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# Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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EVIDENCE

**Thursday, February 1, 2018**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Robert Oliphant**



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• (1120)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.)):** Good morning. I'm very pleased to call to order this 93rd meeting of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

Today we are very delighted to have with us Ambassador William Swing, from the International Organization for Migration, an organization with which Canada has had a strong relationship for over a half a century. Mr. Swing is shortly completing his second term as the head of this international organization. We're delighted he is taking time to come to Canada, both to continue to build the partnership we have in that international organization and to meet with our committee.

I thought this was a wonderful opportunity for us to have insights offered by someone with decades of work on migration, and we're hoping to look forward as much as to look to the past. We welcome you.

The way our committee will work is we invite you to deliver remarks and then we will ask you questions and engage in a conversation.

**Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC):** I have a point of order, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, I would like to welcome Mr. Swing, representing the International Organization for Migration.

My concern is how this got on the agenda. My understanding is—and I haven't visited this committee for some time—that this was put on the agenda by you and not by the committee.

**The Chair:** It was, as a courtesy to an international organization.

**Mr. David Tilson:** Mr. Chairman, I have no problem. My concern—and I hope you will keep this in mind for the future—is that the committee sets the agenda. The chairman does not.

**The Chair:** I understand.

**Mr. David Tilson:** You have set the agenda today, and it's most inappropriate. I just want to make it clear that hopefully you won't do it again, because it is inappropriate. The committee is in charge of this committee, not the chairman.

**The Chair:** I understand.

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

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Thank you, Ambassador. It's your time.

**Mr. William Lacy Swing (Director General, International Organization for Migration):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee.

It's a unique honour for me to have this opportunity to have an exchange with you. I've discovered, over a long period of time, that when I became an ambassador, I spent too much time in the offices of the administration and not enough time with the U.S. Congress. I was 40 years in the U.S. diplomatic service. When I became ambassador, I changed that, and I want to say that we need to spend much more time talking to parliamentarians around the world as well as to mayors. Mayors have a major role to play in migration, as do you.

I think the value of this exchange is an opportunity to hear from you, to have your questions, and to try to respond to these, so I will be relatively brief—not more than 10 or 12 minutes, I hope.

I want to make basically three points.

The first point is that we are living in a world on the move. Migration is already a megatrend of this century. There are more people on the move than at any other time in recorded history. This is not because the percentage is higher—for 20 or 30 years it's been about the same, with about 3.5% of the world's population crossing borders as international migrants—but because of a demographic phenomenon, which is that the world's population quadrupled in the 20th century. It had never happened before and is unlikely to happen again, and I certainly won't be around to see it.

We have 258 million international migrants, according to the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. We have another 750 million domestic migrants moving, for example, from the western, more impoverished provinces of China to the affluent coastal cities of Guangzhou, Shanghai, Hong Kong, etc. In fact, China alone has more domestic migrants than there are international migrants, but of course, everything is big in China, as we know. That means you have a total of 1 billion persons who can be called migrants. In other words, one in every seven persons is a migrant. My own family is scattered on four continents, and I think my family is becoming much more the rule than the exception.

We're in a world of what I like to call not migration but human mobility, but the rules have not kept up with the movements. Most migration, the vast majority, is occurring in a safe, regular, and orderly fashion. There is as much south-south migration as there is south-north migration. It seems that everyone in Europe thinks that everybody's heading north. It's not true. There are more Africans immigrating within Africa than there are going to Europe. These are some fundamental facts that I think are very important.

If you put all these international migrants together, they'd probably be the sixth-largest country in the world. They would have a GDP, if you judge it by remittances, of \$600 billion a year, which is twice the total of foreign aid and roughly equivalent to all foreign direct investment. Of course, migrants are much more important than just their remittances, but remittances are a key element. A country like Moldova or El Salvador depends for at least 30% of its income, its GDP, on migration remittances.

The second point is that, unfortunately, many others are being forced to migrate. There are 66 million forced migrants—23 million refugees, and about 43 million others who are forced to move and who are very vulnerable. They are, unfortunately, caught up in my second point, in what I would call a perfect storm. There is unprecedented anti-migrant sentiment in the world, and it's growing.

I came here in large part to thank you, to thank your government, and to thank the Prime Minister for the very forward-looking, positive, constructive approach that Canada is taking toward migration. You are an example for the world.

● (1125)

When I was here on December 6, 2015, your government asked us if we could move 25,000 Syrian refugees to Canada in the next three months. I think I said something on television like, "Well, if anybody can, we can. By the way, next year is a leap year, so maybe you have an extra day." As a matter of fact, the last plane with Syrians arrived here on February 29, 2016. You've taken many more since then, and I think this year you could well be the number one refugee resettlement country in the world, overtaking the U.S., which has reduced its numbers. I'm grateful to you for that.

Apart from that, we have enormous, widespread, growing anti-migrant sentiment in the world, built on stereotypes and mythology that both endangers the migrants and denies us all the contribution that we know they would make.

I'll give you one statistic from a new study by the McKinsey Global Institute, which is a partner of ours. It has concluded that 3.4% of the world's population who call themselves international migrants are producing 9% of global GDP. That is 4% more than had they stayed at home.

I've never understood the debate about migration and development. Of course migrants are the quintessential agents of development. They're highly motivated and they bring talent. They don't take jobs; they create jobs. They're not criminals, because they have to be careful—a lot of them are irregular and they're afraid of seeing a policeman. They don't bring in terrorism; they're fleeing terrorism in many cases.

However, the other part of the perfect storm is that we have a gross lack of political courage and leadership on the migration issue

in many countries. It doesn't win elections; it loses elections. As well, it very often complicates coalition-building, as you can see if you look at what's happening in Germany right now.

You also have at least 10 simultaneous, protracted, complex armed conflicts and humanitarian emergencies from the western bulge of Africa to the Bay of Bengal in South Asia, with no hope of a short-to medium-term solution. You have a violation of international humanitarian law on all sides, and a serious erosion of international moral authority, including in the Security Council. We have a growing lack of confidence on the part of people in their governments' will, willingness, and ability to manage migration, we have very unclear power relationships, and we have the demographic disparity between global south and global north.

We're doing a lot of work in Niger right now. I was just there recently. The average woman is having six to seven children. The median age is 14. The median age in Germany is 47. It doesn't take a scientist to tell you what that means—more youth unemployment and more pressure.

Based on all the data we have, my belief is that these drivers are not going to go away anytime soon, and the question of irregular migration and how you manage it is going to be one of the major challenges of our century. The concern is that all of these factors together are endangering migrants and preventing them from making the contribution that we know they will make.

Your country was built on the backs and brains of migrants, and it continues to be so. South of the border it's the same thing. I can say that, as an American. We need to get back to a historically accurate reading of migration, an accurate migration narrative that says that historically migration has always been overwhelmingly positive.

This is what you're doing so well. Former minister John McCallum, who is now your ambassador in China—I hope to see him in May when I go to Beijing—was travelling throughout your country prior to the arrival of the 25,000 refugees. He was talking to all the provinces, provincial leaders, and mayors, and he was basically saying, "Here's what we need to do as a community. We need to have shelter, language training, jobs, education, and so on, for these migrants when they come." That's the reason it's gone so well for you.

● (1130)

All of the bad things that have happened in terms of terrorism in Paris; Nice; Brussels; Barcelona; San Bernardino, California; and Orlando, Florida were all home-grown. It was failed integration. These weren't newly arrived migrants: these were citizens, but integration had failed.

This is a bit of the perfect storm in which we are right now.

Europe has three migration problems.

First of all, they don't have a policy. Viktor Orbán, in Hungary, is not going to agree to anything that Brussels preaches.

Secondly, they have what Javier Solana calls “refugee amnesia”. They've forgotten that 61 years ago, 200,000 Hungarians fled to open arms and open hearts in Austria and former Yugoslavia, but today it's a different story. This organization—IOM—and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees were formed in 1951 to take Europeans ravaged by the Second World War to safe shores and new lives in Canada, Australia, United States, and elsewhere, but that's been forgotten. That's refugee amnesia.

The third problem is there's a psychological problem. If you have been a continent that for 300 years has been a continent of origin, peopling the world, and now because of demographic deficit, you've become a continent of destination, that's a psychological adjustment. We're no longer sending our people out; people are coming to us. They look different. They speak differently. They practice a different religion and speak a different language. That is a psychological adjustment we all have to make. That's particularly the case, I think, right now in countries on the European continent.

• (1135)

**Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC):** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** So I would say then—

**The Chair:** Could I just ask you to—

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** Yes, I'll wrap up.

We have a world on the move. Migrants are in the middle of a perfect storm. Therefore, in a perfect storm, what do you do? You grab the high ground. The high ground is what you're doing: the policy that knows how to integrate migrants and make them feel at home.

Secondly, we have to do something about the global compact on migration. I know you'll probably have some thoughts and comments or maybe questions on that, but I think here the global compact gives us an offering.

We will learn also by this to change the narrative—

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** —back to a positive narrative about migration and learn to embrace and manage migration.

I'll stop with that, except to leave you with one thought:—

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** Migration is not—

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Go ahead on your point of order.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** The routine motion in our committee states that witnesses have 10 minutes, and we are well beyond that point. I have some questions to ask. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Your Excellency.

Go ahead, Ms. Zahid.

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

Thanks a lot for coming today and providing your important input.

I would first like to thank the International Organization for Migration for all its work supporting Canada's program to resettle Syrian refugees as well as the vulnerable survivors of Daesh.

Could you speak to the challenges that often occur obtaining exit permits and other necessary travel documents to allow refugees to leave the country, and to challenges around the transportation of refugees and other protected persons to Canada?

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** What is my advice on that?

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Yes. It's because you played an important role in helping us to....

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** Yes, we do what we can to support you on that. It's very difficult sometimes. They don't have travel documents, and we try to link them up with their authorities. Right now we have the problem in Libya. We've taken 21,000 Africans from the detention centres back home. We've encouraged all the Africans to send their consular officials back in to help us identify them and give them at least a temporary travel document.

We don't have the authority to issue travel documents as such, so we depend on the consular authorities, and very often that's difficult and it does delay the process of bringing them here.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** What are the challenges that you face in getting the exit permits?

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** The exit permit is a question of negotiation with wherever the refugees happen to be. We've sorted it out with Libya now. The CNN story on the slave markets brought us all together around a common purpose to try to empty those 31 detention cells and bring them home. Therefore we have gotten support from all the African countries to issue the travel documents.

If we don't have travel documents and the exit permits, we cannot do anything other than talk to the government about it. The Sarajj government in Tripoli right now, where I've been twice this year, is doing a better job on that. They're issuing them now fairly quickly.

Specific cases, however—I'll leave my card with you—you can bring to our personal attention, because our business model is we're in about 480 places. We're very decentralized, even within Libya, and in Syria we have 200 people working. I very often can help you if you give me a specific case.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Thank you.

During your career you have seen first-hand the scale and scope of the global refugee demand. You talked in your comments about it being driven by conflict, war, and poverty. While we talk a lot about resettlement, we know that only a fraction of the global refugee population can be resettled, because the numbers are so high and because many, if not most, refugees hope to return to their homeland one day.

Can you please discuss what more countries such as Canada can do, outside of resettlement, to assist the refugee population and address this refugee crisis?

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** First of all, I want to commend you again for the number that you are taking in, which, relative to your population, is one of the largest in the world, and this year may be the largest.

Continue to encourage others by showing how it works in Canada, because you prepare the terrain very well. We help you with the pre-selection, we do the medical exams for you, we support your cultural orientation abroad program, and we do the transportation. It's by your talking to other governments and encouraging them that... Right now, we're still only resettling 1% of the refugee population every year.

• (1140)

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Other than resettlement, what can we do to assist the refugees?

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** Well, let's take Syria as a case. Many Syrians are already returning home. We have to be very careful. Some of the Nordic countries were asking me in the last year or two to resettle Somalis into the Mogadishu area. I said, "I can't do it." They said, "But they say they want to go home." I can't do it because the security is not there. I will not and cannot take people back to an area that I know is insecure. We're very careful about that.

However, last year we resettled almost 100,000 people who wanted to go home, so it can be done.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Thank you.

I know that the IOM is on the ground in Bangladesh in response to the refugee crisis that has been triggered by the Burmese army and the Government of Burma against its Rohingya population. As you know, Canada has committed over \$50 million in humanitarian aid relief to that region. The Prime Minister's special adviser, Bob Rae, is preparing a report, and he will be visiting Burma again.

Could you update us on the situation on the ground there? What more can the international community do to end this crisis and to help those who have been displaced?

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** That is a good question again. Thank you very much.

In September 2013, IOM was asked by a cabinet decision in Dhaka to take charge of the 190,000 Rohingya who were already in the country. We did that dutifully. We looked after them until August 25 of last year, when the military of Myanmar went in and burned the villages. Another 660,000 have fled since then, from August 25 until today, so we have more. We have roughly 850,000 Rohingya there now. We are still doing the coordination with the UNHCR, our

traditional partner, as well as many other agencies, but the needs are enormous.

The Bangladeshis, of course, have a very small country, overpopulated already, with nearly a million additional people on their territory, and they want to know how these people can be resettled. That is a major political issue with the military, who really don't want them back. They took away their citizenship to start with, gave them an ID card, and then they took the ID card away and chased them out. It is going to be a long political process to get Burma/Myanmar to accept them back.

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

Go ahead, Ms. Rempel.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Thank you, Mr. Chair; and thank you, Mr. Swing.

I note that you're a North Carolinian. I have some family there, so there's a bit of a connection.

My questions relate to some of the audit findings that were undertaken by our Department of Citizenship and Immigration in 2015. One of the recommendations was that our department:

should actively monitor and report on [your organization's] implementation of the 'budget strengthening plan' to ensure that increases to membership costs result in evidence-based reporting, policy guidance, higher quality research, and budgetary transparency.

What measures has your organization put in place to ensure that Canada is getting better value for money than we were prior to the audit?

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** I don't have in my mind what... We are, I think, one of the most transparent agencies in the UN system. We have a budget reform committee that meets regularly. It's continued for the last three or four years. I've always operated on the principle that you own the organization—I work for you, since you elected me—but if there are specific concerns there, I think we're delivering value for money.

We had a budget last year of \$1.57 billion. We ran the organization for less than \$40 million, which comes out to about 3% to 4%. I think we have the lowest markup, or overhead, at about 7%. It's much lower than most of the other UN agencies.

• (1145)

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Just to go back, though, to the specific findings of the audit by our department, would you be able to table with our committee anything that the IOM has undertaken to address that specific concern? I notice that one of the implementation lines in that audit was that your agency was working on some of the concerns that our government had raised. It would be of interest to parliamentarians here to hear your progress on that.

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** Well, I'm not dodging your question; I just don't have the answer. However, I will get you an answer in writing and send it to you.

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

How much is your current budget from Canada right now?

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** Canada has provided IOM \$300 million U.S. between 2013 and 2017. You've been extremely generous to us. You've enabled us to work throughout the world. In fact, I think I have a handout I can give you that has the specifics, including all of the projects that Canada has supported. It's really quite impressive.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Are you in talks with the government right now for an increase in funding from Canada?

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** Well, we're always seeking more support for our projects. You've just given us nearly \$2 million for the Rohingya in southeastern Bangladesh.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Okay.

Is there a formal request to our government for an increase in operating support above and beyond our membership fee?

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** No. In my meeting yesterday with the four deputy ministers and their staff, I told them that as a general proposition, it would help IOM if we got more multi-year un-earmarked funding, or softly earmarked funding, because we have very little flexibility. All of our money, 97%, is tied to projects, what we call projectization. Beyond that, we have very little money if I want to expand, for example, into the Gulf countries.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Sure.

One of the challenges we're facing right now in Canada is that there is a big demand on a lot of our resettlement services programs to ensure that integration component you talked about.

One of the things that the 2015 audit showed—and this was done by our department officials and wasn't politically written—that it's "difficult to quantify the benefits of membership described earlier in this report in an exact dollar figure, given the participatory nature of the engagement."

I'm just wondering if you could quantify for us why we should support giving your organization more money, given that it's difficult to quantify the outcome, when resettlement services agencies that do language training and on-the-ground support are asking for more money and Canada is in a deficit position.

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** When you speak of "giving us money", it's money that's tied to projects that you wish IOM to implement for you to pay to book flights on their own to bring the projects we've done.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** And none of our funding goes to any sort of administrative or just general membership fund for you?

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** There is a 7% markup that we use, yes.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Sure.

During our Syrian refugee initiative, one of the causes of delays in resettling refugees in Canada was the backlog flight arrangement process through your organization. We had several of our private sponsors through our private sponsorship program asking if it was possible for them to pay to book flights on their own to bring refugees to Canada. Would you be supportive of that suggestion?

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** I think it's a good suggestion, if they wish to do that. I would see no problem with it at all.

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

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** It would save your government money too.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Another issue that the 2015 audit report found was that the structure of the IOM made it difficult to navigate and that in addition to some scope creep issues that were identified by department officials, there was no single point of contact that the CIC, our immigration department, could reach out to if it had an issue.

Have the necessary structural changes taken place to address this issue? As you mentioned, we have many projects and contribute significantly to your organization. Our department essentially said that you didn't have a central point of contact for our department officials to contact. What structural changes have you made to address that audit finding?

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** When I arrived on the scene in 2008, we did a structural review reform, and we restructured it because we had things that were called regional offices that had absolutely no capacity and were actually competing with the countries they were supposed to be supporting.

We reviewed the structural reform in 2013 and found that it was working more or less as we thought it should. We—

• (1150)

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** This was 2015, and the audit found that our department officials had no central point of contact to contact you—

**The Chair:** I'm afraid I need to end that questioning there.

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** I will come back to you on that, because I think I owe you an answer on the 2015 audit. I'm not familiar with it.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Ms. Kwan.

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

Thank you, Ambassador Swing.

Before I get into the questions, I would like to put a notice of motion on the record, Mr. Chair. The motion reads as follows:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Committee undertake a study of the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) complaint process; that this study examines the procedures in place to make a complaint, the complaint review process, transparency and accountability measures within the complaint process, and the impact of complaints against IRB members on the federal court system in terms of the filing of appeals to decisions made; that this study should also examine the training provided to Board members regarding cultural sensitivity, gender, LGBTQ2+, and other vulnerable population issues; that this study should be comprised of no fewer than four meetings; that the Minister of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship and IRCC department officials be in attendance for at least one of the meetings; that the Chairperson of the IRB and IRB officials be in attendance for at least one of the meetings; that the Committee report its findings to the House; and that pursuant to Standing Order 109, the government table a comprehensive response thereto.

With that, I would like to get into the questions.

Thank you again, Ambassador, for your briefing and update on the work you have undertaken, as well as on the global environment. I particularly want to acknowledge and say thank you for your acknowledgement of Canada's role in what we are doing.

In 2016, it's true that Canadians—or Canada, if you will—played a significant role, I think, with respect to the refugee crisis. In actual numbers, we brought in 23,523 government-assisted refugees. When you add the privately sponsored and the blended sponsorship, we were at 46,000, not an insignificant number in the context of our country.

However, in 2017, in 2018, and in 2019 going forward, those numbers reduce significantly. The government-assisted refugee numbers diminished from 24,600 as a target to 7,500 as a target for 2017 and 2018, and for 2019 it's 8,500. When you add up all the categories, the total number is almost half of what we had committed to in 2016, so there's much more work to be done.

I thank you for your acknowledgement, but I think Canada needs to continue to step up in that regard. Do you have any comments about that?

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** I honestly have no fault to find with the Canadian policy. I have come here, as I said, primarily to express appreciation to the government at all levels, both here and in Parliament, and yesterday with the various ministries, because I think you are a role model in a world that is not very receptive to migrants or refugees. I think I will continue to use you as an example.

Sometimes when I use Canada, people in other areas say, “Yes, but Canada's a vast country.” However, migration is an urban affair. Most of the migrants coming to your country are settling in five or six major cities. They are not in the outlying areas, so I will continue to use it.

Obviously, there will be times.... You have to determine how many you can bring in every year, but certainly the last two years have been extraordinary in terms of the numbers you have brought in and the manner in which you have received them. You have welcomed them, you have embraced them, and you have integrated them. I have no fault to find at this point.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you. I don't expect that you would find fault, but in the context of the global crisis out there, my point is that I hope Canada is worthy of your comments. In light of the fact that we reduced our numbers significantly, I think we can do more.

With that, I'm going to move on to another area, the issue around internally displaced people. I'm particularly interested in the lessons that perhaps we can learn from other countries on how Canada can shape our immigration stream to address the internally displaced situation.

● (1155)

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** I'm glad you raised that, because as you know, the largest group of forced migrants are the internally displaced persons. They are not included either in the global compact on refugees or the global compact on migration. The 200 people we have inside Syria are doing nothing but trying to keep IDPs alive and trying to give them support. In Libya, apart from the 700,000 migrants in Libya, there are 300,000 internally displaced Libyans and 250,000 recent returnees to Libya.

It's a major issue. It's been bracketed out. IDPs are extremely sensitive politically. Governments don't want to admit failure, admit that they have their own displaced persons. We have something called the displacement tracking matrix. We can tell you more or less accurately how many IDPs there are in a country, but the governments always dispute our figures because they want a lower figure. It's extremely sensitive politically, and we have to come to grips with that.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I would fully anticipate that it would be very sensitive. I wonder if you can share with our committee the information you have in terms of the internally displaced people and their numbers in the different countries. We don't have that much time at the committee, but if you can send us in writing some suggestions of what role Canada can play in that context, particularly within the immigration stream, and also best practices that some of the other countries are doing that we can learn from, it would be very useful for the work we may undertake.

I'm interested.... You mentioned the work that you have done, and I hope you will table that and the budgets and how it was allocated previously, as well as the work that you're undertaking going forward, so that we can see what the work plan is, where that funding is coming from, and how much is allocated to each of those streams.

I want to get into a little bit about northern Iraq and Erbil. I know the IOM plays a role in assisting in bringing refugees here, because we had difficulty. Can you just give us a quick synopsis of what you did?

**The Chair:** I'm afraid I can't let you. I'm being put on a tight leash today, which I am going to respect.

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** These are the Azeris. I'll have to leave that.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Maybe we can get that in writing.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Whalen.

**Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.):** Actually, I'll allow the ambassador to answer Ms. Kwan's question, if he can do so briefly.



**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** We've tried to support you on the minority groups like the Azeris, who have been very persecuted. I think we were able to play a role to help on that. The major role we played in Erbil, however, was to establish 200,000 shelters for Azeris and others fleeing Mosul. We did all of the shelters there in that period. The others, but not the Azeris, are mostly going back to Mosul slowly. In the case of the Azeris, I think we were able to help you get them out and get some of them here. I can give you a more accurate reading when I get back to Geneva. I'll send it to you. Maybe I'll get your card after this.

**Mr. Nick Whalen:** Thank you very much, Ambassador Swing.

We've recently completed a study about medical inadmissibility in Canada and some internal rules we have that deny people entry to Canada on the basis of excessive demand on our health care system. My understanding is that your organization helps facilitate or provides a list of doctors who help us do those international exams and make those determinations. How does Canada compare on that front with other international partners of yours that use your network of international doctors? Are there other countries that do a better or worse job in taking advantage of those services or denying access to their countries on the basis of medical conditions?

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** Migrant health has become a major activity for IOM. We do about 400,000 medical assessments per year—not only for Canada, of course, but also for the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom, and many other refugee resettlement countries.

I don't think we've had major problems. I think Canada is as good as any on the list there. I don't know of difficulties we've had, but that will continue to be a major activity.

Increasingly, we've been able to integrate migrant health into WHO's work. They now have a significant interest in this, and with Dr. Tedros, we're working very well to strengthen that.

We also responded to the Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea. We put 200 people in there to set up the first Ebola treatment centres outside the capital, Monrovia, but I think that overall, migrant health is doing well.

• (1200)

**Mr. Nick Whalen:** In terms of the scope of this problem, you say that Canada is doing well, but we take maybe 0.1% of our population as refugees each year, which is a drop in the bucket compared to the overall problem.

Is there a sense that our money would be better spent in accepting refugees and transporting them to Canada, or in helping people remain healthy where they are, either in camps or resettled in their countries? What's the right mix there?

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** I think you have to do both.

I think you have to do three things. You have to do refugee resettlement, improve the conditions where they are, and try where possible to get them to return. It's a very sensitive issue. Return is very sensitive always, because there will always be someone who will say that the situation is not right for them to go back.

The criteria for us are three: it must be voluntary, safe, and with dignity. This is where we hope to do a pilot project eventually with

UNHCR to have some of the Rohingya return to northern Rakhine State, but it's very tricky. There will never be full agreement as to whether the conditions are right to return or not, but many of them want to return. They don't want to return now, but when the conditions are right.

I think the World Bank will probably play a major role in rebuilding those villages. Whether they do it as a project or provide the money to the Rohingya to rebuild their villages themselves is not clear to me.

**Mr. Nick Whalen:** Thank you, Ambassador Swing.

I'll be sharing my time with Mr. Sarai.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Ambassador. I appreciate your coming to us and your good will about Canada's role internationally on refugees.

I just want to remind you that we're actually one of the rare countries where we have more demand for refugees than we even have.... Our private refugee sponsors are actually eager to take more. It's a good problem to have, and I'm glad that the world is recognizing that.

I work from a ground level, and you're at 10,000 feet. As Ms. Kwan said, we settled thousands of refugees last year and the year before. One of the biggest challenges we find is that when they come to our constituency offices—and my office sees among the greatest number in the country—they are still worried about their loved ones, their brothers' and sisters' families, their extended families, and we have no ability to match them or to prioritize those who are their siblings or loved ones. When we contact UNHCR, we get no response. Our government can't select them.

Is there a way that your office can help facilitate or accelerate those who have siblings here? What happens is that they are not able to settle as fast here when they're worried about their families. They're not getting jobs as fast. They're not learning English as fast, as opposed to economic immigrants who are eager to do that, because they're still worried about them.

We have seen in studies here that settlement is much more successful when family is here, when extended family is here. Do you have any thoughts on that?

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** You're absolutely right. We give strong priority to family reunification. People who are there with their families are much more likely to be productive and good citizens than those who have their families stranded elsewhere.

I think, again, that the best thing to do if you have a particular case is to bring it to my attention. I have a very close relationship with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. We meet on a regular basis. We're literally five minutes apart in terms of our offices. I know that they believe strongly in family reunification too. This is why I think some of the discussion recently about wanting to put that in a more secondary level is unfortunate. I think we will always seek to reunite families.

I don't know exactly what recent developments there have been in UNHCR because I would have thought they were committed to the same principle. I will discuss it, though, with Filippo Grandi when I go back to Geneva to see if there's any change there. I would be surprised.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** That problem is across the board. When we talk to our colleagues, other members of Parliament from across the country, it remains an issue, and there's no ability to—

**The Chair:** I'm afraid I need to cut you off.

Mr. Tilson, you have five minutes.

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

Mr. Swing, I had the opportunity to attend the Council of Europe in Strasbourg a number of times, and the topic of migration is always there. The Europeans are most concerned with illegal migration, such as people coming across the Mediterranean or through Turkey or otherwise.

They ask us if we have any problems as Canadians. Normally, we say that we've had Sri Lankan boats arriving and Vietnamese boats arriving, but generally we have these oceans, so we don't really have the same problems they do.

However, all of a sudden, we have a problem. We have illegal migration coming from the United States of America, and it's causing us very serious problems.

I have a couple of questions. Can you tell me whether you think the United States of America is a safe third country?

• (1205)

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** I like to think that it still is. There are constraints and ways within the checks and balances system to give protection to migrants. I think that it doesn't mean they don't have fears from what they've heard from recent pronouncements that it might not be good to be there. I suspect that's happening.

If they believe what they hear, I know that they might think it's not like it used to be, but at this point, I would judge that it's still a safe third country. I have no reason to question that.

**Mr. David Tilson:** I appreciate that it's rather a difficult question for me to ask an American whether—

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** No. I'm speaking as the Director General of IOM.

**Mr. David Tilson:** Of course you are, sir, but you are from the United States, and we appreciate that.

This illegal migration is causing us great problems. The government is dealing with it by spending vast amounts of resources on dealing with these people, whether in Quebec or out west, but they're coming. I don't know what the latest figures are, but they're still coming. They are mainly people who have come through the United States from Haiti.

With your experience in other areas, can you give us some advice? I am asking because, as a result of the resources that are being spent on this problem, we're not able to use those resources in other areas—use them for people who want to immigrate here, people who want to get visas, etc. We're spending vast amounts.

Can you give us some advice as to how we should deal with the problems and whether you've had any discussions with the authorities in the United States as to how they can help us? I mean, they arrive by taxi. They arrive by taxi to our border and cross over.

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** I've become aware of this in the short time I've been here. Do we have figures on it? Do you have some idea of what the numbers are? They are apparently quite large. They are mostly Haitians, I suppose, and El Salvadoreans.

**Mr. David Tilson:** It's 40,000.

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** I was ambassador to Haiti for five years. It's a place I dearly love, and I know you have a strong commitment to Haiti. The temporary protective status had been in place since the earthquake. However, when the TPS was removed, I guess they started coming across the border.

I would suggest that the best thing....

Are you having bilateral conversations in Washington?

**Mr. David Tilson:** I guess I'm asking if the United States of America closed the loophole in our safe third country agreement that allows people to illegally enter Canada and claim asylum. Can you give us a comment on that?

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** I think, again, that it's a bilateral question to discuss with the United States.

**Mr. David Tilson:** What's your advice?

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** It's to talk to them, to explain. Give them figures and say this is happening. Say, "You've lifted temporary protective status; could you not restore it?"

**Mr. David Tilson:** Sir, you say you want orderly migration. There's a problem. The theme of your organization is to provide orderly migration. We don't have it here. All of a sudden Canada's got a problem.

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** You have the same problem now that Europe has with people coming into Europe. If the numbers are manageable, could you give them temporary protective status?

**Mr. David Tilson:** I appreciate the work you're doing in Europe, but now all of sudden we've got a problem in North America. The Americans have their problems. I don't know what this wall business is that's going on. People have their comments about that.

However, I'm strictly talking about Canada. We have a problem in Canada because of illegal migrants coming to Canada.

• (1210)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Tilson. I need to end you there.

Just to make sure the record is correct on that number and you're not left with the wrong number, in 2017, it was 20,953, not 40,000. It was 20,953 asylum seekers who crossed the border at those points. It's actually not as far off other years, when we look at a year-to-year study. I just wanted to make sure you had that number.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair, it's actually a significant increase from other years. That 20,000 figure for migrants crossing illegally and claiming asylum is one of the largest in history. The number 40,000—

**The Chair:** I don't think that's a point of order. Thank you.

**An hon. member:** It is a point of order, Mr. Chairman.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** It is. You just put a fact on the record that is factually incorrect.

**The Chair:** The number of 20,953 is correct.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** But you said that it was not out of order about—

**Mr. David Tilson:** Mr. Chairman, you're correcting us. We're correcting you.

**The Chair:** Thank you. That would be a point of debate.

**Mr. David Tilson:** Then stop interrupting our debate.

**The Chair:** This is actually my time. Thank you very much.

**Mr. David Tilson:** You have no time, sir.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Anandasangaree.

**Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ambassador, welcome.

I had the opportunity earlier this month to visit Cox's Bazar and in fact meet with some of your folks. I had the benefit of looking at the work that you do on the ground. I want to first and foremost thank you and your team for the efforts, particularly in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh. In that country there is a significant amount of poverty, yet over the past 30-odd years they've taken in over one million people, and most recently, as you've indicated, I believe 655,000 is the number.

I'll just pick up on that. You indicated in your remarks that there's some potential and desire for some individuals to go back to Rakhine State. The indication that I have, having spoken to a number of people, is that they're very apprehensive. There's definitely a pattern over the last number of decades of people coming and going to Bangladesh on a number of occasions. For example, an 87-year-old woman whom I met—she was there in 1978—had gone back and come back twice.

I think the challenge in a situation like the Rohingya is that it's not really up to Bangladesh and Burma to come to an agreement on resettlement. There needs to be some international assurance to secure their safety.

What lessons do you have, and what advice can you offer in terms of ensuring that those who return do have that safety parameter so that it's not just temporary and is much longer term?

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** I wish I had an answer for you. Clearly, until you can convince the military that these people are from Burma, from Myanmar, and that they've been there for generations....

The military is trying to sell a fiction that these people are really Bengali and came there from Bangladesh and have never been citizens of Myanmar, and everybody knows they are. What

happened was when the British drew the line, if they had drawn it a little further to the east, they would have been in Bangladesh, but it happened that because of where the colonial line was, they were there.

There are more than 120 ethnic groups in Myanmar, and this is the only one that is singled out for persecution, to be driven out of the country. They are not from Bangladesh. Somewhere along the line, with elections coming up and so on, between Aung San Suu Kyi and the military there has to be some understanding that they belong there and they're coming back. That's going to take a lot of international presence, in addition to a lot of international money to rebuild those Myanmar villages that have been burned. More importantly, they have to be guaranteed that they won't be persecuted again.

I don't see that happening anytime in the near future. It's going to take a lot of pressure from the UN. I'm going back there in the next couple of weeks. I don't see right now anything happening of significance in the very near future. We would like to see them take an initial group back to see if it works, but they aren't going back if there are not conditions of safety and dignity, and if they can't go back voluntarily. I wish I had an answer; I don't.

For the time being, we are going to have to continue to take care of 850,00 to 860,00 Rohingya refugees who are not only refugees but stateless people. They have no citizenship. We have to take care of them until such time as they can return or be resettled elsewhere. The record is not good on Rohingya resettlement. There were 40,000 Rohingya refugees there who had been there for 20 years. They've only resettled 6,000. The record is not good.

I'm sorry I can't be encouraging.

●(1215)

**Mr. Gary Anandasangaree:** Part of the challenge there is exit visas from Bangladesh. My understanding is that even if resettlement is offered, then there is an obstacle with respect to difficulties in getting exit visas from Bangladesh. Have you had any discussions with the government of Bangladesh on this?

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** No, not up to now.

What we've been trying to do with the Bangladesh government is to urge it to continue to be as generous as it has been up to now and not to look for offshore solutions.

At one time it was talking about putting them on an island offshore. We felt that was not a good arrangement, that their conditions of safety and proper housing could not be guaranteed, and we urged it to keep them in Cox's Bazar until other arrangements could be made. It's one of the major challenges that we and UNHCR and others face, and we're all going to be there for a long time to come.

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

Thank you, Ambassador, for this time with us. It feels too short. I would like to have much more time, but I know we don't and you don't. I hope your trip to Canada is good for you as well. Thank you for 10 years of work on Canadians' behalf with the IOM. I'm really looking forward to your next career.

**Mr. William Lacy Swing:** Thank you. I'm sorry I haven't been able to answer all the questions. I have several follow-ups to several of you. There's the 2015 audit, and I know I owe you an answer also. I'll get back to you. If there are others, I'll leave you my card.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. We'll take a brief break. Then we'll move to an in camera meeting.

Thank you.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*

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