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Chair

Mr. Michael Levitt

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● (1310)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.)): Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the Subcommittee on International Human Rights.

I would like to welcome Dr. Romano. Dr. Romano is a Canadian professor at Missouri State University specializing in the Middle East, and in particular Iraq and the Kurdish community as well as political violence, including politicized Islam.

Dr. Romano, I know you're calling in today from Iraq, so I want to thank you for making the time to join us. I'm going to ask you to give us remarks for around 10 minutes. Then we'll open it up to the members of this committee for some questions and answers.

You can now proceed, Dr. Romano.

Mr. David Romano (Thomas G. Strong Professor of Middle East Politics, Missouri State University, As an Individual): The remarks I've prepared will take probably less than 10 minutes. Not being familiar with how much the committee already knows about various topics, I wanted to leave a bit more time for questions.

The Chair: That's absolutely fine; it will work well. After whatever remarks you want to give, we'll just open it up to use the balance of the time.

Mr. David Romano: Good.

I have four points I thought perhaps the committee might not be aware of.

The first one is that the present campaign to liberate Mosul from Daesh so far appears to be much better at avoiding civilian casualties than past offensives in such towns as Ramadi, Fallujah, Sinjar, and so forth. For an operation of this nature, it is remarkable that they have managed to avoid so many civilian casualties. I think part of it has to do with not allowing the Shiite militias into certain areas. We'll see whether that changes as we move forward.

The second point is with regard to the Syrian Kurdish cantons run by the PYD in what the Kurds refer to as Rojava. I think we need a subtle understanding of how they are operating. They have been excellent with various ethnicities, religious groups, and women. They have been by far the most tolerant and liberal and accepting of all these groups and have been protecting them, actually, including secular Sunni Arabs fleeing other parts of Syria.

The matters in which they are less tolerant and have been more repressive are those involving competing political parties and groups; they have very little tolerance for other political groups operating within areas they control.

We have human rights reports from their areas from last year or a year and a half ago from Human Rights Watch, for instance, that allege systematic destruction of Sunni Arab homes in villages and towns liberated from ISIS. They have replied to these reports and have denied the allegations vehemently. I'm not sure whether the truth lies somewhere in the middle, but I will point out that we have those reports because they invite the human rights monitors to enter the areas they control, which in a relative sense makes them much better than the other parts of Syria, where the human rights monitors can't even operate.

The third point is in regard to the Yazidis. There has been a change within the Yazidi community since Daesh attacked their towns and villages and forced so many of them into IDP and also refugee status. The community used to ostracize female members who had been raped. They were pushed out of their Yazidi community. This has changed. So many fell victim to ISIS that the Yazidi Pirs—the elders—along with other members of the community changed their approach to this issue, and they no longer ostracize them.

The fourth and final point regards the financial crisis in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. The combination of plummeting oil prices, the cut-off in budget from Baghdad, the war against Daesh, and the IDP and refugee influx have really made it very difficult.

I live in a community of normal houses that is mostly of refugees from Mosul and Baghdad, a bit outside of Erbil. This isn't a camp; it's all IDPs. On my way into Erbil almost every day, I pass IDP camps such as the Baharka camp. They are full to capacity. Roughly 40% of the population in the Kurdistan region of Iraq are IDPs or refugees, which gives it the highest per capita anywhere in the world of refugees and IDPs, and it doesn't have the money to adequately address their needs.

I'll leave it there.

[*Translation*]

Feel free to ask me your questions in French. If I can, I'll answer in French.

[*English*]

I would ask you to specify the time period you're referring to, the place, whether it's the Kurdistan region of Iraq or the part of Iraq ruled by Baghdad, or which territory in Syria—that ruled by ISIS or the Free Syrian army, or the Rojava Kurdish region—and which group you're referring to in the question, to make sure I don't misunderstand anything.

● (1315)

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

We had a little bit of trouble with the line, but I think we got the full intent of your remarks.

We're going to open it up now to questions.

The first question is from MP Anderson.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Thank you, sir, for being with us today.

I have a number of questions. We've certainly followed this topic with interest at the subcommittee here for quite some time.

Towards the end, you were talking about IDP communities. Can you tell us whether any of the communities have been able to go home at all? What are the prospects in the future of that happening, particularly for Yazidi communities and Syrian Christians?

Mr. David Romano: Some Yazidis and Christians have begun returning home. This began even before the Mosul offensive, when they liberated some areas around Sinjar.

The problem is, many of the areas they're returning to are quite devastated from the fighting. It's going to be a long-term challenge to reconstitute these communities so that they can function economically, so that more of the IDPs can return. Part of the long-term return issue has to deal with how significant the threat of an ISIS insurgency will become after the actual territory they control, in the traditional sense, is liberated.

Mr. David Anderson: Do you have a sense of how the region's demographics are going to be changing, particularly in that area? I think the Yazidis are in two main areas, but then also in the area where the Syrian Christians were located prior to this conflict.

Mr. David Romano: Again, it depends on how many return. Their [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] still haven't settled the issue of whether there's going to be autonomy for the Nineveh plains, which is much of the area that the Iraqi Christians come from, and where the Yazidi allegiance will be. The PKK-affiliated Kurdish groups are working hard to get a foothold within the Yazidi community and have formed their own militias.

A lot of big political questions are still in the air, which may affect people's decision of whether or not to return and hence affect where the demographics fall two years from now.

Mr. David Anderson: We've talked to a number of Yazidis at different times in this conflict, and there seems to be some distrust that lingers from the failure of the Kurds to protect them from the initial onslaught, if you want to call if that. Some are still unhappy with that. They've talked about establishing a safe zone in that area for the Yazidis, and out on the Nineveh plain.

Do you have any thoughts on that? They're talking about international supervision and that kind of thing. What do you think about that?

Mr. David Romano: Even before 2014, before Daesh or ISIS came on the scene, the Yazidi community was a bit divided. Some components of the Yazidi community were more aligned with Baghdad, which even received funding from the Nouri al-Maliki government. Then there were portions of the Yazidi community that were close to the Kurdistan regional government and received funding from Erbil. When the ISIS attack happened, a lot of Yazidis, as you mentioned, had a bit of a conspiracy theory that the peshmerga intentionally had abandoned them in order to draw in international sympathy and assistance against ISIS, or for other reasons.

I don't think that's true, but the perception is what matters amongst the Yazidis. There is lack of trust, and they would prefer to have guarantees from the international community against whoever threatens them in the future. When al Qaeda, in Iraq, was running its insurgency from 2004-2008, they were targeted left and right along with the Christians. They've been feeling insecure for a long time.

● (1320)

Mr. David Anderson: As ISIS is pushed back in that area then, what do you see as the most likely structure of government that's going to form there? Will PKK be the primary power, or how do you see that coming together?

Mr. David Romano: It's going to be a problem if the PKK doesn't withdraw its armed fighters at least. There's no love lost in terms of political *concurrence*, competition, between the KDP of Masoud Barzani and the PKK.

I think in the short term, they don't have a plan. I asked some Iraqi ministers myself a few weeks ago about just developing more powers for the communities like the 2005 constitution and the 2008 law of the provinces, which allows them to let them run their own show until they figure out more long-term arrangements for possible autonomy or the creation of other regions or what have you. Right now, there seems to be a remarkable lack of organization and thinking as to what the new political arrangements will be. I am quite worried about it.

Mr. David Anderson: How is the conflict between Turkey and the Kurds going to play out in that area as that local set of government structures are put in place?

Mr. David Romano: Turkey says a lot of things when it comes to sending its troops all the way down to Mosul and Sinjar. That's pure bluster. In Syria it's not as much the case. Turkey may capture it, and its allied Free Syrian Army forces may capture al-Bab soon. That's a less complicated endeavour. I wouldn't expect Turkey's ventures into Iraq to be extensive. I'd be more concerned about Turkey in Syria.

Mr. David Anderson: You talked about human rights monitoring. Could you give us more information on that? I'm running out of time here fairly quickly. How's it going? Is there more that the international community can do to make sure that those human rights violations are either recorded or stopped?

Mr. David Romano: I think there are plenty of international forces already embedded with Kurdish peshmerga to get more presence, get people trained, and observe what's going on and so forth and to get the okay of the Kurdistan regional government. There's always Baghdad, an area it's operating in.

The American military has CMOC teams, civil-military operations centre teams. I forget what the Canadian equivalent is. These are military units that look out for civil-military relations. If we are embedding special forces and so forth, I would imagine we could embed some of these people just to monitor the issue and maybe prevent incidents from happening before they even do.

Mr. David Anderson: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Romano.

We're now going to move to MP Tabbara.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Romano for your remarks. Thank you for contributing to this committee.

We look at the instability that's happening in Syria and Iraq and some of the violations that are happening against various minority groups. How do we make sure that after a conflict is over we have a stable government that is protecting these rights? How can we ensure a pluralistic, post-war civil state or an inclusive government of not only different populations but also different non-violent and political views? Could you elaborate on that?

● (1325)

Mr. David Romano: Oh, that's a doozy, the million-dollar question, if you will.

We're at a point where we're risking vengeance now from returning communities that were expelled from Daesh who want to settle scores with especially Sunni Arab communities that collaborated with Daesh. I'm not sure we can just talk about reconciliation to prevent this, because there are also, from the great communities, strident demands for justice and punishment for perpetrators of crimes against them. We have to reassure the Sunni Arab community that there is going to be rule of law, not just vengeance. It's a difficult balancing act.

I can only answer your question generally. You need to bring in responsible members from each affected community and have them speak about ways to address each of their concerns and put them together in one package that will allow for justice and reconciliation and rule of law in the post-liberation territories. It's a tall order.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Thank you for that.

Also, to continue on with this, would a power-sharing model similar to that in Belgium and Switzerland be helpful, or would it further cause divisions like those we see within Lebanon in its political system?

Mr. David Romano: I think a power-sharing model is the only way forward. Of course, with the examples you mentioned, sometimes it devolves into government paralysis such as in Cyprus, or civil war such as in Lebanon, and so forth. The big problem here has been lack of power sharing, lack of trust between different communities, and whoever is holding the central government doesn't trust the others and seeks to hoard and consolidate all the power in their hands.

If we could reassure, in both administrative and financial terms, extensive degrees of decentralization and power sharing, I think it would go a long way to preventing future conflict. I think the Dayton accords in Bosnia have been an unsung success story. It's not perfect. A lot of problems remain. I've been to Bosnia a few times since then, and the story I hear is that no one is quite satisfied but they're all satisfied enough not to shoot each other.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Your power-sharing model might work in the short term as you mentioned in your examples, but do you think that could be a long-term sustainable type of government?

Mr. David Romano: Every government system needs to have various venues to allow for change according to the preferences of the power holders. If, in the longer term, trust redeveloped between the different communities, they could conceivably make adjustments to the governing model and Iraq could function in the long term. Frankly, the people I speak to here are often pessimistic about this. The Kurds frankly want to secede; they're done. It's just a question of timing that they disagree about amongst themselves. Whatever is put in place perhaps needs to have mechanisms for peaceful change in the future.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: I'm asking about this power-sharing model because I'm worried that there might be certain divides, tribal divides, religious divides. Those might breed a system in which, if there's a proper democracy with voting rights, individuals would just vote based on their religion, based on their tribal ties, and not necessarily based on a broader ideology regarding which party would bring a platform forward that would better the country.

Mr. David Romano: That's what has been happening at the national level, and it's a significant risk at a regional or governorate level if you devolve power and power-share. They might have competing tribes within the Nineveh government, for instance, who don't power-share with each other within that governorate, and the problems are replicated at a lower level. It's a definite risk.

If good leaders emerge who convince people to vote beyond narrow sectarian interests, I think that's how, often, historically that risk has been overcome. There's no guarantee that will happen.

● (1330)

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Do I have any time left?

The Chair: You have another minute.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Okay, that's all.

The Chair: Thank you very much, MP Tabbara.

We're now going to move to MP Hardcastle.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, Mr. Romano, for your input. I want to focus on the diplomatic and humanitarian responses, rather than military responses, to what has been happening.

We've heard from a couple of organizations. We've heard from a member of the White Helmets. We've heard from the national Syrian Opposition Coalition. I'd like to hear from you on what you're seeing. How useful would it be for us to be more forceful in the establishment of some solutions? Are there some solutions? What about establishing the humanitarian corridors? We heard about the no-fly zones and establishing some practical methods. Is that beyond us, or is that really what we should be more vocal about?

Mr. David Romano: I think the Syrian regime has decided that it's not in its interest to allow humanitarian corridors, because it's been pursuing a strategy of starving its opposition and laying siege to them. If that remains the case, I think they're going to be impossible to establish and maintain. The problem with the no-fly zone is that it effectively means declaring war against the Assad regime, because enforcing those requires taking out ground-to-air missile defences that the Syrians have installed, and that means striking Syrian army positions, which they'll reciprocate against. It draws the coalition full-force into attacking the regime that's backed by Russia and Iran, and it leads to a very dangerous situation. I'm not sure either of those is a good option.

I think that advocating decentralization within one Syria as a short- and medium-term solution to get the fighting to stop with various cantons, not just the Kurdish canton but other areas in charge of their respective communities until things can calm down a bit, is something Canada could do as a way to calm thing down a bit.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Thank you.

That's very interesting to hear. How would that work? Could you expand a little bit on what you're seeing and what you would envision? How would that work for besieged areas?

Mr. David Romano: We could look at the example of the civil war in Bosnia. When the Dayton accords were being drawn up, whoever controlled whatever territory they were in pretty much kept it. This unduly rewarded Bosnian forces, which had conquered a fair bit, but no one saw another way out of this morass.

In Syria we're in a similar morass. If we could get Russia on board whereby we would freeze everything where it is for a while and leave the different communities running the areas they control with an opening for areas under siege to get supplies delivered to them by the Syrian regime, and with monitors making sure that those supplies go in, then perhaps we could get some breathing room to take it further.

● (1335)

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: What do you think is the key to the new approach needed in the diplomatic response?

Mr. David Romano: I guess every group that controls territory in Syria needs to be brought to the table without preconditions, and that's a hell of a task, because, for instance, Turkey won't allow the groups it supports to let the Kurdish groups, the second-largest controllers of territory in Syria, to attend such a meeting, but until we can get that kind of agreement where everyone sits down without preconditions and talks about a way to stop the fighting countrywide and leave people running their own areas for a while so that everyone can recover, we're not going to get out of the Assad regime. At the same time, the Assad regime may need threats—I don't know—because it feels it can win now.

I wish I had a better answer for you.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Romano.

For the next question we are going to MP Miller.

Mr. Marc Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs, Lib.): David, since you are a student of political Islam in the area, I'm curious about your thoughts about religion generally and the role it's playing in this conflict. I guess that's a broad brush stroke. If you look at the history of Iraq and Syria, particularly with the reign of the Baathist parties in both those countries, relative to the rest of the area, it's generally seen as a secular society, and now there's a tendency to divide ethnic groups neatly and tidily along religious lines, which, as you will agree, is perhaps not the case.

Let's hope we get to a post-conflict governance model, but as we look toward governance generally in both those areas in the next few years, I'm curious as to your views on how neatly things can be divided into religious buckets as opposed to simple power grabs and other interests, ethnocultural divides.

Certainly in the case of the Yazidis, the religious narrative of the Daesh's attempt to exterminate them was there, and there has been some suggestion by a number of panellists who have appeared before us that the religious or ethnocultural differences will be greater as there is a power void.

I'm curious to hear your views on this.

Mr. David Romano: Islam is a contested, multi-faceted field just as Christianity, Judaism, and other religions are. The Baathists were secular, but at the same time, they also incorporated Islam into the legitimation of the regime. It is a bit ironic for the Assad regime, which is Alawite, to incorporate Sunni Islam into the regime, but they actually did. They gave it official state status as the main religion in the country. Of course, Saddam, in his later years, added the Allahu Akbar to the Iraqi flag in his handwriting, and more and more justified his rule under Islamic discourse. That has only become a more pronounced tendency among many groups since 2003, and of course since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, communities like the Yazidis, the Christians, and the secular Kurdish groups want nothing to do with that. There are also Kurdish Islamist groups, but they're minor.

In a power-sharing or decentralized system, when Baghdad, say, passes a law banning alcohol or banning women from wearing skirts or trousers, it doesn't apply to other regions where the consensus is that this is not what they want. A way to defuse some of those divisions and contests over the nature of Islam and whether it should be enforced is to have more decentralization. That said, we have a violent Salafi bent out there that has still not given up on enforcing its interpretation and imposing it on everyone else.

It's going to ebb and flow whether or not people primarily identify according to religious discourse, ethnicity, or tribe, but we know that the more insecure people are, the more likely they are to fall back on one of these identity categories as their primary one, as opposed to a regional or civic national identity that requires more trust of out-group members.

I don't know if I answered your question at all.

● (1340)

Mr. Marc Miller: I just wanted to hear your thoughts, because I don't think there's much of an answer to that type of question. I'm just curious to hear your general views on it, since you're on the ground and a student of political Islam.

Mr. David Romano: I think the currency of Daesh is significantly weakened when the territory it controls is being taken back, with the uprooting of mass graves and displaced communities coming back. I think in this case the military isn't completely divorced from the ideology. The story of Daesh coming in I don't think was necessarily because the Sunni Arab community in Iraq or Syria was especially Salafi; they were just looking for any ideological vehicle to politically deliver them from central governments that they found oppressive. When that turns out to be a chimera, a dead end, then I would assume they would open up to other alternatives that aren't Salafi Islam.

Mr. Marc Miller: Finally, is it your sense that some of these differences, whether they're ethnoculturally based or religiously based, will get worse if there is a power void, or do you see things differently?

Mr. David Romano: They could get worse if they don't come up with methods of adequate governance for areas liberated from ISIS in both Syria and Iraq. They could get better, however, if the government is okay and Baghdad's rule in the Sunni areas isn't too oppressive, and if the Kurdistan region doesn't go into the areas that it has newly acquired area and turn out to be too aggressive. If they start delivering services and some local power to the communities there, then I think you could conceivably see a dramatic turnaround on those issues, because I think in the end people are just not so different from people in Canada. They just want a way forward and a future that promises them an improvement over what they've been living in the past. It doesn't have to be a jihadi way forward or a radical nationalist way forward. They want to live as well as they can and as free as they can.

Mr. Marc Miller: Thank you, David.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Romano.

We are now going to move to MP Sweet.

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Dr. Romano, first off, I would like to thank you very much for your intellectual depth on this file. In fact, I think if we lifted the answer you just gave to my colleague Mr. Miller, that would encapsulate the confusion that most westerners have around Islam and the eastern world, and that would give us a handle on it rather than some of the stereotypes that we see in the mainstream media with regard to Islam.

I wanted to be clear that we're talking about religious minorities now. I wasn't here for the testimony, but I understand that Global Affairs made it very clear that a high volume of Shiite and Sunni Muslims have been killed in this conflict, maybe collectively more than the minorities. It's a different situation around the religious minorities in the sense that they don't generally have any place to go. I just wanted to ask you if my thinking is correct on that.

I was just in Jordan at the Zaatari refugee camp, and I spoke to some officials there. They're very clear that some of these religious minorities wouldn't even seek out a camp. That wouldn't be a place they would find safe at all. Is that a reasonable assessment?

Mr. David Romano: Conditions in the camps are not great. They want to work. They want to earn money to support their family and send their kids to school.

Mr. David Sweet: Absolutely, but would there be a concern among a lot of the religious minorities that they would suffer persecution in the camps, so they would avoid them and try to find help in their own way?

● (1345)

Mr. David Romano: That would depend on where. I'm not as familiar with the situation in Jordan. I know some of the minorities would quite likely feel threatened in some of the camps in southern Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon.

In the Kurdistan region of Iraq, as well as Rojava, I've not come across any reports that minorities are afraid for their safety in the camps. The authorities have done an admirable job of protecting them over there. Some of the camps are mixed. Some of them are overwhelmingly all Yazidi, and others are overwhelmingly Christian. In terms of physical safety, it's been good here.

Mr. David Sweet: Thank you for that answer. In fact, the UN mentioned to us that they have different models for camps. In their ideal model, they would get property in a host country, and they would actually manage and look after the camp, but many countries insist on being involved in the management. That's where it becomes very complicated.

Mr. David Romano: Sure.

Mr. David Sweet: I wanted you to maybe expand on something, because you made your remarks very quickly. You said there's a remarkable lack of thinking regarding the future political situation after the purging of Daesh. That's profoundly concerning to me. I'm certain it must also be to you.

Mr. David Romano: I think they have thought about it. Actually, I should rephrase that a bit. They cannot agree on anything, so it's almost as if they haven't thought about it, because no plan has materialized with regard to how to really govern these areas as they're liberated from Daesh.

Even within the Sunni community, I heard former governor Atheel al-Nujaifi, who was governor of Nineveh, saying that it should form a region. The current governor of Nineveh didn't even attend the talk, is dead set against that kind of proposal, and is accused of being financed from Baghdad. Then you have others who say that they should do something else.

We haven't been able to arrive at anything even approaching sufficient consensus to move forward.

Mr. David Sweet: You mentioned, regarding the camp, that you weren't informed about Jordan, but, can I ask you a question about Jordan? They've absorbed up to two million Syrian refugees. The number is tough for them to nail down, between 1.6 million and two million, because many are in camps, but many more have assimilated throughout the population.

Are you concerned about this conflict, as it continues on, destabilizing more areas in the region?

Mr. David Romano: Absolutely. The three areas that are most overwhelmed by refugees and IDPs are the Kurdistan region, Jordan, and Lebanon.

In Lebanon, probably the only thing that's prevented this from bringing Lebanon back into civil war is the fact that the Lebanese still have so many memories of the last civil war, and they're just too tired to go there.

In Jordan, there is a risk of destabilizing the monarchy, especially if there's no way forward and there's no adequate government set up in areas that are liberated from ISIS. The people won't go back; they don't see a way back, and they end up stuck in camps. They're playing a role similar to that of the Palestinians in south Lebanon in the 1970s. They were in the camps and they had no real future, and they ended up inserting themselves into Lebanese politics. It broke the system down.

So, yes, we do have risks.

Mr. David Sweet: We've identified Turkmens, Christians, and Yazidis. I know there are small communities of Baha'is and Zoroastrians.

Are there other religious minorities that we should keep in mind, as well, as we continue our study?

Mr. David Romano: Yes. There's a group in Iraq that's alternately referred to as Ahl-e-Haqq or Kaka'i. I'm not sure if you've included them.

Mr. David Sweet: Thank you very much.

Mr. David Romano: There's been a resurgence of Zoroastrianism. I have no idea how big that really is, but there is that.

Then, even within the Christian communities, of course, you have those who consider themselves Assyrian, and others who consider themselves Chaldean, and so forth. So there's that to consider.

● (1350)

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Romano. We're coming to the end of our time.

I just want to follow up on a quick thing. It had been raised that a cause for concern was the treatment of Yazidi women who are coming back into villages and camps pregnant from forced rape by Daesh militants. That's something that's been raised as a cause for concern, the treatment that they were getting when integrated back in with other Yazidis.

Have you had any experience with that, or heard of that happening?

Mr. David Romano: Yes, I've looked at that issue. I was one of the examiners on a doctoral dissertation that was examining precisely that, and whether the humanitarian assistance being provided to the Yazidis in Iraqi Kurdistan was culturally appropriate to their specific circumstances and backgrounds. That research and field work were done just last year. It uncovered that at the beginning, those women were treated very badly, which was the standard modus operandi of the Yazidi community. It's a very insular community. It's xenophobic towards others. You're not allowed to convert into Yazidism or out of it, and then these women were non-entities after something like that happened.

However, there were so many who suffered this fate, that the community, just to survive, made a conscious effort to change its norms. Many of the Yazidi peers and elders came forward to say, "Look, this has to change. These are our daughters, the women of our community. We must take them back in." They're working really hard to get over that.

The situation, I believe, is much improved, although I wouldn't necessarily suggest it's settled yet.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr. Romano. On behalf of all committee members, I want to thank you for taking the time to give your testimony before the subcommittee this afternoon, and obviously for calling in from Iraq. It was very valuable, and I know we all appreciated having you on the line today.

Thank you very much.

Mr. David Romano: My pleasure, and good luck with all your work.

The Chair: Thank you.

At this point, we're going to move in camera for a short batch of committee business.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]