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Mr. Dean Allison

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•(0850)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)): Good morning, everyone. Pursuant to Standing Order 108 (2), our study of Canada's response to the violence, religious persecution, and dislocation caused by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant will start.

I want to welcome our witnesses, those who are here today and those who are joining us via teleconference. After I introduce the witnesses, we'll have their opening remarks. After that, we'll go around the room and have individuals ask questions.

Joining us via teleconference from Washington, D.C., we have Dr. Thomas Farr, director of the Religious Freedom Project at Georgetown University.

Dr. Farr, welcome.

Dr. Thomas Farr (Director, Religious Freedom Project, Georgetown University, As an Individual): I'm delighted to be here.

The Chair: I understand you're able to join us for the first hour. Is that correct?

Dr. Thomas Farr: That's correct.

The Chair: Excellent. We'll get back to you very shortly.

Joining us from the Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East we have Bishop Emmanuel Joseph Mar-Emmanuel. Welcome, sir. We're glad to have you here.

Joining us as an individual we have Jonathan Halevi, who is with the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. Welcome to you, sir.

Dr. Farr, we'll start with your opening statement and then we'll continue here in the room. Once the opening statements are done, as I mentioned, we'll go back and forth with questions from the members.

Dr. Farr, we'll turn it over to you, sir. You have the floor for 10 minutes, please.

Dr. Thomas Farr: Thank you, Mr. Allison. Thanks for inviting me to testify on the subject of such importance to both our nations.

Three months ago, the U.S. marked the 13th anniversary of the Islamist terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. What we're facing with ISIL today in Iraq and Syria has deeply troubling similarities to 9/11, in my view, both in its origins and in its threat to international security. Now, there is of course at least one major difference between then and now: while Christians and other minorities in the

Middle East were under mounting pressure in 2001, today their very existence is at risk. We're witnessing the disappearance of Christians and Christianity from Iraq and Syria, a religious and cultural genocide with terrible humanitarian, moral, and strategic consequences for Christians, for the region and for all of us. What has not changed since 9/11 is the root cause of Islamist terrorism: a radical and spreading interpretation of Islam nourished and abetted by Middle Eastern tyrants, both secular and religious, by legal and cultural practices of radical intolerance, and by a dying political order.

Unfortunately the religion avoidance syndrome that afflicts many western policy-makers has not served us well in addressing this threat. Whatever political order emerges in the Middle East will necessarily be grounded in the religion of Islam. Despite the efforts of western and western-inspired modernizers, religion remains the primary identity of people in the region. This means that any successful new political order must ultimately be based on religious freedom, that is, full equality under the law for all religious communities. Both history and contemporary research make it clear that religious freedom will be necessary if highly religious societies are to be stable and to rid themselves of religious violence and terrorism.

While military force is clearly necessary against ISIL and on occasion will be required against other terrorist groups, force alone will not suffice. For this reason, Canadian and U.S. international religious freedom policy should be understood as part of a broader national security strategy, as a diplomatic counterterrorism tool, if you will.

In recent decades Islamist terrorist movements have emerged throughout the world and they are today present in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas. Notwithstanding their theological and other differences, these groups are motivated by a belief that God is calling them to brutality and violence against the enemies of Islam. In the case of ISIL, the objective is to conquer and control territory in order to carry out this divinely ordained mission. Most of these groups would destroy our countries if they had the means. Violent Islamist extremism has deep roots in the last century and beyond. Varying factors have contributed to the emergence of religiously disparate groups like Saudi Wahhabism, the Muslim Brotherhood, the Taliban, Hezbollah, the al-Nusra Front, Boko Haram, al-Shabaab, al-Qaeda and its various guises, and ISIL. Those factors doubtless include economic stagnation, a sense of victimhood, and rage at the west, but the most powerful factor is religion, which energizes and sustains other grievances.

Let me quote, if I might, from the U.S. 9/11 commission report:

Islamist terrorist leaders draw on a long tradition of extreme intolerance within one stream of Islam....That stream is motivated by religion.... Islamist terrorists mean exactly what they say: to them America is the font of all evil, the "head of the snake," and it must be converted or destroyed

Now, the vast majority of Muslims do not support violence or cruelty. They are horrified by what is taking place in the name of their religion, but it's also true that most Muslim majority nations have legal and social structures such as anti-blasphemy, anti-defamation, and anti-apostasy laws and practices that encourage extremism, including against Muslim minorities, and that discourage the liberalizing voices of Islam. It's here that Canadian and U.S. religious freedom policy can make a contribution. Until the extremist understanding of Islam is utterly discredited in the Islamic world, or at least moved to the margins of intellectual, theological, and political discourse, Islamist terrorism will continue to grow and flourish.

Let me give a brief example to illustrate the point. A few years ago, an Afghan graduate student submitted a research paper that argued, from the Koran, that Islam supports the equality of men and women. His professors turned him in to local police. He was charged with blasphemy, convicted, and sentenced to death. The rationale for this action was that the young man had offended Islam and must be punished.

So long as this malevolent idea remains institutionalized in Muslim societies, radicals will dominate the discourse about what Islam requires of its adherents. That idea must be isolated within, if not eliminated from, Muslim societies if they are to rid themselves of the scourge of Islamist extremism and terrorism. A regime of religious freedom would help in this task by ensuring open debate about Islam and other religions without fear of criminal charges or mob violence. One could criticize anti-blasphemy laws, for example, and support religious freedom without fear of being murdered, as were two Pakistani leaders recently, Shahbaz Bhatti and Salmaan Taseer. History, modern research, and common sense tell us that a system of religious liberty would undermine radicalism. On the other hand, repression of the kind that has been endemic in the Middle East clearly encourages radicalism.

Let me conclude by addressing what Canadian international religious freedom policy might do to mitigate the threat of Islamist terrorism in the Middle East, in particular ISIL. There's much to be said here, but the key to success will be overcoming the widespread presumption that religious freedom is a Trojan horse designed to destroy Islam, and replacing it with the firm understanding that religious freedom is necessary for the health of Islam. In order to accomplish this goal, Canada should ensure that the diplomatic status and authority and the resources allocated to its own very impressive religious freedom ambassador, Ambassador Andrew Bennett, are sufficient to communicate to other nations and to Canada's own diplomatic establishment that this issue is a high priority for the Canadian government and that it will remain so into the future. Give the ambassador everything he needs to develop strategies and to implement them in key countries around the globe.

However, to be successful, this policy cannot be the purview of a single office or ambassador. I also urge Canada to train all its diplomats to understand what religious freedom is, why it's

important for both individuals and societies, why advancing it is important for Canadian national interests, and how to advance it.

In the end, we have to convince struggling Muslim democracies such as those in Iraq, Egypt, Afghanistan, and Pakistan that until they move in the direction of religious freedom, they will never achieve their own goals of stable self-government, internal security, economic growth, and peace.

I don't discount, Mr. Chairman, the extraordinary difficulties that will attend the development and implementation of the policy I've described, but in my view, the stakes are high enough to make the effort. I believe that Canada, the U.S., and other nations can together mount an effective religious freedom counterterrorism policy that does not entail the costs in blood and treasure that military action does. Indeed, religious freedom diplomacy, if successful, would reduce the need for military action and reduce the loss of blood and life and treasure.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak. I'd be happy to entertain questions.

• (0855)

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

Bishop Mar-Emmanuel, the floor is yours, sir.

Mr. Emmanuel Joseph Mar-Emmanuel (Diocesan Bishop, Diocese of Canada, Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and the standing committee, for allowing me to stand here and give my testimony.

I'll begin with a background about Christianity and the people of Iraq and Syria.

With respect to culture, the Christians of Iraq are descended from the native people of ancient Mesopotamia, that is, Assyria and Babylonia, the cradle of civilization. The ancient Christians of Iraq and Syria both trace their Christianity back to apostolic times. By the 10th century in Mesopotamia, which is roughly modern-day Iraq, the Christians constituted a majority of the population and had lived under Muslim rule since the Arab conquest of the region in the 7th century AD.

During the First World War, genocide against Christians occurred in what is now Turkey. Millions, including Greeks, Armenians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Syrians or Syriac, were massacred in that horrible genocide. In 1932 Iraq became a member of the League of Nations and an independent country. Immediately after that, in 1933, the Iraqi army initiated a brutal massacre against the Assyrians, and over 3,000 innocent people died. Only those who meekly converted to Islam could save themselves. Immediately after this horrible massacre, the patriarch of the church was exiled. As church historian Christoph Baumer said, “For the surviving Assyrians it was crushing to experience the fact that an Islamic state, only a few months after the establishment of sovereignty, could allow itself to butcher members of a religious minority with impunity. No one reacted; Great Britain helped Iraq to hush up what had happened, and the League of Nations appointed a commission”. This commission recommended that the people could move to other countries. In time, one of them was Canada, and “thus the Assyrians had the status of refugees within their own homeland”.

Turning to the crisis today, things are relevant to what happened about 100 years ago, during the last century. During the crisis in Iraq and Syria and especially in the civil war that has erupted in Syria, Sunni insurgents have been very active under the name ISIS or ISIL. By June 2014 they found their stronghold in northern Iraq, especially in the city of Mosul, and the western part of Iraq in the province of Anbar. ISIS caused the deportation of thousands of Christians who were given options: either convert to Islam, or pay the *jizya*—the Koranic tax against non-Muslims—or leave, or suffer beheading. Thousands have left Mosul especially to go to northern Iraq, which is experiencing more peace today. They are mostly Christians, but there are also thousands of Yazidis and other minorities. During this exodus about 150,000 Christians and other religious minorities left the city soon after it was captured by ISIS and fled to the autonomous region of Kurdistan relocating mainly in the provinces of Erbil and Dohuk.

Currently, and particularly since winter has set in, there is a serious shortage of resources and basic necessities such as housing, medicine, food, clothing, etc. There is an urgent need for assistance from outside the region.

● (0900)

In the long term, one major concern among the dislocated Christians is that there will be inadequate security after they return to their homes, assuming that this in fact does take place. A great deal of mistrust has developed between ordinary Christians and Muslims. For Christians, those who have openly welcomed ISIS have broken a fundamental trust.

In the midst of the current crisis, all the leaders of the native Christian churches, along with several of the Christian political parties, support the creation of a safe zone within Iraq, where security is guaranteed and protected by the international community in collaboration with the central and regional governments of Iraq.

Also, to help you, I have included certain websites of the communities, with certain interviews or videos and daily reports about the situation in Iraq and Syria.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're now going to go to Jonathan Halevi, who is with the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs.

Jonathan, the floor is yours, sir.

Mr. Jonathan Dahoah Halevi (Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, As an Individual): Good morning.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with the committee about Canada's response to the violence, religious persecution, and dislocation caused by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. The group's official name is the Islamic State, and it is also known by these names: IS, ISIL, ISIS, Daesh, and the Caliphate.

All Canadian parties are united in condemning the Islamic State as an enemy of western civilization because of its stringent implementation of the sharia, the Islamic law, which includes, among other things, the mass killing of unbelievers and apostates; public beheading and crucifixion; chopping off thieves' hands and legs; flogging cigarette smokers and alcohol consumers; allowing sex slaves; stifling with an iron fist any opposition; and depriving people of basic human rights.

The Canadian government and the opposition have differences over the preferred way to confront the Islamic State, whether by contributing, however modestly, to the U.S.-led military coalition, together with large-scale humanitarian aid, or by concentrating primarily on humanitarian aid and combat support.

The formulation of foreign policy in this case must consider, besides the obvious moral aspects, the objective evaluation of the threat posed by the Islamic State to Canada and Canadian strategic interests. The Islamic State has justly gained a reputation for being the most brutal and ruthless regime. It has taken control of large swaths of Syria and Iraq and has meticulously strengthened its grip by creating alliances with local clans and centres of power. It is accelerating its process of state-building with an emphasis on education in order to create a new jihadist generation.

The war in the Levant is not a political or territorial conflict that can be resolved by negotiations and compromise. The Islamic State leaves no doubt about its extremist Islamic Sunni ideology and its determination to relentlessly conduct jihad to spread the rule of Islam and the word of Allah, first in the Middle East and later in Europe and North America.

The cornerstone of the Islamic State's publicly reiterated strategic goal is to conquer Rome, the capital of Italy and home of the Vatican, in order to strike the symbol of Christianity. Spain is portrayed as a formerly Islamic-occupied country, as are other parts of Europe, and all must be liberated, according to the Islamic State.

This is not a far-fetched harmless fantasy. It is an actual plan of action. The Islamic State sees itself as fully committed to bringing about the fulfilment of this prophecy of Muhammad in order to pave the way for the emergence of the Mahdi, the Muslim messiah. As part of its ideology that generates jihad in the Levant, the Islamic State calls upon all Muslims to initiate attacks throughout the world, including in Canada, with the explicit purpose of indiscriminately killing non-believers by all available means.

The Islamic State threatens Canadian strategic interests because of its unwavering religiously motivated determination to redraw the map of the Middle East, erase existing borders, unite the Muslim world under its flag, and pursue a foreign policy of jihad in which western civilization is the prime enemy.

Four years of civil war in Syria and Iraq with virtually no international interference have served as a golden opportunity for this al-Qaeda offshoot to gradually build up the Islamic State as an independent entity that can no longer be ignored. The west, including Canada, has no option of sitting on the sidelines. Refraining from confronting this threat head-on will most probably result in ever greater threats to the stability of the oil-rich Middle East and the main international trade arteries.

The military option against the Islamic State is not a magic wand. It is essential in the long run for degrading the group's military power and terrorist capabilities, but it has little effect on the ideological aspect. Moreover, the Middle East is currently torn by the Sunni-Shiite rift. Ferocious sectarian fighting is taking place in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Lebanon, with friction also occurring in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere.

After the fighting ends in Syria and Iraq, the day-after strategy must focus on helping the local people build strong new regimes that respect human rights and will prevent a vacuum that might allow Iran to realize its vision of a Shiite Crescent and military domination over the Arabian Persian Gulf states.

● (0905)

The so-called Arab Spring, which has brought about the collapse of Arab regimes in the Middle East, prolonged civil wars, and the rise of radical Islamic movements, has caused millions to become displaced within their homelands, as well as flooding neighbouring countries with refugees who live in dire conditions. Curbing the Islamic State and preserving the basic geopolitical order in the Middle East is also important in order to limit human tragedy and prevent further chaos and the massive displacement of additional refugees.

U.S. President Barack Obama and political leaders in Canada have asserted that the Islamic State, with its rigid interpretation of the Koran, does not represent the true, peaceful vision of Islam. Prominent leaders of the Canadian Muslim community even argue that those who are affiliated with the Islamic State should not be portrayed as Muslim by the media.

It is true that none of the major Islamic movements worldwide or in Canada have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State. However, the ideas of the caliphate and of jihad as a legitimate tool to spur this on globally, and the belief in the prophecy of Muhammad regarding Rome, are shared by the great majority of Islamic movements and organizations, including the international movement of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Salafi movement, Hizb ut-Tahrir, Islamic Jihad, Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya, al-Qaeda and its affiliates, Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Iranian regime, among others.

The caliphate, jihad, and the teachings of Muhammad are embedded and enshrined in the DNA of the Islamic faith, with some minor exceptions, and that explains why so many Canadians, like other westerners, are so fascinated with the message of the

Islamic State and have gravitated to join its ranks. These ideas exist and flourish in Canada.

Listening to the voices of the Muslim community leaders is highly important to understanding the underground currents. The following are some examples. A leading imam in Montreal, who is also a member of the Quebec supreme council of imams, explained to his congregation in his weekly sermon that apostates should be executed in the Islamic State, mentioning in this regard the Islamic punishment of crucifixion and chopping off hands and legs. Another respected Toronto imam also justified the application of corporal punishment on apostates in the Islamic State in a speech at the University of Waterloo.

The Walk-In Islamic InfoCenter, a Toronto-based organization dedicated to dawah, propagating Islamic activity, distributes for free in downtown Toronto the book *Human Rights in Islam And Common Misconceptions*. Here are some quotes from the book, which is used to present the perspective of true Islam. It says that jihad is an honourable struggle to spread the message of Islam. It also says:

The non-Muslim residents of an Islamic state are required to pay a minimal tax called "Jizyah"....

If the robber kills and seizes the money, the punishment may be killing and crucifixion. If he takes money and threatens but does not kill or assault, the punishment may be amputation of his hand and leg....

As for...[the] married male or female who commit adultery, the punishment applied to them is stoning to death....

Execution of such an apostate is...a salvation for the rest of the society members....

The book also justifies slavery under certain conditions.

The caliphate and the strict implementation of sharia law are main tenets of the ideology embraced by the Canadian branch of the international Hizb ut-Tahrir organization. Facing the challenge posed by the Islamic State and the constant pressure on its members to pledge allegiance to the caliph, Hizb ut-Tahrir decided to move from the phase of preaching to taking concrete action to establish the true caliphate as an alternative to the Islamic State.

There are also mainstream imams who have warned of the danger, embodied in Islamic radicalism, to Canadian national security. An imam from Calgary called on the Canadian government to designate Wahhabism, a terrorist ideology, and the followers of Wahhabism an illegal terrorist cult. Another imam from Brampton, Ontario, described the Salafi ideology as extreme, like a poison, like a disease in the Muslim community. He said indoctrination was like brainwashing, and those who espouse it are misguided, very aggressive, and sometimes they can be violent.

An RCMP deradicalization counsellor who met recently with Taliban officials in Qatar admitted that, based on his own personal experience, converts to Islam are more vulnerable to absorbing extremism. At least 13 Canadian converts to Islam were involved in terrorist activities since mid-2012: two committed terrorist attacks in Canada; two are suspected of planning to blow up the legislature in Victoria, B.C.; one carried out a suicide bombing attack in Algeria; one was a would-be suicide bomber; six joined the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq; and one was killed in Dagestan after joining a local jihadist organization.

As to my recommendations, the Canadian government has already joined the multinational coalition against the Islamic State and tabled bills enhancing the powers of law enforcement agencies. I would like to concentrate mainly on the intelligence aspect.

According to CSIS and the RCMP, more than 140 Canadians were involved in terrorist activities abroad and 80 have returned to Canada. Each one comprises a potential threat to the country's national security.

● (0910)

Successfully thwarting future terrorist attacks requires greater investment in intelligence gathering in all its aspects: strengthening cooperation and information sharing with foreign intelligence agencies; building an extensive new database of foreign terrorists and terrorism suspects, which will be highly useful to improving the screening process of the Canada Border Services Agency; monitoring more closely those radical organizations that provide the ideological platform for ideas similar to those of the Islamic State; considering adding other radical organizations to the blacklist of unlawful entities; and exercising less tolerance toward incitement to violence and hate speech.

Thank you.

● (0915)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The first round will be seven minutes for questions and answers. We'll start with Madame Laverdière.

[*Translation*]

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

To start, I would like to say that the people whose aggressive comments were reported here this morning by Mr. Halevi are not representative of the Muslim community, in my opinion. As a general rule, Canada's Muslim leaders only make comments of tolerance, openness and peace. I think it is very important to point that out right off the bat.

That said, my first question would be for Dr. Farr.

[*English*]

I don't know if this is being translated for Dr. Farr, so I'll ask my questions in English. It might be simpler.

You talked about the work and the possibilities of what we could do with the office of religious freedom. Last year the performance report for the Department of Foreign Affairs indicated that \$4.9 million was budgeted for the office of religious freedom last year, but out of that, 69%, or \$3.4 million, was not spent.

Do you think it's money that could have been used last year, and that could have been useful?

Dr. Thomas Farr: Thank you very much for that question.

Obviously I do not know the details. I was aware of the roughly \$5 million that had been allocated to the office. I certainly support the notion of funding. I'm at a bit of a disadvantage in not knowing precisely how the money was spent and was not spent, but as a general proposition I would say that the issue here is the quality of

the expenditure of the money. I think it's very important, as I said in my remarks, that this issue, while it must be led by an ambassador such as Ambassador Bennett, who I think is very talented, needs to be a Canada-wide diplomatic initiative. It needs to be spread across the diplomatic service. Now, I say that because I know, having observed my own diplomatic service, from which I came, and having had 16 years since the passage of our own law on this, that this policy is not yet embraced by the American diplomatic service.

This is why I think the answer to your question should not be simply whether we should cut the funding here or there—I would urge you not to do that—but to ensure that the funding is supported by a strategy that will involve the entire diplomacy of Canada. That's where you will, if I might put it this way, make your money. That's where you will make progress against the scourge of Islamist terrorism.

I hope that's a clear answer to your question.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Yes. Thank you very much. It's very useful.

In your speech you also mentioned—I'm not quoting you exactly—that religion fuels and kind of crystallizes other grievances. In fact for homegrown radicalism, for example, it does appear that religion sometimes becomes an expression of other grievances.

I'm wondering what grievances you were thinking about. As well, what can be done to address these?

● (0920)

Dr. Thomas Farr: As I mentioned, I think there are legitimate economic concerns throughout the countries of the Middle East where violent Islamist radicalism is incubated and from which it is exported. They're economic grievances. There are legitimate concerns about the past. But all of these, in my judgment, pale in the explanatory power of this radical version of Islam as an explanation of this terrorism. My point was not so much to say that I think we need to address economic grievances. I do think we should, but this is a standard understanding of what we should be doing in the Middle East. What I am saying that I believe is truly new is that religious freedom is the answer to this linchpin of radical religion.

Religious freedom is a counterterrorism tool. Religious freedom frees Muslims to speak about their own religion and not be charged with blasphemy when they do so in a liberal way. Religious freedom, as both history and common sense make clear, plus modern research, is a way to bring religious people into the public square. It's not a matter of getting Islam out of the way. It's a matter of accommodating Islam to the basic norms of self-governance and, if you like, liberalism, although that's a term that is heavily laden.

So the answer to your question is yes, they're economic grievances, and they're concerns about the history of imperialism, but I think it is a mistake to focus on those. It's far more important to focus on religious freedom as the antidote to religion—to violent religion, I should say, religious extremism.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're now going to move to Mr. Anderson, for seven minutes.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): It's a very interesting discussion that we've had.

Mr. Farr, we've heard other testimony that this is actually not a religious battle, that ISIS basically hates everybody and will butcher every community, whether it's religious, Christian, or Islamic. It's a war with everyone they disagree with.

You talked about religion being the identity of this struggle. I'm wondering if you want to address that a little more.

Dr. Thomas Farr: Sure. I think it's very important if you're going to defeat any enemy—I assume we're all in agreement here—that you understand what motivates them. Why is it that they're doing what they're doing? Why have they conquered territory? Why have they brutalized captives, such as those who have been beheaded, such as those they have brutalized in Iraq, and the Christians, Yazidis, and others?

Terrible things have been going on. We all agree on that. Why are they doing this? Is it because they hate us? Is it because they hate everyone? I suppose there's some truth in that statement, but it doesn't do very much work in terms of telling us what to do about it.

As I said in my statement, I believe military action is necessary against these people, but it's not going to undermine the religious ideology, which I believe underlies what they are doing. Listen to what they say. Read what they say they're doing. They're not saying that they just hate everyone and are striking out blindly against the rest of the world, trying to carve out a little place. They're trying to carve out a caliphate and to use that as the way to expand this radical extremist version of Islam.

If we don't understand that, and if we aren't willing to put it on the table—with due respect to the vast majority of Muslims who do not think this way—if we don't do that, we're not going to be able to defeat this enemy.

I thank you for that question, Mr. Anderson. I think it's critically important to focus on the religious aspects of this problem.

Mr. David Anderson: I'd like all three of you to address this. Are the Islamic communities in Canada—I'll limit it to that—ready or able to isolate their radical counterparts? One of the complaints I've heard from what I would call moderate Muslim leaders is that they're out-funded in terms of communication, out-funded in terms of education, and out-funded in terms of the establishment of mosques.

Mr. Halevi, you talk about there being voices speaking out against Wahhabism and the Salafis, etc. Are there enough moderate voices? In your mind, do they have the strength and capacity to be able to win that battle in Canada, I'll say, or in North America, if Mr. Farr wants to address this?

Mr. Jonathan Dahoah Halevi: The problems with extremism go back to the roots of radicalism. We are talking about the ideas of the caliphate. When someone says that the ideas of the caliphate do not represent Muslims or the Muslim community in Canada, I think that should be corroborated, because the essence, the main issue, the major tenet, of Islam is restoring the caliphate and building the Islamic State.

The major groups in Islam today have differences about the conditions to establish the caliphate, to establish the Islamic State, but the idea of it is being taught in private schools and mosques. In dealing with radicalism here in Canada—we're talking about funds; we're talking about the importance of pluralism and liberalism—I

think it's very important to allocate funds to supporting new trends in Muslim community that support reformism, liberalism, and also secularism in Muslim communities.

As I see it from the outside, there is intolerance towards Muslims who do not go on the mainstream path. Those who espouse secular views are not regarded as part of the mainstream Muslim community. I'm talking about the voices who are explicitly against radicalism, Tarek Fatah and others. They are not being adopted by the mainstream Muslim community, on the contrary.

I think it is very important to encourage within the Muslim community, like all other faith communities, the importance of liberalism and tolerance toward other voices.

• (0925)

Mr. David Anderson: Isn't it a bit of a contradiction to expect secularism to exist in faith communities and play a major role?

Mr. Jonathan Dahoah Halevi: I mean tolerance.

Mr. David Anderson: Okay.

Mr. Farr, I think I'm running out of time here, if you...

Dr. Thomas Farr: Just very briefly, I would say that we have the same problem in the United States, obviously, of some Muslims being radicalized. I think on balance the answer to this....

It sounds like I think the answer to every problem is religious freedom, but religious freedom includes the right, even in a secular society, for religious people to bring their views into the public square. I think to the extent the United States has been successful in doing this, it's because religious freedom means that Muslims can bring their ideas into the public square but they can be challenged. We have a constant dialogue about what Islam means. It's not always a happy dialogue. It hasn't worked perfectly—I mean, we have our own radicals—but at the end of the day, I think for the kind of secularism that removes religion from the public square, that is not supportive of the kind of liberalism and tolerance that Mr. Halevi speaks of. It is the kind of religious freedom and secularism that invites religion into the public square within the norms of democracy that can help.

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Halevi, you talked about state-building and the importance of that. We've heard quite a bit about that here. Can you give us some idea of where you think that needs to start and what's happening in that area right now?

Mr. Jonathan Dahoah Halevi: Do you mean state-building in Syria and Iraq?

Mr. David Anderson: Yes.

The Chair: I apologize, but you have only about 30 seconds for your answer.

Mr. Jonathan Dahoah Halevi: They've built different levels of government, which means police, courts, an educational system, and law enforcement agencies. You can see that they are doing very well in Syria and Iraq. This is ISIS; this is the Islamic State.

The Chair: We'll finish off the first round with Mr. Garneau.

You have seven minutes, sir.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Thanks to all of you for being here and for your testimony.

First, Mr. Halevi, you mentioned that the master plan for this Islamic State caliphate goes all the way to Spain. That obviously embraces Israel.

I'm going to take advantage of your presence here, because of where you're coming from, and ask you what Israel's view is. Is it participating in the coalition in Iraq at the moment, and if so, in which way?

Mr. Jonathan Dahoah Halevi: Israel is definitely worried, because Israel is also targeted by the Islamic State.

The Islamic State sets priorities. The first priority is to build a state in Syria and Iraq. This is the base for launching the second stage of jihad. They target specifically Saudi Arabia and Jordan. These are the next targets for the Islamic State.

The next target being defined is Israel. Israel is not the end. It's just one of the steps in order to launch the jihad further to unite the whole Muslim nation under one flag. It has been repeated once and again by ISIS that in launching jihad, the end goal of the jihad is Europe and the U.S., which means Rome, Spain, Austria, etc.

In this case, why Israel is important in the idea of this jihad is that the prophecies of Muhammad talk about three cities that must be liberated: Istanbul, Jerusalem—al-Quds—and Rome. These are the preconditions for the emergence of the messiah.

The issue here is that it's not just a fairytale. This is a tenet in the Islamic faith. That's why it has become so attractive to Muslims. They see, and I'm monitoring their work in the Middle East and also here in Canada by radical Muslims, how it comes true, how the Islamic State and the restoration of the glory of the Islamic era of Muhammad, after Muhammad, is being realized. Even if Israel is gone, if Israel does not exist anymore, it does not stop the Islamic struggle in order to make the world of Allah become dominant. This is what they are saying. It is repeated once and—

• (0930)

Mr. Marc Garneau: I'm sorry, but my time is limited.

Can you tell me whether Israel is involved at the moment?

Mr. Jonathan Dahoah Halevi: I think there are two silent partners to the coalition. One is Israel and the second is Iran. They are not involved in the coalition officially, but both countries have interests in the area. We see it from time to time in different actions that are taken by both countries.

Mr. Marc Garneau: Thank you.

Mr. Farr, you mentioned, and I agree with you, that ultimately religious freedom is essential to stability and security in that area. That's a very tall order. The bishop spoke about the history of difficulties and the persecution of Christians. We had the Yazidis speak to us last week. It's a very tall order. Even within Muslim sects, there is a great deal of conflict.

Mr. Halevi mentioned that there are some imams here in Canada who may be preaching a form of extremism, Wahabbi or otherwise. How does one address that in this country, in your opinion—I don't know if there are similar examples in the United States—bearing in mind freedom of expression and freedom of religion? How does one address that here in Canada if there are imams—I'm not talking

about individuals; I'm talking about imams as church leaders—who may be preaching a form of extremism that we do not believe is acceptable?

Dr. Thomas Farr: It's a tough question. It's a tough question for any democratic society, including my own.

As I was trying to indicate in my remarks before, I think the answer is greater religious freedom, that is, to encourage other imams to take the floor and to denounce extremism. I think the way to counter this kind of speech is better speech. Now, that's a typically U.S. way of approaching the problem, and as I say, it hasn't always worked.

But I do think that at the end of the day... For example, next Monday we're having an event at Georgetown on this very issue: the experience of Muslim minorities in the west and elsewhere. There will be many who will argue with each other, and there will be American Muslims arguing with each other about what their own religion requires. I think that's healthy. It's not always pleasant. I happen to be a Catholic, and I believe there are routine defamations of my own religion in the American press. But the answer is not to outlaw it: it is better speech.

I think religious freedom is the answer to these imams, to encourage others to counter them publicly and bring them out, and to provide other alternatives to Canadian Muslims who are listening to these people.

• (0935)

Mr. Marc Garneau: I was very pleased to participate with members and an imam of the Ahmadiyya community, a Muslim sect, about two weeks ago in Montreal, and they were doing exactly that. Hopefully we'll see more of that.

Mr. Halevi, you mentioned that Iran is a silent partner. We certainly know they have been militarily involved in Iraq. How do you view that?

Mr. Jonathan Dahoah Halevi: One of the root causes of the conflict is the Sunni-Shiite rift in the Middle East. You could say that the main interest of Iran is to curb ISIS. The interest of Iran goes in Lebanon to the Hezbollah, in Syria to the Alawites. Iraq is mainly Shiite, and their explicit aspirations are to dominate what they call the Persian Gulf. So for them, that is the real threat embodied by ISIS, and for them to defeat the Islamic State is the main priority, so they are going to be involved in curbing, stopping ISIS, and they will do their utmost to do that.

The Chair: I will start the second round with five minutes for each party.

We will start with Mr. Goldring, please.

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Thank you for appearing here today. It has been very interesting.

Who is supporting ISIS? We hear that they receive funding from the oil refineries they have taken over, but that can't be all of it. How large or extensive are they? Some say it's a few thousand radicals. Where is their funding coming from mostly, and what can be done about the funding sources?

Mr. Farr, maybe you'd have some idea, or Mr. Halevi.

Mr. Jonathan Dahoah Halevi: First of all, millions of dollars have been funnelled to Syria since 2011 to support the fighters/militants/jihadists/mujahedeen that fought against the al-Assad regime. Some of the money went to other groups like Jabhat al-Nusra and groups that really are affiliated or joined the Islamic State later. The Islamic State took control of the banks and robbed the banks in Iraq. They got funds from this source. They also export oil that goes to Turkey.

According to Canadian jihadists who joined ISIS, or joined the Islamic State in Iraq, they said—I'm speaking specifically of a Calgarian, who is in Mosul right now. He said that the conditions in Iraq for those who join ISIS are excellent. They are being paid a monthly salary, and the Islamic State takes care of their families. They pay all their expenses—

Mr. Peter Goldring: Is it not possible to cut off that funding?

Mr. Jonathan Dahoah Halevi: Yes, that's what I want to add. We have to look into that from an Iraqi perspective, not from a Canadian perspective, which means that the cost of living in Syria and Iraq is totally different from what we expect here in Canada, and with more money, you can do much more. I think it should be a priority for the coalition to work hard on the specific issue of funding. I think the pressure should be put on Turkey because Turkey is the key issue here in this case because of the oil being transferred to the Turkish market.

Mr. Peter Goldring: We have representatives here, certainly Christian and Jewish, but we don't have anybody who is Muslim. How can we engage the Islamic community to stand up and be vocal on an international basis? Many of the organizations that would otherwise be able to have a voice on this, you would think would come from international.... Is there any type of international Islamic organization of parliamentarians or part of Islam itself that can have credibility?

It's very tough for us to have credibility, as Christians and Jews, on issues like this, but how do you get this credibility of significant Islamic voices condemning what is happening internationally?

• (0940)

Mr. Jonathan Dahoah Halevi: First of all, the major Islamic organizations in Canada repeatedly denounced, condemned, the Islamic State, but in analyzing the position of the Muslim community in Canada, I noticed that possibly all the major organizations also oppose any military action against the Islamic State. They condemn the Islamic State, but oppose taking actions against the Islamic State. In his weekly sermon, one of the imams in Scarborough, Ontario criticized the Canadian government for joining the coalition. He said—I'm quoting him—that Canada should be neutral toward ISIS, so not take any actions against ISIS, and because of that, he mentioned the Canadian foreign policy, etc.

If you denounce and condemn the Islamic State, how can you stay neutral toward the Islamic State? Why not take any action? Well, the meaning of not taking action against the Islamic State.... What will happen? The Islamic State will not stop. They'll continue to expand. I think it's very important to encourage the....

Also, there's one more point. We saw massive demonstrations during the summer against other issues. The Muslim community went out in the streets last summer and in recent years. In this case,

we don't see, beyond the declarations, any action on the street to convey the message to the masses and by the masses.

I think it is very important to speak to the Muslim community leaders in order to convey the message that the Islamic State and its values should not be tolerated. The meaning of that, also, is to condemn those imams and the organizations that spread ideas that are similar to those of the Islamic State.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'll just remind everybody that Dr. Farr is going to be with us probably just until the end of this round.

I believe, Dr. Farr, you can stay with us until the end of this round, and then you'll have to go. Is that correct?

Dr. Thomas Farr: That's correct. I'm happy to stay until the end of the round though.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Rafferty, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

It's Dr. Farr, right?

Dr. Thomas Farr: That's correct.

Mr. John Rafferty: Thank you for staying a little bit longer.

I know I have only five minutes. I'm going to try to get a question in for everybody, so feel free to be brief, if it works out that way.

Dr. Farr, you talk about religious freedom as a way of accommodating all. I certainly agree with your thoughts on what you've said so far here today. I think in general terms we could say that Canada and the United States both have freedom of religion. You have a little more difficulty in the United States at the moment, I believe. Your country is based on a separation of church and state, yet there's a creeping blur that is happening along that line.

The United States has been quite successful in terms of dealing with Christian extremists within your own population. I wonder if there's something in your thoughts perhaps that could help us deal with Canada's response to religious violence and persecution.

Dr. Thomas Farr: That's a great question. I won't answer it successfully because I want to keep it short, as you asked. Maybe the best way is to just challenge the premise of your question.

The essence of the American system of religious liberty can be misunderstood if you focus on the separation of church and state. That phrase is nowhere, as you probably know, in the American constitution. It is correct insofar as it means an institutional separation of church and state. In other words, they can't be unified; there can't be an establishment of religion in our system.

The genius of our system, in my opinion, is to invite religion into the public square. Religion in politics—Islam in politics, Judaism, Christianity, all the rest—is what is under threat in my country at the moment, and which, in my view, endangers lots of people and lots of views, and includes the issue that we're talking about.

My answer to your question is that Canada and all western democracies should not focus on removing religion from the public square as their definition of “religion” and “religious freedom”, but invite it in within the norms of the society. This is being re-examined in France, as you may know. The whole notion of *laïcité* is to bring religion back in, to invite religious actors in.

That's my answer. It's not separation of religion from politics. It is separation of church and state, but it's inviting religion into the public square to be involved on the basis of equality with all other voices.

● (0945)

Mr. John Rafferty: Thank you for that, Dr. Farr.

Bishop Mar-Emmanuel, I have a question for you. It alludes to something you said a little earlier, and I'd like you to expand a little bit on that. What are the particular needs of women and girls who are impacted by this conflict, and what role can Canada play in addressing these needs?

Mr. Emmanuel Joseph Mar-Emmanuel: The situation is one of crisis in Iraq nowadays, especially what happened through ISIS and the discrimination of women, and how many thousands were being taken captive, especially among the Yazidis and a few Christians. It's a problem with these extremists and how they interpret certain verses within the religion or the Koran.

Mr. John Rafferty: Is there a role Canada can play in helping to relieve the population, particularly refugee population, of these problems?

Mr. Emmanuel Joseph Mar-Emmanuel: I think Canada has been involved recently through many visits of its high officials to northern Iraq to encourage this development, especially with winter setting in. Mostly it is about the education of the people, but things are very hard there...how it has been interpreted by the other sides and the opposition.

Mr. John Rafferty: So it's education, and I'm also thinking of things like housing and food and health.

Mr. Emmanuel Joseph Mar-Emmanuel: Exactly.

Mr. John Rafferty: With your knowledge of the situation, would you say that what is there now is inadequate?

Mr. Emmanuel Joseph Mar-Emmanuel: Yes, exactly, there is an urgent need for that, and many church leaders and even many western organizations such as the Red Cross, Caritas, and others are involved there, but there is more urgency. There are certain caravans, and there is a shortage of electricity and food, problems with the sanitation, and disease. Up until now, many people were occupying schools, parks, or church halls. There are a lot of difficulties in this crisis, and the resources there are very limited.

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

Dr. Farr, I just want to take this time to thank you very much for your testimony today. We appreciate your time.

Dr. Thomas Farr: I'm delighted to be with you. This is an important subject. Thanks for inviting me.

The Chair: Thank you. Have a great day.

We are now going to move over to Ms. Brown for five minutes.

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Mr. Chair, I am very disappointed that Dr. Farr had to leave us because I would like to have asked him about his thoughts on training for our diplomats. He said that the money in the office of religious freedom should be spent on helping our diplomats. I would like to know how, who, and what he thinks would be the things on which they need to be trained, and with what. He used the word “linchpin”. I used that word on Tuesday when we had our witnesses here. Our witness said that the linchpin issue was security, solving the security problem in Iraq. I would love to have had the opportunity to discuss this with him.

Here are my questions for our other witnesses.

Bishop, you talked about the churches that are supporting the creation of a safe zone. I wonder if you could tell us a little bit more about that. Is it respected? Is humanitarian assistance getting in there? Canada has been one of the largest contributors to humanitarian assistance. We have spent something in the neighbourhood of \$362 million to date on the situation in Iraq and Syria. We've been generous contributors, but the real question is, is it getting to the people? Are these safe zones being respected?

● (0950)

Mr. Emmanuel Joseph Mar-Emmanuel: Mr. Chairman, about the safe zone, most of the Christian leaders and other Christian organizations expressed on this that since the people have been deported from the city of Mosul and surrounding regions it's very hard to go back to their homes, even after the liberation. Individuals being interviewed sometimes state—especially the Christians and even the Yazidis—that it's very hard now. There's no fundamental trust there, since many of their homes have been looted. How is it possible for some to go back to their homes and live with their neighbours? It probably needs a generation or more before things will be more refined or reconciliation will be done.

There was even a survey being done there by Nineveh Center for Research and Development, a certain organization back up north. They surveyed about 4,000 individuals. About 56% said they were ready to go to their homes in the city of Mosul, but on the condition that they are supported by the international community. Of those asked, 42% were thinking about immigration just to leave the country when they are done.

That's a problem. The impact that it has on the people is very strong—enormous. It's very hard. Of course, help is coming to the people, but again it's more urgent and many are suffering. Prices are high.

Ms. Lois Brown: Thank you.

We have heard over and over again about people really just wanting to go home. They want to return to their homes and their own belongings. That's a message that we've heard loud and clear.

Mr. Halevi, you said something that is a little bit of a breakdown in logic for me. Perhaps you have some thoughts on it. You talked about the Canadian imam who advocates that Canada should remain neutral. Yet the breakdown in logic for me is that he still wants Canada to go in and help those people who are so afflicted, and give humanitarian aid. Does this not seem a breakdown in logic to you? They advocate that Canada should stay neutral and not participate in the coalition with our allies, and yet continue to provide funds and humanitarian assistance to the people who are so desperately in need, many of whom are from the Muslim communities.

Do you have any thoughts on that? To me it just seems like a complete breakdown in logic.

Mr. Jonathan Dahoah Halevi: Are you quoting from the sermon?

Ms. Lois Brown: No, you were saying—

Mr. Jonathan Dahoah Halevi: No, what your saying is quoting from the sermon of the imam.

Ms. Lois Brown: It was what you said, that the Canadian imam advocates—

Mr. Jonathan Dahoah Halevi: No, I know that. What he said is not what you said. That's not his argument. His argument is totally different. I recommend that you listen to him and to read exactly what he said. It's not the same logic at all.

He blamed Canada for the situation in Syria and Iraq. He blamed the Canadian foreign policy for that. He was not suggesting such logic as you said. This is exactly the logic for some of the community leaders in the Muslim community. This is their logic in opposing the policy, blaming Canada and the west in general as the cause of the problem of extremism, and not taking any responsibility for their side of creating the problem of extremism, not only here in Canada but in general in the Middle East.

Where is the cause of extremism? Because extremism is not the west. It's not retaliation.

We heard just yesterday what the Ottawa jihadist has said. He said that this is retaliation for the oppression. What oppression? They regard—and I'm quoting, it's their position; it's not my assessment—that when Muslims cannot pursue jihad and cannot spread Islam, they are being oppressed and they are being victimized and then they have the right to launch an attack against the oppressors. The meaning of that is the causes of jihad always exist.

What this imam specifically said is that to be neutral means you should not take any action against the Islamic State. Don't take any action. If you don't take any action against the Islamic State, what's the meaning of that? You give licence to the Islamic State to pursue its policy regarding minorities in Iraq and Syria. I think we should not tolerate that.

• (0955)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Schellenberger will start the next round, for five minutes, please.

Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC): It's been mentioned that ISIL makes education a top priority.

Do these teachings teach young people to become suicide bombers, etc.? How do we, as Canadians, dissuade the young people from these practices without physically eliminating them?

Mr. Jonathan Dahoah Halevi: The answer is yes.

You can see the evidence on YouTube of how they organize the youth in mosques, in groups, teaching them the tenet of Islam according to the ideology of the Islamic State. You can see training with guns, with AK-47s and everything. They are prepared and they present them as the new generation of jihadists who will fight the west.

I want to give an example. I have some comments about how Canadian diplomats should work with other governments and the role of Canadian diplomacy. I want to give an example from Afghanistan, which I probed recently.

Canada tried to promote democracy and liberalism in Afghanistan. One of the key partners in Afghanistan, one of the officials—who is also a Canadian citizen, by the way—cooperated with the Canadian government. This specific individual is a member of the Hizb ut-Tahrir. He said, in his own voice in Canada, that Islam is incompatible with democracy. As a member of Tahrir, he believes in the caliphate. This is the main issue of Hizb ut-Tahrir. We have to be very careful about, first of all, choosing our partners in promoting democracy, and investing our money in promoting democracy and tolerance to other religions.

I want to add one more thing, which is important, with regard to looking after the money. The money comes to Canada from different sources to promote radicalism, as the imam from Brampton has said. I am quoting him, "They go from Canada to Madinah University, being taught there, coming back here, and spreading hatred, etc." The money comes from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and other places. The mosque south of Ottawa was also funded by Kuwaiti money.

What is important for Canada, I think, is to first of all look into the sources of money. Second, all these countries do not allow freedom of religion in their own countries. You cannot build a church in Kuwait. You cannot build a church in Saudi Arabia. If we want to convey a message of tolerance towards other religions, we have to adopt a reciprocal policy: if you don't let others preach for other religions in your country, please do not fund other activities in our country.

Mr. Gary Schellenberger: I know that the Iraqi government is not being very protective to residents of Iraq. I am talking about Camp Liberty, and it used to be Camp Ashraf. These are Iranian citizens who fled Iran when the shah was overthrown. This camp was protected for many years by the Americans. Once the Americans left, the Iraqi government gradually took down any protective barriers around the camp. They indiscriminately shot into the camp, killed many people, shot mortars in. They wouldn't let food shipments go through. The sanitation is terrible.

When we're talking about religion, these people have been taught that all the way. How do we then realistically have a political solution for people who have ingrained in them that you should hate certain people?

•(1000)

Mr. Jonathan Dahoah Halevi: Are you talking about the Mujahideen-e-Khalq in Iraq?

Mr. Gary Schellenberger: Yes.

Mr. Jonathan Dahoah Halevi: When we are talking about the problems in the Middle East, we should not expect that we, Canada, or the west, or even the U.S., can solve the problems between Sunnis and Shiites, or that we can change Islam. This is their own religion, their own faith. They have other problems which we cannot control. It's not a chess game; we are not moving pawns.

First of all, we have to defend our democracy. This is the most important thing. This is the first priority to prevent the foreign influence of radicalism from coming onto our own soil. The rift between the Sunni and Shiite didn't start yesterday, but we can see it coming, penetrating, and infiltrating into Canada.

We've seen some incidents, one in Montreal, and some in other places. A Shiite imam in Toronto revealed a few months ago that there are tensions here in Canada and also in the U.S. A meeting was arranged in Washington, D.C. to discuss these tensions. I think it is important in terms of national security to look very carefully at the tension in the Middle East between the Sunnis and Shiites, because it will affect us here on Canadian soil.

The Chair: That's all the time we have. We're going to move on to Mr. Donnelly.

Sir, you have five minutes.

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): I think it is Hélène's turn.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: I'm sorry. I was distracted.

I'd like to make a comment regarding Mrs. Brown's comment a bit earlier that there seems to be something illogical about being neutral and providing humanitarian assistance. I would like to remind everybody that among the basic tenets or principles of humanitarian assistance is neutrality and impartiality, and that in fact, a lot of humanitarian organizations find it difficult to work on the ground to provide humanitarian assistance while Canada participates in a military action.

That being said, my—

Ms. Lois Brown: I'd like to make a point of clarification, Chair.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Lois Brown: What Mr. Halevi said in his remarks was that the imam advocates that Canada should stay neutral. My comment to him was that there is a breakdown in logic if Canada is asked to remain neutral and yet ISIS still...we are still being requested to provide humanitarian assistance. I understand that our humanitarian assistance is going to be neutral.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Lois Brown: Canada is going to remain neutral, but it's a breakdown in the imam's logic that we can remain neutral and still have responsibility to provide for people, many of whom are from the Muslim community.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: I think we could have that discussion, but I think there might be some misunderstanding about the basic

principles of humanitarian assistance and international humanitarian law.

Ms. Lois Brown: Not at all.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Anyway, we'll have this discussion another time.

Mr. Halevi, on this topic, you mentioned that some imams who condemn ISIS also oppose taking action against ISIS. By that, should I understand that you meant they oppose taking military action against ISIS?

•(1005)

Mr. Jonathan Dahoah Halevi: That's what I said.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: No, you just said "action" and I wanted to clarify that, as well as the fact that there are a lot of experts, opposition parties, and other countries who believe that military action, as it's done now, is just fuelling ISIS and fuelling the problems. I think it gives a different perspective on what type of action should be taken.

That being said, Bishop Mar-Emmanuel, you mentioned the issue of mistrust between various communities. We all know that once all this is over, hopefully as soon as possible, we will have a responsibility to rebuild Iraq. What kind of role do you think Canada could have in promoting dialogue between the various communities including, in some cases, within communities?

Mr. Emmanuel Joseph Mar-Emmanuel: Canada has a big role as a democratic country, especially in the crisis in Iraq. The minorities in Iraq are small ethnic groups and are marginalized. Even after 2003, the Christian minorities have had their representatives in the central government, even in the northern region, but still much has to be done. For example, it's all about awareness about the country itself. As I mentioned in my notes at the beginning, Christianity in Iraq goes back to the apostolic in its origin but very little is known by the average Iraqi. So the Iraqi majority think that Christianity is a product of colonial powers or has been embedded in Iraq by the western missionaries.

I remember myself in the mid-1970s when we read about the history of Christianity and other religions, especially in Europe, and about the Reformation at the time of Martin Luther. Nothing was being taught about Christianity in Iraq, that it existed there even before Islam. Even recently, near Kufa in the region of al-Hirah, more than 30 monasteries and churches were uncovered. The people there were astonished to find churches there. That would reveal something. So I think it's more like tolerance, the Christian being accepted. But sometimes the Christians, as a small minority, become more a victim of the superior powers, about certain policies and interests. Even in Iraq nowadays, mostly it's about the Kurds, the Shias, and the Sunnis. You very rarely hear about the Christians, so they're suffering.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Thank you very much. That was a very interesting point.

We've had other witnesses tell us how essential it would be, if Iraq is to hold as a country, to build a sentiment of citizenship, of being citizens of Iraq first and foremost. Do you think it's achievable?

Mr. Emmanuel Joseph Mar-Emmanuel: I'm sorry to say there are certain difficulties within the Muslim world and sometimes among Christians or other minorities about how they are second-class citizens. With the Christians it's sometimes only on paper, and nothing in practice. They will hold certain senior positions, but they're not decision-makers. Sometimes they try to polish it or make it fancier. They are a democratic country but somehow we see Christians being marginalized all the time.

• (1010)

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Laverdière.

We're now going to move over to Mr. Anderson, sir, for five minutes.

Mr. David Anderson: We've heard of an organization that's working its way across the Middle East. It's butchering men on the way, enslaving women, and selling children. It's destroying the religious communities and minority communities as it goes. I think it's the height of simplemindedness to think that we can walk across and shake hands, hold hands for a while, sing some modern version of *Kumbaya*, and all will be well. I just don't buy that. We have some international responsibilities. We've been glad to play our part, and we will continue to do that.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Mr. Chair, I don't think I said that. Could we know which comment Mr. Anderson is referring to right now?

Mr. David Anderson: I was just making an observation. I understand Ms. Laverdière's response may be because she knows exactly what I'm saying.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: No, I'm asking for a point of clarification. Can Mr. Anderson specify who said we should hold hands with ISIS?

The Chair: I'm going to ask members to keep their comments to their periods of time. If not, we'll end up with a debate. We all get additional rounds, so could you move forward?

Mr. David Anderson: Do I get my full time?

The Chair: Yes, you do. Madame Laverdière did as well. So go ahead.

Mr. David Anderson: Bishop Emmanuel, can you tell us where the assistance is coming from right now? Canada has tried to make sure it has paid its commitments and done that. Does the assistance to your community come from other church communities? Is it coming from governmental help?

We heard some testimony the other day that there was some interference with assistance being delivered to the camps. Can you tell us a little bit about your people and where their assistance is coming from? Clearly, you have said they need more as well, but can you just help us with that a bit?

Mr. Emmanuel Joseph Mar-Emmanuel: The assistance is coming from Canada. It has taken a very active role to provide humanitarian assistance, and there's also its recent role in the military coalition with other countries.

The assistance, funding and humanitarian aid, comes from many European countries and the United States as well. Also, we have our communities in North America, here in Canada and in the United States, and even in Europe and Australia, and people in the congregations try to support their relatives or the situation there.

These funds are given out and distributed with no discrimination even to non-Christians and others who are suffering.

Mr. David Anderson: May I ask who is providing protection to your community then? You have moved into the Kurdish areas that the peshmerga control. How is the security situation in that area?

Mr. Emmanuel Joseph Mar-Emmanuel: Some at the beginning blamed the Kurdish since they have a strong foothold in certain regions close to Mosul but they withdrew and then people fled the country.

As you know, there was a certain tension between the Iraqi central government and the Kurdish regarding the budget, but probably now things are getting better with the new Iraqi government's election.

Of course, now the Iraqi army and even the Kurdish are being supported by the international community, which is providing military assistance and advisers. The United States is very involved and even Canada.

They had certain suggestions for the Christians so they could defend themselves despite their small numbers. They have formed certain security guards to protect their villages as much as they can.

Mr. David Anderson: I want to ask both of you what your thoughts are on the new Iraqi government. Are they going to be able to provide the state structure that is needed in order to return your people to their areas and then to provide some level of protection for them?

Mr. Halevi, you have talked about state building. Is the Iraqi government going to be able to build its political infrastructure faster than ISIS can in the areas where ISIS now dominates, or actually in the area we would like to see them pushed back from?

Mr. Emmanuel Joseph Mar-Emmanuel: The Iraqi government promises, but I think it needs the support of the international community; that was made clear, especially about the liberation of Mosul. Even in some news it speaks about certain churches in Mosul, many ancient churches, being turned into prisons by ISIS. It's very difficult to know how to liberate the city from the forces of evil or darkness.

The Iraqis, too, encouraged the citizens of Mosul to do that as well. They sought to give them the courage, as they have done with certain tribes, on the ground so they could all work together along with the military in a way to liberate the city.

•(1015)

Mr. Jonathan Dahoah Halevi: We can look into the larger picture of the Middle East and then into Iraq and look at what's happening in Lebanon. Lebanon is divided. Syria has disintegrated. Yemen has disintegrated also. Shiites supported by Iran took over the capital city of Sana'a. We see the pressures inside Bahrain and inside Saudi Arabia between Sunnis and Shiites. In Iraq things have also disintegrated. Sunnis in the northern part of Iraq are being controlled mainly by the Islamic State. You have Kurdish autonomy. There is an almost independent entity inside Iraq and they have a Shiite...and the pressure on Baghdad, the mixed capital city of Iraq, is enormous. There have been hundreds of terrorist attacks during the last few years. I cannot see a magic wand that can reunite all Iraqis under the same nationality as they were in the past. The pressures between the two forces of Sunnis and Shiites in the Arab world are so intense that they are causing more disintegration in the area. And unfortunately as I see it, they may cause more and more tensions and frictions between these two sects.

The Chair: We're going to start our fourth round with Mr. Donnelly.

Go ahead for five minutes, please.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you to our witnesses for providing testimony today.

Mr. Halevi, we've heard troubling testimony at this committee about the relationship between Syria's President Assad and ISIS. I'm wondering, in your view, how the situation in Syria relates to the ISIS crisis or threat.

Mr. Jonathan Dahoah Halevi: What was said in the testimony about Assad and ISIS? What was the main argument?

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Well...

Mr. Jonathan Dahoah Halevi: You asked me about what was said about ISIS and Assad. ISIS, the Islamic State, is—

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Do you want to provide your comment about...?

If not, I can ask another question.

Mr. Jonathan Dahoah Halevi: I can comment on it.

ISIS, the Islamic State, is an enemy of Assad because for ISIS, the Assad regime represents an infidel government, the Alawites, which is an offshoot of the Shiites. For ISIS they should be executed as apostates, and particularly, Syria is called al-Sham. Al-Sham means the old area. Syria, Jordan, Israel, and Lebanon are part of the prophecy of Muhammad. This would be the first area from which the jihad would start to expand, and that's why they are focusing on Syria.

ISIL, the Islamic State in Syria and the Levant, was established first of all in Iraq and then in Syria in order to organize and unite all Islamic forces under one flag of Islam to establish a very strong basis, a stronghold inside Syria, to be used as a basis for launching the jihad.

There is no way for compromise between the Islamic State and the Assad regime. There is no way. They are not talking about compromise. They aren't looking for any negotiation with the Assad regime. He is a prime enemy. If you have listened to what Abu Bakr

al-Baghdadi, the caliph, the leader of the Islamic State, has said, it's very important. He talked about the next target, which means Saudi Arabia and Jordan. But he said to the followers of the Islamic State that there is a religious obligation to kill the disbelievers. This is the priority. But they should also remember that their first priority, their first enemy, is the Shiites. They shouldn't misunderstand him. They also have to look after the Shiites. They should not give the Shiites control of the area on a silver platter.

That explains in a nutshell the animosity of the Islamic State towards Iran and Bashar al-Assad of Syria.

•(1020)

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Thank you.

UN Security Council Resolutions 2170 and 2178 call on member states to suppress and prevent the illicit movement of money and weapons to extremist organizations through border controls and information sharing. I'm wondering if you could speak to the importance of strong controls on weapons and financial transfers.

Mr. Jonathan Dahoah Halevi: We have seen for many years the transfer of funds and weapons into conflict areas that brings about terrorism and instability. It started with what is called dawah, propagating for Islam by Saudi Arabia in the sixties and into the late seventies, which meant to build communities in order to spread Islam. In some cases, we saw at that time Saudi charities that also supported the mujahedeen in Pakistan, in Afghanistan, in the Middle East and other areas. That was the strategy. That was the way it was constructed.

Money went either directly to the mujahedeen or through charities in order to support the infrastructure, the network of the mujahedeen, by supporting the families of what they called "martyrs"—the terrorists—and supporting what they called "prisoners", terrorists who were convicted and serving jail terms, etc. That was the disguise.

By the way, one of the cases was here in Canada. It was a Canadian organization that sponsored millions of dollars to front the organization of Hamas. That also supported the network of Hamas and gave them the money they needed to promote their activities.

I think it's crucially important to look after the money. Of course, for weapons, it's not a question; weapons should be getting a close look, but it's also the money. The money here is crucial to finance and to give life to these organizations.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're now going to Ms. Brown for five minutes.

Ms. Lois Brown: Thank you, Mr. Halevi, for those comments. That is the very reason our Canada Revenue Agency takes so seriously the auditing of the charities we have in Canada. We have very robust rules on contributions and how they can be used. If they start to be directed towards political activity, it is the responsibility of the CRA to ensure that these organizations are following the well-established rules.

I wonder if you could help me, though, with a bit of education. I need to be educated here. You spoke earlier about a tenet of the faith: that Rome, Istanbul, and Jerusalem must be liberated for the coming of the messiah. That's basically what you said. Is that the tenet?

Mr. Jonathan Dahoah Halevi: That's what Muhammad said. I just quoted Muhammad.

Ms. Lois Brown: Is that shared by both Sunni and Shiites?

Mr. Jonathan Dahoah Halevi: Yes.

Ms. Lois Brown: If that is the tenet of the faith and we see this uprising that's going on with ISIS, is there going to be.... You say that they want to establish the caliphate so they have a stronghold from which to work. If this is accepted by Muslim people all together, should we expect more attacks and more terror?

Mr. Jonathan Dahoah Halevi: The restoration of the caliphate that ended in the last century when the Ottoman Empire collapsed triggered the establishment of the Muslim Brotherhood in the late 1980s, and later the Hizb ut-Tahrir in the 1950s. By the way, the Muslim Brotherhood is the largest Muslim organization worldwide. It's an international organization that has branches here in Canada also. The Hizb ut-Tahrir is also an international organization with branches in Canada.

The issue of establishing the caliphate is essential for Muslims. This is part of the religion, part of the goal. The end goal is to establish a caliphate in which Islamic law will be implemented.

One of the imams who warns of the radicalization, the Wahhabism, etc., in Canada, said in an article that Canada should let all countries in the Middle East establish the Islamic law, the sharia. For him this is the solution. Sharia law, Islamic law, should be implemented. Even though he denounced the Wahhabism, he supports sharia law.

The difference between these groups is focused mainly on the tactics to realize this goal of the caliphate and the Islamic law. The Islamic State, ISIS, like al-Qaeda, supports using the violent jihad in the first stage. Others, like Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who is the most important prominent scholar in the Muslim world and the spiritual leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, said in 2003 that we have to use the dawah, which means propagating Islam, and immigration as a tool in order to take over Europe. We have to do it in stages. Don't do it, first of all, to resort to jihad, because that will cause the other side to take actions against it.

Hizb ut-Tahrir is promoting this as the main agenda to establish the caliphate, and they changed the policy very recently because of the establishment of the caliphate. If they're promoting the caliphate, and the caliphate already exists, what's the role of Hizb ut-Tahrir today? They decided that they should take action for the first time, not only preaching to and educating the Muslims, but also taking concrete actions in order to establish the new caliphate.

The difference between all the groups is about what the specific and the right conditions to establish the caliphate are. Hizb ut-Tahrir said that the caliphate, under the rule of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, was not properly established. They can do it. By the way, one of the discussions about the caliphate was held here in Canada. They talked about it very openly. This is an issue that's being discussed. It's not

being concealed. They talk about it, and when they talk about a caliphate, what they intend, in fact, is Islamic law.

• (1025)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Here's what we're going to do. We have about 15 minutes left. I need about five minutes to talk about what we're going to be doing when we come back.

I have Mr. Goldring. The NDP are okay. Mr. Garneau will have a couple of questions, and then, Mr. Anderson will finish it up. We're going to try to do that all in the next 10 minutes.

Mr. Goldring, it's not quite five minutes, but you have a couple of questions. Then we'll go to Mr. Garneau, and we'll finish off with Mr. Anderson. Then we'll go in camera for five minutes to talk about what happens when we come back.

Mr. Peter Goldring: Bishop Emmanuel, there is discussion about our Ambassador Bennett and the office that he holds, and the dialogue and the work that he's doing for the freedom of religion around the world. A lot of it is dialogue and meeting with groups and people to have discussions.

I met with an imam in Edmonton just last weekend, and it was very concerning. His comments toward the United States were very bitter, comments such as that with all the poverty in the United States, who do they send off to war but the soldiers who come from the poverty-ridden areas of the United States. In other words, they do the fighting. With that type of conversation going on, obviously there's a great need for having regular communication and dialogue with the communities to push back on some of that vitriol.

Do you have conversation with the Islamic community from time to time? What is the overall reaction and response that you get, the feedback from the communities that you dialogue with?

• (1030)

Mr. Emmanuel Joseph Mar-Emmanuel: In our church, even in the diaspora, we don't have any dialogue with Muslim communities, and even back home there are just little but at certain times ceremonies that are.... Of course the church encourages certain dialogues in order to have more reconciliation, not on the issues of faith—there are certain problems there—but just to be in harmony as citizens of the country.

Last August I met with Ambassador Bennett. We invited him to our church. He supports all communities.

Mr. Peter Goldring: I guess my concern here, and I'm seeing this even within the orthodoxies, is that there's a lack of dialogue even between the groups. We're seeing here another circumstance of the militarization of religion. We see that with Putin and what he's doing with the Russian Orthodox Church, and of course we see how that impacted his takeover of the Crimea. There's utilization of that, and the need for dialogue there too.

Mr. Halevi, how important will be the work of the office of religious freedom and Ambassador Bennett? Maybe you could comment on the importance of that as well. Maybe there's a need to expand the amount of support we're giving to that region. How important is that? Are the Americans participating? We heard from Mr. Farr that they are possibly not doing enough in that area, but how important will that be for Canada, and as well for America, to accelerate their efforts in that area?

The Chair: A quick response would be great. Thanks.

Mr. Jonathan Dahoah Halevi: I will be very quick.

Support is crucial for the minorities in Iraq. The problem is that humanitarian support alone is not enough, because they will be swept by the other forces; they have to be supported by military means as well. Without military means, without weapons in Iraq, those communities will not survive. The only humanitarian support that will be relevant will be possibly burial services.

The Kurds managed to hold ground in Iraq and defend themselves only because of the weapons. We see that in Kurdistan. We see it on a smaller scale in Kobani and other places in northern Syria. Without that, humanitarian support is totally meaningless.

The Chair: Thank you. That's all the time we have.

Mr. Garneau, we'll go to you, sir.

Mr. Marc Garneau: Bishop Mar-Emmanuel, the UN is saying that it will need \$16 billion for refugees worldwide next year. About half of that is for refugees from Iraq and Syria. Many have spilled over, as you know, into Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon.

But specifically in the Kurdish region of Iraq and the Assyrians specifically, how would you describe their needs at the moment? Are they getting enough? Do they need more, and do they need much more? Where do they need that? Is it education? Is it food? Is it shelter? What is it?

Mr. Emmanuel Joseph Mar-Emmanuel: Yes, there's an urgent need. The church leaders there are saying that most important are shelter and food, and of course education and other necessities come with it.

Mr. Marc Garneau: You describe it as an urgent need.

Mr. Emmanuel Joseph Mar-Emmanuel: Exactly.

Mr. Marc Garneau: Very good.

Mr. Halevi, Iraq wasn't working very well before this whole ISIS thing happened, and now the coalition is there. If all of the coalition partners took a large-scale approach to ISIS, including troops on the ground and all that, there would be a massive amount of force. It could probably push ISIS out fairly rapidly, but we might end up with the same vacuum after.

What are the things that are needed and what should not be done to defeat ISIS in Iraq and end up with some reasonable chance of a working country afterwards? I know that's a broad question, but I'd like your opinion.

• (1035)

Mr. Jonathan Dahoah Halevi: First of all, ISIS started in 2003, with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. He also established an Islamic state, but it didn't hold. The Islamic State these days is stronger, and I think

it has existed for over 160 days already. We see that they are based on the ground.

There are no simple solutions to the problems. I think that the military intervention in Iraq and Syria should be primarily based on the Muslim countries themselves, not by the west. The Americans did it in 2003. They gave the Iraqis democracy on a silver platter: "Take democracy. We have removed the tyrant Saddam Hussein. We removed the regime. We removed the army." Everything was removed. They could do it, but we've seen that the problem is much deeper; it's not just giving democracy and they will take it.

Also, with regard to military operations in Iraq, I doubt if it can change the fundamentals of the situation in Iraq. That's why I think it should be based on the people themselves. They should do the job themselves and do the major sacrifices in order to gain the fruits of democracy and liberalism by their hands.

The Chair: Thanks, Marc.

Mr. Anderson, for a few minutes, and then we'll wrap up.

Mr. David Anderson: I have one last question.

Mr. Farr talked about the importance of trying to establish religious freedom. He saw that as the real key to this.

As Ms. Brown pointed out, we've heard some other suggestions of what the key issues might be. The three principles of religious freedom are typically the freedom to believe, the freedom to practise that belief, and the freedom to change that belief.

There are large sections of religious communities, especially Islam, who don't believe in at least two of those, particularly the one about conversion. When we talk about the establishment of religious freedom in the Middle East, do you have any ideas of how that can be achieved, and how are you contributing to that?

I will ask either or both of you. The bishop first, perhaps.

Mr. Emmanuel Joseph Mar-Emmanuel: Religious freedom is very important, but I think it's very hard to establish there. For example, they believe with those who believe in the book, whether Jews or Christians, but everything is according to the sharia.

Suppose there is a family, a husband or a wife, for example, and one of them is being converted to Islam. If it's the husband, then automatically the children are considered Muslims. It's very hard. If a Muslim is converted to a non-Muslim religion, he is the opposite, so they are hard in terms of suffering, or punishment against him. It's very hard to have this dialogue.

Tolerance is very important. Well-known Islamic centres speak about this tolerance, to love the others, but very little has been practised.

Mr. Jonathan Dahoah Halevi: There's another category. It's freedom of thought.

Even if you're thinking a different way from the mainstream radical Islamic, you could be executed. You are an apostate. There are different categories. You cannot think otherwise.

Why are we looking to the Middle East? We cannot really change what is happening in the Middle East. We can help them take decisions by themselves, but the problem starts here in Canada. Do we have freedom of religion? Can Muslims here say things freely about Islam, about Muhammad, about the Koran? I'm not sure.

You would see the reaction. You can see the reaction in recent history, after the cartoon of Muhammad and after the film on the life of Muhammad.

Mr. David Anderson: Just to interrupt you, we have free speech here and some of us would stand very strongly on that. What do you suggest we should be doing further that would enable that?

• (1040)

Mr. Jonathan Dahoah Halevi: I think we should enhance tolerance, enhance freedom of religion. It's relevant to all issues that Muslims be able to speak freely about their beliefs regarding Islam, regarding Muhammad, as Jews and Christians can, without fearing any retaliation or violence from their own community. That does not

exist today in Canada. I cannot see any newspaper in Canada that will have the courage to reprint, for example, the cartoon of Muhammad. That will not happen.

If we want to convey a message of freedom of religion, we should start here and convey a very strong message that's focused not only on Islam, but on all faith communities. Democracy respects freedom of religion, but all religions must respect democracy and should not impose their values on society.

The Chair: Thank you.

To both our witnesses here today, thank you very much for your time and for your insight.

I want to suspend the meeting to go in camera. If we could just do that as we clear the room, then we'll discuss what we're going to be doing when we come back. Thanks.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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