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# Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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EVIDENCE

**Tuesday, December 4, 2018**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Robert Oliphant**



## Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

Tuesday, December 4, 2018

• (1535)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.)):** I'm going to call this meeting to order, the 138th meeting of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

Thank you to the witnesses for coming.

Thank you, Mr. Stewart, for joining us. We understand there is a problem in our communication, but we're glad that you're able to join us for this first panel.

We're still trying to work out a few technical difficulties with respect to our second panel. We are having some connection difficulties. We will be working on that during this hour.

I wanted to mention that yesterday the foreign affairs committee was looking at Venezuela. You might want to draw your eyes to their meeting notes when they're out. I also noticed a media release by the committee yesterday afternoon on the issue of Venezuela, which I found interesting.

Today, we're going to continue with our study on migration challenges and opportunities for Canada in the 21st century. We are focusing today again for our second time on Latin America, and trying to understand some of the emerging issues that are happening there, particularly how they may impact in Canada.

We'll give Mr. Stewart time to collect his thoughts. Thanks to Professor Smith for joining us a second time. This time you'll be able to focus a little more on your area of work with respect to Latin America.

Professor Smith.

**Mr. Craig Damian Smith (Associate Director, Global Migration Lab, University of Toronto, As an Individual):** Yes. Thank you, sir.

I'm just going to start my timer here. I don't want to make the same mistake as last time.

Thanks for having me again. I'm going to speak mostly from the report that I shared with the committee last week about displacement drivers in the NTCA countries, the northern triangle of Central America.

This is a project idea that started when I was in Geneva last summer, talking to people from the UNHCR and IOM about what could be done to ensure that the migration and refugee compacts

were successful in addressing migration crises. The main thrust of my argument in that report is that focusing on the expanding displacement crises in our own backyard is not only a humanitarian imperative, but is very much in Canada's national self-interest, and further, that the refugee compacts offer a clear framework for doing so.

I'll just briefly talk about displacement in the NTCA countries, which are El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. They have witnessed a tenfold increase in refugee and asylum seekers from 2011 to 2016, with an estimated 180,000 people displaced in neighbouring states. Over 350,000 people claimed asylum globally from the region from 2011 to 2017, with 130,500 of those 350,000 in 2017 alone. If you imagine a graph, it would be a pretty significant uptick. Women, families and unaccompanied minors are vastly overrepresented in those migration flows.

In addition to that, there are an estimated 715,000 IDPs, internally displaced people, in the region. The fact that governments don't have the capacity and political willingness to address that problem leads some people to estimate that the number of IDPs could be actually twice as high as that.

There are some particularities about displacement in the region that are worth noting as well. Refugees and IDPs in the region are displaced at least twice, on average. The region also has the world's most urbanized displaced population, where about 95% of people there live in urban areas. To put that in context, the next most urbanized refugee and displaced population is in sub-Saharan Africa, where an estimated 68% are in urban and peri-urban areas.

That is important because urban populations make traditional camp-based humanitarian aid for displaced people increasingly challenging. I'm fairly sure I said as much last week, but it's really important to know that we have adequately addressed and diagnosed the problems in the NTCA countries enough to start doing the work. Canada has the expertise and resources to make a significant difference if it makes the decision to do so.

What is driving displacement from the region? We have endemic poverty, corruption, criminality, lack of access to education and services, gender and sexual identity-based violence and discrimination, and weak states.

Violence in the region is really staggering. If you look at the whole Latin American-Caribbean region, it accounts for only 8% of the world's population, but 33% of the world's homicides. That violence is particularly acute in cities. The homicide rate there for young men is 10 times higher than it is for women. It's at 94 in 100,000, on average. That's a homicide rate of one in 1,000 people for young men.

To illustrate how impactful that is, the global peace index estimates that El Salvador lost 49% of its GDP to violence in 2017, making it the fourth worst affected country, on par with South Sudan and behind only Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. Again, that is loss of GDP to violence.

That violence doesn't even tell the whole story. There are 3.5 million people in the region who require HAP humanitarian assistance because of ecological and climatic degradation. As of 2018, the NTCA governments reported losses of 208,000 hectares of agricultural land, leaving 2.2 million people at risk of food insecurity in an area that we call the "dry corridor", which stretches from the south of Mexico down to Panama.

My research looks at migration from an international relations perspective. The kind of knock-ons that we have from this type of displacement are really important. The images that we're seeing on the border with Guatemala and Mexico, but also Mexico and the U. S., are precisely the kinds of images that gave wind to the Brexit campaign and to far-right victories across Europe.

• (1540)

Not coincidentally, the countries that made the most hay over those migration crises also suffered the least. These are also the same states that are now using the migration compact to whip up fear for electoral gains, which is also a trend that has begun to emerge in Canada.

Containing displacement in a region without a plan can mean a downward spiral as well. Displacement dynamics stress host-state institutions and social cohesion. The impacts are particularly acute because people are moving from low-income countries to low-income countries, so we don't see the complementarian labour skills and labour market that we see when refugees move from poor countries to rich countries with needs in the low- and medium-skilled parts of the labour market.

It also has significant knock-on effects for housing markets, rents and wages at the lowest rungs of the economy.

I'm going to go a couple of minutes over time. Are you going to cut me off?

**The Chair:** Plow on.

**Mr. Craig Damian Smith:** Okay.

As we discussed last week, the content of the global compacts reflects the various elements of the 2030 sustainable development goals around inclusive and sustainable development. The kind of burden sharing that we need to address root causes in the region is encapsulated in the comprehensive refugee response framework, CRRF.

In the NTCA countries and Central America in general, it's through a regional process called MIRPS, which is a Spanish acronym. Really importantly, the CRRF and MIRPS call for new and additional funding mechanisms over and above regular development assistance, and there is a call to link humanitarian and development aid. The CRRF offers a novel avenue for responsibility sharing at a unique historical moment to do this.

This falls under what academics and practitioners call the humanitarian development nexus, or the new way of working.

I can talk about the obstacles to supporting MIRPS in a second, but I want to add that there are at least four reasons why Canada should really consider supporting MIRPS and stop talking about it and doing studies about what's going on there. We should instead focus on how we can address the situation.

First, it will improve human rights and protections in the region.

Second, it offers a framework for Global Affairs Canada to do a proof-of-concept of the comprehensive refugee response framework and do pilot tests around the humanitarian development nexus, which is something that Global Affairs and the international community really need to do if the global compacts are going to make a difference.

Third, it can help bolster Canada's soft power on the international stage.

Fourth, unfortunately and maybe most importantly, it can help forestall irregular migration dynamics from the region and prevent the kind of political knock-on effects we see in Canada.

This matters for domestic stability in Canada, but all of these things are of a piece, because domestic stability and the lack of pressure from irregular migration in Canada are among the reasons why we have such a high approval rate for all categories of immigration. In turn, our soft power role on the international stage and international prestige and capacity to act as a norm entrepreneur and policy entrepreneur are predicated on that domestic support.

• (1545)

**The Chair:** I do need to have you wrap it up, please.

Thanks.

**Mr. Craig Damian Smith:** I have one more sentence.

Again, as I argued last week, focusing on whether or not we should sign the compacts not only misconstrues how they work, but it misses the whole point. We should be focusing on leveraging this unique moment in international migration governance to start to fix the system for the safety and dignity of displaced people, and for the stability of the rules-based international order, which is in all states' rational self-interest.

Thank you.

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

We now turn to Mr. Stewart from Vancouver.

**Mr. Steve Stewart (Co-Chair, Americas Policy Group, Canadian Council for International Co-operation):** Thank you.

I'll first tell you very briefly about our organization. I'm here as the co-chair of the Americas policy group. It's a national coalition of 32 Canadian organizations that work on human rights and development in the Americas.

While some of our member organizations, such as Amnesty International, work directly on migration, most of our work is done directly in the countries of Latin America. The majority of our members focus on three regions: Mexico, Central America and Colombia.

Given that we have a fairly limited time for the presentation, I'm only going to touch very briefly on Colombia and Mexico and focus primarily on the Central American countries, particularly Guatemala and Honduras, because I believe that's the area where Canadian policy can play a role.

The focus in this presentation is primarily on the conditions that lead to migration. I think the speaker who preceded me did an excellent job of covering that, so I may jump over some of my points.

Colombia has the highest number of internally displaced people in the world after Syria, with 6.5 million people who are displaced. Despite the demobilization of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia last year and an end to that part of the war, violence and displacement continue. In 2017, violence in the country generated another 139,000 displacements, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. Although sometimes we have the impression that there is peace in Colombia, violence is still generating large numbers of internally displaced people.

There are a number of factors behind these displacements. They're common through all of the countries I'm referring to here. They are the impacts of free trade, extractivism, the drug trade, corruption and organized crime. It's exacerbated, as the previous speaker mentioned, by climate change.

In Mexico—and I think you've probably heard these statistics before—large numbers of displacement and violence coincided with the launching of the drug war in 2006, with a total of some 250,000 people believed to have been killed between the launching of the war and last year, while another 37,000 people have been forcibly disappeared.

In Colombia and Mexico, it's not uncommon for local government and security forces to act in collusion with organized crime, but it's in the Central American countries, in particular Guatemala and Honduras, where these networks have also deeply penetrated the national state. Organized crime operates on a number of levels in Honduras and Guatemala, ranging up from the street gangs that you've heard about in earlier testimonies, such as the Mara 18 and the Salvatruchas, who control both urban neighbourhoods and also a number of rural areas in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, often serving as the foot soldiers for more sophisticated criminal networks involved with drug trafficking, but also involved with graft in a large scale at the state level, and sometimes providing security to transnational corporations operating in these countries.

I'm not going to go in depth on statistics, but some rather stark examples have come up recently with the arrest last week of the brother of the Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández on cocaine smuggling charges, and then just last year Fabio Lobo, the son of the former president, Porfirio Lobo, was sentenced to 24 years after being convicted in U.S. courts on similar charges. In both of these cases, testimony indicates that the Honduran presidents were aware of these activities and, at the very least, did nothing.

However, the Honduran government's involvement in organized crime goes beyond links to drug smuggling. De facto President Juan Orlando Hernández, in his previous term, was forced to admit that his party looted the national public health and social security system to fund his 2013 electoral campaign.

• (1550)

We find similar cases in neighbouring Guatemala. In 2015, the president, vice-president and most of his cabinet were forced to resign and were indicted on corruption charges after investigations by the United Nations' international commission against impunity, CICIG, revealed a vast organized crime network within the Guatemalan state.

The president that succeeded him, current president Jimmy Morales, is now also under investigation. In recent times, though, his administration has taken steps to block the effective work of the UN body by preventing its director from entering the country.

The penetration of organized crime into government and state institutions takes place in the context of economic and ecological shifts in the region that are generating significant internal displacement. There are many different factors linked to that, which I mentioned previously.

In the Colombian case, the influx of low-priced basic grains that followed the signing of free trade agreements with North America and Europe in the past 25 years has reduced local food production and made it much more difficult for rural families to earn a living growing basic foods. This is combined with new unpredictability related to climate change, and pressure on farming communities from the expanding agro-industrial frontier—primarily sugar cane and African palm, which is, ironically, often used for the creation of biofuels.

These serve to drive the farmers from the land, either to marginalized communities in surrounding urban areas, or to take the long and dangerous migrant trek.

I know I'm running out of time already—

**The Chair:** Because I have your text, I'm just going to suggest you jump forward, particularly from “the combination of the factors”, to the end. That may be helpful for the committee.

**Mr. Steve Stewart:** I think you've probably heard a lot of testimony on the sort of generators of forced migration from the region, so I'll jump ahead to some of the suggestions coming from the Americas policy group on what Canada can do.

Unfortunately, we received the invitation fairly late, so we weren't able to carry out widespread consultation. These are based on input I received over the weekend from member groups.

Some of the things Canada can do are to continue its already important work in providing financial and diplomatic support for CICIG in Guatemala, and the less effective—but still important—mission against corruption and impunity in Honduras, which is sponsored by the Organization of American States. Those are among the few things that still provide hope to people that there can be change within their countries.

It would be important to implement the legislation enacted by the Canadian government earlier this year to create an ombudsperson for responsible enterprises who can monitor the behaviour of Canadian extractive nationals in the region, which make up the majority of extractive corporations operating in these areas.

Then, finally, refrain from endorsing governments that are linked to corruption and organized crime. Canada has positioned itself as a constant ally of the regimes in Honduras that took power following the June 2009 coup. Canada was one of the first countries to endorse the November 2009 elections that whitewashed the coup, and soon after pursued a free trade agreement and extensive mining concessions with the de facto regime of Porfirio Lobo. Under Lobo, the murder rate in Honduras skyrocketed to the highest in the world.

Similarly, in the midst of the violent suppression of pro-democracy protests last year that followed the questionable re-election of Honduran president Juan Orlando Hernández, with even the Organization of American States calling for the elections to be annulled and held again, Canada was once again among the first nations of the world to recognize the re-election of Hernández.

Rather than lending quick support, Canada needs to distance itself from regimes that are so deeply linked to organized crime and corruption.

The final point is to suspend the current safe third country agreement on refugees that Canada has between our government and the government of the United States of America, recognizing that the U.S. currently is not a safe third country for refugees. It's a call I'm sure you've heard in numerous other testimonies.

Those are our quickly cobbled together recommendations.

• (1555)

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

With your permission, I will have the clerk circulate your complete comments, including the part you left out, if you would like. We could have that translated and available to the committee.

For questions, we're going to begin with Mr. Sarai, who will share some of his time with Mr. DeCoursey.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.):** Thank you.

Thank you to both of you, especially Mr. Stewart from British Columbia. Welcome. It's nice to see you here.

I have a couple of questions. First, in your testimony, both of you spoke of the level of violence in Guatemala and El Salvador. Organized crime is probably at its worst, and the violence is at high

levels. Is this more government sponsored—or sanctioned, as you might want to call it—or is it because the governments have lost control in both of these countries?

If you can answer quickly, I'll start with you, Mr. Smith. Mr. Stewart can answer after that.

**Mr. Craig Damian Smith:** I think I'll give most of my time to Mr. Stewart, as he's the expert on the region. I just want to say it's never that clear-cut and very unfortunately I think what we're seeing in a lot of these regions is the beginnings or some of the indicators of failing or weak states.

One thing to note as well is that from the migration perspective, what we're seeing in El Salvador and seeing around the region is the fact that the deportation policies from the U.S. under the previous administrations are coming home to roost. When we're thinking about these things, the knock-on effects of immigration policies can have not only wide-ranging but quite long-term effects.

**Mr. Steve Stewart:** Yes, I think it is hard to give a cut and dried answer because, particularly in Honduras and Guatemala, less so in El Salvador, the organized crime has penetrated the state so deeply it's often hard to distinguish whether violence is what you might call political violence, or common crime. This was starkly revealed by the investigations that CICIG has carried out in Guatemala, where we discovered that the running of the organized crime networks went all the way up to the president. Often security forces are involved. High-level officers within the military in Guatemala, for example, have been involved in commanding the street gangs that carry out what seems to be common crime. It's very difficult to disentangle common crime from political or state violence.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** In contrast, the other state that has a serious outflow of forced migrants is Venezuela, specifically since 2017, most of whom are fleeing threats from armed groups or fear of prosecution based on their political opinions. There's obviously a very severe economic downturn in the country and a lack of essential services, food, medicine, including hospitals. There were over 1.5 million, I understand, displaced Venezuelans throughout the region between 2014 and currently. Has the increase in migration in recent years affected states in Latin and Central America? Would that have displaced a lot of the other needs of neighbouring states?

**Mr. Steve Stewart:** None of our organizations actually work in Venezuela, so we're not as well-versed in that, but from my limited knowledge, the neighbouring state that has been most affected is Colombia, which, ironically has even higher numbers of displaced people, but gets less focus, with 6.5 million displaced. There is a large influx of Venezuelans crossing into Colombia, which has an impact on the situation within that country as well. I have heard nothing about that impact in Central America.

•(1600)

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** Many of the migrants who are coming from that region have now arrived at the U.S.-Mexico border in hopes of seeking asylum and settling in the United States, despite warnings that they would be deported from the U.S. How do you think the U.S.'s policy with regard to this migrant caravan will end up affecting Canada?

**Mr. Steve Stewart:** I'll let Mr. Smith answer.

You have the expertise.

**Mr. Craig Damian Smith:** Sure. One of the things that we need to think about with the migrant caravan is people's decision-making in the face of the fact that they know they're going to face violence from Mexican authorities at the border with Guatemala, and it was well-publicized that they knew it was going to happen at the border with the U.S. and they nonetheless made the decision. They weren't using smugglers either. They were banding together for self-protection. That tells you that the push factors, the things making them leave, are more powerful than the control measures or the obstacles in their way.

How that might affect—

Sorry, I'm hearing feedback, is that somebody speaking?

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** No, we're fine. We can hear you.

**Mr. Craig Damian Smith:** In terms of how that might affect Canada, right now, there are very few people from NTCA countries arriving in Canada, and that's because it's difficult to make it into the U.S., and difficult to make it through the U.S. Where it might start impacting Canada—and that's something that people, the current government especially, needs to keep on their radar—is when the U.S. will end temporary protected status for people from the region, which will coincide almost directly with the next federal election in Canada.

When the Trump government announced it was ending TPS for Haitians, roughly 10% from the U.S. decided to come to Canada. If the same number of people from El Salvador and Guatemala who have TPS now in the U.S. did that, it would double the asylum claims in Canada overnight, or in very short order, which is something that we should keep in mind.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** Thank you. I'm going to cede the rest.

**The Chair:** Mr. DeCoursey.

**Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Fredericton, Lib.):** Craig, it's Matt DeCoursey here. Thanks for being back in front of the committee.

When you were here last week you spoke about the role of ODA in helping to address some of these protracted refugee and migrant situations. Could you share your view on the role that unlocking or activating international private capital might have in helping to address some of these situations?

Obviously, a number of different elements go into dealing with these situations, but money is certainly one of them. Money from government is certainly a part of it, but what role could unlocking private capital have in helping to address these situations?

**Mr. Craig Damian Smith:** I'm only now starting to have proper conversations with people at international financial institutions about

using leveraged funding to unlock other development financing. What Canada has done with the special trust fund for Bangladesh through the World Bank's IDA18 refugee sub-window and what Canada and the EU have done for unlocking private capital for the trust funds in Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon offer some examples. I would be happy to do some research on this subject.

**The Chair:** Mr. Tilson.

**Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I move:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Committee invite the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship and departmental officials to update the Committee on the 2018 Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration, including Canada's immigration Plan for 2019-21.

Despite the minister appearing on the supplementary estimates last week, we were hardly able to ask any questions due to the Liberal filibuster the entire hour the minister was with us. I'm of the opinion that the levels plan requires its own separate meeting. We've heard through our migration study alone lots of testimony that raises questions about Canada's immigration levels, and I believe we owe it to Canadians to examine the levels plan in a separate meeting.

There are a wide variety of opinions with respect to immigration levels in Canada. Some advocate for higher levels and some for lower. There are many arguments to be made for both, and I would like to know what the minister's arguments are for the levels numbers he has presented.

What are the underlying economic assumptions? How did he conclude they were solid enough to base his numbers on? With whom did he consult in arriving at the numbers he has presented to the House? Has he adequately budgeted the necessary integration services needed? These are all questions we should be asking the minister in a separate meeting.

I'm going to quote, Mr. Chairman, from a recent piece that I read in the press:

The Trudeau government is ramming through its plan to boost immigration levels, despite survey after survey showing that Canadians oppose this idea.

An Angus Reid poll from August 2018 found that half of Canadians want lower immigration compared to only 6% who want increased numbers. Likewise, another Angus Reid poll from earlier that month, which focused on illegal immigration, found that two-thirds of Canadians believe we accept too many asylum seekers.

These numbers represent the lowest public approval of Canada's immigration program since pollsters started tracking this data in the 1970s.

While public opinion on immigration has hit an all-time low, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is boosting immigration to an all-time high.

The Liberal government announced its annual immigration targets this week—unveiling an aggressive plan to boost immigration numbers to the highest levels in modern Canadian history.

By 2021, the Liberals plan to welcome 350,000 new permanent residents per year.

Under Trudeau's plan, Canada will add a city the size of Victoria, B.C., London, Ont., or two Prince Edward Islands each and every year.

The Liberals will have welcomed 1.3 million new permanent residents in by 2021, the equivalent of the city of Calgary or the province of Manitoba within the next three years.

Trudeau's plan will bring in more people than the current populations of Yukon, Nunavut, Northwest Territories, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador and New Brunswick, combined.

New permanent residents are just half the equation. The Trudeau government also plans to boost the number of temporary foreign workers to 250,000 per year.

When we add together permanent residents, temporary workers, foreign students and other long-term visitors, Canada will welcome roughly three-quarters of a million people into our country each year.

That's more than 2% of our total population.

Where will these newcomers live? Will they disperse across our vast country, or, like most newcomers over the past few decades, will they join the already congested major cities?

Will these newcomers learn English or French and adopt a Canadian identity? Will they learn about Canadian history, will they celebrate our culture and adopt our values?

Or, will they follow Justin Trudeau's cue that Canada is a "post-national state" with "no core identity"? Will they live in isolated communities and fail to learn English or become economically self-sufficient?

● (1605)

Trudeau has created a toxic brew when it comes to immigration. He's flung the door wide open, repeatedly inviting the world to come to Canada on social media.

His government has welcomed and even helped to facilitate the stream of illegal border crossers coming in from the United States; a problem that those same Angus Reid polls show two-thirds of Canadians describe as a "crisis" and 70% do not trust Trudeau to fix.

Alongside the Trudeau government's unwillingness to protect our borders, Trudeau has embraced a postmodern attitude that neglects the Canadian identity and downplays the importance of integration.

Canada has long been a country made up of different people from different parts of the world who came to Canada for new hope and opportunity. Immigrants from all backgrounds worked hard and come together over our shared values and way of life.

Canadians are intrinsically open to immigration and welcoming to newcomers, so long as they are willing to work hard, play by the rules and embrace our Canadian values.

Trudeau's immigration and integration policies are testing the limits of Canadian openness and generosity. Canadians want a responsible, rules-based immigration program that benefits the entire country. That's simply not what the Trudeau government has offered.

That's the end of the quote, Mr. Chairman.

To be clear, the Conservatives are steadfastly pro-immigration. Under our previous Conservative government, we oversaw historic levels of immigration each year. The difference here is that we knew how to properly plan and manage it to ensure that newcomers and Canadians alike had faith that it was working in a fair manner. Instead of fixing the problems they have created with border crossings and increasing wait times, the Liberals have launched a pro-immigration campaign to convince the public this government is in fact managing immigration well. Nothing to see here, Mr. Chairman.

Members of this committee consistently hear about the benefits of immigration through our work here. However, we should avail ourselves of the opportunity provided by this motion to dig into the nuts and bolts of the minister's levels plan to see if we're providing Canadians with the best possible immigration policy or if we are doing our economy a disservice.

It has been noted the Liberals have reduced the focus on economic class migrants by a number of percentage points in terms of the overall total in favour of family class migrants. In 2015, the numbers were 63% economic class, 24% family class and 13% refugees, protected persons and humanitarian class. By 2021, under the minister's numbers, that shifts to 51% economic class, 30% family class and 19% refugees, protected persons and humanitarian class.

While family class and refugees are important and a demonstration of Canadians' openness to immigration, Canadians also expect our immigration policies to support the economy and our job market. By reducing the percentage of economic class migrants in the overall number, the minister may be undermining Canadian support for robust immigration numbers. Labour shortages in certain parts of the country and certain industries are acute. As members here know and understand, employers need access to a robust labour market to continue our economic growth, and migration is an important source of labour—especially as Canada's population ages. Our worker-to-retiree ratio is dropping quickly and we need access to labour to maintain our economy and social programs.

Mr. Chairman, Canadians support that.

● (1610)

**The Chair:** I'm just going to interrupt you for one minute. I will let you continue after because it's your right to have the floor as long as you need for this.

I just want to explain to the witnesses that obviously this is an opportunity for you to stay and see the work of the committee; however, you also have the opportunity to take a break. My instinct is that this could go on a while.

Out of respect for you, as professionals, and for your time—you may be open to this—a procedural point is that once a member has the floor in any meeting, he or she may bring forward a motion that is in order. There was a motion we appropriately had a notice of motion for, a brief motion from Mr. Tilson. He is in order to present this motion today, and he is in order to continue his comments as long as he doesn't repeat, which he has not. Thank you. He can continue on for as long as he would like.

I just wanted to give you two notice that this could go on for a while. You're welcome to stay, and you're welcome to have lunch.

Mr. Tilson.

**Mr. Craig Damian Smith:** Thank you.

**Mr. David Tilson:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.



As I have indicated, our worker-to-retiree ratio is dropping quickly, and we need access to labour to maintain our economy and social programs. Canadians support that. We mustn't lose sight of that important fact. Under this government, Canada has dropped on the OECD rankings for immigrant employment. Additionally, the average earnings of economic migrants have dropped 6% under Trudeau. With all this spending, what are they actually doing to help new Canadians who are playing by the rules?

There are other factors at play when it comes to support for immigration levels as well. The government's handling of the illegal border-crossing situation, and all the fallout from it, is certainly testing the public's patience and confidence in the government's ability to maintain integrity in our immigration system.

The Province of Ontario has asked for \$200 million to handle the increased costs they've had to incur to deal with the influx from Roxham Road in Quebec. To date, the federal government only plans on reimbursing \$50 million for Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba.

I submit, Mr. Chairman, that this is not a good way to increase public confidence in our immigration system.

We see Canadians' concerns reflected in last week's report from the Parliamentary Budget Officer, regarding costs associated with illegal migration at our southern border. He noted that it currently costs \$14,321 per migrant, which he predicts will rise to \$16,666 in 2019-20. This means that at current levels we're talking \$340 million for the last fiscal year, rising to \$396 million in 2019-20. This is just the federal costs that they were able to nail down.

As this committee knows very well, there are huge burdens on the provinces and municipalities in terms of housing, education, and social and integration services that are not reflected in these numbers.

The border security minister is quoted as saying the system is working. Mr. Chairman, try telling that to the IRB, which is buckling under the load being imposed by these numbers. Their backlog is just shy of 65,000. This is well beyond their capacity to handle. The wait times are going nowhere but up, which isn't fair to either those coming in via normal channels or to border crossers.

Canadians are watching this and wondering why this government can't seem to manage their immigration system in a way that is orderly, planned, fair and compassionate. This is what Canadians expect, but it's not what they're getting.

Further eroding public support in our immigration system is a new loophole—"a loophole within a loophole", my colleague, Ms. Rempel, calls it. Canada Border Services Agency officers have identified a phenomenon where one claimant enters Canada illegally and acts as an anchor relative to other family members. Those family members can then enter at a port of entry and not be considered illegal migrants. The PBO asked for data, but the CBSA said it's not currently being tracked.

This means that a migrant can cross into Canada from the United States of America between official entry points, avoiding the safe third country agreement that would otherwise have made them ineligible. Once a claim has been made, the migrant can access Canada's generous welfare system, as he or she navigates the asylum

claims process that gives them multiple hearings and appeals. In the meantime, they can effectively sponsor other members of their family, who can arrive as regular migrants, also avoiding the safe third country agreement.

● (1615)

Due process should work both ways. In this case, the integrity of this system is being violated.

The anchor relative position does not just apply to nuclear families, but to parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, nephews and nieces. The obvious solution is to close both loopholes in the safe third country agreement, amend it so it applies between official points of entry and more tightly define who migrants can bring in.

It's incumbent on the government not only to have solid numbers to back up the economics behind the levels plan, but to put in the hard work required to maintain and increase public support for it. The minister may well have the economics to support his numbers, but simply laying out a policy and saying that this is the way it is going to be doesn't guarantee buy-in from Canadians, nor is it acceptable to demonize those who may not share the government's views for whatever reason.

This committee understands the need for an orderly, rules-based and compassionate immigration system. It's up to the government to make that case to Canadians much more effectively than has been the case for the past couple of years.

An August survey by the Angus Reid Institute set off alarm bells. The consensus that has characterized Canadian attitudes toward immigration for the past four years is in danger of shattering. The poll found that the number of respondents who felt immigration levels should stay the same or be increased, which has registered at over 50% for 40 years, had fallen to 37%. Half of those surveyed said that they would prefer to see the federal government's 2018 immigration target of 310,000 new permanent residents be reduced.

This must be treated as a warning to the government. It needs to do a better job of managing Canada's immigration system in a planned, orderly and compassionate way, and it needs to do it now.

It's clear that the public's patience is wearing thin when it comes to this government's handling of our immigration system. They are not impressed by the government yelling "racist" every time someone questions its stewardship of the system. There are legitimate questions to be asked. There are systemic failures at play.

This is something that I think the minister needs to explain to this committee. The long-held consensus in Canada that strong immigration is a net benefit for the country is being challenged by Canadians themselves. The case for it can be made, most certainly, and it's the minister's responsibility to tell us how he plans to do it.

In closing, I believe that this committee has a duty to examine the policies set forth by this government that fall within our mandate. No one would argue that the immigration levels plan falls outside of our mandate. This topic is certainly important enough to warrant its own meeting with the minister.

I have one final note, Mr. Chairman, as we approach the Christmas season. As my colleague Ms. Rempel indicated in a response to you, we are amenable to leaving this meeting until the new year so that we can continue with our work on the current study.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

• (1620)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I have Ms. Kwan on the list.

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

I just want to make a quick comment here. It's interesting to note that the Conservatives decided to basically filibuster this committee meeting with expert witnesses offering their expertise on forced migration in South America. I can't help but speculate as to why that might be. It might be because they recognize that the expert testimony, time and again in terms of the information they provided, undermines, frankly, the rhetoric that the Conservatives espouse, particularly related to the safe third country agreement and particularly related to the fact that the U.S. is not a safe country anymore for many of these inland asylum claimants.

The issue, of course, is that the experts are clear, over and over again at this committee and elsewhere when they say that the agreement should be suspended. The Conservatives are, of course, trying to suppress that aspect of it, and they are suggesting that the entire border should have the safe third country agreement applied to it.

On and on this goes. I don't disagree with having the minister come back. In fact, at the last committee meeting, I called for the minister to come back. The Liberal members voted against it, which is unfortunate. The minister should see the light of day and answer questions that are pertinent and important for committee members, but it's disappointing to me that the Conservative member has decided to filibuster this committee meeting in that context, and in some ways, I suppose, I'm not that surprised, given their position and perspective on asylum seekers.

• (1625)

**The Chair:** Mr. Tilson.

**Mr. David Tilson:** Just to respond to that, Mr. Chairman, I rather resent the NDP member saying that this is a filibuster. This notice of motion was made some time ago. All members saw it. If they know me, they know that when I make a notice of motion, I'm serious about it. I just don't make notices of motion for the heck of it. I do it because I sincerely believe it. I've even talked to you privately about having a meeting with the minister to discuss the levels plan, and I still want that.

There has been no time set aside by this committee for me to make this motion. It's unfortunate that the member thinks that I am trying to block the evidence that's being given today, but it's the only time I

have. I don't know when else I can do it other than today. We're not having a meeting on Thursday. I could have done it then, but the meeting has been cancelled.

I'm simply saying this is an important motion. This is an important topic. Much of it fits into the study we are processing as we speak, so it is most relevant, I would hope, that the members of the government would support this motion and have the minister attend the meeting with officials to explain his rationale for the levels plan and justify where he intends to go in the years ahead.

**The Chair:** Mr. Maguire.

**Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC):** Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I would just like to reiterate that I believe all members, including my colleague from the NDP who has just indicated that she is not against having the minister appear before us.... There is a very important question here with regard to my colleague Mr. Tilson's presentation on the need for more information and perhaps some explanation on a number of these areas that he has pointed out today.

I'd be fully in favour of having the minister appear before us as well.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** I'm going to read the motion, seeing no other hands up:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Committee invite the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship and departmental officials to update the Committee on the 2018 Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration, including Canada's immigration Plan for 2019-21.

All in favour?

**Mr. David Tilson:** I'd like a recorded vote, Chair.

(Motion negated: nays 5; yeas 4)

**The Chair:** We have come to 4:30, which is the time for our second panel to begin, so I'm afraid I need to thank the witnesses.

Witnesses, if you want to stay on and listen to the next panel, you're invited to do so. We can then ask questions of any of you, but I also recognize that your time is valuable. That really will be up to you. If you'd like to stay, you're welcome.

We'll need a small suspension for a minute to make sure our next group of witnesses is available.

• (1625)

(Pause)

• (1635)

**The Chair:** We're going to call the meeting back to order.

I'll just let you know what is going on. Professor Smith is going to stay and be available for questions. Mr. Stewart has left. We have two individuals on telephone: Professor Basok, whom we had here on October 25, when she presented a statement but didn't have time for questions; and Professor Duhaime from Montreal, who we also saw on October 25 and who will be available for questions. On telephone as well, we have Ivan Briscoe, program director for Latin America and Caribbean for the International Crisis Group, who is in Bogatá and was called at the suggestion of Sofia Martinez Fernández.

I just want to check whether any of the witnesses would like to have a statement. Professor Basok and Professor Duhaime have already made statements, and we've had a statement from the ICG, but Mr. Briscoe might want to make a statement.

Mr. Briscoe are you there?

**Mr. Ivan Briscoe (Program Director, Latin America and Caribbean, International Crisis Group):** I'm here. Thank you very much.

Good afternoon.

I don't feel any great need to make a statement. I would be perfectly happy to just answer your questions as they come up.

**The Chair:** Very good.

Let's begin. We're going to start with Mr. Tabbara.

You have seven minutes to ask questions with respect to migration and Latin America.

• (1640)

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

Thank you to all those who are still there, whether you are on teleconference or video conference. We appreciate your presence here.

My first question will go Dr. Basok. From your research, what strategies and programs are being implemented to manage the status of these irregular migrants? How can these programs be improved to provide more comprehensive status regularization mechanisms for them?

**Prof. Tanya Basok (Professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Windsor, As an Individual):** Since 2010, there have been two status regularization programs, one in 2015 and one in 2017.

The number of migrants that they were able to regularize is relatively low, as I said in my presentation in October. The major obstacles are lack of knowledge about the procedures on the part of front-line immigration officials, inadequate communication channels to make migrants aware of status regularization programs, financial costs of the program and complicated procedures. Migrants are required to bring many documents and sometimes it's difficult for them to obtain the documents that they need to bring. These are the major obstacles.

How can the system be improved? I think training for the front-line immigration officials who receive documents would be a must. Another must is better communication channels for migrants, particularly in rural communities. There are many undocumented migrants who reside in remote communities. They are not aware of the regularization programs, but also they are afraid to travel to major cities because of immigration checkpoints. It would be good to have some arrangements made that they would receive some kind of a pass, so they would be able to travel to urban centres without fear. Another improvement would be the reduction of costs and maybe simplification of some bureaucratic procedures.

**Mr. Marwan Tabbara:** Thank you.

My next question will be to, I believe, the first witness, Mr. Smith. You mentioned that El Salvador had 49% of its GDP lost because of violence and that was close to the losses in GDP to some failed states that we see: South Sudan, Afghanistan, etc.

I'm reading a report here that was released not too long ago by CIGI, the Centre for International Governance Innovation. On page 8, it says "The Venezuelan Exodus". It's talking about the mass movement of migrants out of Venezuela. I'll read you some numbers. "Estimated Venezuelan population in the major destination countries as of July 2018" and it just shows the mass exodus of Venezuelans going to Mexico, Panama, Colombia, Ecuador—basically large neighbouring countries.

As you've heard in the first hour, the opposition was mentioning that there are too many asylum seekers coming, but we can see these numbers that are coming from Latin America and not too far a distance from us. This is something that governments need to take into consideration, similar to the global compacts that we have discussed. Can you tell us what would happen if countries don't sign onto the global compact? What we're seeing in Venezuela we could see in other countries like El Salvador, with the numbers that you've shown with GDP losses, etc.

• (1645)

**Mr. Craig Damian Smith:** This is precisely the purpose of the global compacts. We really need to understand, and I said this last week, that the compacts came about after two years of negotiation and consultation and, therefore, reflect a balance of interest between host states and donor states.

Not to put too fine a point on it, but it's in donor states interests, like Canada's, to ensure that there's the capacity for these mass migration and reception events in the host states in regions of origin. It's slightly ethically ambiguous to state this, but doing that prevents the types of irregular migration dynamics that we could see in Canada. We want to do our best to attenuate those beforehand, and the cheapest and most expedient way to do that is through the compacts in regions of origin.

**Mr. Marwan Tabbara:** I want to remind some of our witnesses who were here that the past government did have cuts to border security of around \$300 million plus. We've reinvested \$2.7 million into expanding our biometric screening. We've invested more into outreach strategies of \$1.1 million. These are the types of things that our government has put forward. We understand the need, and as academics have shown and testified, this problem isn't going away. We need to be prudent in our investments and in solving these issues that may arise in our future.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I need you to end there.

Mr. Maguire.

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

I move:

That the Chair send, on behalf of the Committee, a letter to invite the Auditor General to examine irregular migrants crossing in the southern border, and that this examination include a review of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, the Canada Border Services Agency, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service and the functioning of the Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Task Force on Irregular Migration.

At this time, I'd like to walk through the reasons why I believe this committee would benefit from such a report.

Since January 2017, close to 38,000 people have illegally walked across the border and then claimed asylum. From the latest available data, 17,120 have been intercepted by the RCMP at the border so far in 2018 with the vast majority of these individuals crossing in Quebec. Contrary to the claims by Liberal ministers, the overall number of people intercepted by the RCMP is not declining. Comparing this year to last year, the number of people who crossed last year in the exact same period was 16,992.

While the numbers are comparable, saying that the number is declining is factually incorrect. It boggles the mind why Liberal ministers keep repeating that talking point when it is clearly wrong.

At our committee, we've had multiple appearances by ministers and departments but it wasn't until I requested a financial analysis from the Parliamentary Budget Officer that we got a better understanding of what the total costs are across departments.

I want to thank the PBO and his staff for the report as it gives all of us around this table—

**Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, on a point of order, with respect to this current motion, it would appear to me that we actually have witnesses, expert witnesses available to us right now who could provide testimony on the very topic of interest before us in the motion and that by speaking to the motion, he's actually defeating our ability to get information from experts on irregular migration.

It's somewhat surprising. I'm not sure it violates the terms of order of the committee, but it just seems not to be using the committee's time.

I'm not sure if the motion is in order. When we have witnesses who can speak to the very topic and then someone brings a motion to ask them to speak to the topic, that violates all principles of logic.

• (1650)

**The Chair:** I'm going to thank you for that. However, the member is in order in bringing the motion that he did. I'd like to draw the committee's attention to the verbal notice of motion that was presented. It has been slightly changed to make it an acceptable order of motion to invite the Auditor General. However, I also do hear the member's concern in the point of order and again, I think it's my opportunity to tell the witnesses that we may be at this motion for some time and I don't want to waste their time.

We have someone on the line from Bogota, someone from Montreal, someone from Toronto and someone from Windsor. You're certainly welcome to listen to the committee. However, the member does have the right to raise a motion for which he had given due notice of motion.

Mr. Maguire.

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

We have had multiple appearances from ministers and departments at our committee. However, it wasn't until I requested a financial analysis from the PBO that we were able to have a better understanding of what the total costs are across all departments. I want to thank the PBO and staff for the report, as I said, as it gives us all around this committee table a clearer picture of what the costs are to Canadian taxpayers.

I don't know if all the members of this committee have had time to read the PBO report, but to provide the highlights, the PBO estimates that the average cost to each asylum claimant who entered Canada in 2017-18 is \$14,321 per individual for the entire claim process, increasing to \$15,482 this year and then to \$16,666 in 2019-20.

If we receive the same number of people next year, we will be well on track to spend \$1.1 billion of taxpayers' money. I would like to stress that this does not include any of the costs being borne by other levels of government to provide for housing, welfare and other social services.

While the parliamentary budget office gave us the overall numbers, its mandate doesn't provide it with the ability to examine the Liberal government's performance in responding to the situation. The Auditor General is well within his mandate to undertake a performance audit and would be best placed to determine whether the government has responded accordingly.

Furthermore, the Auditor General can provide recommendations to determine whether there are ways we can improve how the various departments responded. I think this is something every single one of us around the table wants to see. We also know there are many moving parts as to how the government has responded to the border crossers. It would be in our committee's best interests to get a third party audit of what has transpired.

To name a few of the areas in which the Auditor General could undertake a performance review and to give my colleagues an idea of where this report could go, I will outline the following.

First, the RCMP and CBSA had to reallocate members from across the country to respond to the border crossers, so they could apprehend them and hand them over to the CBSA. How did the RCMP and the CBSA prioritize which parts of our border needed greater assurance resources? Did the allocation of RCMP and CBSA members to the border have any immediate consequences? There have been media reports that travellers will have longer wait times while going through customs, because of the reallocation of resources. Is that true? Because the situation has been going on for the past two years and doesn't seem to be stopping, what long-term budgeting has Public Safety put in place? Did the RCMP and the CBSA effectively coordinate with other departments? Is the CBSA effectively removing denied claimants?

Second, the IRCC had to reallocate members to deal with the border crossers. There has been testimony provided at this committee that the reallocation of employees has caused delays with other immigration streams. Is this impact true as well? How did the IRCC determine who would be pulled from their current job and reallocated to deal with the border crossers? Is there a direct correlation in visa denials and a concern that an individual might claim asylum in Canada, therefore adding to the backlog?

Third, there is backlog at the Immigration and Refugee Board and in its processes. The IRB has had to ramp up and hire new employees. How did they determine the number of new people to hire? The IRB has an expedited process for individuals from certain countries. How was that determined, and is it the best way to determine someone's claim?

The IRB wait times are growing, and it could take up to 20-plus months just to get an initial oral hearing. Is that causing any consequences and driving up costs elsewhere? Are IRB wait times causing a spike in humanitarian claims? For example, if someone has had to wait years for their claim, and they have either married or had a child on Canadian soil, are decisions being made in a timely manner, and is there evidence that certain processes are being rushed due to the backlog? Is the IRB effectively going through appeals? Are individuals now, because of the backlog, appealing decisions, to inevitably claim on humanitarian grounds?

• (1655)

Fourth is background checks by the RCMP, CBSA and CSIS. Given the massive influx of people, do our law enforcement and security agencies have the resources to do effective background checks? Are there any gaps in gathering intelligence on claimants, such as by checking with Interpol and other international police organizations? Has the CBSA, in reducing the amount of time while conducting background checks, caused any unintended consequences?

Fifth is deterrence. Has the government effectively instituted enough deterrents to stop the influx of people? How was it determined to send the minister to Nigeria, and what were the results of doing so? How has the government communicated with the U.S. administration in reforming the safe third country agreement? How was it decided to send Liberal MPs to visit with various communities in the United States, and how were those meetings determined to be successful? How did the government share information with embassies and foreign countries to deter individuals from coming across the border illegally?

Sixth is the ad hoc intergovernmental task force on irregular migration. How has the federal government worked across departments to effectively respond to the influx of border crossers? How were budgeting decisions made for budget 2018? How has the federal government worked, in coordination with provinces and municipalities, to reimburse costs and coordinate the transportation, housing and health care of border crossers?

In closing, I believe there are sufficient reasons to send this request to the Auditor General. There are many unanswered questions. We all want Canada's immigration and refugee system to run efficiently and in an orderly fashion. We also want our immigration and refugee system to have the full trust of Canadians. I

can think of no better way to request this information than inviting the Auditor General to do just that.

If people continue for years to walk across the border to claim asylum, then it is incumbent upon us as parliamentarians to ensure that the system is working at peak performance. I don't think anyone around this table can say that it is. We do not have any evidence to suggest that things are running as smoothly as Minister Goodale, Minister Hussen, and Minister Blair would like us to believe.

We already have the Parliamentary Budget Officer's report. Canadians are concerned and deserve to know with the transparency of a thorough audit. I would assume that further developments would reflect the PBO's findings, which were based on findings from the six departments of government that he interviewed in gathering information to determine his request.

Thank you.

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

I'm just going to read the motion and then we'll continue.

It is:

That the Chair send, on behalf of the Committee, a letter to invite the Auditor General to examine irregular migrants crossing in the southern border, and that this examination include a review of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, the Canada Border Services Agency, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service and the functioning of the Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Task Force on Irregular Migration.

I have Mr. Whalen on the list next.

• (1700)

**Mr. Nick Whalen:** Mr. Chair, I would say with respect to the Auditor General that the Auditor General is independent. I think a motion like this might mislead Canadians and indeed other members of the committee as to whether or not this committee has any authority to direct the Auditor General to do or not do any study, which it doesn't.

I also fear that, rather than being used as a tool to actually get to the truth—in the event that the Auditor General chooses or does not choose to do any study into immigration that doesn't meet the express conditions of this motion, which is not binding on the Auditor General—this motion would be used as a whip to undermine the authority and independence and the ability of the Auditor General to give coherence to the reports that he creates.

It's not that I think the Auditor General shouldn't be free to undertake whatever studies he feels are appropriate to do, but that this committee shouldn't be trying to direct or be seen to direct the Auditor General when it has no authority to do so.

There is already a PBO report. If the Auditor General decides to go ahead and do a further investigation, doing so is up to the Auditor General.

Supporting this motion is just going to lead to further misinformation within the minds of Canadians about what committees are for, what the Auditor General is for, and who is responsible for this type of oversight. I am thus going to be voting against the motion.

**The Chair:** Mr. Allison.

**Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West, CPC):** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Welcome to our committee.

**Mr. Dean Allison:** Thank you very much. It's very interesting to be here. I figure, since everyone's talking, maybe I should talk as well for a little bit.

I just want to respond to Mr. Whalen.

I've had a chance to see the public accounts. As a matter of fact, I've sat on many committees where, quite frankly, there's been.... I'm just going to disagree with the premise of what he is talking about.

The Auditor General is looking for areas to look into if there are any issues people may be concerned with. I know at the public accounts committee, we always had the opportunity make recommendations to them. I sat on the public accounts committee when I got here in 2004. I know that continues to be the case today.

As I said, I think coming from this committee, it would be a good thing in that they would have a chance to look at what's going on and make any recommendations. I know this government is always singing the praises of the Auditor General and how it's great. They say we'll look at the recommendations, we'll make sure we act on them, and I think this will just be one more opportunity for us to point out an area that we would love to have some clarification on. Then, of course, if there were some recommendations, that would obviously take some time, and it would be an opportunity for the government of the day to be able to enact those things.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll have Mr. Tilson and then Ms. Kwan.

**Mr. David Tilson:** I have a further response to Mr. Whalen's remarks. If he looks at the motion that was made by Mr. Maguire, we're not directing. The committee is not directing him to do these inquiries, we're inviting him. It reads, "That the Chair send, on behalf of the committee, a letter to invite"—and I emphasize the word invite—"the Auditor General to examine irregular migrants crossing in the southern border", and so forth.

The reason that's being done is that the Parliamentary Budget Officer doesn't have the same authority as the Auditor General has. The Parliamentary Budget Officer has made it quite clear that he does not have the authority to look into other matters of serious concern that I raised in my motion and that Mr. Maguire has raised in his motion. He can go a lot further, and that's the reason we're inviting the Auditor General to examine this whole process.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Kwan.

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

With respect to the motion itself, I don't have a problem with the Auditor General being invited or being requested to look into these

items and then to present to Canadians for their determination. I think I'm fine with that.

Although, I have to say, I think the word "invite" is a bit strange. Perhaps the word should be "request", that we request the Auditor General to look at this. The Auditor General, then, is within their authority to either decline or accept. It is entirely up to them and their independence would be intact. I don't think we're in the position to invite them to look into this.

I would, therefore, make an amendment to say, instead of the word "invite", the word "request".

● (1705)

**The Chair:** In discussion with the clerk on the original notice of motion, I said that I would probably rule out of order a request of the Auditor General to do something, as that sounds heavier handed, and I think that is not the role of a Parliamentary committee, so Mr. Maguire changed it to "invite", and I think that it is a more cautious word. I would have preferred, frankly, "invite the Auditor General to consider examining", but as it stands now, I would rule that out of order, requesting the Auditor General to do anything.

Are there any other speakers?

I see none, so we will vote on the issue.

**Mr. Larry Maguire:** I'd like a recorded vote.

(Motion negatived: nays 5; yeas 4)

**The Chair:** We now go to Ms.—

**Mr. David Tilson:** I believe I can ask questions.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry...?

**Mr. David Tilson:** I believe I can have some questions. That was a notice of motion. The Conservatives still have the right to ask questions.

**The Chair:** On the notice of motion, the motion was just defeated.

**Mr. David Tilson:** No, not the motion...to the witnesses that we have before us.

**The Chair:** Yes, but it was Mr. Maguire's time, the clock was running and that time has been used.

**Mr. David Tilson:** No, Mr. Chairman, that was a notice of motion. That wasn't part of his time for questions. That was something separate.

That's been the practice of this committee for as long as you've been the chairman.

**The Chair:** I will let you continue, Mr. Maguire, if you would like, or you may cede your time.

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

To the witnesses, there are a number of areas here. I'd like to ask Mr. Briscoe—

**The Chair:** Just before we do that, we should check to see whether we have any witnesses left.

I see that Mr. Smith is still there.

Professor Basok, are you still there?

**Ms. Tanya Basok:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Professor Duhaime...? No.

Mr. Briscoe...?

**Mr. Ivan Briscoe:** Yes, I'm here.

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

Go ahead, Mr. Maguire.

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

Mr. Briscoe, I notice from this backgrounder that you've been dealing with the International Crisis Group, which has been working internationally for almost 20 years, I assume, from what I read, to prevent wars and shape policies for a more peaceful world, conducting field research for comprehensive reports to inform decision-making and public debate. You've been in the role of program director for Latin America since 2016. Is that correct?

**Mr. Ivan Briscoe:** That's correct.

**Mr. Larry Maguire:** What changes have you seen, then, over that period of time that you've...with your experience before you became the program director for Latin America and Caribbean, not just in Latin America but other areas as well?

**Mr. Ivan Briscoe:** I just want to ask for a clarification. Are those changes with regard to migration flows, or are you talking about broader political changes and social changes?

**Mr. Larry Maguire:** First it would be the migration changes, I guess, but then how the political changes may impact that.

• (1710)

**Mr. Ivan Briscoe:** Okay.

I would answer the first one on migration.

The primary change we have seen is the Venezuelan migration crisis, the likes of which are unprecedented in the post-Second World War period in Latin America, and the dimensions of which were not expected at all. I was at the border between Colombia and Venezuela over the weekend. There was a very substantial flow of people coming in, legally, over the four main border crossings between the countries. They're probably in the region—it varies per day—of 2,000 to 3,000 people coming from Venezuela every day. As we know from the latest UN figures, we're talking about a population of Venezuelans abroad, primarily in Latin America, of three million now. Most of them have left since 2015 but this has particularly accelerated since late 2016, as the economic crisis in Venezuela was aggravated. That would be the main difference in migration flows.

Obviously, I could also talk about the change in the nature of migrant flows in central America. The role of Central America is dominating the migrant flow through Mexico to the United States, replacing the Mexicans on that route. They're turning the flow much more into a flow of refugees because these people, of course, are fleeing in part from high levels of insecurity. That process, that change, predates 2016 when that was clearly witnessed in the crisis of unaccompanied children in 2014.

As for the second part of your question about the broader change in Latin America, I think we now have to acknowledge that the region is entering a period of profound political polarization, which

is not just characteristic within countries but is also characteristic across the entire region. In fact, if we look at a political map of the region nowadays, we see authoritarian left-wing governments in Venezuela and Nicaragua. What I would characterize as an imminent, authoritarian, right-wing government, will be taking power in Brazil, with many shades of left, right and centre in between.

In my personal experience of working in Latin America since 1996, in all of Latin America's history since independence I don't think there has ever been this level of political diversity in the region, which poses very great problems for regional coordination and regional responses to crises, including migration. To a large extent, it's also an expression of vitality in democracy and a diversity of democratic expression, which we see very much within countries. It could be the evangelical churches, which play an important role in the rise of conservative right-wing candidates in Brazil, Costa Rica, Colombia or the other grassroots indigenous Afro movements such as the Afro-Colombian movement, which is responsible for the rise of new left-wing movements, particularly in Colombia and other parts of Central America.

That would be my general diagnosis. My concern, particularly at the moment, is that this political dynamic is great for diversity. As I said, it's undermining the capacity of regional institutions that respond to crisis in a moment where we are seeing ongoing problems with criminal violence, uneven economic development and of course, instability and unrest in particular contexts such as in Nicaragua, Venezuela and Honduras.

In this light there is a grave concern that we will see greater levels of instability as the regional institutions prove unable to respond satisfactorily to these crises.

**Mr. Larry Maguire:** We're dealing with Latin America here today, but obviously we're looking at Venezuela, Colombia, Costa Rica and the other Latin countries. To what extent is it in places like Panama, as obviously there must be migration through those areas?

• (1715)

**Mr. Ivan Briscoe:** Panama is one of the front-line states for Venezuelan migration, which are effectively Colombia, Panama and to a degree, some of the islands in the Antilles such as Curaçao and Aruba. These are very small islands, but they have been affected by a very large influx of Venezuelan migrants and refugees.

What we are seeing in the region, because the numbers are so large, is that Colombia has about a million Venezuelans within it. The Colombian response in terms of providing residency rights to the Venezuelans, lowering the border controls for these Venezuelans and allowing them to access education and health services has been outstanding, but there's no doubt that there is a limit to this generosity.

We have, alas, seen episodes of xenophobia in Colombia. We have noted that the Colombian state is not at its best moment, fiscally speaking. There is a package of new tax reforms, which is being debated at the moment and is highly unpopular, so it is limited in its actions, as are the other states that are receiving Venezuelan migrants, particularly Peru and Ecuador.

It's interesting that we see similar xenophobic reactions increasing in southern Mexico where Central Americans are often bottled up because of the high levels of border control and internal control exerted on Central American migrants within that country.

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

**Mr. Ivan Briscoe:** Yes, of course. No problem. Thank you.

**The Chair:** We're going to go to Ms. Kwan now.

I want to signal to the committee that consistency will not necessarily be my middle name. As a chair, I have tended to stop the clock when a member is interrupted by another member on a point of order, but I have not, in other committees, tended to run the clock when they use their time for another purpose. That is to ensure that other members have the time to ask the questions they want to and that witnesses who travel or make their time available have that time.

If people use their time for their own purposes, I will indeed cut them off because there is a variety of ability for the chair to do that within the Standing Orders.

Mr. Tilson.

**Mr. David Tilson:** On that, Mr. Chairman, you have raised a good point, and I understand that, but the difficulty is that when members of all sides have legitimate notices of motion and wish to debate them, there's no other time. We also have the right to ask questions of witnesses.

If that's going to be your ruling, I would suggest that you allow time in future meetings for motions to be brought. Otherwise, we can never bring motions that may be legitimate. The committee may agree with those motions and they may disagree with those motions, but if you follow your rationale, we will never be able to make motions.

**The Chair:** Your point is taken. Certainly, we do have business meetings from time to time, and we can have a business meeting. I remind you that if four members chose to require a meeting for such a motion, that's within the Standing Orders.

I'm going to be following the Standing Orders. There is no consistency among committees with respect to that practice. Some committees keep the clock running; some don't. It is at the discretion of the chair, but I do hear Mr. Tilson's comment about motions and making sure we do have business time for any member of the committee to bring motions, so I will take that under advisement.

Ms. Kwan.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Thank you to all the witnesses.

Professor Smith, in your comments, you mentioned that the United States is no longer a safe third country. The latest we have learned is of course that the U.S. is now firing tear gas at migrants

still in Mexico, to deter them from making an asylum claim. We have also learned that the U.S. has outright declared that those who face domestic violence and gang violence will no longer be considered legitimate refugee claimants in the United States.

In this context, can you share with us your thoughts on Canada's response to the safe third country agreement. Do you think Canada should exercise our right to suspend the safe third country agreement?

● (1720)

**Mr. Craig Damian Smith:** I think that's a really important question.

There are two points that I think need addressing here.

One, if the Conservative Party of Canada is most interested in cost overruns.... To extend the safe third country agreement to the entirety of the border, we should look to the European Union to see how much it costs to have what the organization they call Frontex comprehensively does with respect to migration controls on their border. The cost overruns would be significantly higher than they are currently.

The second point is whether or not the U.S. is safe. That's a very complicated question. It depends on where you are, who you are, whether or not you live in mixed documented and undocumented households.

I think the way the safe third country agreement is now, the rationale for suspending it is to make it safer for people who don't feel safe in the U.S. to make asylum claims in Canada so that they can enter through regular border crossings. Also, it would address the things that people are worried about, which are the extraneous costs and moving CBSA and RCMP officials around.

It would also remove the kind of spectacular context and images of irregular migration, which are the things that serve as the fodder for populist discourse around unsafe borders and asylum seekers.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** That's exactly what we heard from other witnesses. They made the suggestion that if Canada suspended the safe third country agreement, then the border communities would not be faced with the kind of pressure that they are today. We can actually have orderly crossings at the borders.

At the last meeting, the UNHCR representative noted that what's happening in the United States with the tear gas is in fact in contravention of the 1951 refugee convention, which of course we all acknowledge.

**Mr. Craig Damian Smith:** Can I make one quick comment there? I'm sorry to interrupt you.

In the 1951 refugee convention, article 31 states that it's not illegal to claim asylum between ports of entry. It's enshrined in international law and, therefore, it's part of Canadian law.

The word "illegal" is a misnomer. It's also not illegal under Canadian law to not use a port of entry. It's not a criminal offence.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Yes, exactly. In fact, the Immigration Refugee Protection Act explicitly says that it's not a criminal offence for asylum claimants to cross over irregularly to make a claim.



With that being said, I should note also that Minister Blair, at the public safety committee, did not rule out Canada not putting on the table applying the safe third country agreement to the entire border. I was very dismayed. I learned it from my colleague who sits on that committee. The government would not rule this out. That to me is hugely disturbing.

What are your thoughts on that? Do you think that the government, as they are embarking on a process of talking to the United States about the safe third country agreement, should rule out applying the safe third country agreement to the entire border of Canada?

**Mr. Craig Damian Smith:** I'm going to refrain from commenting specifically on what the Liberal government ought to do in that regard. I'm not privy to all of the negotiations with the U.S.

I'll just say, as a fact, if the safety of individuals, the safety of Canada's security services and costs are the things that we're interested in.... If those are the metrics for which we would consider making a decision in that regard, then extending the safe third country agreement to the world's longest undefended border would be extremely costly and also very likely dangerous for asylum seekers and CBSA and RCMP officers alike.

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

One of the issues I think Canada is known for and recognized for is our Immigration and Refugee Board approach. We actually have an arm's-length, independent board that assesses asylum claims. The only problem with it, of course, is that it does not have enough resources to process claims in an expeditious manner.

Would you say that it is important for Canada to maintain what I think is widely regarded as a world-class standard of refugee assessment process?

• (1725)

**Mr. Craig Damian Smith:** I think that in the way it does its work and goes about its work, the IRB is successful and largely fair. From what I understand about the IRB, the investigation processes are fair and comprehensive.

It's a fact that other states look to Canada's IRB model to increase their capacity. For instance, and in direct relation to what's going on in Latin America and on the Mexico-U.S. border, one of the areas where Canada is making the most significant impact, even if it's a small impact in relation to the overall state capacity and scale of the problem, is with the IRB twinning projects with Mexican authorities. IRB members go to Mexico and do bureaucratic training to increase capacity.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I only have less than a minute left. Quickly, on the caravan situation, do you have any recommendations on what action Canada should take with regard to that situation?

**Mr. Craig Damian Smith:** I said it last week in the committee, and I said it again today. The best thing that Canada can do right now, in my opinion, if I were in charge, is to deal with the issues at Global Affairs Canada that prevent us from successfully implementing projects under the comprehensive refugee response framework, and break down the bureaucratic silo between humanitarian and development programming.

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

**The Chair:** Mr. Whalen.

**Mr. Nick Whalen:** Thank you very much, Chair.

I guess, with the amount of time I have, I'm just going to ask one question to each of you. Do you believe that the Colombian efforts are best-in-class in the Venezuelan migration crisis, in terms of what Colombia's doing versus Peru, Ecuador, the Latin American countries and Brazil? If that's the case, what can Canada do to help Colombia in those efforts? What can it do to help the other neighbouring countries in their efforts to assist Venezuelan refugees? What paths can Canada provide here in Canada to do its fair share in terms of hosting, as a third country, refugees from that country and from that crisis?

I'll start with someone who hasn't had a chance to speak much yet, Ms. Basok, and then we'll move to Mr. Briscoe and then Mr. Smith.

**Ms. Tanya Basok:** I will be very brief because, unfortunately, Colombia is not my area of expertise. I focus on Mexico and the Central American migration. From my general knowledge, I believe Canada has had a good record of third country resettlement in the past. I hope that it will continue doing so with current refugee situations.

**Mr. Nick Whalen:** Mr. Briscoe.

**Mr. Ivan Briscoe:** I think Colombia, in South America, has definitely led the way, but it's absolutely at its limits. There are 60 babies being born to Venezuelan mothers every day in the main border town. There are problems with the provision of health and educational services. What it needs, above all else, is the financial support from other countries. The financial support for Colombia's response to the Venezuelan migration has been miserable so far. There is, I believe it just came out today, an estimate that Latin American-South American countries need \$700 million to respond to the Venezuelan exodus. I think Colombia's looking at between \$50 million to \$100 million for the last year only, or rather less than that. Financial support is essential.

Also, perhaps, would be support for Colombia's capacity to sift the migrant flow, decide who are valid refugees and give proper protection to those refugees. The capacity for refugee identification and protection in Colombia and other South American countries is lacking at the moment. You have to remember that these are mixed flows from Venezuela.

**Mr. Nick Whalen:** Mr. Smith.

**Mr. Craig Damian Smith:** There are two things.

First, Canada should support the emergency appeal from UNHCR, which I think is around \$700 million, maybe closer to \$800 million for the Venezuelan crisis. Generally these funding appeals are not met.

The second one is that Canada should seriously consider expanding and actually living up to our protection transfer agreements, PTAs, with the UNHCR, which help alleviate burden by bringing some of the most vulnerable people to Canada. There's room, again in both the compacts, to experiment around safe and legal channels for migration for people who are caught in displacement crises.

• (1730)

**Mr. Nick Whalen:** This is great. I actually have a chance, probably, for one final question.

In terms of the approach that's being bandied about, it sounds like Colombia, by allowing residency, education, opening their borders and presumably allowing some type of work, in some senses, has a better approach than camps. We've heard that there's some motion to create camps in Brazil.

From each of your opinions, in terms of protecting migrants from xenophobia by having them in camps versus allowing them to integrate, work and become part of the communities in which they're being hosted, which is the better approach in the current crisis?

I guess I'll start with Mr. Smith, Mr. Briscoe, and then Ms. Basok at the end.

**Mr. Craig Damian Smith:** I'm glad you asked the question in that way. Through the refugee compact we have the means and the mechanisms to support what we call these livelihoods approaches, implementing at the outset of displacement crises development programming, instead of care and maintenance approach humanitarian funding, which you generally see in refugee camps. In speaking as a social scientist, we have these opportunities now to experiment with innovative program delivery and do proper monitoring and evaluation in our hemisphere, in a place where we can make an actual difference.

**Mr. Nick Whalen:** Mr. Briscoe.

**Mr. Ivan Briscoe:** That's a good question. In fact, this is quite a lively debate between the international community and UN agencies present in Bogota. The government is absolutely certain that it's best to treat the Venezuelans as migrants who are eligible for two-year residency, in which time they can work. It's important to bear in mind that to enter Colombia from Venezuela, all they need is to put their identity details into a website run by the Colombian

government, print out a document from that and they can get in without a passport or without even a valid identity card.

The problem is, what happens at two years? Will those working residency visas or cards be renewed? There is an uncertain future. The refugee approach, which, as you've said, can be based more on camps is often based on systems of protection with no automatic right to work. It is one that will be much more costly for the Colombian government, which is the reason why it was reluctant to take it, but it would, perhaps, offer a greater degree of certainty over the horizon.

I think what makes the Colombian—

**Mr. Nick Whalen:** I'm sorry, Mr. Briscoe, since we only have just a few seconds left. I'm going to ask Ms. Basok to chime in from the Mexican perspective, and whether or not Mexico sees opportunities for migrants to work versus putting them in camps. What is the current position and status of irregular migration in Mexico with respect to the right to work and the right to access social services?

**Ms. Tanya Basok:** In general, when you place refugees in camps, I don't believe it reduces xenophobia. It increases it. When the local population sees migrants receiving aid and not contributing to the society, and being a drain on international and national resources, then xenophobia tends to rise.

In general, I am in favour of allowing migrants and refugees an opportunity to work, to receive resident status if possible—even temporary residency status—and start providing for themselves and their families, as opposed to being idle in refugee camps and being susceptible to diseases that are often common in camps.

With respect to Central Americans, they've currently found a stadium and some of them have been recently resettled to a shelter. At the present moment, they do not have the right to work. However, Mexico does have a one-year humanitarian status visa. Refugees also have the right to apply for refugee status. When they apply for refugee status, they are granted the right to work, and this is a much better approach than keeping them in refugee camps.

• (1735)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. I want to thank our witnesses for their presentations.

The meeting is adjourned.







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