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Chair

Mr. Robert Oliphant

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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• (0900)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.)): I'm going to call the meeting to order.

This is meeting number 89 of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, as we continue our briefing on resettlement issues related to Yazidi women and girls.

One of the issues that has come up in the settlement process of a small population with a non-widely disseminated language is providing interpretation, the difficulties and challenges of providing that, and we're actually seeing that this morning. We had testimony at our last meeting from community interpreters talking about finding interpreters who are professional or could be accredited in some way in a language that doesn't have that formal being.

We're going to begin with Professor Clifford, who does teach in the area of conference interpreting, but also has experience in the field of general interpreting and translation.

Professor Clifford, welcome. You have seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Andrew Clifford (Director, Master of Conference Interpreting, Glendon College, York University, As an Individual): Thank you.

I intend to make some initial comments in French. Then I will change to English, if that works for you.

Mr. Chair and members of the committee, first, I would like to thank you for inviting me to talk to you about interpreter training, which is close to my heart.

In the few minutes I have been given, I would like first to paint you a picture of the program I represent, the Master's degree in conference interpreting. Then I will explain some of the obstacles we have to face in training interpreters that may well have some effect on the arrival and settlement of female Yezidi refugees.

The Master of Conference Interpreting offered on the Glendon Campus of York University is a two-year graduate program. The first year is given entirely online to students from all around the world and the second year is taught on campus in Toronto.

The program has two objectives. First, our aim is to train conference interpreters, like those working in the booths in this committee room. Of course, we train interpreters in English and

French, but we also train them for other markets, such as Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Turkish, Russian and Arabic.

Our graduates work on Parliament Hill, but also for the International Committee of the Red Cross, for United Nations agencies, and in various private markets around the world.

You may be interested to learn that former students in the Master's program at Glendon College trained the 500 interpreters who greeted the 30,000 Syrian refugees a year and a half or two years ago. It was also one of our graduates whom you saw on television when the Prime Minister welcomed the first Syrian family to arrive.

[*English*]

That sort of gives you a brief introduction to the program that I'm responsible for here at the university.

I'd now like to talk about two obstacles that we're facing. These two obstacles are interrelated and might have an impact on some of the issues that you're looking at.

First off, I'll say that it's not very easy for us to find qualified applicants. We do have to look around the world. It's one of the reasons that we do some of our training online. When the time comes to bring those students to Canada, it's not always easy. This is particularly true with regard to Middle Eastern languages. Our applicants are routinely refused study permits. In fact, I'm dealing with a case now where an applicant is a trained translator. She works with written translation, and she'd now like to become a trained interpreter. However, an embassy official refused her study permit because, apparently, he didn't understand that there was a difference between translation and interpreting and said, "You already have training in this area; you don't need to come to Canada."

That's sort of the first obstacle that we face in trying to get qualified applicants into the program. It's connected to the second obstacle that we face, which I think, in large part, is due to the ignorance that the public has about the complexities of interpreting. It's very wrongly assumed by most people outside the field that it's not a very difficult task and that if you speak two languages, then that's enough. In fact, interpreting is a very specialized skill, whether it takes place in the conference setting or in the community setting.

One of the things I forgot to mention about Glendon is that while we train conference interpreters, we also train people for the community market. We have courses in medical and in legal interpreting. Students who finish the first year with us and don't go on to the second year often go into the market as community interpreters.

I'll just give you a very brief idea of how specialized this skill is. We know of a case, for example, where a patient who didn't speak English went into a hospital. A family member who spoke both languages interpreted for the patient, but a mix-up between the words "right" and "left" resulted in the patient having the wrong leg amputated. Instead of being a single amputee, he wound up being a double amputee. There was a case here in Canada where confusion between the words "back" and "stomach" caused a B.C. man to lose a leg and a kidney, and to be paralyzed in his right arm. This is not work that we want to put into the hands of people who are untrained or unqualified.

The skill that's required to do this work is often grossly underestimated, and as a consequence, it tends to be grossly undervalued and grossly undercompensated. What tends to happen is that people who go into community interpreting and who have the skill set to do the work well don't find the compensation that they're looking for, that they need, so they tend to leave. It's very difficult for us to build capacity in community interpreting with the high turnover of interpreters.

I know that last week you heard from my colleague, Lola Bendana, who is very active on several fronts in our field, with the "National Standard Guide for Community Interpreting Services", with the championing of the language interpreter training program at a number of community colleges here in Ontario, and also with the Ontario Council on Community Interpreting and its new accreditation system.

This gives you a sense of the landscape that is out there that many of us are trying to build and get off the ground. I would argue that a lot more needs to be done to ensure that trained interpreters are used when interpretation is needed, that those interpreters are remunerated adequately, and that, in many cases, the interpreters have help in gaining access to training and accreditation.

We're a country that relies on immigration to support our labour force and to feed into our social safety net. It's time for us to recognize that interpretation plays a key role in the settling of newcomers to this country. We should get serious about supporting interpretation.

That's what I have to say to you now.

I'm happy to answer your questions.

• (0905)

The Chair: Perfect. Thank you very much. Your timing was excellent.

Lobat Sadrehashemi, welcome.

You have seven minutes to share.

Ms. Lobat Sadrehashemi (Lawyer, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for the invitation to speak to you today.

I work as a refugee lawyer in Vancouver. I am the president of the Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers, but I am speaking on my own behalf today.

Before I start my comments, I should say that my work is and has been primarily with refugees who have already somehow made their way to Canada and claimed asylum once they arrived here. I do not have specific expertise on the situation of Yazidi refugees. Where I thought I could make some contribution to your study was on two points: the specialized services needed for refugees who have experienced severe trauma, including the need for family reunification, and more broadly, Canada's resettlement program.

First, on specialized services needed for refugees who arrive in Canada, I have experience working with women who have experienced violence and gender persecution. At one time, this was the primary focus of my practice. Each case is different, and the particular needs of a community will of course vary, but there is no doubt to me that arriving in a safe country is not the end of the journey of feeling safe and secure. The work continues, in some cases for many years after a refugee's resettlement.

You've heard from a number of witnesses about the specialized services needed for Yazidi refugees—women and children who have suffered horrific abuses and have come to Canada with severe trauma. I urge the committee to listen to the voices of the survivors themselves, and to those who are working with these communities, about the specialized services that would benefit them in resettlement. I echo the comments made this morning about the importance of proper interpretation and the use of trained interpreters in this work.

Canada has undertaken a special program to bring these refugees to Canada. When we bring refugees to Canada, we also have an obligation to try to estimate the types of services they may need and to monitor and respond to their needs. Refugees who have experienced this kind of trauma need specialized services. It is important to pay attention to the services they need and to respond. An investment in these services not only is the right thing to do, but it would also likely mean that community integration happens faster.

You have heard from survivors and those who work with them in Canada that family separation is particularly devastating to those who have experienced severe trauma and been resettled. Family reunification has been recognized by the UNHCR and by the government as an essential step in refugee resettlement. The UNHCR has recognized the family as "an essential right of the refugee" in its 1983 "Guidelines on Reunification of Refugee Families".

There has been research—an Australian study in 2013, for example—that has found that being separated from their families had “pervasive impacts on the wellbeing [of refugees] and on their capacity to participate and direct their own futures”. The study concluded that family reunification must be “a crucial consideration for the design and provision of settlement services” to a refugee.

For refugees who survive trauma, separation from family can be especially difficult. Having the family together is absolutely critical to feeling safe and protected in one's new home. Efforts to reunify families have to be considered as part of our resettlement strategy. This may be done through special programs. It does not necessarily have to be through the resettlement process.

The second point I have to make is about setting priorities for Canada's resettlement program. It is no easy task to decide who is chosen for resettlement in Canada and who is left behind. I want to echo the comments made by the UNHCR representative who appeared before you, as well as Professor Shauna Labman. Both talked about establishing priorities for resettlement based on UNHCR's global resettlement criteria. These are objective criteria based on legal and physical protection needs, survivors of violence and torture, medical needs, women at risk, children at risk, and so on.

Where we do have special programs and initiatives for particular groups of refugees, this should not be carved out of Canada's targets that have already been set by the government for resettlement. When viewed in the context of the scale of the crisis, Canada's targets on resettlement are not high.

● (0910)

In 2018 we've capped government-assisted refugees at 7,500. As many of you know, there are refugees suffering in camps all over the world who have been victims of rape, torture, who have lost their family members, and who feel forgotten by Canada and the world as they wait to be resettled.

I would be remiss if I did not say to a committee studying refugees—and it's been said many times, but it is worth repeating—that this is a global refugee crisis. There have never been so many displaced people since World War II, and with these increasing numbers, in my view, Canada as a wealthy nation needs to respond by increasing its numbers. And in particular the number of government-assisted refugees is particularly low.

Thank you. Those are my submissions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we're going to Nadre Atto. Aveen is going to be with her, but Nadre will begin.

We'll probably have interpretation.

You can begin. Thank you.

Ms. Nadre Atto (As an Individual): [*Witness speaks in Kermanji*]

● (0915)

The Chair: Just one minute. We're trying to find the English or French interpretation.

Ms. Nadre Atto (Interpretation): Thank you very much, Canadian government, for giving us all this help, and also, thank you for letting me express my problems. I really thank you.

I was under arrest by ISIS for two years. I was at the point of committing suicide. My kids were there with me but I couldn't do anything for them because I was sold easily more than 10 times. All I want from the Canadian government and from the authorities is their help in getting our people released, freed from ISIS.

I am one of them and there are lots of people like me, and some of them even have a worse situation. Our honour...we shouldn't let my honour be on their hands. Also, my 10-year-old daughter got married to a terrorist in front of my eyes. Who could accept their own kids being married to somebody at that age?

Eight members of my family plus my daughter are all in the hands of ISIS. Nobody could help us and we have no information about what happened to them.

I'm really thankful and grateful. I just wish and hope you guys help Yazidi people. Also, I'm thankful for the Canadian government helping our people. I spent two years under arrest and I saw too many things happen. I am not really happy here because my mom and my daughter are not here. I'm always crying and thinking about them. I'm not comfortable here. I hope you do something to find the mass graves; the young women and girls are all being killed and buried. We should find all these bodies and let the families know. This all has happened to our Yazidis. It's been 80 times we've been massacred by those people.

In 2017, Daesh did an explosion in the area of the Yazidis. They tried to massacre and kill all the Yazidis. They killed my dad. They killed my uncle. My brother was wounded. Five members of my family in one hour were all gone. This all happened to my family. It's not once or twice, it's too many times this has happened to us. I'm begging and I hope you guys will be helpful for us and try some kinds of ways to release our people.

● (0920)

When I came to Canada, I had no information about Canada. I didn't know any English. My brother was with me. I went to the hotel. I was in the hotel for two months. It was a very hard time for me, because I had trauma and I was still kind of afraid and scared. There were no Yazidis to help me or any other people. There was no one to help us.

After a month in this situation, we didn't know what to do. We didn't know where to go. There were two Yazidi people by the name of Hayder and Ismail. They came and they helped us a lot. They rented a house for us. We didn't even know how to rent a house.

It has been five months that we've been in Canada and still we are refugees here, so we expect the Canadian government to help us.

The Chair: I want to let you know that you have about one minute left.

Ms. Nadre Atto (Interpretation): We want you to bring more Yazidis in this situation and to help us. Our rent is too high. If you could help us, and also if you could bring my brother, sister, and my mom.... I tried to commit suicide three times, but because of my kids, I couldn't. My kid was 10, and in front of my eyes she was forced to marry an ISIS terrorist. I hope you help us to bring all those kids and those girls here and make them free.

Thank you for helping the Yazidis, and especially Nadia Murad.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Nadre Atto (Interpretation): Thanks all.

The Chair: Thank you for being here, and I also thank you for sharing your story with us.

We will go now to the Mozuud Freedom Foundation, and Debbie Rose and Gary Rose. I'm not sure who's going to begin.

Thank you.

Ms. Debbie Rose (Manager, Project Abraham, Mozuud Freedom Foundation): Mr. Chair, on behalf of Project Abraham and the Richmond Hill Yazidi community, I want to express our heartfelt gratitude to the Government of Canada for having brought survivors of the Yazidi genocide to Canada, where they can survive and thrive. It's only time constraints that compel me to leave out the wonderful successes we've observed in the resettlement activities of this Yazidi community and to focus solely on the challenges.

Please let it be noted in the record that all recommendations provided by Operation Ezra are also the recommendations of Project Abraham. We provide the same services. We have run into the same challenges in the resettlement of the GARs, and our recommendations are the same.

Many of our GAR families are going hungry while waiting for child benefit payments. Without these payments, the money provided to them barely covers rent, let alone anything else. Child benefit payments should arrive within 11 weeks from the time of application. However, there is a continual glitch where, around this time, the family receives notification that the government is waiting to receive information on the spouse's income. This is happening to grieving widows. In reality, some families do not see these payments for up to six months.

The experience of arriving in Canada often exacerbates the trauma of Yazidi refugees. They are met by people who speak the language of their oppressors. They are taken to a dirty hotel room, where it can take a couple of days before anyone communicates with them. They have no knowledge of an existing Yazidi community that could immediately welcome them, and which would go a very long way towards bringing them comfort. The food is alien and for some, seemingly inedible. They are not given adequate orientation on what they can expect to happen next. They get minimal, if any, help in finding a home. Some initially believed they were back in the hands of ISIS. From their perspective, their future is uncertain and frightening.

There is huge, ongoing stress for Yazidis due to being separated from surviving family members who are still in Iraq. The Canadian government allows for family reunification under the one-year window of opportunity provision, which assumes that family

members left behind are identified in the original application. This is often not done by Yazidis, who believe these family members to be dead. Sometimes spouses and children are discovered alive after the fact. Under the current provision, they cannot be brought over without a long, drawn-out process that could take years.

Project Abraham raises money to help with resettlement projects, as well as to bring in more privately sponsored Yazidi families. However, it is challenging to raise funds for the administrative costs involved in managing the larger project. If Project Abraham had funds available to hire more staff, there is so much more we could do to help our Yazidi community.

As a result of all issues mentioned here, Project Abraham would like to make the following recommendations:

One, inform the local Yazidi community when Yazidi refugees will arrive and where they will be placed, so that a delegation can meet them at the airport and provide immediate support.

Two, expedite the processing of child benefit payments and correct the application to reflect the correct information regarding widows.

Three, extend the one-year window of opportunity provision for victims of genocide to include family members who are discovered to be alive after the refugee families have emigrated to Canada. In addition, for the special needs of this community, extend this provision to siblings and parents.

Four, provide funding for staff for grassroots resettlement undertakings like Project Abraham and Operation Ezra, which are working daily with the Yazidi community to help them resettle, heal, and integrate fully into Canadian society, enhancing the existing government services.

Five, prioritize genocide as a criterion for selecting refugees to resettle in Canada, and therefore work outside of the UNHCR, which has stated it does not use genocide as a criterion, directly contravening both the UN and the GOC mandate.

To speak more on this, I will pass the floor to our communications director, Gary Rose.

● (0925)

Mr. Gary Rose (Director of Communications, Project Abraham, Mozuud Freedom Foundation): The Government of Canada has proudly done the right thing. It has recognized that Canada has a moral obligation to protect the Yazidis from the existential threat of genocide. It has responded by committing to relocate women and children survivors of ISIS to Canada.

While its execution of the relocation has not been without problems, it needs to be congratulated on its moral intent. Still, Canada, as a signee to the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, must continue to do more for the Yazidis. It is an obligation that must not end with the current initiative since not only is it fundamental to the role Canada has taken in the world as a peacekeeper and a nation that respects the right of all people to live in freedom, but also it is our duty by international agreement. We cannot claim the moral high ground if we limit sanctuary for a people who have experienced genocide. We must as a moral nation do our fullest to uphold our commitment and to continue to help the survivors.

It was with great pain that I, as a Canadian and as a Jew who knows only too well about genocide, heard that the representative of the UNHCR, speaking before this committee, refused to acknowledge the obligation of the UN regarding the Yazidi genocide. It was with great pain that I heard from his lips that the UNHCR is ignoring its mandate as required by the 1948 Geneva Convention by having a stated policy that disregards and contradicts the policy of the Government of Canada on the genocide of the Yazidis. It was even more astonishing to hear it while knowing that a survivor of the Yazidi genocide, Nadia Murad, is a UN goodwill ambassador and spokesperson who is demanding justice for her people.

Given this flagrant disregard, I urge the Government of Canada, out of respect for its moral leadership, to continue the Canadian initiative to help the Yazidis, who are still facing an existential crisis, by following the U.S. government's lead to no longer fund the UNHCR with regard to the minorities in Iraq and to commit to work directly through its own agencies and NGOs on the ground in Iraq to resettle Yazidi refugees who need sanctuary.

• (0930)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to go to our questioning round, starting with Mr. Tabbara.

I'll just give you notice that I'll be pretty tight on the seven minutes today.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Just give me a one-minute warning if you can.

The Chair: I would actually tell all members to have their staff give them a one-minute warning. That would be the role of the staff. I will try, but I'm usually listening to the testimony and the questions.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here today.

Thank you for your bravery in sharing your much-needed story with the committee. I think the committee needs to hear about what's been happening. Unfortunately, with lack of security and stability, atrocities like this happen too often. The world needs to pay attention to these atrocities.

This is our final meeting on resettlement issues regarding the Yazidis. This committee really wants to come out with recommendations on what we can do with the resettled Yazidis we have here now. I thank you all for your testimony.

With regard to language training and interpretation, Mr. Clifford, you mentioned in your testimony that it wasn't very easy to find interpreters and translators. Oftentimes people can translate, but they can't interpret. You gave an example of individuals going into medical clinics or into hospitals who have given the wrong information. You mentioned some of the outcomes of that.

Can you elaborate a little bit more on that?

Mr. Andrew Clifford: Sure I can.

I'm going to start though by making a distinction. You said two things that I just want to make very clear. What we're talking about here is not language training. When people come to an interpreter training program, the assumption is that they already have a very strong command of their working languages. We don't train them to speak another language. We train them to interpret. The skill set to interpret is extremely demanding. The languages are in place before they come to us.

The other distinction that I want to make is between written translation on one hand and spoken interpreting on the other. Those are two separate skill sets, although connected in some ways. Very often in interpreting programs, the people who come to us have a background in written translation. We use that as a springboard to teach them to interpret.

With regard to the examples I was giving, one was based in the United States and the other one was based in Canada. They are typical of what tends to happen. About 10 years ago, I was part of study that was conducted in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. We spoke to a 150 different primary care physicians, nurses, and social workers who dealt with patients who don't speak either dominant language, English or French, and the services that are provided. We heard stories like these, in which very often family members are called upon to interpret. Clearly that's not sufficient. In some cases, family members may not even have the language competency. They certainly don't have the interpretation training.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: May I interrupt and get specific with some of the difficulties you've been finding with Kermanji, the language? I know you've had witnesses in London, and they said because there's a bigger Yazidi population there, it was a little easier for them to find interpreters and translators.

How difficult is it for you to find qualified applicants? That's what you mentioned in your testimony.

Mr. Andrew Clifford: I'll start by saying that we don't work with Kermanji. We work with the languages I mentioned at the outset. The closest and most relevant language we work with might be Arabic. But I can talk generally about how difficult it is to find people who have the qualifications.

We're looking for very rare individuals. In my case they have to have a university degree or a graduate program. In the case of the language interpreter training program, which is offered by the community colleges in Ontario, the requirements are a little less stringent, but still there. We're looking for somebody who has prior university training, speaks the two languages, can pass an entry test, and has the ability to analyze situations.

What's challenging about interpreting in the community setting might be going back and forth, rendering a message from one language to another, but it's very often dealing with the power differential between the two players who are face to face. In the medical setting, for example, imagine a doctor who's very often white, male, invested with a lot of education and power in the institution where he's working, on one hand. Then maybe it's a refugee who is often a woman, a person of colour, hasn't had access to a lot of education, and does not have a lot of power in that situation. Communicating back in forth is difficult.

● (0935)

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Thank you.

Ms. Sadrehashemi, we had a witness named Jean-Nicolas Beuze from the UN. He mentioned the need of refugees around the world for resettlement. He gave us some numbers to understand the instability that is happening around the world. I'm going to read something:

By the end of 2016, 65.6 million individuals were forcibly displaced worldwide as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, or human rights violations. UNHCR estimated that at least 10 million people were stateless or at risk of statelessness in 2016. 37 countries admitted 189,300 refugees for resettlement during the year, including those resettled with UNHCR's assistance.

You can see the millions of people in need, and the small amount.... So yes, the world needs to take more action. Canada has taken really good action in welcoming over 50,000 Syrian refugees, and we've committed to 1,200 Yazidis as well.

Of refugees worldwide, 55% come from South Sudan, Afghanistan, and Syria. How do you suggest Canada balance the interests of all refugees and vulnerable groups without prioritizing ethnic groups? We need to ensure we're bringing in refugees from all around the world because the need is so great.

Ms. Lobat Sadrehashemi: It's an incredibly difficult task to figure out who is the most vulnerable among the most vulnerable. That's why I think an objective criterion is necessary. That's why I referred to the global resettlement criteria. That's not perfect and of course there are crises that elevate a need for protection on a localized basis and it is completely appropriate for Canada to have special programs in those circumstances.

I think the main point is that it is a global crisis, and to maintain our number at 7,500 for government-assisted refugees is much too low.

The Chair: Thank you. I need to end it there.

Ms. Rempel.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Nadre, Canada needs to bring justice to your people. How do we do it?

Ms. Nadre Atto (Interpretation): They should help to—

● (0940)

The Chair: Hold on for one second. I'm not getting English interpretation. I think we're going to bring the interpreter out and, if people would speak in short points, then we will have consecutive interpretation. I think there's a technical problem. I still think we should have a technician working on that, however. Excuse me.

Ms. Rose, could I have you move over one seat so that the interpreter could have a microphone? He will need to be speaking into a microphone for us to be able to hear him and for translation into French. I think the language professionals are happy to see us having troubles, so we understand the complexity of their world.

I'm going to ask Ms. Atto to repeat her comments, unless the interpreter got her response. Would you like to have it repeated?

Mr. Shahram Doustan (Interpreter, Cultural Interpretation Services for Our Communities): I think it is a good idea.

Ms. Nadre Atto (Interpretation): They could bring Yazidis from Iraq. They should bring most of the Yazidis from Iraq to here. This is part of what they could do.

It has been three years that our honour has been managed in the hands of ISIS and nobody has given any kind of useful help to us to secure those families and women, those people, from ISIS. They should do something about it.

My daughter was 10 years old three years ago and she was married to a terrorist. Who can accept as a human being that happening to their family?

They should help to bring more Yazidis here to Canada because they are not.... In Turkey there are a lot of ISIS members, people affiliated with ISIS, so they are not free to go to Turkey and stay there. Canada should be helpful to bring them over here.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Rempel.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Nadre, you spoke about the graves of your people and the need to document them and the need for the world to understand where they are. How can Canada help you bring justice to those who have died at the hands of ISIS?

Ms. Nadre Atto (Interpretation): Canada could be helpful and open those graves, basically, and examine them and find out through DNA which body belongs to whom, and to have some respect.

Also, I mention again that Canada could be helpful by bringing more Yazidis from there to here.

● (0945)

Hon. Michelle Rempel: How can we help you?

Ms. Nadre Atto (Interpretation): I'm looking for some way—I don't know how to do it—to bring my mom, and also my brother and sister here to Canada. They live in a tent in northern Iraq and the conditions are really difficult, so I don't know what to do.

If you could help....

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Is there anything else you want to say, that you want to tell the government, Nadre?

Ms. Nadre Atto (Interpretation): If I tell you my story, it's going to take days, so I just told you the simple part of it, and it was all honest.

I hope you bring Yazidi families from northern Iraq, not from Turkey.

We haven't done anything wrong to any other nation in the region. All that has happened to us has come from the Islamic thought and those people, so we want you to bring more Yazidis here, instead of bringing those Muslims. We are more needy. With their thoughts they could create problems here again for us. That is the concern I am trying to explain. Massacres have happened so many times against our nation, but we are not against any religion or anybody. We are peaceful people. We don't know what is happening to us, why they are doing all this to us.

There are more than 200 families in the mountains of Sinjar and now they are in a very bad situation. They have not too many resources on hand, and also nobody is taking care of them.

Could there be some help for them?

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of the witnesses for the presentations. In particular, I'd like to acknowledge Ms. Atto for sharing her experiences with us.

I think all of us recognize that each time you tell your story it must be difficult for you to relive the trauma and to share that with us. We really appreciate your taking the time to do this today.

● (0950)

I'd like to follow up on the question that my colleague Ms. Rempel asked. You mentioned some 200 families that you're hoping the government can help relocate and resettle here in Canada. I'm curious, are those 200 individuals registered with the UNHCR, or are they not connected with them at all?

Ms. Nadre Atto (Interpretation): I don't think they are already registered with an organization that can help them. Some people, including my brother, are in the hands of ISIS. They desperately want to get somewhere and they can't. That's the priority I'm talking about. One of my brothers was wounded by ISIS, so he came with us. The rest are in Iraq.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I see. Thank you very much for that information.

I'd like to ask one further question related to your family members. Do you know where your daughter is?

Ms. Nadre Atto (Interpretation): I have had no information or phone calls from her, and it's been three years. But it was my honour, and she was taken in front of my eyes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

Debbie and Gary, you mentioned in your presentation the need to go beyond assistance with the UNHCR, mostly for people who perhaps may not be identified. I think we just heard an example of that. I want to acknowledge the recommendation you put forward.

The other piece I want to focus on is the numbers. As you know, through the summer we had a study on the Yazidis issue. For myself, I always envisioned that for the government, even for the 1,200 Yazidis they've resettled, that was meant to be above and beyond the current numbers of the refugee resettlement process. As we now learn, however, that's not the case. That is all part and parcel of the refugee resettlement numbers.

To that end, I want to ask a very specific question. What number do you think the government should engage in the resettlement of the Yazidis? Coming out of this study, what recommendations should we make to the government by way of numbers that we should try to help resettle with the Yazidi population? As well, should that number be above and beyond the existing refugee resettlement program?

Ms. Debbie Rose: I've heard other people say 5,000, and 5,000 is a good start. I don't know that we can.... We had 50,000 Syrians brought over.

If you don't mind, I'd like to go back to this prioritization, because suffering is suffering, and if we're human and we have compassion, we're going to feel for all of the people around the world who are in these despicable situations, but genocide is the purposeful intent to eliminate a people.

Humankind is very concerned right now about animal species going extinct. This is a whole people, a culture within humankind, that is literally being wiped off the face of the earth as we speak. They were once 23 million. They are now a million, and those numbers are decreasing as we speak. Right now, they're going.

This is a peaceful people who say prayers for every other culture in the world before they say prayers for themselves. They adore their children. This is happening to them, and the world doesn't seem to care. We're looking at something like genocide, but we're more concerned about whether polar bears are going to survive, and we're not concerned about the Yazidis surviving.

I can't put a number on it, personally.

● (0955)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Okay. Thank you.

Yes, we've heard through the committee that 5,000 would be a good start, and to build on that. I guess, more specifically, can you confirm for me that, whatever the number that the government resettles, that number should be above and beyond the existing refugee program in terms of the government-assisted refugees? Could I get a short answer? I have a feeling that I'm going to run out of time very quickly.

Ms. Debbie Rose: Yes.

Mr. Gary Rose: Yes, we would be in agreement with that. Yes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

I'm going to turn to Lobat.

The Chair: You just have 10 seconds.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Just to clarify, did I hear you say that in the resettlement of the Yazidis, it should be a special program above and beyond the existing GARs?

Ms. Lobat Sadrehashemi: That's correct.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: And that the number of GARs, that 75,000, should also increase out of the 2018 levels targets?

Ms. Lobat Sadrehashemi: That's correct.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kwan.

Mr. Whalen.

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

Thank you all for coming today and telling us your stories.

Ms. Sadrehashemi, could you explain quickly to us the priorities for different ethnicities to come to Canada and why it's not the practice of the UNHCR to differentiate based on ethnicity but to focus on vulnerability?

Ms. Lobat Sadrehashemi: My understanding is that without objective criteria, the task runs the risk of becoming arbitrary and fraught. I'm not saying that these special programs were arbitrary. I'm not saying that at all, because there was clearly a pressing need and an urgency. But there is the risk, and I think that's why the UNHCR has objective criteria based on need and vulnerability, that where you pursue special programs, especially "in the place of" instead of "in addition to" the general refugee resettlement program, the process could end up becoming based on a host of factors, for example, what stories are getting coverage in the media or the wishes of different community groups. It is very difficult, and so that is the purpose of having objective criteria.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Thank you very much.

Mr. Clifford, in your experience, is there a critical mass of people that we would need to have in Canada who are part of a particular linguistic minority in order for us to be able to successfully develop interpretation capacity here? It seems that this is a problem that won't be quick for us to solve. Can we do it, and how long do you expect it would take for us to develop sufficient capacity for Kermanji interpretation?

Mr. Andrew Clifford: That's an excellent question. I wish I could give you a number to say, if x number of people were settled, then that would spill over into x number of interpreters. Unfortunately, I can't.

The one thing I can do is point out some of the issues that are facing languages of lesser diffusion. For example, very often in a small language community, it's difficult for the interpreters to work, because when they show up to a setting where there's a service provider and a person who needs interpretation, they're known to the person, and they recognize one another, because the community's very small.

One of the ways around that is to do what we're doing, and that is to train people online, because then, for example, somebody who lives in Toronto and who's trained as an interpreter in Toronto could work in Vancouver and vice versa. There's a lesser likelihood that they're going to then bump into the person they've interpreted for in the local community.

• (1000)

Mr. Nick Whalen: Thank you. That's very interesting, Mr. Clifford.

To the Roses, I look at the location of the population of Yazidis around the world and obviously there's Iraq, and then Germany has about 100,000, Syria 70,000, Russia 60,000. While Canada does have a direct role to help them resettle and we're trying our best now to do it, it's fraught with problems mostly associated with the fact that there are so few Yazidis here in Canada. Does Canada have a role, and what is it, in demanding and encouraging other countries to do their part in taking in Yazidi refugees, countries that might be more successful at this?

Mr. Gary Rose: Canada has put itself out as a humanitarian leader in the world as a peacekeeper. I would presume, especially in the case of genocide—as I've mentioned, we've signed on to the 1948 Geneva Convention—we have a moral obligation.

Mr. Nick Whalen: What should we be doing with respect to other countries? The genocide convention talks about prosecuting genocide.

Mr. Gary Rose: It also talks about protecting.

What should we be doing with other countries? Is that your question?

Mr. Nick Whalen: Yes.

Mr. Gary Rose: We should be promoting other countries to do what Canada is doing. We should be spokespersons advocating for the Yazidis, noting that if Canada, Germany, and Australia can bring in Yazidis, other countries that are wealthy nations, especially the United States, which has a community of Yazidis, can bring in more Yazidis.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Mr. Clifford, this brings me back to you.

Is there a way we can try to develop a program for Kermanji translation by reaching out to Germans and Americans, and the populations of Yazidis in other countries, to help us develop this capacity? Ms. Rempel has rightly pointed out online that there's a real deficiency in our attempts here.

Mr. Andrew Clifford: Once again, it's interpreting we're talking about, not translation.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Sorry. I'm always making that mistake.

Mr. Andrew Clifford: Yes, is the short answer.

One of the things I can tell you about the field in general is that there is a very strong movement towards the remote delivery of interpreting services. As an interpreter, about half the work that I do is remote from my clients, and increasingly there are platforms that people can use. That's happening at the level of service provision. I don't need to be in Ottawa to provide service to people who are in Ottawa, and that kind of thing. It's starting to happen internationally as well. People are getting recruited for assignments that are taking place in other countries.

What we have yet to do in a systematic way is use remote platforms to connect people and make training easier and more accessible. For example, here in Toronto I may not get a critical mass that I would require to train with Kermanji, but if I were able to link up with other institutions around the world, we might together reach that critical mass. We're not doing that work yet.

Mr. Nick Whalen: In terms of responsibility for paying for and funding the development of this capacity, where does it lie? I put this to each of them.

Who should be responsible for paying for this development capacity?

Mr. Clifford.

Mr. Andrew Clifford: I won't lie to you; this is not a money-making proposition for a university. The program that I run could not exist without external funding.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Should the federal government support it?

Mr. Andrew Clifford: We have had federal funding in the past. Yes, I think so.

Mr. Nick Whalen: I would ask the interpreter for Ms. Atto, who has helped you or paid for your training in interpretation?

Mr. Shahram Doustan: I'm working for what's called CISOC.

The Chair: We met them last week.

Mr. Shahram Doustan: CISOC contacted me and sent me. This is the second time I've been here.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Okay.

The Chair: We'll have to end there.

Ms. Rempel, Mr. Maguire, you have five minutes.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Ms. Sadrehashemi, we're beating around the bush on an issue here, which is that the UNHCR failed to recommend Yazidi genocide survivors to Canada through the Syrian refugee initiative and, frankly, through the GAR program after the Sinjar massacre.

You can get into the partisan politics of it. There was an audit issued. It became a campaign issue. There were failed allegations of racism. We've gone through two years of fighting on whether or not this should happen. The UN criteria always comes down; it's always used as a wedge.

I agree that there need to be objective criteria; however, in this instance, it is very clear that the list of GARs referred to Canada did not include Yazidi genocide survivors.

We've also had testimony in front of committee from Yazidis who have advocated for the program and whatnot and who are showing appointments well into the future in terms of selection process. I can't reconcile this. I don't want to make proclamations that a system isn't working writ large, but clearly the system didn't work in this situation.

Is there something this committee can recommend in terms of reforming that system so that it's still doing what it's supposed to do in terms of objective criteria, but is also being cognizant of the fact that these women can't get to camps and get on these lists, and if they did, they can't stay there. How does that system work?

This is why we advocated for a stand-alone system: we weren't getting these people into Canada. What can the UN do? What should we be advocating for in terms of the UN to reform the system so that in an emergent situation like this our asylum system is responsive to a genocide?

• (1005)

Ms. Lobat Sadrehashemi: That's a very good question. I find it difficult to comment on the very specific situation, but I could say in general that I agree that there are problems with the UN system. There are problems here for the Yazidi refugees and there are problems all over the world for people who cannot get to camps that are not identified by the UNHCR. That I for sure agree with, and that is something that needs further study and detailed recommendations that I can't give you.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Okay.

I'll pass the microphone over to Mr. Maguire.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Thanks to my colleague and to you, Mr. Chair, and thanks to the witnesses for being here today.

Mr. Clifford, what is your budget for training?

Mr. Andrew Clifford: What is my budget? I'm not sure that I'm at liberty to discuss that in such an open forum.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Okay. I guess I'm just saying that there's a huge need from your end, from what you see, to train more people.

Mr. Andrew Clifford: Yes, I could give you a couple of numbers, for example, that might put things into perspective. For example, the financial people here at my faculty tell me that a classroom needs to have a minimum of 40 students in it before the university breaks even.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Okay.

Mr. Andrew Clifford: With all of my languages combined, I would never have in the classroom more than 15 people and, with a specific language pair, usually no more than five. I consistently operate at a loss.

Mr. Larry Maguire: What would it take to find a classroom of 40 to do the job that is before you with the Yazidi people?

Mr. Andrew Clifford: It would take the sort of system that I was talking about before, whereby a number of institutions decide to pool their resources and, over a remote platform, decide to share classes. That's being done on an ad hoc basis, with a little bit here and a little bit there.

It's mostly being guided by the European institutions—the European Commission, the European Parliament—but that's operating at the level of conference interpreter training rather than community interpreter training, and it's a sporadic here-and-there. We do one or two classes a year with the European Parliament, and one or two classes a year with the European Commission, and that brings together maybe two or three universities at a time.

Mr. Larry Maguire: I saw a lot of millions of dollars given away last summer in one particular case. Just to use a number, how far would \$10 million go in your effort?

Mr. Andrew Clifford: We're talking about \$10 million invested within a broader area and divvied up among universities and institutions. That would certainly help.

One thing we are trying to do as well is figure out what are the mechanisms by which we can help graduates bridge from training to actual work and have meaningful work opportunities. That's an area we need to explore, because I think that would also help to allay some of the problems we have with costs.

•(1010)

The Chair: I'm afraid I need to stop you there. Sorry.

Go ahead, Ms. Zahid.

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

Thanks to all of you for coming today.

Special thanks to Nadre Atto for sharing her story.

My first question is for Ms. Sadrehashemi. I know that, with the Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers, you have worked with refugees from around the world who have faced, or are facing, unimaginable violence and persecution and are seeking to escape from extremely dire circumstances.

Could you discuss some of the vulnerable groups you have worked with and the help they need from the international community, including Canada?

Ms. Lobat Sadrehashemi: Yes, of course.

I've worked with refugees all over the world. I've worked with refugees from Iraq, Namibia, Sudan, Eritrea, China. I've worked with refugees all over the world, and first and foremost they need to get to a safe place. Once they're here, they need supports. Many of them have suffered extreme violence, and it is a long process for them to feel safe and be able to resettle. Also, part of that resettlement is being able to quickly reunify with family members.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: My colleague Marwan also mentioned that there are about 22.5 million refugees right now. What would you suggest to us as a committee? How should we structure our refugee system to ensure that the most vulnerable are prioritized for resettlement here in Canada? Should this be done on an individual or group basis, or should it be done based on their needs?

Ms. Lobat Sadrehashemi: In general I would suggest it should be based on need, but of course there are always situations where Canada may decide to do a special program or respond to an urgent need.

I think the main thing when you look at those numbers is that we need to increase our number of refugees. We need to increase the number of government-assisted refugees. The 7,500 is not enough.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: How do we make sure that the most vulnerable are prioritized?

Ms. Lobat Sadrehashemi: As I've said, that's a very difficult task, and I recommend communicating with experts on the ground and using objective criteria.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Do you think Canada has done a good job as compared to the rest of the world?

Ms. Lobat Sadrehashemi: To be honest, most refugees are resettled in neighbouring countries, in some of the poorest countries in the world, and it is the wealthier countries that are not, in fact, doing their fair share.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: My next question is for Mr. Clifford.

We have heard testimony about difficulty with access to interpretation services for newly arrived Yazidi immigrants. We have also heard that there are a number of different dialects with Kermanji. Could you discuss the challenges of providing interpretation services to the Yazidi arrivals? Are there many qualified interpreters in Canada right now, and are they located in the communities where the Yazidi families are resettling?

Mr. Andrew Clifford: I don't work specifically with Kermanji. I said at the outset that there's a restricted number of languages that our program trains for specifically. I can comment more broadly on what it means to try to train people who work with languages of lesser diffusion.

One of the things we notice very often is that there's a pattern when a new group of people comes to the country. What tends to happen is they start showing up at community-level services. It's at this level that the whole interpreting infrastructure first takes note. All of a sudden a hospital is saying it needs Kermanji, and community centres are saying they need Kermanji. It's up to the agencies and the training institutions to try to respond. We don't really get a first alert, if you will, to say, "Hey, by the way, we're about to bring in this new wave of people. These are their language needs, and can you come to it and snap to attention."

This is different from what we see elsewhere. For example, I contrast this with conference interpreting at the European institutions, where each time there's even the remote possibility that a new member state will be added and a new language will enter into the mix, there's a whole cadre of people who spring into action and start preparing for language services to be provided. We could do a little bit to imitate that pattern.

•(1015)

The Chair: I'm afraid I need to end it there.

I think next is Mr. Maguire.

You're the last one standing on that side.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a number of questions that I never got to before. There are so many on this issue.

Ms. Atto, I know you've been through a lot. The first step, as Ms. Sadrehashemi just said, is to get people relocated. The second one is to get them some kind of help here or in the country of relocation. The third one, of course, is reunification of family. Are those the three issues that are the most important to you?

Ms. Nadre Atto (Interpretation): There are very bad conditions. The Yazidi people are living in tents. All I want is if you could bring more Yazidi families over here to Canada to help them because the situation over there is that they are living in tents. What happened to them is very difficult for the families. All I need is if you could help bring more of them over.

Mr. Larry Maguire: I think that statement shows the kind of people we're dealing with. They're very selfless. Caring for others is more important than the fact that she is here now.

Mr. Rose, you said there was a flagrant disregard. You said to not fund the UNHCR program anymore. Can you expand on that? Are there other methods besides the UNHCR through which we could be bringing these types of refugees to Canada?

Mr. Gary Rose: Can you repeat the last statement you just made?

Mr. Larry Maguire: I'm wondering if there are other methods to bring people here besides the normal ones that we're using.

Mr. Gary Rose: I know there are NGOs on the ground, and I know other organizations that know who the Yazidis are who are in desperate need. A lot of them aren't registered with the UN for all the reasons that we know. We know now that the United States is networking through USAID to divert the \$1.3 billion that it was allocating to help the minorities in Iraq. It has found that this money isn't going there, so it has a way of being able to do it through USAID and through contacts on the ground.

I'm not an expert on this. I just have contacts among some people who have been on the ground in Iraq. However, from the little that I know, it could be done.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Would there be a need for more Ezra and Abraham programs?

Ms. Debbie Rose: Yes, I believe it would be extremely helpful if every community had volunteers on the ground who could help. We've seen so many wonderful successes within our own program. I think about the communities that don't have these volunteers and how much more difficult it must be for them, so yes, I would highly recommend that.

Mr. Larry Maguire: How would those that are not in connection with the government today be able to get in touch with it and be accredited to bring these people in? What would be required?

• (1020)

Ms. Debbie Rose: I'm sorry. I'm not sure I understand the question.

Mr. Larry Maguire: With regard to the groups that you indicated could use more help, how would you recommend that they get in touch with the government, and how can the government help them to be the arm that brings more of these people in?

Ms. Debbie Rose: That's a challenging question. I know that we're trying to work very much with the government NGOs that are on the ground trying to help resettle people. It's through these NGOs that we need to work, unless we can establish our own direct relationship with the government, which would be wonderful for us. It would be very helpful.

While we're working with the NGOs, we are finding a lot of communication breakdown. For example, let's just take this simple thing about the—

The Chair: I need you to wrap up quickly.

Ms. Debbie Rose: It's just regarding the Yazidis being hungry. If we hadn't told the Yazidis to contact their caseworker and say that they're hungry, they never would have gotten the help.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to turn to Mr. Sarai now. He's offered me one of his minutes and I want to ask a question.

Every witness gives their personal understandings and testimony from their personal experience at this committee and they're all welcome. I do need to ask though—Ms. Sadrehashemi it was—we had testimony this morning that Muslims should not be brought to this country because they are a danger. Do you agree with that?

Ms. Lobat Sadrehashemi: No, I do not.

The Chair: Mr. Rose, it was brought to this committee that Muslims should not be brought to this country. Do you agree with that?

Mr. Gary Rose: Absolutely not.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Rose.

Ms. Debbie Rose: No, I don't agree with that.

The Chair: Last, we have Mr. Clifford.

Mr. Andrew Clifford: Absolutely not. I don't agree with that.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Sarai.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Thank you to all the witnesses and I want to really thank you, Nadre Atto, for sharing your experience. I think it would be safe for me to say that everyone here, their hearts bleed when we hear your stories.

I grew up in a culture where I heard stories of genocide to my community multiple times. On hearing about the Yazidis and finding out that your community has gone through it over 70 times, it is amazing to see that you survived, but it was through your persistence and your will. I want to commend you and your whole community for that.

Our job here is to make sure that you feel safe, that your journey here is as easy as possible, and to make it as comfortable and safe as possible. In that regard, I want to ask you, do you feel safe and comfortable in Canada?

Ms. Nadre Atto (Interpretation): I'm very thankful. I'm safe here, but I don't have a good time because all I think about is my daughter and my mom and my family over there, so I am not comfortable. Otherwise, I feel safe and secure here. I'm especially thankful for the British government and also the NGOs. Those people were really helpful for our people and also I especially thank Canada. Canada has been really helpful for us. I'm safe here, but I'm not happy about my family in that situation.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: We completely understand and it's the plight of a lot of refugees to get their siblings and their extended family here. It's a difficult thing with the parameters that we work with and we would like, especially if you're able to locate your daughter, to help them get into Canada.

What can we do to help you feel better integrated in Canada, which means being able to adjust to Canada? Obviously, we can't compensate for the feeling of longing of your missing family and loved ones. How can we make it better for you to settle in Canada and make Canada your home?

• (1025)

Ms. Nadre Atto (Interpretation): All I want from you is to help bring more Yazidis, because I've been there and I've gone through it. I was handcuffed one day, with my kids in front of me. I defended my honour and it didn't go the way they wanted it to and that's why I have gone through a lot. I want Canada to be helpful and to bring more families, which I know they bring here to Canada, which is

helpful, and to watch the Yazidi community over there and feel responsible for defending them.

The Chair: Thank you.

I need to end it there. I'm worried we are going to have bells at 10:40. We need to have a fairly quick ending to this meeting because I have to get some instructions for the analysts in before 10:40.

I want to thank all the witnesses for their testimony. It is a rich experience for this committee to have among us someone who is a refugee, an interpreter helping that refugee, an exceptional agency committed to the cause of helping refugees, a lawyer, an interpreter and trainer of interpreters with us. It has been a very rich day. Thank you very much.

We're going to have a very quick turnaround, because we need to go to an in camera meeting.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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