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# Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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EVIDENCE

**Thursday, November 9, 2017**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Robert Oliphant**



## Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

Thursday, November 9, 2017

• (0850)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.)):** I call to order the 83rd meeting of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

Good morning, everyone. We are continuing our brief series of meetings on the resettlement issues related to Yazidi women and girls, following a motion by the committee.

We are delighted to have the three of you here, as people who can inform us on the experience and the state of resettlement of Yazidis in Canada.

We will start with Operation Ezra. Nafiya and Lorne, you have seven minutes between you.

**Mr. Lorne Weiss (Working Committee Member, Operation Ezra):** With the chair's permission, Nafiya will begin.

**The Chair:** Wonderful.

**Ms. Nafiya Naso (Working Committee Member, Operation Ezra):** Thank you very much.

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

Operation Ezra is a grassroots project, founded in March of 2015, with the primary objectives of raising awareness and fundraising to privately sponsor Yazidi refugees to Winnipeg. To date well over \$500,000 has been raised by Operation Ezra across Canada. Applications for private sponsorship were submitted for a total of 10 families, or 55 people. Seven families, or 41 people, have arrived to date. We have one family arriving later today, actually, and two more families will arrive over the next few weeks.

Operation Ezra is a well-organized, community-wide project guided by a steering committee and several programming committees. In addition to providing support, Operation Ezra partners and a large group of volunteers provide the following tools and services for a successful integration: furnishing and setting up complete homes with donated goods from private and corporate donors; clothing and shoes through corporate donors; welcoming new families and assisting with all the necessary paperwork required to start new lives in Canada; assisting with public transportation, banking, finding medical professionals, and accompanying refugees to all their appointments; enrolling children in school; and assisting with finding employment. To date we have 13 people employed by Operation Ezra volunteers. We run a supplemental EAL program. It is staffed by professional volunteers. We also provide assistance with

coordination of Yazidi community events to help create a strong, cohesive, and supportive community in the city.

Our future plans for 2018 are to continue to raise awareness, to continue to support the current Operation Ezra privately sponsored families, to continue to fundraise and privately sponsor Yazidi refugees, and to continue to provide support to government-sponsored families. This includes providing translation services, furniture and furnishings, clothing and shoes, access to Operation Ezra's EAL program, and invitations to all social events, and finding housing and employment.

I will pass it over to Lorne Weiss.

**Mr. Lorne Weiss:** Thank you.

One of our challenges is that we're not only trying to help individual Yazidi women, children, and families, but also trying to assist them in rebuilding community. We think that's important in settlement, both in terms of support and a feeling of security within a very strange and foreign environment.

One of our problems in terms of logistics is that we spend a lot of time looking for sponsorship agreement holders who have available quota to allow us to sponsor private families. That is a bigger challenge to us than raising the required funds to provide them with the year's support that's necessary. We need more sponsorship agreement holders in major centres where there are already Yazidi communities in existence. We need more quota as well. We have sponsorship holders who don't have quota. We understand they're having challenges getting more quota or even maintaining the quota levels they have. To us, that's a large challenge in terms of the success going forward of private sponsorship.

We would also like the government to encourage private sponsors to be more active in sponsoring Yazidi families. I know that the focus of this committee lately has been the issue of women and children who have been damaged through the activities of ISIS and the disruption and loss of family members. But in order to build a strong community, there has to be a foundation for that community as well. We believe that increasing the number of families who are available to come to Canada will help build that foundation.

The other thing we are recommending is that in settling families in any cities, strong consideration should be given to cities with existing and thriving Yazidi communities. We should avoid settling new families in cities where there is no Yazidi community to assist them in the settlement process. In many cases, municipal settlement agencies are lacking the resources to provide adequate levels of settlement assistance. When we were here a little over a year ago, one of the recommendations we made was for a hybrid program between the government and private sponsorship organizations like Operation Ezra so that we could work together in an agreement to assist these government-sponsored families who need more help than government workers are able to give them on an ongoing basis.

Right now we're filling that void, but one of the difficulties we're having is that we can raise funds specifically to sponsor refugees, while fundraising for private organizations is difficult to cover off operational costs. Most people who give money want to see actual results of where that money is being spent. One of the difficulties we have is that we could do a lot more if there were some form of partnership between the government and private sponsorship agencies so that we could hire people to help—not to replace government workers, but to enhance the work the government is able to do with these people.

We're committed to rebuilding communities, particularly in Winnipeg, where we've had private families come. We've tried to settle them close to each other so that their children are attending the same schools together and the families have an ability to interact. Unfortunately, our hands are somewhat tied. We don't have any funds to really do this. We're relying almost entirely on volunteer help. We'd like to be able to have some professional assistance on a full- or part-time basis to assist these families.

• (0855)

**The Chair:** I'll need you to wrap up fairly quickly.

**Mr. Lorne Weiss:** Sure.

Family reunification opportunities should be prioritized, as families play an important role in the integration of newcomers.

Mr. Chairman, those are my comments and our recommendations.

**The Chair:** Very good. Thank you very much. That sets a very good scene for us.

Mr. Hesso.

**Mr. Hadji Hesso (Director, Yazidi Association of Manitoba):** Good morning, and thank you, everyone, for allowing me to be here to represent the Yazidi Association of Manitoba.

My name is Hadji Hesso. I stand before you today on behalf of my brothers and sisters, who are living in conditions of dire straits in Iraq and the rest of the Middle East. On behalf of them, I urge you to resettle vulnerable Yazidi women and girls here in Canada.

As a religious and ethnocultural community, the Yazidis have been in Manitoba, particularly in Winnipeg, in Ontario, and also in Calgary for a while now. We work closely with the settlement agencies in Winnipeg in particular. We help them. We work in partnership and provide socializing for those who are isolated, as well as some transportation services and interpretation.

Back on August 3, 2014, the Yazidis experienced the most devastating attack against them. The attack conducted by ISIS was the 74th attempt to eliminate them as a religious group. I think this is not news to anybody. I think we all know about what happened that day. Everything has been documented since then. They live it day by day, and it's still going on even though ISIS has been defeated in the majority of areas in Iraq and Syria.

We urge the Canadian government to unite Canadian Yazidi refugees with their captured relatives who have found refuge in UNHCR camps in Iraq, Turkey, Greece, Syria, and Jordan. Yazidis everywhere pray that Canada will provide them with hope for a better future that will allow them to live in dignity and freedom despite the unforgettable past.

I'm going to talk about what the Yazidis have been going through, and specifically the people who have arrived in Canada, in terms of trauma. Trauma is very present, whether someone has been captured by ISIS or has escaped into the mountains. All of us have noticed it. We've seen it on video or in recordings, whether it's television or in a magazine or whatever. We've seen what happened to them back on August 3, 2014, when they ran to the mountain to escape the ISIS militants and to survive. Every person I've met has been traumatized to a certain extent. A prime example of the trauma suffered by those captured by ISIS includes women being regularly raped by multiple people, sold to others, and used as servants. Children as young as four years old are regularly separated from their mothers and kept in rooms with no food or water for extended periods of time. There are several stories of adult women witnessing the torture and rape of young girls. Many male children have been separated from their mothers to serve ISIS men. Male children have been trained to fight and kill. Females aged 12 and up have been used as servants, sold to many different people, and forced to watch videos of ISIS killing Yazidi men on a daily basis.

Many of the women and girls who have arrived in Canada have been going through a difficult time. It's severe, and it varies from person to person. We see it every day as we see them for appointments, transportation, or whatever is needed.

The Yazidis are adjusting and adapting despite the previous list of traumatizing events. We see this in the way people settle in their new country, including attending English classes or learning English, or attending community gatherings of various groups. Large families that arrive seem to be adapting more quickly than are individuals and those who are from smaller families.

• (0900)

The existing Yazidi community in Winnipeg is very involved. They often check on people's well-being and have organized community gatherings. The new arrivals are very appreciative of the support of the existing Yazidi community.

Almost all of the new arrivals talk about family members still in the refugee camps. When they bring some families, there are still people left behind. Some have been captured or missing since August 2014. The majority of men, 95% of the time, have been killed, or there is no news from them, but we are hoping for the women and girls to be returned one day.

Many of you maybe saw the story of the Yazidi boy we reunited with his mother in August. He was captured by ISIS back in 2014, and he was found alive in July of this year. The mother was here in February, after she had lost everything. The whole family was destroyed, like many Yazidi families. She came here and then noticed that her son was alive. We hope and wish that this will be the case for many families that have been through this.

As for school and the education system in Canada, all the children have commented about loving the experience of attending school and learning. This gives them hope for the future. While they all describe loving school, they are having a hard time learning because of the impact of trauma, which makes it difficult to learn and retain information.

Adults all love attending English classes but often struggle to learn because of the impact of trauma. They appear to learn more through conversational groups where they make connections and build relationships with others. We asked the resettlement agencies in Winnipeg not to put all the people together, to eliminate the mother language so they can possibly learn faster than if having conversations together next to each other.

We regularly hear about how helpers are being impacted by the shared stories. This shows the horrific nature of the trauma the Yazidi people have been exposed to.

● (0905)

**The Chair:** I just need you to wrap up fairly quickly.

**Mr. Hadji Hesso:** Yes.

In Winnipeg, because the newly arrived Yazidi are met by the community and various helpers right from the day they arrive, they appear to be starting the new journey to recovery much sooner, and we are hopeful this will continue. This is significant because the Yazidi people are beginning to make connections and form relationships with others. This takes a lot of courage on the part of the arriving Yazidi people and on the part of the community trying to help.

In February of this year, the Government of Canada promised to bring in 1,200 people. That's when it started, and up to today we've seen 650 people. Now we are almost two months away from the end of this year, and I don't know if we are going to reach that number. A couple of years back, when we had the Syrian civil war, they brought 25,000 Syrians to Canada. We cannot reach the 1,200 number of Yazidi people by the end of the year, when entire religious and minority groups such as Yazidis and Christians have been through all these massacres, raping, and killing. The United Nations has acknowledged that it's a genocide against humanity.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Abdallah, go ahead.

**Ms. Dalal Abdallah (Yezidi Human Rights Activist, Yazda):** Thank you.

Mr. Chair, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for having me here today.

My name is Dalal Abdallah, and I'm from the Yazidi community in London, Ontario. I'm here representing Yazda.

I came here on May 3, 2016 to bring you the voices of Yazidis girls from Iraq, Syria, and Turkey.

My family fled during the Gulf War to Syria to have a chance at a better life. My family stayed in Syria in refugee camps for eight years until we were accepted to come to Canada. As a little girl, that was a dream come true for me and my family. That opportunity of Canada bringing me and giving me a new life that day when we got accepted to Canada has been one of the best days of my life. The struggle and the pain that my family went through was unimaginable.

That struggle and pain is still going on with Yazidi families back in Iraq, Turkey, and Syria. On August 3, 2014, we were all left speechless while witnessing a horrifying genocide happening in front our eyes. Thousands of Yazidis lost their homes and loved ones, some witnessed horrifying massive killings, and some were sold and endlessly raped by members of ISIS.

Today I stand in front you again because these activities are still happening to the Yazidis in Iraq. There are still thousands of Yazidis missing, and still hundreds of girls are being raped on daily basis and being sold for as little as the price of a pack of cigarettes. I stand here fighting for the voiceless souls left behind in Iraq.

I thank the Government of Canada for opening their doors to the Yazidi survivors. I've had the pleasure of working with some of the survivors who have recently come to Canada. One of the ladies I keep in touch with is named Ghazel. I told her that I was coming here, and she asked me to share her experience with you today. She came here to Canada less than two years ago with one daughter and two boys. Her husband was captured by ISIS, and one of her daughters, younger than 12 years old, was also captured by ISIS. She managed to escape with two boys and one girl.

She wanted me to tell the Government of Canada, "I thank you from the bottom of my heart. You have given me life that I will never ever be able to thank you enough for." Her kids are in a safe school here in Canada, and she also attends ESL classes herself. Her determination motivates me to be a better person. Despite of all the pain and struggle she went through and is going through, she still has that beautiful smile that keeps up with our world in Canada. She wants to learn English and become a voice for the voiceless.

When I asked her what she wanted from the Canadian government, she said exactly what she wanted from Canada, and that is to keep the doors open and bring more survivors to Canada, to protect the ones who do not want to leave Shingal to be able to live a peaceful life, and lastly, to help provide any necessary aid to the families who are still in Iraq. The last thing she shared with me is that a lot of the refugees who come to Canada have been separated from their families back in Iraq. We would like a program for the Yazidis to reconnect with family members left in Iraq to have them come and join them here in Canada.

The Yazidis have always been used and abused, either by the Kurdish government or by the Iraqi government, and yet they still do not have a voice in Iraq. It's time for the Yazidis to have a voice. These acts that are happening to the Yazidis are crimes against humanity.

I'm the same little girl who wished once upon a time on those bright stars, with no hope and no future, waiting for Canada to call my name in hopes of coming to a beautiful country like Canada. There are thousands of girls right now waiting for Canada to give them a chance for a better life. Imagine if that were your daughter screaming for your help, would we still stand here and turn our backs on the Yazidis? Canada is their only hope. I am a proud Canadian who will keep fighting for the beautiful souls who are struggling.

● (0910)

I want you all just for one moment—one moment—to be able to get out of those suits and think for one moment of the pain and struggle Yazidis are going through. Right now, as we speak, there is a girl screaming for our help. As a proud Canadian, I beg you to open your hearts and your doors to the Yazidis.

I had the pleasure of meeting Ahmed Hussien. I admire his work and his dedication to the refugees. I would like more Yazidis to be included among those refugees. We are bringing thousands of refugees to Canada. We have brought thousands of refugees. We want at least some of those refugees to be Yazidis. Particularly, I'm fighting for the girls who are struggling in Iraq right now. They go to Kurdistan with nothing. They have nothing. There are no services there. The whole country—Kurdistan, Iraq—is corrupt. This is not a place for a little girl to recover from being raped multiple times a day or from being sold to so many men. This is not a place for her to recover. Canada is the right place for her to recover.

I've seen that. I'm seen that from the women we've brought. The women I have met in my town of London, Ontario, are amazing examples. It's amazing to hear their stories. It's amazing how they are so motivated to do so much in this country. I believe in them, because I was once one of those girls. Somebody here fought for me, brought me to Canada, and gave me a chance at a better life.

Now I'm standing here, in front of you, to fight for my sisters who are left behind. I would like you guys to very much open your hearts. Whatever you can to help the Yazidis, please do so. They have nobody. Realistically, everybody is against them. We're watching a genocide still going on today. There are still hundreds of girls screaming for our help. There are still thousands of men, women, and children who are captured by ISIS. Yes, ISIS must be gone in some places, but these activities will continue. I strongly believe that Yazidis will be the target for a very, very, very long time.

As a country that helps, and that steps up to every situation that happens in the world—we are the first ones to step up—I'm very proud to be a Canadian just for that one reason. We need to step up. We need to step up and help the Yazidi minority group.

● (0915)

**The Chair:** I'm afraid I need to bring you to a close.

**Ms. Dalal Abdallah:** Thank you so much for all your time and for listening to me. I hope—I hope—all of you guys will go and think about this not as politicians but as humans to humans.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Abdallah.

Ms. Zahid.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

To all of our panellists today, I want to thank you for your dedication in raising awareness of the plight of the Yazidi people and for your work to bring Yazidi refugees to Canada and help them resettle here in their new home. From the bottom of my heart, I really want to thank you.

First, to either of you from Operation Ezra, could you discuss your working relationship with the IRCC in regard to this project of bringing the Yazidis here and resettling them? Were they responsive to the issues you raised in this process?

**Ms. Nafiya Naso:** We've had a pretty good relationship with the government, I have to say.

**Mr. Lorne Weiss:** We've had some of the families reach out to us directly through the community—and directly through people like Nafiya, where they have the comfort to speak out—and they need some extra help. So we use our resources, which we use for our own sponsored groups, and we include those families in those activities. For example, once a week on Thursdays we have a gathering. Part of it is an EAL program, part is an opportunity for them to connect with each other, and part of it is for the kids to have supervised play areas. We're trying to create that.

We see ourselves as not being an alternative to IRCC but an enhancement to some of the programs they are providing. We're also stepping in to provide where there are voids for certain families.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Have they been responsive to the issues you have raised in this process?

**Mr. Lorne Weiss:** The families or IRCC?

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Has IRCC been responsive to the issues you've raised?

**Mr. Lorne Weiss:** We've had good co-operation from them. They know what we're doing. We'd like to continue that co-operation. Our challenge is not IRCC. Our challenge is being able to fund the ability to continue to do that.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Mr. Hesso, would you like to add to this?

**Mr. Hadji Hesso:** I do want to thank the IRCC and the partnership. We at the Yazidi Association of Manitoba have sponsored a family in Winnipeg through the IRCC. We are co-operating and talk regularly back and forth. We do have help from them. For all the families that have arrived in Winnipeg, particularly under the government resettlement program, in terms of the isolation, we provide socializing opportunities, transportation, medical care, and the most important is interpretation and integration into Canadian society.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** All of you know that Canada does not typically ask refugees or immigration applicants to declare their religion or ethnicity in their applications or in the interviews they have with visa officers. In this case, Canada did provide the opportunity for applicants to volunteer this information. I understand that some Yazidis often are reluctant to declare this information. Could you expand on their concerns about declaring themselves as Yazidis to the government officials and being tracked as such?

**Ms. Nafiya Naso:** I can speak to that. I know a few families in Turkey, for example, who are outside of refugee camps and are living amongst other religious groups. They fear talking about religion within other groups. Because of everything the Yazidis have gone through, they are therefore afraid to release that information—at least those families that I know of who are outside of refugee camps are.

● (0920)

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** What about those who are in the camps?

**Ms. Nafiya Naso:** All the Yazidis in Iraq, Syria, and Turkey are in segregated camps. They are in Yazidi-only camps.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Ms. Abdullah, would you like to add to that? You deal with many of them.

**Ms. Dalal Abdallah:** Yes. I believe that a lot of the Yazidis, as Nafiya said, are afraid to expose their culture and religion because they are targeted. They are being targeted in the Middle East.

For the majority of them, when they do come to the interview process and are asked about it on the application, I don't think there is any problem with saying they are Yazidis, as long as they have some sort of trust or guidance in terms of knowing that they are talking to a government official, and not to other governments that are trying to do something to them. I think that then they are very comfortable in saying who they are and that they want to be helped.

As Yazidis, we are screaming for help. Nobody knew us as Yazidis until this genocide happened, and here we are. At first, the question was, "Who are the Yazidis? Who are these people and where do they live?" Hardly anybody had heard of us. We are coming out and speaking out. We are having a stronger voice, and we are saying that we are Yazidis, that we need help, and we are being targeted.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** I understand that community is very important to the Yazidi people—as it is to any community—and to their successful integration into Canada. Can you tell us more about the Yazidi community that is already in Canada? How large is it? Where is it located? How equipped are they to help welcome the new families that are coming here?

**Ms. Dalal Abdallah:** I believe that at one point the largest population was in London, Ontario, where I am from. Also, Winnipeg has a population that is growing fairly—

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** How many families do you think there would be in London?

**Ms. Dalal Abdallah:** I believe that in London, Ontario, it's growing. The last time I checked, the population was around 400, but that number is growing with incoming refugees. For Winnipeg, I'm not too sure.

**Mr. Hadji Hesso:** The number is almost equal to that in London, Ontario. Now we're noticing that there are a few families who have been arriving in Calgary also. I think there are about seven families in Calgary today. They have recently arrived.

**Ms. Dalal Abdallah:** There are some in Scarborough as well.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** How equipped are they to welcome and help the newcomers?

**Ms. Dalal Abdallah:** We are very equipped. We have an amazing community in London, Ontario. We have the London InterCommunity Health Centre that provides beyond medical services, such as counselling, and referrals to anything that they require or need. They are very supportive of the women's shelters and keep connections with them. Also, the hospital I am working at has developed a program just for refugees. It's not necessarily for Yazidis, but I do work there and make sure that those services are provided to every woman, girl, man, or little boy who needs them.

One of the barriers is that, because these are special services and because the second language is Kurmanji, it's very difficult to get accurate translation and have that passed on to psychiatrists and psychologists. It's very hard.

**The Chair:** I'm afraid I need to end you there. You'll get another time.

Ms. Rempel.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC):** Typically how these types of studies at committee work is that, after hearing from witnesses, the committee gathers recommendations and presents a report to Parliament, requiring the government to respond to those recommendations. Would you find that helpful for this study?

I'll go down the row.

**Mr. Lorne Weiss:** Very much so.

● (0925)

**Mr. Hadji Hesso:** Yes.

**Ms. Dalal Abdallah:** Absolutely.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Excellent.

In terms of recommendations this committee could provide, I've just been taking notes on some of things you've said. Perhaps I'll use my time to go through what those recommendations would be and to just get a yes or no if you think it would be helpful.

First would be perhaps allocating a dedicated quota within the privately sponsored refugee system, or PSR system, in the upcoming year to the Yazidi community. Would that be helpful?

**Mr. Lorne Weiss:** Very much.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** How much? What would the quota be, or should we just lift the cap entirely for the Yazidi community?

**Ms. Dalal Abdallah:** At this point, I think we should lift the cap entirely. I mean, we haven't done enough for the Yazidis, and we need to do that. This is the time—

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Okay, so then, lift the cap on the privately sponsored refugee program for Yazidi families.

**Mr. Lorne Weiss:** I think the cap will be self-monitoring in essence because of the ability to raise funds.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Absolutely.

Would you also recommend including an additional tranche within the government-sponsored refugee strain for the Yazidi community this year?

**Mr. Hadji Hesso:** Absolutely.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Thank you.

Would you recommend that we prioritize the resettlement of Yazidis coming to Canada in communities where there are already pre-existing Yazidi communities?

**Mr. Hadji Hesso:** That is much recommended, yes.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Excellent.

Would you recommend that we prioritize in the PSR stream, as well as in the GAR stream, the family reunification of Yazidis to help some of these women through their trauma?

**Mr. Hadji Hesso:** Yes.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Thank you.

Would you recommend that the government examine perhaps a unique or innovative resettlement services program dedicated specifically to the Yazidi community to better support the activities your groups are currently undertaking in support of interpretation services, transportation, and trauma support, and to link them with existing government services to expedite that service delivery?

**Mr. Hadji Hesso:** I would recommend that. I think it would provide much better services to everybody.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Just for the record, I'll go down the row on that.

Ms. Naso and Mr. Weiss.

**Ms. Nafiya Naso:** Yes.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Mr. Hesso and Ms. Abdallah.

**Ms. Dalal Abdallah:** Yes.

**Mr. Hadji Hesso:** Yes.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** To acknowledge my colleague Ms. Zahid's comment about the identification or perhaps perceived reluctance to identify as Yazidi, would you recommend the continuation or perhaps the establishment of a special program for Canada outside of the traditional UNHCR process as we've seen this year, a continuation of it that would allow Yazidis to enter into Canada's resettlement services program without primarily relying on the UNHCR process?

**Ms. Dalal Abdallah:** Yes, I think that's definitely much needed for the Yazidis.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Why?

**Ms. Dalal Abdallah:** One of the big reasons I'm here is because I've seen that outcome. I mean, we haven't reached the number that we have promised the Yazidis. That is a very big thing. I believe that Yazidis are lost in the UN at times. We need to create a program that is dedicated directly for Yazidis.

We have seen this. We have brought so many refugees. We can bring more Yazidis into these refugee numbers. I don't think there is a problem with that, and there are a lot of people waiting and waiting for Canada to call their names. This is very urgent for Canada to do and to continue to do. I want this number to double. I mean, 1,200 Yazidis will be brought to Canada, yet thousands of girls, boys, and men are being killed.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** I have a very short time, so I'm just going to ask you to clarify. Do you think that if Canada relies solely on the existing UNHCR process it will hamper our ability to reunite families in the Yazidi community with people who are here right now?

**Ms. Dalal Abdallah:** Yes.

**Mr. Hadji Hesso:** I would say so.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Why?

**Mr. Hadji Hesso:** To have the UNHCR approve applications makes Canada's job much easier, from what I understand, than in the past, as a former refugee myself more than 10 years in Syria.

I think to have that number to expedite the cases.... If they can make a special case for the Yazidi, which is much recommended, that would be much better.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** We just had the high commissioner's representative testify that the UNHCR doesn't recommend refugees to Canada based on ethnicity. Would you be asking them to do that in this instance and prioritize Yazidi applications?

**Ms. Dalal Abdallah:** Yes.

**Mr. Hadji Hesso:** Absolutely.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Excellent.

How many families are in Calgary? Was there an existing community in Calgary before the resettlement occurred?

● (0930)

**Mr. Hadji Hesso:** No. There was no Yazidi community. There was only one family, and that was 20 years ago.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Do you understand why families were resettled in Calgary?

**Mr. Hadji Hesso:** I honestly don't know. We had a family in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, also. We brought them to Winnipeg. They wanted to be closer to the existing community.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Would you recommend that there be some examination of where Yazidis have been resettled this year, perhaps looking to move them to...?

**Mr. Hadji Hesso:** Yes.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Excellent.



**Mr. Hadji Hesso:** Even though the resettlement agency in Calgary has reached out to the Yazidi Association of Manitoba, which needs help with interpretation and translation for the newcomers.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Who haven't we heard from? Who does this committee need to hear from to get the right recommendations for this report? Is there anyone else in Canada?

**Mr. Hadji Hesso:** In terms of personnel?

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Yes. Is there anyone in Canada we should definitely be hearing from?

**Ms. Dalal Abdallah:** I think it would be great to bring some of the survivors to this table, people like Ghazel, who I talked about. They have the real information of what they have gone through and how the process is. I think it would be beneficial for Canada to see the work that is being done and how much of a life we're giving to these ISIS survivors by bringing them here.

**Mr. Hadji Hesso:** To add to that, I'm sure all of you know the boy Emad, who was reunited with his mother. The first words when he arrived were that he was not the only Emad. There are thousands of Emads who have been going through this as children.

I would like to bring a child as a witness, because nobody can tell a story better than people who have been through it.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** We'll go to Ms. Kwan.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses for your advocacy, for your ongoing work, for never giving up, and for reminding us about humanity and what this is all about. Thank you very much for that.

First, I would like to say thank you to you, Mr. Hesso, and to the Yazidi Association of Manitoba for your incredible work. When we saw that newscast of the young boy you talked about, Emad, I certainly got to work right away to do everything I could to assist and to urge the government to bring him here. I'm so glad he is here.

You're right. There are many others in that situation.

**Mr. Hadji Hesso:** Yes.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** We can do more. To that end, I want to ask questions along the lines of what my colleague, Michelle Rempel, asked. She asked specifically whether the government should open up private sponsorship. Let me go there first.

The immigration levels were just released for 2018, and the number of privately sponsored refugees is 18,000.

In terms of lifting the cap, should the government lift the cap for privately sponsored refugees altogether, whether it be for Yazidis or other people? The truth of the matter is that if Canadians will step up, and they are willing to do that, it will self-monitor. People who are able to do it will step up, and that in itself would cap the numbers.

Should the government lift the cap for privately sponsored for all categories? Can I get a quick answer from all the panellists?

Ms. Naso.

**Ms. Nafiya Naso:** Yes.

**Mr. Lorne Weiss:** Yes, with a qualification. I think we have to recognize that groups like the Yazidi are special needs groups. I would hate to see that they would have to compete for private sponsorship with groups that are more well established and that have more funds to provide the funds for private sponsorship.

I'm not suggesting that private sponsorship should be open for everybody. I think we have to recognize that there are certain groups that are going to require some preferential treatment. Certainly groups that are experiencing genocide would fall into that category.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** To respond to that, if the cap's lifted for everybody, then everybody has an opportunity to come, so there are no barriers for Yazidis.

**Mr. Lorne Weiss:** I feel certain groups have to have special incentives.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Mr. Hesso, yes.

**Mr. Hadji Hesso:** Yes.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Yes.

Ms. Abdallah.

**Ms. Dalal Abdallah:** Yes, of course.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you.

I want to go to the question of government-sponsored refugees because when we heard from previous panels on this issue, people suggested that as a first step we should target at least 1,000, and then move beyond that because it's only a first step. Others continue to say that governments should move the number up to 5,000, and the officials who appeared before us pretty well told us that the government has no intention to move beyond what we have done so far. To this question on the government-assisted numbers, the number released for 2018 is set at 7,500. That's for all government-assisted refugees from everywhere. Should that number increase?

For the Yazidis specifically, I have always hoped that the 1,200 the government committed to bringing in would be a special measure over and above the refugees brought in from elsewhere. That did not happen.

In going forward, would you call for the government to increase that number and at least try to target what the other panellists brought to our attention, namely 5,000 above and beyond the immigration-level numbers of 7,500?

We'll go down the panel.

Mrs. Naso.

● (0935)

**Ms. Nafiya Naso:** Yes, I think 5,000 is a fair number.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you.

Mr. Weiss.

**Mr. Lorne Weiss:** Absolutely.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you.

Mr. Hesso.

**Mr. Hadji Hesso:** Yes, 5,000-plus would be much better.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Above and beyond, so as a special measure.

**Mr. Hadji Hesso:** Yes.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Let the record show that all the witnesses are nodding.

Ms. Abdallah.

**Ms. Dalal Abdallah:** Oh, yes, 5,000 and above.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you.

I want to go to the question of location because previous witnesses, and you here today, have indicated that it's important to have a community to support each other. The officials reported that Toronto, London, Winnipeg, and Calgary are the designated locations. I'm a little taken aback to hear that Calgary did not have the infrastructure or community to support the Yazidi refugees. Lethbridge is another community that is identified. Does that community have that infrastructure in place?

Mr. Hesso.

**Mr. Hadji Hesso:** I had that conversation with an immigration assistant for the Prairies and the Northwest Territories. Lethbridge was targeted and they were going to bring some families to that city specifically, but after the Yazidis were consulted and the communications that we have done, the people who arrived in Canada wanted to go to the existing communities. Pretty much when they first arrived at Toronto's Pearson International Airport or Montreal, or wherever in Canada, they wanted to go to where the existing Yazidi communities were. It makes their job easier, and it's better to integrate with the specific conditions they may have. It makes it easier for everyone.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Absolutely, I agree. Is Lethbridge one of those communities?

**Mr. Hadji Hesso:** It was, yes.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Okay, great. I just wanted to double-check.

**Mr. Hadji Hesso:** There are no families to my knowledge in Lethbridge. There are in Calgary, yes.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** There's nobody in Lethbridge?

**Mr. Hadji Hesso:** Not to my knowledge.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Then it's not a community with the infrastructure?

**Mr. Hadji Hesso:** To my knowledge no Yazidi families or single members live in Lethbridge today.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I see. Thank you.

That's important information.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I wonder if you know of other good communities to resettle Yazidi families. I think if you could pass that information to this committee, so it could be communicated to the government, that would be really important work. That's resettlement 101 from that perspective.

Resettlement services are one of the keys we need to be sure are in place. What does the government need to do to ensure proper resettlement services?

We'll start with you, Mr. Hesso.

**Mr. Hadji Hesso:** I think the government needs to co-operate with the existing communities and the people who have vacancies and are known to the IRCC specifically. I think it makes everyone's job easier with socializing, interpretation, and medical issues, in every way possible. I think it makes it better for the families who arrive when we greet them at the airport, and it may put smiles on their faces as Yazidi families here welcome them.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Hesso.

Mr. Whalen.

**Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

These are always such traumatic meetings when we hear about the stories of the Yazidis and the horrors that are happening to them and the genocide.

I'm trying to figure out how we can reconcile some of the things we're hearing from the United Nations commission and also how we can identify Yazidis if the UN doesn't do that.

Ms. Naso, you said there are camps that are essentially Yazidi camps. Which camps are they?

• (0940)

**Ms. Nafiya Naso:** There are camps in Kurdistan. There are seven Yazidi-only camps in Kurdistan, and there is one large camp in Turkey.

**Mr. Nick Whalen:** They're Yazidi-only.

**Ms. Nafiya Naso:** Yes.

**Mr. Nick Whalen:** Do you know the names of those camps?

**Ms. Nafiya Naso:** Yes. In Turkey it's the Midyat camp. That's where the families we are privately sponsoring are from. In Iraq there is Khanke camp, and....

**The Chair:** You can get those to us later, if that is more helpful.

**Mr. Nick Whalen:** You can provide the committee with a list of the camps.

You would be of the impression that if we targeted our refugee resettlement efforts at those camps, we would inadvertently receive a large number of Yazidis as a result of that.

**Ms. Nafiya Naso:** Yes.

I can provide those names to the committee.

**Mr. Nick Whalen:** Thank you.

Mr. Hesso.

**Mr. Hadji Hesso:** In the past we've offered the IRCC our help. We've offered to be part of the mission that goes to those camps so that we can identify the Yazidi people at the camps themselves and make the processing much easier for everyone. We can settle the families who have escaped the ISIS militants or the women and girls who we talked about today. We are willing to be—

**Mr. Nick Whalen:** Thank you.

**Ms. Nafiya Naso:** Maybe an official—

**Mr. Nick Whalen:** This is wonderful. I'm going to move on to my next question, thanks. That's really helpful.

Ms. Abdallah, you speak about the work you're doing in London in the health care system, and you're helping, women, girls, and boys access medical services. Do you provide translation or do you provide counselling? What's your role?

**Ms. Dalal Abdallah:** My role here with the Yazidi ladies is to develop a connection and relationship with them. I see what the family needs. Even other agencies, like the intercommunity health centre, as I said, contact me and sometimes bring me in. At the hospital, I am very much part of the refugee program that has been developed.

**Mr. Nick Whalen:** That's great. You're the perfect person to ask this question. How many clients or how many families are you able to help with a full-time position like that?

**Ms. Dalal Abdallah:** I volunteer my time with these girls and ladies, so I'm very limited with my time. I do have to provide for myself. There are bills to pay. I volunteer my time as much as I can. I sit down with them and have conversations and just get them to have this comfort zone with me.

**Mr. Nick Whalen:** Do you have a sense of how many families you're helping? Do you have a number?

**Ms. Dalal Abdallah:** I'm currently seeing about five families that are survivors. It's difficult for me as an individual to hear their stories and to be so helpless.

**Mr. Nick Whalen:** If we were going to train people from within your community to be more like you and to help with this settlement effort, it sounds as though we would need 50 of you to bring in 5,000 people or 100 of you in the different communities. It doesn't sound as though we're at the critical mass yet, but we are moving in the right direction in order to do that. If we're talking about bringing in 5,000 Yazidis, how long will it take to have enough people like you, Ms. Abdallah, in order to provide the services that the refugees will need in order to be properly integrated?

**Ms. Dalal Abdallah:** In the community in London, Ontario, a lot of them are not Yazidis and they are helping the Yazidis. The whole community is coming together and helping each other. Of course they have this comfort zone with me because I speak Kurmanji with them. I'm very comfortable with them. I sit down with them on my own time in places other than hospital settings and all of these other settings that are very overwhelming at times.

I believe it's very important for the Yazidi community to step up to help the new refugees. They feel comfortable. They feel relieved. They feel comfortable enough to tell you what they need and what they require. These people have no idea of our society, so we have to teach them what we have and what kind of services we have.

**Mr. Nick Whalen:** In terms of cultural differences, again, please excuse my ignorance of Yazidism, your religion, and your culture, but I'm trying to understand whether or not people want to come to Canada.

If I look at the distribution of Yazidis outside of the Kurdistan area, we're looking at 100,000 in Germany, where there is a solid community where people can interrelate, and then you look down at the list that is on Wikipedia, and you get down as far as 7,000 in Sweden, and throughout the list, there are different numbers, but Canada has such a small number.

Does your culture require a critical mass for people to remain Yazidi in Canada?

● (0945)

**Ms. Dalal Abdallah:** No.

**Mr. Nick Whalen:** Do people want to stay, or do people want to come to Canada?

**Ms. Dalal Abdallah:** Yes, from my experience, they would love Canada to open its doors. There are not a lot of Yazidis in Canada because we haven't opened the doors for them. We have not given them a chance.

I know that Yazda can provide you documents after document of applications of people who are crying, who are waiting, who are struggling to come to Canada.

**Mr. Nick Whalen:** Do you feel there is enough demand to meet that 5,000 request?

**Ms. Dalal Abdallah:** Oh, yes, of course, 100%, and even more.

**Mr. Nick Whalen:** Through the camps, then, you'll be able to provide us a list—

**Mr. Hadji Hesso:** Yes.

**Mr. Nick Whalen:** —as the way to most easily go about this.

**Mr. Hadji Hesso:** Yes.

**Mr. Nick Whalen:** Okay.

The UN representative also gave us some pause in suggesting that some of the women and children who have come here already are at risk from within their own community.

Do you get a sense that is an honest risk, or is that not factual? And if so, if we bring over people from the same camps, can we have some assurance that it won't be the people who will put the children we've brought over at further risk? That's one of the risk factors that he mentioned when he was at our meeting on Tuesday. The reason some of these children were allowed to come is because they were at risk in the camp.

**The Chair:** Be very brief.

**Mr. Hadji Hesso:** Can you specify that question, in terms of what has happened in their own community? Can you specify the...?

**Mr. Nick Whalen:** Yes, specifically he mentioned that the children of the women who had given birth during their time in captivity with ISIS were at risk. They were highlighted as people to bring to Canada for protection.

**Mr. Hadji Hesso:** I think we all know what happened back in 2014, which was recognized by the United Nations as genocide.

Those women and girls, we all know, had been sold, as my colleague recognized, for as little as a pack of cigarettes. I don't think they went on vacation. They have been raped and enslaved for months and months and years now. There are many women and girls who have been pregnant. They have given birth.

But what can we do about that? Forgetting the religious side, as humanity, I think that child, or whoever was born, has nothing to do with what happened. We need to go after the people who did that, first, and that's what we need to do. We need to bring them, to heal them, and to recognize that genocide in order to help more Yazidi people.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** I need to end there, and I need to end this panel.

Thank you very much for your contribution to our update. We are attempting to get a little picture in time as to where we're at. This this has been very helpful.

We're going to suspend for a few minutes while we change the panel at the table.

• (0945)

(Pause)

• (0950)

**The Chair:** I call us back to order.

At this meeting, we have simultaneous interpretation from English to French, French to English, and English to Arabic, which will be a relay interpretation from French to English to Arabic, as needed. We also have the ability, with a community interpreter, for Kurmanji, so we have all languages covered, if that is needed in our meeting. I want to thank the clerk for organizing that activity.

We have several individuals we are going to hear from in this second part. Basema Ali Jedaan Alo is not able to be with us today because she has a child who is ill, but we have others.

We are going to begin with Professor Payam Akhavan, for seven minutes, and then we'll move from there.

You are joining us from Oxford.

• (0955)

**Dr. Payam Akhavan (Associate Professor, Faculty of Law, McGill University, As an Individual):** Yes.

Could you please change my translation to English?

**The Chair:** Okay.

[Translation]

**Dr. Payam Akhavan:** Good morning from Oxford.

I would like to begin by thanking the members of the committee for inviting me. I am honoured to be able to share a few ideas on the Yazidi minority situation.

[English]

I really want to thank the committee for still being engaged with this issue. Having worked in the human rights field for quite some years, I realize that when the headlines move on, the victims and survivors are forgotten, but sadly they are...

I'm sorry. I have a problem with the translation.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I think what's happening is that channel 1, which says "English", is actually coming through in French.

**The Chair:** Yes. I noticed that. I suspect it's because we have extra channels going on today.

[Translation]

Channel 2 is for English, and channel 1 is for French.

[English]

You don't need to listen to anything right now; you can just talk.

**Dr. Payam Akhavan:** I was hearing myself *en français* when I was speaking to you in English, so it was just a bit distracting. Apologies.

I spent some time, in the summer of 2006, advising the Kurdish regional government on the question of accountability for the ISIS atrocities against the Yazidis. In that capacity, I travelled to Erbil and Dohuk and met a number of the survivors, in particular, in the Kabato camp. I even spoke to some of the ISIS captives in the prison in Dohuk, so I will share with you some thoughts today about that experience to the extent that it may be relevant to the work of the committee.

My first observation is that the conditions in the IDP camps remain quite difficult. Some of the survivors have now been in those camps since 2014. In some instances, they are still using the same tents they used three years ago. There are all sorts of areas where humanitarian relief should be given to those who are still in those camps.

My second observation is that virtually all of the people I spoke with did not want to leave Iraq to become refugees in other countries, but wanted to be able to go back to their towns and villages. Of course, today, ISIS no longer controls Mosul as it did when I was there. It is still a threat in isolated pockets in the more remote regions of Iraq and Syria, but now there's a new problem for the Yazidi, which are the Shia militia. They have occupied some of the areas where ISIS has withdrawn, so there's a continuing security problem that doesn't allow many of the IDPs to go back to their villages. I heard time and again that people wanted to go back to their homes.

My third observation is that the survivors have very pressing psychosocial needs, which I know have been recognized in the work of the committee. That includes the testimony about the pioneering efforts in Germany to bring some of the most severely traumatized women and girls to Germany for the purpose, among others, of receiving some form of therapy. I am certain that the problem also has been considered in relation to members of the Yazidi minority who arrive in Canada as refugees.

However, I would like to focus my comments today on, if you like, another dimension, which is the need for collective therapy and healing among the survivors, which was the area of my own expertise that I was asked to advise the Kurdistan regional government about. In that regard, I would like to turn to the June 15, 2016 report on Yazidi genocide of the UN independent commission of inquiry on Syria, which I know the committee has previously considered. I understand that at the recommendation of the committee, the government adopted some of the recommendations of the commission on the psychosocial needs of Yazidi IDPs and refugees.

I would like to focus today on one of the recommendations of that commission that I was involved in, which I think has still been overlooked. It has far-reaching consequences on the processes of healing and reconciliation in the local communities in Dohuk and that region that has been most directly affected by these atrocities. That recommendation appears as subparagraph 209(b) of the commission's report, in which the commission recommends the following:

● (1000)

to the Government of Iraq and the Kurdish Regional Government...(b) Establish a forum, based in the Duhok region, which advances reconciliation between the Yazidi community and Arab and Kurdish Muslims. Such a forum may include the establishment of an internationally-advised Truth Commission which would simultaneously seek to establish a historical record, provide survivors with a catharsis and opportunity for healing by telling their stories, and which would expose and delegitimize ISIS crimes in the region through broadcast and dissemination of the testimony

This recommendation that we made to the UN commission has largely been ignored, although it is a very simple, cost-effective way of providing, if you like, collective psychosocial assistance to the survivors.

We know that the discussions about the prosecution of those crimes before the International Criminal Court have unfortunately gotten nowhere. The Iraqi government has refused to recognize the jurisdiction of the court. There have been some efforts, still largely unsuccessful, at having local trials. But my experience, having worked in several war zones around the world, is that it is extremely important for the survivors. We have here, of course, Nadia Murad, who has spoken about this at great length. It is extremely important for the survivors' healing and for the reclaiming of their own humanity to have some process of accountability. Beyond criminal justice, a truth commission provides a very important platform for survivors to tell their stories, to reckon with their past, and to promote reconciliation, and in that sense, it should be seen as an accountability mechanism that would also have a far-reaching psychosocial impact.

Therefore, my comments to you today aren't really addressed to the refugees who are accepted in Canada, which I think is highly commendable, but more to how we can help the much larger populations that invariably will remain behind in the IDP camps and will still need to deal with this profound trauma.

**The Chair:** I'm afraid I need you to wrap up.

**Dr. Payam Akhavan:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** We'll go to the other teleconference as well. Nadia Murad Basee Taha is sharing her time with Haider Elias. Perhaps we could begin with Ms. Taha, and then you'll share your time however you decide.

● (1005)

**Ms. Nadia Murad Basee Taha (President, Nadia Murad Initiative, Yazda) (Interpretation):** [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]...They took us to one province in Germany, Baden-Wurtemberg, as 1,000 survivors. Now we have a better life. We live safely. We have medical care. There are more than 250 families, and we were expecting and hoping that Canada would bring more Yazidis into Canada.

There are a lot of survivors and families that I communicate with personally. They have had only one or two interviews with Canada and are still waiting to be taken. They have no information about when they will travel to Canada, because it has taken between two and four months for the interviews. They have had all the medical checkups and are waiting to depart. Hundreds of families who have done those interviews and concluded them are still communicating and asking us the same questions: When will be our turn? When are we supposed to come? We're hoping the Government of Canada will not take a longer time to bring those people in.

People are so tired. People are exhausted. In those camps there are thousands of survivors who miss their loved ones and families, and they are waiting for the chance to start a new life.

Sinjar is still suffering. Right now none of those mass graves of Yazidis has been opened or talked about.

● (1010)

**The Chair:** I will need to interrupt for one minute.

You have one minute left. If you want to give some time to Mr. Elias, he will have only one minute.

**Ms. Nadia Murad Basee Taha:** Okay.

**The Chair:** Mr. Elias.

**Mr. Haider Elias (President, Yazda):** Mr. Chair, members of the committee, ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for inviting me and my colleagues to speak and give our perspective about resettling the Yazidi community members in Canada.

I will keep my remarks very brief, as my time was cut down to 10%. I will talk about some difficulties and challenges of Yazda as an organization participating in the process of submitting applications to the Canadian government during the resettlement project over at least the past eight months. I will talk to you briefly about some of our challenges since we established our organization in late 2014.

We created a database of Yazidi women, female children, and any other survivors traced back to their community who'd been victimized by ISIS and the violence in Iraq. We had all the data already available for those applications. We had qualified those members of the Yazidi community, especially female children and women, who'd been victimized. We submitted their applications. But we faced a challenge that made it very difficult for the Yazda organization. The bar was raised for us to submit those applications. We found that some of the difficulties increased with regard to submitting applications for the families admitted to Canada. One of them was that UNHCR was dealing with multiple random individuals and organizations. As a result, the applications were duplicated. Many cases were rejected and denied, because two copies of the applications would be submitted to UNHCR by two different individuals or organizations. Families had to bear the responsibility of not being accepted as refugees when it was through no fault of their own.

They raised the bar recently for those applications—for example, requiring that families must have very recently survived or very recently escaped from ISIS. Hundreds if not thousands of applications have been submitted to our database. Going back to January of 2015, we still receive, every single day, applications from people who have recently survived. That's one of the other difficulties we have. Being very selective, and requiring that for individuals and families who were recently released, is a very difficult thing for us to do.

As well, multiple organizations have been dealt with differently. Some of the requirements for Yazda have been different from those of other organizations. Yazda submitted multiple applications for cases that according to our database were qualified in terms of the Iraqi government and for any organization helping families go to Australia, Germany, or Canada. According to our standards, those families were qualified, but some of the families were rejected. They complained that—

•(1015)

**The Chair:** I'm afraid I need to end you there, just to make sure the members of the committee have time to ask questions. I'm sure you'll be able to get more of your thoughts out during the question period.

**Mr. Haider Elias:** No problem.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Now we'll go to Mr. Barber.

**Mr. Matthew Travis Barber (As an Individual):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and honourable members. I am grateful for the opportunity to come and address this committee today.

My name is Matthew Barber. I am a Ph.D. student studying Islamic thought and Middle Eastern history at the University of Chicago. I had done research with the Yazidi community for several years prior to the genocide, and I was living in Iraq when the genocide took place. After that, I began to respond and advocate for the community, and later served for one year in Iraq, 2015-2016, leading Yazda's projects there in humanitarian relief and advocacy work for the Yazidi community.

As a non-Canadian, I cannot speak to the issues here in Canada, but I can talk about the situation in Iraq at length and hopefully provide some insight. I am really grateful that the Government of Canada is providing leadership and, hopefully, serving as an example to my country on the kind of response that's needed for the Yazidi community. We should feel embarrassed that we are not doing what you are doing, that we are not doing more.

In terms of the situation of the survivors in Iraq at present, there are still people living near the Yazidis who have strong sympathies for the IS organization—the Islamic State—but the organization has been dismantled and eliminated in terms of being an organized threat right now to the Yazidi community. That doesn't mean there will not be more possibility of genocide down the road, but at present slaughter and additional cases of enslavement are not the primary risk.

The case for bringing survivors to Canada or to other countries for resettlement remains strong, however, and it has a lot to do with the

conditions that people are living in now. There are four main areas that I believe are of issue regarding the recovery of survivors.

One is the lack of proper mental health and psychosocial supportive services in the country, which was discussed in the last panel.

Another is political instability. I disagree with Dr. Akhavan that somehow the Shia militias have replaced the IS organization as a threat, impeding the return of Yazidis to the area. That is not true. The Kurdistan Regional Government provided a much greater impediment to the return of people to Sinjar. That threat is no longer an issue, because KDP, the ruling party, has withdrawn the peshmerga. Things are actually more positive now with regard to the potential return of people, but things remain difficult and there is political instability. There needs to be a transition from the Hashi Shabi Shia militias to the kind of self-administration the Yazidis have been asking for in the last three years. In this context, there remains political instability, even if things are slowly improving.

Economic conditions are another factor. It is very difficult for people to return to Sinjar, where their homes and farms are destroyed. Many women who were enslaved, and now carry tremendous psychological damage and mental health issues, have to work long hours in a very difficult and bleak environment. This is not the environment that can provide the opportunity for a person to rebuild their sense of personal dignity after having suffered the kind of trauma that Mr. Hadji Hesso talked about in the previous panel. Canada can provide an environment where women who have been subjected to this form of violence have a better opportunity to recover in terms of their mental health and so forth.

The last issue, I would say, would be the Yazidi family. Some families are very healthy. They have embraced their female family members post-enslavement in the way that the Yazidi religious leadership has requested they do. Other families—as is the case with families anywhere in the world—are less healthy and are struggling with issues of stigma and so forth. Also, there is an issue if young women are pushed towards early marriage and towards becoming mothers while they haven't had a chance to recover psychologically from these issues or even think about whether they want to be mothers. Motherhood is very challenging in this post-enslavement context. I believe that expanding the number of Yazidi refugees who can be resettled in Canada, specifically for the survivor population, is a very good idea and an important idea.

My last point, before I finish, is that I believe that, in addition to this resettlement strategy, there needs to be a multipronged approach to a comprehensive response to the Yazidi genocide and the needs of the people. The purpose of all these resettlement efforts and so forth should be the long-term preservation of the Yazidi community. It is wonderful to resettle several thousand people here. That is of major benefit to them. However, there are several hundred thousand Yazidi people who will not leave Iraq, who will remain there, some by choice, some by lack of opportunity to leave. Some of them who stay by choice are committed to rebuilding their homeland, the Sinjar area, which is a very important religious centre. I can speak at length about the nature of the Yazidi religion and the fact that Iraq remains an important focus for religious practice. It is hard to replicate that in the diaspora, so preserving the Iraqi homeland for the Yazidi community is very important for its tradition and culture.

• (1020)

I know that this committee is focused on citizenship and immigration, but I believe it should dialogue with other committees in the Canadian government and other agencies to also focus on humanitarian relief and reconstruction efforts for the Yazidi community that remains in Sinjar. This is vital.

Lastly, I will just mention that when I was in Iraq, I supervised a resettlement program on our side—the NGO side, with Yazda—with the Australian government to resettle Syrian-born Yazidi refugees who had crossed from Syria into Iraq because of the violence of the Syrian conflict. Australia resettled that entire population to their country and worked entirely with us through that process. With regard to all of the questions that the other member had about working with the UNHCR, about whether Yazidis want to leave, and ethnic and religious identity, and challenges like these, it's unfortunate that the member has left because I can also speak to those issues in the Q and A.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Very good.

I feel you have more to say.

To all the witnesses, I just remind you that if you want to send anything in writing to the committee, that's also helpful.

**Mr. Matthew Travis Barber:** I have submitted a detailed handout with my recommendations and suggestions.

**The Chair:** It's here. I have—

**Mr. Matthew Travis Barber:** It's being translated into French, I understand, so it supposedly on Friday will become available to the members.

**The Chair:** Perfect.

Mr. Ismail, our last witness, is next.

**Mr. Mirza Ismail (Founder and President, Canada Section, Yazidi Human Rights Organization-International):** Good morning all.

Honourable Chair, committee members, and honoured guests, I am honoured to be here today. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak at this briefing on the settlement issues related to Yazidi women and girls.

I would also like to thank our respected Canadian government for recognizing the Yazidi genocide by ISIS. The Yazidi are, indeed, the victims of genocide and I am pleading with each and every one of you to rescue them from certain destruction.

Yezidis are an ancient and proud people from the heart of Mesopotamia, the birthplace of civilization and the birthplace of many of the world's religions. We believe in a supreme God and in God's seven archangels. Yezidi is a religion, a language, and a culture.

You are probably aware of the current political strife in Iraq between the KRG and the central government. When the KRG declared an independent Kurdistan on September 25, Iraq's Popular Mobilization Force started fighting the KRG and has re-taken

Kirkuk and most parts of Mosul province, including Sinjar, the main Yezidi city that was hit the most by ISIS. Since most of the Yezidis and Christians live in the so-called disputed area, Sinjar and Nineveh Plains, a strip between the Arabs and the Kurds, we are caught in the crossfire of the battle. When there is fighting, we minorities are paying the cost with our lives.

Yezidi women and girls who have resettled in Canada are very happy and deeply appreciate the Canadian government's efforts to bring them here to safety and freedom where they can sleep without fear. It's truly heartwarming to see these traumatized women and girls coming back to their normal life. However, the Yezidi women and girls arriving in Canada do not know there is an established Canadian Yezidi community here. They are not informed and the government does not connect them with our established Canadian Yezidi community here, which adds to their trauma, fear, and feeling of isolation.

Some Yezidis do not speak Arabic, and upon their arrival at Canadian airports, they are met only by Arabic-speaking government translators. When those Yezidis ask to stay with their extended family or relatives here, the translators tell them, "No, you are to resettle in a different city, different province. You have to go there. This is the law." This adds to their confusion and fear. Some Yezidis thought they were back in the hands of ISIS.

There are problems when it comes to finding housing. It is left to the refugees to find their own dwellings. The housing NGOs provide apartment listings and it's then the job of the refugees to follow up on their own. They have to do this without any familiarity with Canadian culture, language skills, and transportation etc. The newly arrived Yezidi families who come to Canada in the escape program consist of women with young children who have lost their husbands.

There are also issues with the children. Some families, including Ms. Basema—who is supposed to be here but, unfortunately, due to personal issues, she couldn't—have been in Canada for more than four months and still have not received their child tax benefit. Until that happens, the amount of the money allocated to families barely covers the rent, let alone food and other expenses. Also, landlords are asking not only for the first and last month's rent, despite it being illegal, but up to four months rent in advance. This leaves the refugees with no money, no food, no transportation, no clothing and other necessities.

Case workers who are looking after the refugees often have more than 70 families in their caseload. This leaves traumatized refugees isolated and without the full support they need. Since these Yezidi women and their children are the firsthand survivors of ISIS and are severely traumatized, there needs to be a trauma support program for them.

When a refugee family moves into their new home, sometimes it takes up to two weeks or more for the government to provide furniture, including beds. This means they must sleep and eat on the floor until the furniture arrives.

•(1025)

Therefore, the newly arrived Yazidi families are more comfortable housed close to the Yazidi community. This is important for the Yazidis' sense of connection and well-being. Our community embraces newly arrived Yazidi refugees, which goes a long way toward the healing of our traumatized, escaped women and their children. The contracted NGOs do not take this into consideration when helping to resettle Yazidi families. This leaves the new Yazidi refugees isolated, without language skills, transportation, and their network of support.

Project Abraham was founded by Mozuud Freedom Foundation and the Yezidi Human Rights Organization-International three years ago. Its goal is to reunite the Yazidi families. Some of the family members are here in Canada and some are still in the UN refugee camps in Turkey or elsewhere. Project Abraham now has more than 150 volunteers, and they are providing excellent help and support to these new Yazidi refugees.

These are our recommendations and solutions. Over the next three years, we request that Canada bring in 20,000 Yazidis, with priority being given to escaped Yazidi women, their children, and orphans who are the first-hand victims of ISIS, and their immediate family members.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada should allow the escaped and traumatized Yazidis to stay in the same city where they have relatives and should inform the Canadian Yazidis of the coming of new Yazidis, prior to their arrival.

The monthly income of the Yazidis who come to Canada in the escape program is not enough, especially for rent. We strongly request the federal government work with the municipal governments to provide these Yazidis with government housing.

**The Chair:** I'm going to need you to come to a conclusion; you have just a few more seconds.

**Mr. Mirza Ismail:** We request our Canadian government to intervene in the liberation of more than 3,000 Yazidi women and children who are still held by ISIS members in Iraq, Syria, and other states in the Middle East. We request our government to help support the creation of an autonomous region for the Yazidi and Chaldo-Assyrians in Sinjar and Nineveh Plains, with their own police and security forces, and provide necessary supplies and training to be able to defend themselves from any future attack.

We ask our government to send humanitarian aid on an urgent basis directly to those internally displaced in Iraq. There is a real threat of starvation, dehydration, and disease, especially in Mount Sinjar. This assistance should come from neutral, non-governmental sources to avoid the diversion of food, water, and medicine.

•(1030)

**The Chair:** I'm afraid I need to end you there. Thank you very much.

Just to give the committee members a heads-up, I'm going to suggest that we have three seven-minute rounds, which will take us to about five minutes over our normal time, if anyone has to run. If anyone wants to share time, there will only be one round for each party.

Mr. Tabbara, you have seven minutes.

**Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all the panellists for being here today.

Since the the Yazidi crisis happened in August 2014, the international community has been slow to respond. From 2014 to 2015, the previous government only brought in three Yazidis under its watch. However, since the report, our government has brought in 807 survivors, and we'll continue to do more before the end of the year to bring in 1,200 refugees.

Mr. Payam Akhavan, after I cite the following, I want you to comment. Our witness in the prior meeting, Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze, said:

Throughout the world we have more than 22 million refugees. We have identified 1.2 million of them who are in need of resettlement, and out of them we will be able this year to settle less than 90,000, mainly to the United States, Canada, and Australia.

A large number of refugees around the world need resettlement, and only a small number can be resettled. Could you elaborate more on that?

**Dr. Payam Akhavan:** As I said, and other panellists have also explained, it's impossible to resettle the hundreds of thousands of victims, and Canada must bear its share, hopefully in concert with other countries. That's why we also need to look at the protection of IDPs in the camps and how we can contribute to both the process of fleeing and finding ways that will allow them to return to their homes, which is why I was speaking about the security situation in Shingal. While this committee is focused on accepting Yazidi refugees, it should situate that within a broader engagement with the wider context of the situation. In that regard, I did want to emphasize the recommendation to have some sort of a truth commission as a very cost-effective way of helping both the healing process and the reconciliation process, because as one of the panellists explained, the tensions still exist with neighbouring Arab and Kurdish Muslim villages and neighbours who had a hand in these atrocities. We have to deal with those issues if there's going to be a long-term solution and opportunity for a return to Shingal for the displaced.

**Mr. Marwan Tabbara:** That's a good segue.

Mr. Barber, you talked about a three-pronged approach in the region. I think everyone in this committee would agree that security and sustainability within that region is what the multinational community needs to do to ensure that we have ongoing safety not only for minorities, but for everyone in that region.

Could you elaborate on your three-pronged approach that you briefly got into in your statement?



**Mr. Matthew Travis Barber:** The Yazidi community has been extremely consistent over the last close to three and a half years since the genocide about what they want. They're very unified in this. They want a self-governed, local administration within the Sinjar region that would provide the Yazidis from that area the opportunity to govern their affairs with a non-partisan security force, a local security force. One of the problems for the Sinjar region is that security forces that have controlled it in the past have always been party militias or aligned with particular political groups. The peshmerga, who withdrew from Sinjar and allowed the genocide to happen, were not a national Kurdish defence force committed to defending all of Kurdistan equally. They were beholden to a particular party, which is one reason why the trust of the Yazidis is so broken with the Kurdistan Region. I wholeheartedly agree with Dr. Akhavan about the need to restore security in Shingal, into Sinjar, and to bring the Yazidis from the camps back home. The time is ripe to do that now.

The Kurdish government doesn't have any legitimacy for the Yazidi community, so to me, a truth commission based in Dohuk is a little bit questionable. I also think the emphasis should be first on restoring the normalcy of Yazidi life—they've been stuck in the camps for over three years. Help bring them home; help them create the kind of local government they need in Sinjar, where they'll be safe; then work on reconciliation. It is hard to go to someone who has wronged you and work on reconciliation while you're still suffering in the conditions of the camps and so forth.

Now, the international community has been very slow to respond to this request from the Yazidi community. The fact that the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the peshmerga have left leaves two contenders in the Sinjar area now, PKK-sponsored militias and the Yazidi militias that are under the umbrella of the Shiite militias that Dr. Akhavan mentioned. These groups that are there now need to be transitioned into a less-politicized local force that will be run by the Yazidis, and they need the sponsorship of the international community to help facilitate that process.

• (1035)

**Mr. Marwan Tabbara:** Can I just stop you there? I wanted to share my time with Mr. Ehsassi and to make sure he has time.

**Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.):** Thank you.

I'd like to welcome back Professor Akhavan. First of all, congratulations for being the keynote speaker at the Massey Lectures.

I was looking at the transcript of your testimony over the years. You've always been very consistent. You've looked beyond immediate challenges. You've always considered a truth commission to be a very significant part of that, but you said today that this has largely fallen on deaf ears. Could you tell us if there is any country that is assisting in this endeavour, and what Canada should be doing at this juncture?

**Dr. Payam Akhavan:** Thank you very much, Ali, for inviting me.

The answer to your question simply is that there has been little to no interest in looking at some of the more grassroots initiatives, which will allow for not just a process of healing but also a transforming of the political culture that has allowed these atrocities

to be committed and allows for this culture of intolerance to persist. I agree that there are—

**The Chair:** I'm going to need to cut you off, sort of rudely, because I really am under a time strain. I'm sorry about that.

Ms. Kwan.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses. You've given us some very important and also very compelling information.

I'd like to first say a big hello and a thank you to Nadia, who is coming to us all the way from New York. I recall that the last time the various witnesses came there was a request for urgent action from the government in terms of resettlement of Yazidis, to which the government accepted with the 1,200 number. My recollection was that it was also just the beginning that people were hoping for in terms of action to be taken.

We heard Mr. Ismail today suggesting the 20,000 number, so I want to ask this question that I asked of the last panel: whether or not you would support the government for it to increase the resettlement numbers for the Yazidi population as a special measure, so that the number does not come out of existing government-assisted refugees or privately sponsored refugees, to reach a minimum of 5,000. Can I get a quick answer? I'll start with Nadia.

**Mr. Matthew Travis Barber:** I won't answer—

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I'll ask Nadia to answer the question first.

**Dr. Payam Akhavan:** Can you repeat the question?

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Okay. The quick question is, would you support the government increasing the resettlement numbers of Yazidis to at least 5,000 as a special measure—that's above and beyond the 7,500 level for the government-assisted refugees—and to lift the cap on all privately sponsored refugees?

• (1040)

**Ms. Nadia Murad Basee Taha (Interpretation):** Of course. We want the government to increase the number of Yazidis who are registered to come here so we can have a bigger community in Canada. This would be tremendous support for Yazidis, especially if the number of resettled refugees would be increased.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you.

Mr. Ismail.

**Mr. Mirza Ismail:** The Yazidis are the victims of genocide. I think a civil war is very different from a genocide. From 23 million Yazidis 750 years ago, the Yazidis have dropped down to less than two million worldwide. Canada has been in the front lines when we want to save people, and we are hoping that Canada can do this. We know that Canada can do it. The Canadians can do it. We hope that they can bring over 20,000 in the next three years—that's what we are asking for—to save them from destruction. That would be greatly appreciated.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you.

Mr. Elias.

**Mr. Haider Elias:** I would strongly agree with that, and I say yes to your question. I think it's very important to increase the number of Yazidi refugees in Canada as victims of genocide. I think this resettlement plan and project is a godsend for the Yazidi people. It is very special to them. It never has happened to them in that special way with any other country.

I think the Yazidis will always remember that at the heart of their ancestral homeland they were attacked, that genocide was committed against them, and that their own country was not able to protect them from rape, killing, kidnapping, and all of that, but also that the Canadian people, from thousands of miles, extended their help and their hands. They helped them. This is very historic and—

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you very much. I don't mean to be rude, but I want to get other questions in by way of recommendation.

In terms of my next recommendation, I think a number of the witnesses talked about the need for humanitarian relief now, and the need to work through an independent agency so that the aid goes to the camps and the people where it is needed. That's along the lines of really supporting the people who are there and who may not be able to get resettlement support.

I want to touch on that very quickly with the panellists by way of their specific recommendations on what the government should do now with respect to that aspect. Perhaps I could start with Mr. Barber, with just a short answer so that I can get everybody to participate.

**Mr. Matthew Travis Barber:** I haven't followed the situation in Canada very closely, but I saw the number \$25 million floated as being reserved for resettlement. With money like that, you could rebuild several towns.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Sorry, we don't have \$25 million; it's \$25,000.

All right, I'm going to move to Mr. Ismail.

**Mr. Matthew Travis Barber:** It was some kind of budgetary allotment that I saw.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** It's not \$25 million, I guarantee you.

**Mr. Matthew Travis Barber:** With a small amount of money, you can rebuild many homes.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you.

I'm going to go to Mr. Ismail.

**Mr. Mirza Ismail:** On October 25, the U.S. vice-president said that from that day forward they were going to send humanitarian aid directly to the persecuted community. We hope that Canada will do the same thing, send it directly, to work with the NGOs, especially in the Sinjar Mountains, and send whatever is necessary there.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Do you have a figure in mind, by way of recommendation?

**Mr. Mirza Ismail:** The recommendation is that they need everything. They have nothing. The KRG has been blocking food and drinking water for the last year, and we have now 80,000 to 100,000 people in Mount Sinjar who have nothing, no humanitarian aid.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you.

Mr. Elias.

**Mr. Haider Elias:** I think the U.S. government has decided to bypass the internal bureaucracy of the UN. I think the Canadian government should do the same thing, and get linked directly with the local NGOs in Sinjar that are trying to rebuild the communities over there. Thousands of houses have been booby-trapped. Many have been destroyed or looted, and even door frames and windows have been taken away. Absolutely all kinds of help is needed by the Yazidi community, including electricity, education, hospitals, and all of that.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I'm going to go by video conference to Mr. Akhavan.

**Dr. Payam Akhavan:** I would just add that I think the conditions in the camps are appalling. There's immediate assistance that could be given there. I also think that it's time to start thinking about reconstruction efforts so that the IDPs can go back to their towns and villages where security circumstances permit.

•(1045)

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you.

On local resettlement issues here, we heard from the previous panel that there are some challenges with where people are being relocated so they can build those communities.

Mr. Elias, you say you have a list of the families. Is that correct? Do you have recommendations as to which communities have some sort of infrastructure to welcome the resettlement of Yazidis? If you do have that list, can you provide that to—

**The Chair:** I'm going to have to ask you to provide that to the committee in writing somehow.

**Mr. Haider Elias:** We had a database that—

**The Chair:** We'll have to get that offline.

I need to move to Ms. Rempel. We're just in a very—

**Mr. Haider Elias:** We'll be happy to provide that list for you.

**The Chair:** Ms. Rempel.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Perhaps I'll just pick up on that.

Mr. Elias, I would ask you to table with the committee the list you provided to the UNHCR of people whose applications were rejected. If you want to redact the names, that's fine. I think that would be helpful.

**Mr. Haider Elias:** Okay.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** In a situation like this, where a parliamentary committee undertakes a study—we've had two meetings in the follow-up—typically we would ask the committee to provide a report and then ask the government to respond to the report. Is that something you would find useful in this situation?

I'll just run through the deck.

Mr. Barber.

**Mr. Matthew Travis Barber:** Yes.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Mr. Ismail.

**Mr. Mirza Ismail:** Yes.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Mr. Elias.

**Mr. Haider Elias:** Absolutely.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Nadia.

Hi, Nadia. I'm not sure if she's connected.

**The Chair:** Just give it a minute for the Arabic interpretation.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Okay, I'll move on.

**Ms. Nadia Murad Basee Taha (Interpretation):** Yes. The answer is yes. I can hear you.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Okay, good.

Moving on from there, we had many recommendations, some of which my colleague Ms. Kwan has suggested. I suggested some in the first panel, so I won't repeat those.

I'm just going through some of the notes on what you've raised.

Mr. Elias, would you suggest that the committee recommend that the government undertake an audit of outstanding applications that were provided to the UNHCR but that were not recommended for resettlement to Canada?

**Mr. Haider Elias:** Yes.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Excellent.

Mr. Barber and some of the witnesses on the teleconference, you mentioned many of the issues related to rebuilding and that also affect resettlement. I'll note that the motion the Canadian Parliament accepted also accepted recommendations 210, 212, and 213 in the 2016 report entitled "They came to destroy".

Would you recommend that the government provide a response to Parliament on its efforts to meet and take actions on those recommendations?

**Mr. Matthew Travis Barber:** Absolutely.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Excellent.

Mr. Ismail?

**Mr. Mirza Ismail:** Yes.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Mr. Elias?

**Mr. Haider Elias:** Yes.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Excellent.

My colleague Mr. Tabbara noted, and I agree with him, that many people around the world are in need of resettlement. One of the biggest public policy challenges the world faces right now is global forced migration and displacement. Our Prime Minister, though, said that resettling 25,000 Syrian refugees was only a matter of political will. There was a prioritization placed on that cohort.

Do you feel, since your people have experienced genocide, the government should put a similar priority on continuing to resettle victims of genocide in both our government-sponsored and privately sponsored refugee streams?

**Mr. Mirza Ismail:** Yes.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Thank you.

Nadia?

**Ms. Nadia Murad Basee Taha (Interpretation):** Yes.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Okay.

Mr. Barber, you mentioned the figure of \$25 million. Just for clarity, in budget 2017 the amount of \$27 million was allocated to the Yazidi resettlement initiative. Our departmental officials noted this week that they'd reduced that amount of funding to \$21 million.

Would you recommend that this funding be restored?

**Mr. Matthew Travis Barber:** Yes, I would. And I wasn't suggesting that this amount be used for reconstruction in Sinjar.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Of course.

**Mr. Matthew Travis Barber:** I was drawing a comparison between how much that same amount could be effectively used for reconstruction.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Would you also recommend that the committee perhaps or another committee of Parliament, or the House of Commons itself, undertake a study on what action has been taken in response to the other recommendations Parliament adopted in last year's motion? Again, those were recommendations 210, 212, and 213.

**Mr. Matthew Travis Barber:** Most definitely—and not just a study of the past, but a look at what can be done in the future.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** On that, would you recommend that the Government of Canada ask the United Nations to undertake a follow-up study to the 2016 report entitled "They came to destroy" to look at what has been achieved by the global community, and to provide recommendations to the global community and member states for support of the Yazidis?

• (1050)

**Mr. Matthew Travis Barber:** I'm not sure I would leave that in the UN's hands. I would recommend that Canada directly engage with the community in Sinjar and conduct its own study on what kind of action it can pursue.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Excellent. That's a better recommendation. There we go.

Nadia?

**Ms. Nadia Murad Basee Taha (Interpretation):** Yes. I agree with Matthew.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Excellent.

I will use the remainder of my time as follows. We've had exactly four hours of study time on this particular topic. We've had witnesses suggest that other witnesses should come to the committee. As you can see, it's a weighty study. My colleague has also expressed to me that there have been some discrepancies, which I believe she will address, between departmental officials' testimony and the testimony we've heard from the witnesses.

What I'm about to do is ask for more time. I'm also going to ask, in a formal motion, that the government actually table a response to our report.

On that, I move:

That, notwithstanding the motion adopted by the Committee on October 16, 2017, the Committee hold an additional meeting prior to December 20, 2017, on the resettlement issues related to Yazidi women and girls; and that the Committee report its finding to the House; and that the government table a response.

For the witnesses, I have just asked the members of the committee to consider an additional meeting here so that we can perhaps hear from survivors. We have not had them come to our committee. It would also require the committee to table a formal response with these recommendations.

My colleagues have a choice here. They can, in front of you, since we're at this meeting, vote on this motion—I'm hopeful that they will and that we'll extend this hearing and allow for a report—or they can adjourn debate, which means they're probably not willing to do that. I would like you to watch this.

I would implore my colleagues on this committee to put aside political differences for a moment and ensure that we have at least one more meeting to hear from survivors themselves who have come to Canada; as well as have a formal report drafted, given the severity and the seriousness of some of the recommendations that have been put forward today; and also that the government table a response.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Just before we get into debate on that, there is another committee moving into this room at 11 o'clock, so we won't have a full debate. However, a motion has been put on the floor. I'm going to see if we need to debate it or if there will be a discussion.

**Mr. Marwan Tabbara:** Mr. Chair, I have a slight amendment, if that's okay.

I think our members might agree with that. I will agree with that, but the only slight amendment I would make is if we could hold that meeting after the new year. I think the government wants to get their target number. It was supposed to be 1,200 people before the new year. An update after the new year might be better for us to know exactly where we are, and then we can provide more information.

**The Chair:** Just so you all remember, as chair I'm not that concerned about the government. I am concerned about the work of the committee and our timetable.

I need to tell you that we have three meetings available, unscheduled, in December. Modestly, I would recommend to the committee that we could take one of those meetings to continue this study. You might want to consider that. We have three meetings available and we have other witnesses we could hear from, but I want to give you that information in terms of a timetable.

Ms. Kwan.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would absolutely support this motion. We need to do this work before the new year. We have heard from the witnesses; there is ongoing and additional information that would be useful and helpful to inform the

committee, and more to the point, to inform the government, I hope, in terms of further action.

It was always my view from the summer study we embarked on that this would be a first phase of the work that needs to be done, and that the initial phase of resettling the 1,200 Syrian refugees was only just a very beginning into the crisis and the genocide before us. There's much work to be done, and I would absolutely support this.

To that end, I know we're running out of time, so I'm going to raise a point of order at this juncture, that we have a discrepancy in the information provided to us by the IRCC officials. I'm deeply disturbed by it. The issue is the number of people who have been rejected. It sounds to me as though the number of people whose applications have been rejected might be greater. We need to receive the information from Mr. Elias so that we can ask the officials to provide us with an accurate response on that, and I would ask—

• (1055)

**The Chair:** I will interrupt you. I will not allow negative comments such as that about the government officials in the committee. You have made an accusation about them, which I will not accept.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Mr. Chair—

**The Chair:** I will accept the fact that we might need to reconcile two different opinions.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** That is what I'm saying, that there's a discrepancy and we need to undertake a process to get that clarified.

**The Chair:** That's fine.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I would ask that you ask the IRCC officials to provide that clarification.

**The Chair:** Absolutely.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** The other issue for which there appears to be a discrepancy is the location to which people are resettled. From the report by the officials, I was under the impression that people are being resettled into areas where there are some Yazidi families and support, but it appears that might not be the case. I would also like clarity with respect to that issue.

**The Chair:** Very good.

Is it the will of the committee to vote on that motion now and leave it to the clerk and me to attempt to schedule meetings?

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Yes.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.):** How many meetings were asked for?

**The Chair:** The request was for one more meeting.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** We can vote. I think we're all in favour.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Just to clarify, there would be a report with a government response.

**The Chair:** We can't give you a deadline on report being in before Christmas—

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Sure.

**The Chair:** —because we have the other report coming in, but there could be a report.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** I would like clarity on what the motion is. Is it just to have another meeting, or to do a report as well?

**The Chair:** It has both.

Would you like to read it again?

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** The motion is, “That notwithstanding—

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** Actually, can I move to adjourn that? I think I have another committee meeting in three minutes.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** I think we should vote. We can vote right now.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** We're ready.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC):** We should vote. It will take two seconds. No one will be late.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** I move to adjourn the meeting.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** This is crazy. For the witnesses who are watching, this is the government members trying to shut down debate on an additional meeting for your people. That's disgusting.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** This is Conservative theatrics, for those who are watching.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** It's not; it's the reality. Let's vote on it right now.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** In my view, to go through this in three minutes—

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Let's vote right now.

**The Chair:** I'm going to call this to order. I allow only one person to have the floor at a given time. Mr. Sarai has the floor.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** I move that the debate be now adjourned.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Let's vote right now—a recorded vote.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Let's vote.

**The Chair:** Is it that the debate be now adjourned, or that the committee be now adjourned?

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** A recorded vote.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** We can talk about this afterwards. It's two parts to do a report as well as to hold another meeting. I have no problem with holding another meeting, but I need to know the context of the report.

**Ms. Michelle Rempel:** You don't have to call that in order.

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Sorry, what was the last report, did you say?

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** I have no problem with holding another meeting, but it wasn't decided that this be a report. It was to be a briefing on finding out how the situation—

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** So you are opposed to giving a report to the government?

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** Yes, right now I am.

**Mr. Jamie Schmale:** Randeep, that's not accurate.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** That doesn't make any sense. Why would you not put forward recommendations?

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** When we voted originally, it was not for a report. We voted down a report.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** That's the motion that's on the floor.

**An hon. member:** You're stalling that.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** We've already done a report.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Why would you do this study and not put recommendations to the government?

**The Chair:** I am trying to call us to order.

I want to thank the member for the motion. We will consider the motion at the next meeting.

The meeting is now adjourned.





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