sure of that. I think you put your finger on something important in that something is happening in the Muslim world. It's not just the Middle East, although the Middle East tends to be an engine that runs a lot of it.

I think it's more of a conflict of perceptions, actually, than of the Muslim world and the secular western world, because in many instances the secular western world can be far more pietistic than, for example, the Assad family or Saddam Hussein. They were quite secular people. I think it's more a war of perceptions, and what has happened is what the UN constantly refers to as a dialogue of civilizations that has broken down, and what we are overwhelmed with is the worst of the other. They are overwhelmed and sometimes manipulated by being shown the worst of western civilization, and we for our part get overwhelmed with some of the worst things that Muslims have done. That dialogue of civilizations really has to take place again because there's a mutual demonization that just goes nowhere except to more violence.

● (1040)

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: I find it astounding that we are always so quick—and I think rightfully so—to separate church and state, yet in Muslim societies it's part of their...yet we don't recognize that as being problematic.

Father Elias Mallon: Right now, for whatever reasons, and they're very complicated, intellectual life in the Middle East, Pakistan, and places like that in Islam has not really had a chance to develop for any number of reasons: colonialism or authoritarian regimes.

I was at a meeting several years ago, and this topic of church and state came up. There is a principle in Islam that Islam is *din wa dawla*; Islam is a religion and a nation. The conversation got very heated, and I sort of withdrew and then I said, "Well, excuse me, okay, we got Islam *din wa dawla* , what would you Muslims think about the expression Islam *din watan*?", *watan* being a word for nation-state While they all agreed that Islam *din wa dawla* was not negotiable, but on the notion of Islam *din watan*, they said, "No, we don't know."

I think what that provides is an opportunity for reflection on how Islam operates in a new situation in the modern world, and they have not had the opportunity yet to do the intellectual work in terms of philosophy, political science, etc., to develop a way to be Muslim in a modern pluralistic society.

The Chair: Thank you, Father. I'm going to have to cut you off. That's one short question with a very long.... We need for time for that.

We're going to turn it over to Madame Laverdière for a few minutes, and then I know Mr. Dewar wants to just get his motion on the table.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My thanks also to the two witnesses for joining us today.

[*English*]

Thank you very much for the presentation. It was very interesting.

[*Translation*]

I have a few minutes only and I would like to ask Mr. Hétu a question.

You provide a great deal of humanitarian aid. Do you coordinate with other humanitarian organizations on the ground, such as the Red Cross or another organization?

Mr. Carl Hétu: We are a church organization. In Rome, there is a group of 20 Catholic organizations from around the world and discussing what is happening in Iraq, Syria and everywhere in the Middle East. We share the work.

As I said earlier, we have three offices on the ground. The offices do not work in isolation, but in cooperation with Caritas, which is one of the largest international movements. We also work with the United Nations, the Red Cross, the Red Crescent and many other organizations. We do not step on each other's toes. We know each other and we talk. Sometimes, there is a bit of friction and there are misunderstandings, but we are well coordinated overall.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: We fully understand the financial challenges that you are facing. We sometimes seem to forget long-standing crises, such as the one in Syria. It is very difficult.

Could you tell me where your funding comes from primarily?

Mr. Carl Hétu: Whether in the United States or in Canada, our campaigns are targeted completely to Canadians and Americans.

In Canada, my job is to raise the public's awareness as much as possible and to raise funds from foundations, dioceses, individuals and groups. So far, we have raised about $400,000 for Iraq.

Our organization has raised between $800,000 and $900,000 in the United States. Our two countries have already sent $500,000 to Iraq. Approximately $1.9 million has been sent to Syria over the past two years. We are doing what we can with the resources we have.

Almost $80 million from the Catholic church or nominally Catholic organizations has been sent to Syria over the past three years alone. Our contribution is a drop in the ocean compared to all the assistance provided by other nominally Catholic organizations in Europe and in the United States.

Clearly, we are not talking about other organizations. Governments, the United Nations and all the other groups also provide assistance. Specifically, we are talking about several hundred million dollars in aid to Syria. We are now seeing the same thing for Iraq, but the issue is figuring out how long it will take. We don't know. People are hesitant. We do not want to build things and then have everyone go home. Everything would have been in vain. It is all very difficult to evaluate.

● (1045)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

To our witnesses, thank you very much for being here in Ottawa, and thank you to Father Mallon, who is in New York. Thank you both very much, gentlemen. We will let you go.

Just very quickly, Mr. Dewar wants to put a motion on the table, and then we're going to end.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Thank you, Chair, and thanks for the indulgence of the committee.

It's actually a motion on the supplementary estimates, which is part of our duty, as a committee.

I move:

> That the Committee invite the Honourable John Baird, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Honourable Christian Paradis, Minister of International Development, to appear before the Committee regarding the Supplementary Estimates (B) 2014-2015 before December 5, 2014 and that this meeting be televised.

That's the motion.

I note that the estimates are December 5, and/or the last supply day that is three days before that. I'm not sure when the last supply day might be. It might be December 3, I believe. We don't know.

I want to move that motion to seek support from the government to invite the ministers for that purpose.

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Anderson, go ahead.

Mr. David Anderson: We're always willing to invite ministers. They will make their decisions. It's on fairly short notice. That is in two weeks. I'm sure they have their schedules set, but we can extend the invitation. I think the committee should see if they can fit that in.

The Chair: We'll have the invitation sent out tonight.

Mr. David Anderson: It's a case of whether they can do that or not, but we certainly will invite them.

The Chair: Okay.

Shall we vote on the motion then?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We're okay to send the invitation out.

Thank you very much.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.