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Chair: Mrs. Salma Zahid



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• (1305)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting 34 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

Today we continue our study on application backlogs and processing times.

I would like to welcome our witnesses for our first panel. Thanks to all the witnesses for appearing before the committee and for joining us today.

We are joined today by Mr. Leblanc, president and chief executive officer of the Chamber of Commerce of Metropolitan Montreal.

We are also joined by LUSO Community Services, represented by Irena Sompaseuth, settlement services manager.

Our third witness for today is the Quebec Immigration Lawyers Association, represented by the president, Stéphanie Valois, and Ms. Krishna Gagné, lawyer and vice-president for economic affairs.

Once again, welcome. Each of you will have five minutes for your opening remarks, and then we will go into the rounds of questioning.

Yes, Madam Clerk.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Stephanie Bond): Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe has his hand up in the room.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): I'll try to be very brief, Madam Chair.

I have two things to say. First, I'd like to ensure that the witnesses did the preliminary sound check on their equipment, as provided under the committee's routine motion.

Has that been done?

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, the clerk has told me those have been done.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: That's great. We're working well here.

I don't want to waste too much of our witnesses' time, but I briefly want to introduce a motion that all members of the committee have already received.

The motion reads as follows:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(b), the Committee undertake a study as soon as possible on the conditions faced by asylum-seekers using the irregular administrative path maintained by the Safe Third Country Agreement; that the Committee consider the safety, security and health of people and families of migrants who cross the Canada–United States border at Roxham Road in particular; that the Committee hold no less than five meetings to hear witnesses; and that it report its findings and recommendations to the House.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe has moved a motion.

Before we continue, I want to inform all the members that we have scheduled a subcommittee meeting for Tuesday, October 18. Just for everyone's information, when we are in our subcommittee meeting, we can schedule with regard to which study needs to be done when.

Ms. Kwan, go ahead.

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

I support the intent of the motion. However, I'd like to make the following amendment to the motion. I'd like to change the five meetings to three meetings, and then add a clause, which is our standard clause, to say that the committee report its findings to the House and that pursuant to Standing Order 109, the government table a comprehensive response thereto. I would really like to hear the government's response to it.

Madam Chair, I'll have my staff send the amendment to the clerk for distribution.

To be clear, for the clerk, the changes will then mean that we'll strike out the word “five” and change it to “three”. It would read, “the committee hold no less than three meetings to hear witnesses”. Then we strike out the word “and” and continue with “that”, and then add the words “the committee”. We strike out the word “it”, so it would read, “the committee report its findings”. We strike out the words “and recommendations”, so it would read “report its findings to the House”, and then we add the phrase “and that pursuant to Standing Order 109, the government table a comprehensive response thereto.”

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan has moved an amendment, so we have an amendment on the floor.

I want to apologize to all of the witnesses for the delay in starting their opening remarks. A member has moved a motion, and then another member has moved an amendment. We have to deal with these before we go into opening remarks from you, so I'd ask for your patience for a little bit longer. Thank you.

Mrs. Lalonde, go ahead.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): I'm sorry, Madam Chair, but can I have clarification? Did Ms. Kwan say "no more than three" or "no less than three"? I didn't understand clearly. I want to be sure of the language she is proposing.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Lalonde.

Ms. Kwan, could you please clarify Mrs. Lalonde's question?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Sure. It should be "no more than three". I don't know if I misspoke or not. I apologize if I did.

The Chair: The amendment is "no more than three".

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: That's good.

[English]

The Chair: Is there any further discussion on the amendment moved by Ms. Kwan?

Okay, we can go to a vote on the amendment.

(Amendment agreed to [See Minutes of Proceedings])

The Chair: We have the motion by Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe as amended by Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, go ahead.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

When we finish this motion, I have another motion that I would like to move.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, Ms. Kwan.

Is there any further discussion on this motion as amended?

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Kwan, go ahead.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to move the following motion:

That the committee study the government's response to the final report of the Special Committee on Afghanistan entitled "Honouring Canada's Legacy in Afghanistan: Responding to the Humanitarian Crisis and Helping People Reach Safety", following the tabling of the report; that the committee invite the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Minister of National Defence, Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Justice and Attorney General, and their officials, with two hours allotted for each department, to provide an update on which of the 37 recommendations related to their portfolio they have acted on and/or its progress and which they will not implement with an explanation; and that the committee report its findings to the House.

• (1310)

The Chair: Mrs. Lalonde, go ahead.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I want to say thank you very much to the member, Ms. Kwan, for the notice of motion she's bringing forward. But as we are seeing witnesses waiting for us to hear them and to continue the great work of the study that we are doing, I would move to adjourn debate.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: That's a clear message.

Thank you for that.

The Chair: We have a motion to adjourn the debate.

(Motion negatived: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: We have the motion by Ms. Kwan on the floor.

Is there any discussion?

Mrs. Lalonde, go ahead.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: First, I'd really like to apologize to all the witnesses here. We think it's very important to hear their presentations and comments. They're here because we believe our Parliament should function properly. The witnesses are here and they're listening to us.

I must unfortunately move an amendment to my colleague's motion, and I would like us to be able to debate it now.

Once again, witnesses, please excuse us, but we must deal with this technical detail.

[English]

On the amendment that I would like to propose.... This is the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, and there was a special committee. That special committee, as I understand it, was over six months, and many of our current members on this particular committee were on this special committee.

When you think about Afghanistan and the circumstances and the initiatives that were raised, it is heartbreaking. We are all collectively extremely sensitive on this issue. There are measures that were put in place just yesterday. The government tabled its response to the report that was presented by the Special Committee on Afghanistan, entitled "Honouring Canada's Legacy in Afghanistan". I hope that we will have the time to read it over the course of the next week, as we are in our constituencies, and that we'll have a chance to see the government's response.

For that matter, what I would like to propose, possibly as an amendment—and I hope my colleagues will support it—is that after "following the tabling of the report", it would say, "that the committee invite the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship and the Minister of Justice, with one hour allocated for each".

Give me a second, Madam Chair. I'm looking at my notes. I just want to make sure I say it properly for our analysts. The way it would work is this: "that the committee invite the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship and the Minister of Justice, and their officials, with one hour allocated for each department, to provide an update on which of the 37 recommendations". The rest would stay the same.

I would like to remove some of those ministers. I think as we are in immigration, we would see the IRCC. I know there's a particular interest from my colleagues, who sort of made their own amendment, that the Minister of Justice come.

I would like to propose those friendly amendments.

● (1315)

The Chair: Can you please provide that in both official languages?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: I will certainly do that. We can suspend, and that would be forwarded to the attention of the clerk.

The Chair: Ms. Kwan, go ahead.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Speaking quickly to the proposed amendment, I do not support it. I think we need to have all of the ministers stated in my original motion come forward. This is supposed to be a whole-of-government response to Afghanistan. Because of the significance and the seriousness of the situation in Afghanistan, I think that having the minister come for one hour and officials for one hour is not too much to ask.

The Chair: Mr. Sidhu, go ahead.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Brampton East, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

From my memory, if it serves correctly, a lot of the ministers went to the special committee. I know there's progress being made on Afghanistan. We just recently welcomed over 20,000 people. We've hit the 20,000 target. There are new flights coming every week or so. I think there's progress being made. We've heard from ministers on this file already.

We have a subcommittee next week, I believe on Tuesday. Out of respect for the witnesses, who took time out of their busy schedules to join us today, I ask that this discussion take place there, so we can hear from our witnesses here today.

We have to respect their time. We want to hear from them. We invited them here. I think it's important that we hear from them today.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sidhu.

Have all the members been able to get the amendment? They want the amendment in both official languages.

Mr. El-Khoury, go ahead.

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to ask my colleague, why the rush? We have done a tremendous job regarding Afghanistan, for several months. There is

a report. Why don't we wait until we see the report—understanding, analyzing? Then we could go further and give our opinion to see if it's suitable to invite those ministers or not. Receiving and reading the report is essential for us as a committee.

The Chair: I think Mrs. Lalonde will send her amendment to the clerk in both official languages. We will suspend for three or four minutes so that every member can get it in both official languages.

Monsieur Brunelle-Duceppe, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Before we suspend, I too would like to apologize to the witnesses, who have to put up with this situation.

We could speed up the process if everyone agreed to vote now. We know everyone's position, and it won't be different next Tuesday. Every party's position will be exactly the same.

I therefore propose that we vote on the amendment without delay once we've received it in both official languages. It took us five minutes for the first motion. We could do it quickly, and the witnesses would be able to participate in the committee, as they should. We should therefore vote without delay.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Hallan, go ahead.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): I agree with my friend Alexis. I think we should just go to a vote on this one, and Ms. Kwan's proposed motion as well. I think everyone's pretty clear on their position.

The Chair: Mr. Sidhu, go ahead.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Madam Chair, I propose we suspend for a few minutes while we await the written language.

The Chair: Okay, we'll let this come to all the members in both official languages. Mrs. Lalonde, please send it to the clerk.

I'll suspend the meeting for a few minutes so that we have the amendment in both official languages.

I want to apologize to all the witnesses for the delay. We will try to resume as soon as possible.

The meeting is suspended.

● (1315)

(Pause)

● (1325)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

I hope all of the members have received the amendment moved by Mrs. Lalonde, in both official languages.

We have an amendment moved by Mrs. Lalonde on the floor. Is there any debate? Is there any member who would like to speak to the amendment?

Seeing no further debate, we will take a vote on the amendment moved by Mrs. Lalonde.

(Amendment negatived: nays 6; yeas 5 [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: Mrs. Lalonde, go ahead.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Madam Chair, thank you very much.

Maybe I didn't quite understand the sentiment expressed by my colleagues. We could possibly propose an amendment fairly similar to the one that my colleague has received. However, instead of one hour, and I think that's being fair, we should have stuck with what my colleague Ms. Kwan wanted to see, which was two hours.

The proposed amendment would be that we would invite the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship and the Minister of Justice for two hours, instead of the one hour that I made as a proposal.

The Chair: It is two hours allocated for each department.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Yes, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

Can you please repeat your amendment so that everyone can get that?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Definitely.

[*Translation*]

I'll read it:

That the Standing Committee on Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship study the government's response to the Final Report of the Special Committee on Afghanistan entitled Honouring Canada's Legacy In Afghanistan: Responding To The Humanitarian Crisis And Helping People Reach Safety, following the tabling of the report; that the Committee invite the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Minister of National Defence, Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of International Development, and their officials, with two hours allocated for each department, to provide an update on which of the 37 recommendations related to their portfolio, they have acted on and/or its progress and which they will not implement with an explanation; and that the committee report its findings to the house.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Lalonde.

We have an amendment on the floor, moved by Mrs. Lalonde.

Ms. Kwan, go ahead.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll just speak to this very quickly.

I'm opposed to this amendment. What the government is trying to do is water down the number of ministers to come before the committee or the time for the officials to come before the committee.

Given the gravity of this situation, where Afghans and their family members who serve this country are being hunted down by the Taliban as we speak right now, and some have actually disappeared already, surely we can find a few hours within this committee to hear the government's response, which they only just tabled yesterday.

I read the response. I think the families who serve our country deserve this hearing from this committee, and we need to get some answers on the recommendations that were tabled by the Special Committee on Afghanistan. The government said that they have taken a whole-of-government approach. The minister, just today in question period, said that he's doing everything he can. So, they should not have any problems whatsoever with coming before this committee to speak to committee members on this important issue.

All these amendments, frankly, are the Liberals trying to delay the time on the passage of my motion and, frankly, squandering the time for witnesses to present on the current study. I'm opposed to this amendment.

• (1330)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kwan.

Mr. Sidhu, go ahead.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I agree that it's an important topic. There's no doubt about it. I think the situation in Afghanistan is at the top of our priorities.

What the member opposite is proposing is, I think, close to eight hours or six hours. We're saying, let's be reasonable here. Yes, we don't mind ministers coming to speak to this. We have no objections about that, but let's be reasonable, because there are many other immigration topics that members want to discuss as well.

I think the amendment put forward by my colleague is reasonable.

Again, I want to make sure it's on the record that we're not saying it's not a priority. It is a top priority for our government, and that's why we're continuing to work on the file, but I think it's also important that we be reasonable about some of the other immigration issues out there, and that's why we have witnesses to speak to some of the other issues out there.

The Chair: Are there any other comments?

The Clerk: There are hands in the room, Madam Chair. It's Monsieur Brunelle-Duceppe, Mr. Hallan and Madame Lalonde.

The Chair: Go ahead, Monsieur Brunelle-Duceppe.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Witnesses, I am truly sorry. We could have resolved this in two minutes, but some people wanted to stretch it out.

I'll try to save us some time.

I think the last amendment that we received is too similar to the previous one, which was negatived. Consequently, I don't think it's even admissible. We could go immediately to the vote, since that would save us time and the witnesses could then take part in the meeting.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Hallan, you have the floor.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

There have been things that have come to light after that report came out from the Afghan committee, so I think Ms. Kwan's motion is very concise and very clear. We need to continue to stand up for those who are being persecuted, because a lot of them have been exempt and continue to be hunted down by the Taliban.

Instead of delaying more and more and putting up motions that are very similar to one another just to delay more time, let's get to Ms. Kwan's motion, and let's respect the witnesses who are here.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hallan.

Go ahead, Mrs. Lalonde.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: With all due respect to my colleagues, that's why my first thought was for our witnesses at the very beginning.

[Translation]

The witnesses have taken the time to come and testify before the committee.

We're conducting a discussion on the committee's priorities. However, what my colleague is proposing will take up an enormous amount of time.

I must say I'm a bit surprised. We've conducted a study on the acceptance rate of foreign students and now we're considering a report on processing times.

After discussing that, the committee decided to continue with the motions so that, in the coming months, we could continue drafting the reports, such as the one on informal caregivers. Earlier we discussed the motion introduced by my colleague Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

I don't think my colleagues realize that what our colleague is requesting will take up a lot of time. We've been studying it for six months. I would never say that the situation in Afghanistan isn't critical or that we shouldn't continue making every possible effort to provide our assistance.

However, I believe the committee wants to try to help the government understand the other issues that it considers important.

In my view, the proposed amendment is very minor and intended to allow my colleague Ms. Kwan's motion to move forward. It would also enable us to undertake other studies during the current and next sessions.

I'm therefore somewhat surprised at the way the situation is unfolding because I made this proposal openly and transparently. My aim was to emphasize that many problems concern immigration and that they're all important. It's true that it's important to discuss Afghanistan, but it's important to discuss all countries.

I didn't want to offend anyone; I was just trying to make everyone understand that the committee has many upcoming studies and

reports and that inviting all these people could slow down its work. We've been studying this for six months, and ministers have appeared before the committee. I'm not saying that the response has or hasn't been good. What I'm saying is that the committee could hear from only two ministers for one hour each. That would enable us to continue our work. That's why I introduced this amendment.

• (1335)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Lalonde.

Is there any further debate?

Seeing none, we'll vote on the amendment moved by Mrs. Lalonde.

(Amendment negatived: nays 6; yeas 5 [See Minutes of Proceedings])

The Chair: We have the motion moved by Ms. Kwan on the floor. Is there any debate on the motion?

Mrs. Lalonde, go ahead.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Again, I want to reiterate to my colleagues that this motion is significantly important, but the amount of time, which this committee may be opposed to, could impact other very important studies that we would like to go forward. As I said, I don't dispute the rationale, the importance; I'm just trying to be practical and pragmatic.

[Translation]

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Sidhu, go ahead.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Going back to what my colleague said about the importance of witnesses taking the time to be here, we all knew witnesses were scheduled to be here at this meeting. We also know that on Tuesday we're going to have a subcommittee discussion on anything that the members want to talk about.

I just don't understand why we are wasting the witnesses' time, when this is such a substantial motion that's been put forward. I think we need to talk it through. We need to look at it more in depth.

We've seen over 21,000 folks from Afghanistan who have now arrived in our country. We're making progress, but I do believe it's important. It's a priority to talk about it, but I think this is not the right time to do it. We need to be aware. All of us knew the schedule. We all knew witnesses were coming today, but for some reason, some members on this committee decided to bring a motion today, even though they knew we could talk about it on Tuesday.

If you're saying we can rush through it, that's not the way. It's not practical. We all know that there are many other discussions, many other studies, to be had. There are many different points of immigration that we need to discuss with many different witnesses on many different motions. But pushing this forward just because you knew witnesses were going to be here today, I don't think that's sincere. I think we need to wait until Tuesday to carry on this discussion.

The Chair: We have Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, and then Mr. Ali.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I find it somewhat amusing that the Liberals put this on us. We already know how everyone's going to vote, and we'll vote the same way on Tuesday.

I truly apologize to the witnesses. I believe you've noticed that one party is stealing all your time, even though it knows perfectly well how this will end.

I just wanted to set the record straight. It's all well and good to play the victim, but, in the end, we know how we're going to vote. Personally, I would stop the discussion, go to the vote and let the witnesses speak.

Thank you.

• (1340)

[*English*]

The Chair: We have Mr. Ali, and then Mr. El-Khoury.

Mr. Ali, go ahead.

Mr. Shafqat Ali (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I agree with MP Sidhu. We all knew we were going to listen to witnesses and this meeting was scheduled. I think we could have brought these motions after listening to the witnesses.

I feel sorry for our witnesses, and I apologize. I realize their time is important. They have taken the time out to join this meeting, and we got into this situation.

My suggestion to all of my colleagues is to listen to the witnesses first, and then we can get into the business of the motions. I hope my colleagues will consider my request.

Thank you so much.

The Chair: Mr. El-Khoury, go ahead.

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I don't feel comfortable when we have witnesses accepting to come here to aid this committee and to put value in order to continue our study. Bringing this motion with the presence of the witnesses here I don't think was the right thing to do.

My suggestion is to adjourn debate on the motion out of respect for our witnesses. Let's hear them.

Thank you.

The Chair: We have a motion to adjourn the debate.

(Motion negated: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: The motion to adjourn the debate is defeated.

We have Ms. Kwan's motion on the floor.

Ms. Kwan, have you made any amendments to your motion?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I did not make any amendments to my motion. I read the motion as it should be put.

The Chair: We have the motion moved by Ms. Kwan on the floor.

Is there any debate on the motion?

Mr. Ali, go ahead.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Madam Chair, can we read the motion again, please, just to clarify?

Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Kwan, can you please read the motion?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm happy to read the motion. It's also been sent to all MPs through their P9 account, so they should be able to get that accordingly.

The motion reads as follows:

That the committee study the government's response to the final report of the Special Committee on Afghanistan entitled "Honouring Canada's Legacy in Afghanistan: Responding to the Humanitarian Crisis and Helping People Reach Safety", following the tabling of the report; that the committee invite the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Minister of National Defence, Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Justice and Attorney General, and their officials, with two hours allocated for each department, to provide an update on which of the 37 recommendations related to their portfolio they have acted on and/or its progress and which they will not implement with an explanation; and that the committee report its findings to the House.

The Chair: We have a motion on the floor.

Ms. Lena Metlege Diab (Halifax West, Lib.): Can I get a clarification, please?

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Diab.

Ms. Lena Metlege Diab: I have two things.

One, I don't have it, but I appreciate your reading it. I do have a question. Is this the same motion to have no more than three meetings?

A voice: No.

Ms. Lena Metlege Diab: Oh. So I don't know how many meetings this one is. You have four departments coming for two hours each. How many meetings are you proposing?

A voice: There will be four.

Ms. Lena Metlege Diab: Is that in the motion? I mean, for other committees I've sat on, there's always a time frame.

I didn't receive it; that's fine. I'm just saying that I'd like to know, if I'm voting on something.... Since I'm substituting for an individual, I feel I have the right to have the information in front of me.

• (1345)

The Chair: Madam Clerk, can you please email it to all the members before we vote on the motion?

Ms. Diab, just to clarify, there is no mention of the number of meetings in the motion.

Ms. Lena Metlege Diab: Madam Chair, I have now received it. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there any debate?

Seeing none, we'll vote on the motion moved by Ms. Kwan.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: I'll abstain. I don't know enough about this. I think we need to continue talking about it, but I will abstain on principle.

(Motion agreed to: yeas: 6, nays 0)

The Chair: The motion is adopted.

Mr. Genuis, go ahead.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): On a point of order, Madam Chair, I don't want to belabour the point, but it is an important issue: Voting is not the time to offer a rationale for voting.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

Seeing no further hands raised, we can go to our witnesses, who have been very patient in waiting to give their opening remarks. Based on the time we now have left, we have about 70 minutes for this panel and the second panel, so we will try to shorten the time for both panels.

We will start with Mr. Leblanc, president and chief executive officer of the Chamber of Commerce of Metropolitan Montreal.

Mr. Leblanc, you will have five minutes for your opening remarks. Please begin.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Leblanc (President and Chief Executive Officer, Chamber of Commerce of Metropolitan Montreal): Good afternoon.

I usually begin by thanking the committee for inviting me. Today, however, I want to say instead that you have been the committee least respectful of its witnesses in the past 13 years. Madam Chair, in my opinion, you are the one who has had the least control over the conduct of this meeting in a manner respectful of your guests.

I am flabbergasted. In the business community, we have to deal with the delays in processing the applications of temporary and permanent immigrants. From now on, I think I'll use this meeting as inspiration when I speak publicly. I'm dumbfounded.

Immigration is clearly one of the central economic challenges facing Quebec and Quebec society, as you may have observed in the last provincial election. The labour shortage is a major concern for the business community, one that affects the economy's ability to develop and that of our businesses to grow adequately. As a re-

sult, an enormous amount of attention is paid to the number of vacant positions in Quebec's economy and to immigration-related challenges. Immigration is one of the solutions to that labour shortage.

Delays in the system are clearly a major obstacle for us. Caused by Quebec government processes in some instances and by those of the Government of Canada in others, those delays affect temporary migration, and thus temporary foreign workers, and permanent immigration.

The present situation creates considerable confusion, which obscures accountability for both federal and provincial processes. People in the business sector call me with their problems. They can't determine which person or order of government is responsible. In addition, both orders of government automatically shirk their responsibilities; each one always asserts that the other is responsible for the delays that businesses and immigrants suffer.

Now I'll say out few words about temporary immigration and temporary foreign workers.

The temporary foreign workers program is essential. Unacceptable delays occur from the moment businesses find temporary foreign workers. Those delays may be as long as one year, which is really too long. The purpose of this program is to meet immediate needs by calling upon qualified and available resources.

It is unacceptable for federal government processes to take so long from the moment individuals are selected. Then there is a transition to permanent immigration, and, once again, the situation is mind-boggling. There are delays in Quebec. Waiting time for the Quebec selection certificate is 11 months. It then takes another 24 months to obtain residence from the federal government.

It's easy to say that the 11-month time in Quebec is too long, but a 24-month wait courtesy of the Canadian government is equally absurd. The delay in the rest of Canada obviously totals 26 months. We don't have an 11-month delay as in Quebec, which explains why temporary workers in Quebec want to move elsewhere in Canada to try to accelerate the process.

We acknowledge that the federal government has invested additional funding in the past year and has committed to hiring more staff. We also acknowledge that efforts are currently being made. However, there is an obligation of result. Regarding expected results, it's been said that the number of names on waiting lists could decline by 80% by the end of the year. However, we think an effort should be made to eliminate all delays over the next six months.

The federal government must ensure that its processes are clear and that it discharges its obligation of result respecting recognition of resident status and in the treatment of people who pass through the Quebec experience program, the QEP. In addition, it should, of course, ensure that citizens and businesses are well aware of their responsibilities.

Thank you.

• (1350)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Leblanc.

We will now move to LUSO Community Services. We have Ms. Irena Sompaseuth, settlement services manager.

Ms. Sompaseuth, you have five minutes for your opening remarks. Please begin.

Ms. Irena Sompaseuth (Settlement Services Manager, LUSO Community Services): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon. My name is Irena Sompaseuth. I am the settlement services manager with LUSO Community Services in London, Ontario. Thank you for having me here today to share my feedback with respect to the experience and the challenges that newcomers currently face with immigration application processing times.

LUSO is a neighbourhood resource centre with a variety of programs that support the needs of vulnerable and marginalized communities, including newcomers and immigrants of all immigration categories. Through our settlement services programs, newcomers can access information and assistance to help them make informed decisions about their settlement and their families' settlement.

We have assisted individuals with various types of settlement needs, such as finding suitable and affordable housing, accessing health care and other services in their community, and finding employment and volunteer opportunities, as well as providing newcomers with information on various immigration applications.

Over the past few years, we have had a high number of clients who have sought assistance with the citizenship application process. While guiding newcomers through the process, we have observed quite a significant variability in the processing times. We have had clients who have submitted their applications for citizenship in 2019 and early 2020 and yet still have not received a response or any update on their applications.

The pandemic had a significant impact on newcomers' lives on so many levels, and it has also affected service delivery and the operations of agencies, businesses and service providers. IRCC has been attentive and proactive with resuming pre-COVID processing times by hiring many new staff to help reduce the backlogs. In the recent period, we have seen that processing times have indeed been reduced, with citizenship applications submitted in late 2021 or early 2022 being processed with pre-COVID processing times.

However, there are still many applications in the inventory with no response or any update provided to the applicants regarding the status of or any potential issues with their citizenship applications. In addition, it has been quite challenging for individuals to connect with an agent from IRCC's call centre. When they call throughout different times of the day within business hours, individuals are not even placed in the queue to wait for an agent to become available. Rather, they are disconnected from the call with a message that all agents are currently busy and to try to call again later.

It is important to state that the backlogs and the delays in processing times have had a major impact on the most vulnerable high-

risk applicants, such as refugee claimants. Due to IRCC's limited capacity to process applications in a timely way because of COVID, refugee claimants are facing significant delays to receive their refugee protection claimant documents, to attend an interview and to receive their work permit.

While waiting, they can access limited supports and services; however, these are individuals who have experienced unimaginable hardships and are in a situation where they have very few rights and options. While every refugee claimant has faced their own unique challenges, they all have experienced great obstacles and adversity and are separated from their families, and therefore they are in stronger need of access to supports, care and financial stability.

I have a few recommendations for tackling these issues and reducing the backlogs in immigration applications.

IRCC has recently announced its ongoing work and commitment to strengthen Canada's immigration system and to reduce application backlogs and delays. As part of the plan, IRCC has hired over 1,000 new employees. Through my work with newcomers, I have seen that this has already helped to increase the processing capacity, as more recent applications have been processed with pre-COVID processing times.

While this is a step in the right direction, further work is necessary to have more agents available through the call centres, where applicants can have an opportunity to speak with an agent, ask questions and receive information and an update on their file. Not being able to contact IRCC to receive updates and information has been quite concerning and challenging for many individuals and their families.

It would also be beneficial to have additional staffing resources allocated specifically to processing applications from 2019 and 2020.

Resuming in-person citizenship tests and in-person oaths at citizenship ceremonies would also help to expedite the processing times of citizenship applications, as there are many applicants who miss the ceremony or have to retake the test due to technical glitches at the time of the session.

Lastly, allocating staffing resources to prioritize work permit applications for refugee claimants would help tremendously to alleviate the stress and financial challenges they face during the initial resettlement period in Canada. Without these vital resources and tools, refugee claimants are at a much higher risk of homelessness and other hardships that could further affect their lives and their health.

Thank you for listening and for giving me the opportunity to join the meeting today to share my feedback and recommendations.

• (1355)

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now proceed to the Quebec Immigration Lawyers Association. We have with us Ms. Valois, the president.

Ms. Valois, you will have five minutes for your opening remarks. Please begin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Stéphanie Valois (Lawyer and President, Quebec Immigration Lawyers Association): Good afternoon, everyone.

The Quebec Immigration Lawyers Association, the AQAADI, is the largest association of francophone lawyers in Canada. We now have more than 450 members, most of whom practise immigration law.

As you know, processing times have a major impact on applicants' lives, regardless of the process in which they are involved. Immigration cases have a determinant effect on the lives of applicants, and the current major problem of delays leaves them highly vulnerable.

We want to address the issue from three angles: first, the delays and, especially, the unfair manner in which submitted files are processed; second, the lack of transparency and predictability; and, third, communication with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, or IRCC, more specifically on how to reduce the number of IRCC web forms that must be filed and the resulting workload for MPs' offices.

I now invite Ms. Krishna Gagné, our association's vice-president, to address you.

Ms. Krishna Gagné (Lawyer and Vice-President for Economic Affairs, Quebec Immigration Lawyers Association): Good afternoon.

First, I'll address the processing times and the injustices they cause. These times are very long and unfair. For example, some files that were submitted to a particular program in 2019 may still not be processed in 2022, whereas others submitted in 2022 are being processed this year. The result is thus unfairness in processing for reasons of which I'm unaware.

That leads us to our second topic, the guidelines. According to those guidelines, 80% of files are processed in accordance with IRCC's posted service standard. Consequently, we have no idea of the outcomes of the remaining 20% of files or of the related processing times standard. That represents one in five files, which is not trivial. Files are not processed in accordance with the first-come, first-served rule. Furthermore, the 80% of files that are processed in accordance with the standard are not processed fairly either. The last person to submit a file may receive a response before someone who filed an application a year earlier.

These delays have major consequences for applicants and all associated stakeholders, including educational institutions and employers.

Consider the permanent resident cards, for example. Delays in receiving cards are extremely long once applicants have been admitted to Canada as permanent residents. In many instances, cards aren't received by every member of a single family at the same time because they aren't sent out at the same time. As a result, children

may receive their cards whereas the parents have not, and vice versa. In addition, no service standard is posted regarding these cards. Consequently, applicants become captive in Canada. They can't leave in the event of a family emergency until they receive that necessary plastic rectangle.

Now let's consider processing times for work permit applications, which run to approximately six months. That figure varies, but the delays have consequences. Individuals can readily file work permit applications when they already hold a valid permit but may ultimately lose it if their application is denied. As a result of the length of processing times, applicants awaiting a response may wind up with an expired work permit and must then request that their status be restored. However, between six and nine months may elapse before they receive a response to an application for restoration of status. In the meantime, applicants can't work, access RAMQ, Quebec's health insurance plan, or receive care, apart from psychosocial support if they are in distress. This causes genuine situations of vulnerability that are entirely attributable to delays in the processing system. The system thus simply renders vulnerable people who previously were not. As immigration lawyers, we witness this situation every day.

Now we come to the issue of position changes within a single business. As we all know, we are experiencing labour shortages. However, certain employees who, in some instances, could be promoted or change positions within the same business are currently unable to do so. They must abide by processing times of five or six months, sometimes even much longer. This precludes immediate promotions and substantial pay increases within a single business.

Student visas and study permits are also a problem. When students receive their letters of admission to an educational institution, usually in February, they file their applications for a Quebec acceptance certificate, the CAQ. Approximately four weeks later, they receive their CAQ, which arrives in March or April. They file their study permit application...

• (1400)

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting. Your time is up, Ms. Gagné. You can please wind up.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Krishna Gagné: Lastly, I would like to discuss IRCC's lack of communication. As lawyers, we don't have a point of contact with the department. We have to submit web forms, which clog up the system. Furthermore, the system isn't functional because it takes approximately two months for the web forms to be processed. Decisions are thus rendered without even...

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Ms. Gagné. You will get further opportunity once we go into the round of questioning.

We have heard from the three witnesses on our first panel. I have two options for the members. Please let me know which way you would like to proceed. One option is to have a five-minute round for each party, end this panel, and then bring in the other witnesses. We have two witnesses for the second panel. The other option is to hear from the other two witnesses now. We have one witness by video conference, and the other witness is in the room. Then we can go into the round of questioning based on the time we have available.

Please let me know how the members would like to proceed.

• (1405)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Chair, are we able to extend at the back end, or do we have a hard stop?

The Chair: No, we have a hard stop at 3:05.

Option one is to have a five-minute round and then start the second panel. Option two is that we hear from the other witnesses.

Mr. Hallan, go ahead.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: We're good with option one.

The Chair: Okay.

Do I see anyone for option two? No.

Okay, we will have a five-minute round of questioning from each party. We will start with the first member.

Mr. Benzen, you will have five minutes for your round of questioning. Please begin.

Mr. Bob Benzen (Calgary Heritage, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here on Friday afternoon at the beginning of a long weekend. We really appreciate your being here today. I also want to apologize for the long delay it took to get to this point. I listened to all of you speak, and I have empathy for all the things that you said.

I do want to point out one thing quickly, and that is that I want to defend our chair. Our chair does an excellent job. She's been very fair, but she does have processes and procedures she has to follow and, unfortunately, that's just how it turned out today. She has done a very good job since I've been on the committee, and I applaud her for the good work that she's done.

One of the things we're seeing is that IRCC is really trying to modernize, whether it's virtual ceremonies, online portals or using AI. I'd like all the witnesses to talk a little about how this new modernization is working. If all of you had one thing that you wanted to do, one thing that you could change, or one technology or procedure that you could change that would make a difference in speeding up these long backlogs, what would it be? I'd really like to hear what you have to say.

Any of the witnesses can answer, and all of them should answer, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Krishna Gagné: Good afternoon.

We think that IRCC should establish communication and client services that are efficient and respectful of clients, lawyers and representatives. IRCC's web form is currently the only form of contact available to us. This system is congested, and it takes approximately two months to process an application. As a result, decisions are made based on files, whereas the information has already been submitted on the web form but not received.

When applications are denied for this type of reason, we have to request a case review, once again through IRCC's web form, to resolve a situation that could have been resolved at the outset. We suggest adding boxes to the portal enabling applicants to update their files. The system would thus be less clogged and files could be updated more quickly.

This would also avoid case reviews that generally clog up the entire system. At the moment, we have to wait for an officer to examine the application and request additional documents at his or her discretion—which is not always done—so we can access the additional box in order to file documents.

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Benzen: Are there any comments from the other witnesses?

Ms. Irena Sompaseuth: I can go next.

I agree that with IRCC there has been a trend of moving toward online submission of applications, which is definitely convenient, but there should also be an option for paper applications. Through the work I do with newcomers, I see that many applicants with strong technology literacy and English-language skills find it very easy and convenient to submit their applications online. However, we can't forget about individuals with low English levels and low literacy skills who simply struggle with that. They should have the option to continue to do so on paper with hard copies.

In terms of one recommendation or one major suggestion, I would say that it's very similar to the previous comment as well. It's having contact, having customer service, having an email or a phone number where applicants can simply connect to an agent. As I mentioned in my opening statement, there is a phone number, but it's impossible to connect with an agent and receive an update. The web forms have been helpful, but they do take some time to receive a response, and they can clog the system as well.

Allocating more staffing resources in the call centres so that people can call and receive information would definitely be very helpful.

• (1410)

Mr. Bob Benzen: Mr. Leblanc, I'd be interested in hearing your thoughts on how you would take a business point of view to improve the efficiency and productivity—

The Chair: Mr. Benzen, I don't see Mr. Leblanc. I think he has left the meeting.

Mr. Bob Benzen: Okay. I'll wrap it up right there, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Benzen.

Thank you for your trust in the chair.

We will proceed to Mr. Sidhu.

You have five minutes for your round of questioning. Please begin.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll be splitting my time with my colleague Marie-France Lalonde.

I understand the immigration minister and IRCC are working hard to look at efficiencies to streamline many processes, as mentioned by my colleague in the previous question. Just this morning, Minister Fraser made an announcement that international students will be able to work more than 20 hours a week, which will assist and help businesses on the ground. As we heard from our witnesses here today, businesses need support and labour. We see "help wanted" signs on almost every Main Street across the country. This is one innovative way to help our economy and businesses.

You may ask, "How?" Today's announcement means that over 500,000 international students will be able to help grow our economy and businesses, so I think that's very important to mention. It's a great decision taken this morning by the minister and IRCC.

Ms. Irena Sompaseuth mentioned many challenges. As you know, Canada is a top destination for individuals all over the world, and it's good to be at the top. However, this presents many challenges, given the exponential growth in applications. There have to be innovative approaches, and Minister Fraser has already put into place many solutions, but, of course, there's more to be done.

There was a question that was cut short in the previous question period. Ms. Gagné or Ms. Sompaseuth may want to speak to innovative approaches that they think should be put to use.

[Translation]

The Clerk: I believe Ms. Valois would like to speak.

Ms. Stéphanie Valois: Thank you.

I'd like to continue along the same lines as my colleagues. A portal has just been established for asylum claimants to simplify and expedite processing of asylum claims. The current waiting period is more than one year for persons who claim asylum within Canada and whose files must be processed by IRCC. The department has established a portal that we were informed of on the same day it was launched and that doesn't work at all. There are technical problems.

Creating a portal may be a good idea, but, at the very least, IRCC should test it before launching it. It could also ask us what we think of it. Asylum claimants obviously aren't always able to use the portals, as Ms. Sompaseuth said. It's very complicated for someone who speaks neither English nor French and doesn't have the necessary technological equipment to use them.

Consequently, there has to be better communication among the partners on the ground.

[English]

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Madam Chair, I'll let my colleague Ms. Lalonde jump in.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much.

Once again, I'd like to thank the witnesses who are here with us.

My question will be for all the witnesses.

What do you think are the ideal permanent residence thresholds that would help reduce processing times in obtaining permanent residence in Quebec? I've put that question to other witnesses, and I'd like to know what you think.

• (1415)

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Valois or Ms. Sompaseuth, who would like to comment?

[Translation]

Ms. Stéphanie Valois: I'm not sure I understand the question.

Canada can't establish thresholds for asylum claimants because it obviously has to process the files of claimants who are on Canadian soil.

Our association couldn't comment on preferable thresholds for economic immigration purposes. It's somewhat difficult for us to take a position on that. It's more of a political issue.

All we can ask for is that more officials be assigned to IRCC to process files that are already pending. You have to take into account the fact that immigration candidates pay to have their files processed. At the moment, however, we're not talking about processing delays, but rather waiting periods, so that's not an acceptable customer service for applicants.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: There may be a misconception that there's no real desire to process file numbers that are greater than the thresholds...

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Ms. Lalonde, but your time is up.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: We will now proceed to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you will have five minutes. You can begin, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thanks to all the witnesses for being with us today.

I apologize once again for what the witness saw earlier; it wasn't nice.

My next questions will be for the AQAADI lawyers.

You didn't have time to present all your proposals in your opening statement.

What we're interested in, here on the committee, are people like you who work on the ground and who observe the real problems. They're part of your everyday life. We'd like to know your proposals for shortening processing times.

Ms. Krishna Gagné: Thank you for the opportunity to expand on our proposals.

As we noted earlier, IRCC's web form isn't a workable solution for managing files.

We propose that every file be assigned a unique number and that IRCC publish, on a daily or weekly basis, the number of the application being processed. That way, we'd be able to direct clients to the website, and they'd be able to see whether their applications are being processed. As Ms. Valois said earlier, we aren't talking about processing time but rather waiting times before applications are processed. Several months may elapse between the moment documents are submitted and when applications are processed.

Posting a number on IRCC's website would promote transparency and predictability. It would also ensure that files are processed on a first-come, first-served basis rather than randomly, as we currently observe on the ground.

Earlier we discussed the possibility of creating boxes in the portal. That would make it possible to update files until a decision is made, as is currently the case in judicial proceedings, where files can be amended until a decision is rendered.

For IRCC applications, it should be possible to update files and documents, such as passports, through the representatives portal and the application portal.

That's it for our proposals.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you very much.

In our studies, regardless of the study we're conducting in committee, we hear talk about the department's lack of transparency and its opacity.

Have you noticed the same problem? If so, do you have any solutions to propose? For example, some people have suggested creating an ombudsman position that might help improve the situation.

You may have further solutions to suggest in that regard, but have you made the same observation?

Ms. Krishna Gagné: Yes, we have made the same observation. There's no transparency or predictability, and that undermines the system.

Certain decisions are made, but we have no idea of the underlying reasons for them since they aren't based on the evidence that's been submitted. Then we have to explain the situation to our clients and tell them we don't understand why such and such a decision was made.

We also don't have anyone we can contact. We absolutely have to go through our MPs' offices. We're clogging up the entire system that will send a...

• (1420)

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Yes, I'm aware of that.

Ms. Krishna Gagné: I believe that's something you care about.

Then you have to send in all the Internet forms, which further clogs up the system. If there were a complaints commissioner, like the one at Quebec's ministère de l'Immigration, de la Francisation et de l'Intégration, or if there were an ombudsman whose mandate was to supervise IRCC's work, it would provide enhanced monitoring and more transparency, thus generating more confidence in the system.

We sometimes get exactly the same application from two different people. One gets an affirmative response and the other a negative response. It's often the work of the lawyer involved in those applications because the decisions are completely illogical.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Since the introduction of the Chinook system, are you finding even less transparency in the generic responses being sent to state the reasons for a rejection?

Ms. Krishna Gagné: I'd have trouble trying to find anything less transparent, but in the field it's absolutely clear that the decision-making process is inconsistent.

On some occasions, we found that decisions had been made for the wrong application. It's obvious that it's not a human being running this system because we sometimes get a refusal for a study permit when the application was for a work permit, or on other occasions it's been for the wrong program. It's obvious that there's a lot of inconsistency in the decisions being made.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you very much.

Do I have any time left, Madam Chair?

[English]

The Chair: You have eight seconds.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Okay.

[Translation]

I would like to truly thank all the witnesses. It was a pleasure to speak with them.

I repeat that I'm sorry about what they witnessed earlier.

Ms. Krishna Gagné: Thank you for having invited us to appear before you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now proceed to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, you will have five minutes for your round of questioning. You can please begin.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses as well for their presentations. I apologize for the delay in getting the matter going.

I'd like to ask the representative from LUSO Community Services this question. You raised, I think similarly to the other witnesses, the significance of the delay in processing and what it means. Oftentimes, the government does not even follow its own processing standards. If you look at the website right now, they don't even give you a time; they only say not to expect your application to be processed expeditiously.

Given that this is the situation, I wonder what you think the government should do or what your recommendation is for the government to address this crisis in processing delays within immigration.

Ms. Irena Sompaseuth: Well, I think consistency with processing times.... I think a few of the witnesses mentioned that there is inconsistency, because some applications are processed faster than others, not really for any particular reason, and that communication is not available to applicants.

As I mentioned, we have seen recent applications being processed much faster compared to 2019 and 2020, so just keep that trend going but really focus on the backlog of all those applications that are sitting in the inventory as well. I think allocating staff and resources to specific applications and focusing on getting those processed will help reduce that backlog, as well as training for staff and hiring more staff to be available so applicants will be able to receive information.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Of course, when the government says they've hired new staff and set processing standards, it's for new applicants coming in from that day going forward. It's not for the people who are already in the queue who have already been waiting for a year, two years or longer for their application to be processed.

Do you think that's right? If not, how do you think the government should address that, those who have already applied and are waiting?

Ms. Irena Sompaseuth: With all of the new employees who have been hired to focus and work on all the immigration applications with the goal of reducing the backlogs, there should be designated teams, separate teams, to focus on specific issues. That way, the older applications would also be processed and not just left in the inventory without attention.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

I'd like to ask the same question of Ms. Gagné. I'm sure you're seeing that in the system. What's your response? Should the government be processing new applications and then be able to say, "Oh, look, we're meeting standards", when all the people who are stuck in the backlog are just waiting and waiting?

[Translation]

Ms. Krishna Gagné: The government should really set a deadline for dealing with the backlog. For example, it could decide that all backlogs have to be cleared within six months and hire the resources needed to administer the process.

At the moment, resources are assigned to processing new files. However, applications and the backlog are not always being dealt

with, and 20% of applications are not being processed within the prescribed time periods. We have no idea what's going on.

There should therefore be very clear direction from the government requiring all backlogs to be processed within something like six months. After that, there should be an accountability requirement if the deadline is not met.

• (1425)

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much for that.

Is my time up, Madam Chair?

The Chair: You have one minute and 10 seconds.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

One of the issues is the lack of transparency, really. People don't really know why their application has just been rejected. Often the government just cites, "We don't believe you're going to return to your country of origin", even though there's ample evidence to indicate otherwise.

Ms. Gagné, I wonder what your response is to that and what your recommendation is to address this issue.

[Translation]

Ms. Krishna Gagné: First of all, I would recommend that the reasons be more detailed. At the moment, generic and highly subjective reasons are given. We don't understand why. When we submit an access to information request, we never get any further details.

Officers' notes should therefore be clearly detailed and the reasons given need to be explained at greater length. It's not enough to say in a short sentence that the officer did not believe the applicants would return to their country owing to their financial status. Details about what precisely is missing from the application are needed to answer questions or address officers' concerns. At the moment, the same application might be submitted twice and receive a different response depending on which officer processed it.

The reasons really need to be spelled out and clear instructions given with respect to what is required. For example, for financial means, a definition of the minimum required has to be identified and communicated clearly. At the moment, it's up to the discretion of the officer, and there are no guidelines.

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, but the time is up for Ms. Kwan.

With that, this panel comes to an end.

On behalf of all the members of this committee, I really want to thank and apologize to all of the witnesses for the delay. Sometimes if things are moved, we have to deal with them before we can go to the witnesses. I really want to apologize for the delayed start and the lesser duration we had to talk, but thanks a lot.

If there is anything you'd like to send to the committee, anything you were not able to bring today, you can always send a written submission and we will take it into consideration when we come to the drafting of the report.

With that, this panel comes to an end. I thank you all once again.

I will suspend the meeting for two or three minutes so that the clerk can do the sound checks for the next panel, and then we will come back.

Thank you. The meeting is suspended.

● (1425) _____ (Pause) _____

● (1430)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

As we start the second panel, I would like to welcome our witnesses today. I want to thank them for their patience for that delayed start.

In this panel, we are joined by the Canadian Association of Professional Immigration Consultants, being represented by Dory Jade, the chief executive officer. He is present in person. We are also joined by the chair of their board, Ms. Avni Marfatia.

Our other witness for today is Deacon Rudy Ovcjak, the director of the office for refugees of the Archdiocese of Toronto.

Welcome to all of the witnesses for today. Thank you for joining us and sorry for the delay.

We will begin with Mr. Jade.

Mr. Jade, you will have five minutes for your opening remarks. You can please begin.

Mr. Dory Jade (Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Association of Professional Immigration Consultants): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair and committee members, it is my pleasure to come before you as a witness on the issue of application backlogs and processing times.

CAPIC represents over 4,000 immigration and citizenship consultants, who represent thousands of clients and applicants before Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

Joining me today is Ms. Avni Marfatia, who is the chair of the CAPIC board and a practitioner as an immigration consultant for over 20 years.

[*Translation*]

We are very pleased to be able to appear before you today, particularly in person, after all this time.

[*English*]

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on processing times and operational delivery of immigration applications. The processing system is not yet back to full capacity. As a result, the demands for temporary resident programs continue to rise by more than 30% of 2019 levels. More than 70% of the backlog con-

sists of temporary residents' visa files. The backlog continues to grow, increasing the stress on the system, with now more than 900,000 temporary files in the backlog.

Some IT systems, as you have probably heard, are new, have issues and require time to be tested. As a result, multiple applications are filed for the same benefit, so there are multiple counts.

Applicants are facing extraordinary delays in processing time, and it's jeopardizing their future. The shortage of labour is causing economic stress for employers. Consequently, the immigration system's integrity is threatened.

As desperate applicants continue to look for other options, the pressure on the system should be urgently alleviated with the introduction of these non-regulatory measures. CAPIC recommends the following. First, declare some countries as visa-exempt for short-term visitors. Second, use enhanced eTA to control security and monitor intentions. Third, reinstate a high-in-demand NOC list for the LMIA-exempt. Fourth, implement the SDS, the student direct stream, for all student study permit applications and automatic issuance of post-graduate work permits for successful completion of studies. The minister today made a decision in the right direction.

Our recommendations include measures that can be implemented promptly to reduce the backlog and improve efficiency across the entire system.

Thank you, Madam Chair and committee members.

● (1435)

[*Translation*]

I'll be happy to answer your questions in French or in English.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jade.

We will now proceed to the office for refugees of the Archdiocese of Toronto, represented by the director, Deacon Ovcjak.

Mr. Ovcjak, you will have five minutes for your opening remarks. You can please begin.

Deacon Rudy Ovcjak (Director, Office for Refugees, Archdiocese of Toronto): Good afternoon.

Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee.

By way of introduction, I want to indicate the Archdiocese of Toronto's participation in the private sponsorship of refugees program. We are the largest sponsorship agreement holder in Canada and have been involved in the PSR program since its very inception.

We have been able to address the plight of refugees from many different faith and nationality backgrounds because of the generosity of Catholics throughout the archdiocese of Toronto and because of the vision and values of the church and of our cardinal archbishop. It's a response that is rooted in love of neighbour and finds its source in our love for God and in his love for us.

I would like to begin my comments by first recognizing the important work that IRCC has done to reduce the backlogs and processing times prior to the pandemic. I believe that at that point, average processing times for the PSR program were reduced to approximately one and a half years, a remarkable accomplishment that I'm confident IRCC will be able to repeat.

Unfortunately, the pandemic has had a very deleterious effect on both the backlog and the processing times. All throughout the pandemic, private sponsors were able to continue to submit cases to IRCC. At the same time, IRCC's overseas processing of cases slowed to a trickle. The resulting increased backlog—and it was significant—was exacerbated by Canada's commitment to resettle 40,000 Afghans by 2024. Private sponsors were asked to assist in this work through the operation Afghan safety program.

In addition to the direct increase of the backlog from private sponsors participating in the OAS program, I'm concerned that the situation will be made worse if IRCC resources used to process private sponsorship applications are redeployed to process Afghani cases in order to meet that target.

I'm here as one who has supported the OAS program. The goal of helping Afghani refugees is laudable, as is the desire to assist those displaced by the war in Ukraine through the CUAET program. The impact, though, of a decision to redeploy resources—if such a decision has been made—will lead to a significant increase in the backlog and in processing times for all other refugee populations, many of whom have waited in the queue for many years, oftentimes living in very intolerable conditions.

This ought to raise the question for us about how fair and equitable such an approach is to other refugee populations. I'm afraid that we have learned very little from the approach that was taken during the Syrian refugee crisis, where an enormous resettlement target of 25,000 Syrians was set and their processing was done at the expense of all other refugee populations, who had their processing times extended for an additional year so that this target could be met.

These extraordinary resettlement targets are fine, as long as they are adequately resourced and not resourced at the expense of other programs or other refugee populations. As an indication that such a decision to redeploy resources has been made, sponsorship agreement holders have experienced a significant delay in their annual allocation, which IRCC normally provides to SAHs by the end of February of each year. This allocation obviously indicates the total number of refugees that a SAH is able to submit sponsorship applications for in that year and oftentimes signals when SAHs are able to begin submitting applications to IRCC.

This year, we received the allocation not at the end of February, but towards the end of July—four and a half months later than normal. With the exception of 25 spots released in early 2022, SAHs were unable to submit applications to IRCC until the release of their annual allocation. This delay places an incredibly enormous pressure on SAHs to process and submit applications in the remaining five and a half months, essentially condensing a year's worth of work into five and a half months.

This enormous pressure placed upon SAHs has been exacerbated with the release of the program integrity framework and the new set of requirements for SAHs to complete a very onerous 34-question survey that is primarily focused on documenting policies and procedures that the SAHs undertake.

While time today, in my submission, will not permit me to comment on the many concerns that SAHs have expressed regarding this new framework, I would like to highlight that the timing of this rollout—in the midst of this already reduced processing period—is of great concern for most, if not all, SAHs.

• (1440)

With that, I will conclude my remarks.

Again, I extend thanks to the committee members for allowing me to speak.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now proceed to our round of questioning. We will start with Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Genuis, you will have six minutes for your round of questioning. You can please begin.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Madam Chair. I will be sharing my time with Mr. Redekopp.

Thanks to both of you for your testimony.

Deacon Rudy, I want to put something to you and get your feedback on it. It seems to me that we have this challenge where there are crises in the world. The public is justly moved by images from those crises. The government makes commitments in terms of resettlement. Resources are moved from other places to that resettlement.

The problem is that this public policy response isn't increasing the net number of vulnerable people who are helped. It's simply moving resources around. There are people with long-standing challenges who are not in the top line of the news and, therefore, they're actually getting bumped down. What we really should be thinking about is not moving resources around, but how we help more people.

Related to that, when we ask this question, the government will always tell us that they can fulfill these new commitments without it negatively affecting people in other places. However, from what you're saying your consistent experience has been, it seems that if the government comes out and says they're going to help 20,000 people over here, this is necessarily going to draw resources from other places, which will expand backlogs and reduce the number of people who can come, at least in the current time frame.

What's your reaction to that?

Deacon Rudy Ovcjak: That's exactly right.

That is what happened during the Syrian refugee crisis. Essentially, in my understanding of what took place during that crisis, in order to meet the 25,000 target, they moved visa officers away from many of the posts and had them go to Lebanon and Jordan to process Syrian applications, which essentially stalled all the other applications. Many of them had been in the queue well before the Syrian crisis took effect.

It's a question of equity and justice. We want to be fair with all refugee populations and not place one refugee population ahead of the queue because they have the attention of the Canadian public.

This is why I've argued that if such targets are to be set—sometimes there's reason to do that—additional resources should be deployed and not moved from supporting other programs or other refugee populations.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: The government says they do that. They say that in all these cases when we ask the question.

Your experience is consistent with every other witness who is not employed by the government in saying that there is an impact. They're not just bringing a bunch of new resources on stream; they are being drawn away from other places.

Deacon Rudy Ovcjak: Yes, absolutely.

That is our experience and the experience of all SAHs.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Redekopp, it's over to you.

Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC): Thanks.

Deacon Ovcjak, I want to quote something I found in an article on your website. It says, "The protection of persecuted Christians...is not at the summit of the Canadian government's priorities. This was glaringly obvious to me as I attended the Summit on International Religious Freedom.... Sadly, Canada was missing in action. No high-level government representative was in sight."

I have a serious question about that. I'm concerned that even though there are many persecuted Christians around the world—Syria, for example, has many—relatively few Christians are immigrating to Canada. Do you have any thoughts as to why this may be?

• (1445)

Deacon Rudy Ovcjak: There are not a whole lot of data points out there. I think that's purposefully done.

One article that I often refer to.... Granted, it's a bit dated, but again, it's a very limited dataset. In 2016, The Wall Street Journal published an article that looked at the 12,800 Syrian refugees who were resettled to the United States under President Obama. They found that less than half of a per cent of those who were resettled were Christians, despite the fact that Christians represented 10% of Syria's pre-war population and despite the fact that genocide had been committed against them. That is a significant under-representation taking place. The reporter did kind of look at the root causes. They did indicate that there were a number of causes for this, but the key cause was placed at the feet of UNHCR—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting. The time is up for Mr. Redekopp.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Was it five minutes or six minutes, Madam Chair?

The Chair: Oh, I'm sorry, Mr. Redekopp. It is six minutes. I'm sorry about that.

Please go ahead.

Deacon Rudy Ovcjak: The U.S., like Canada, relies upon the UNHCR to refer refugees to them. My reading into this is that there is a problem with their referral program. What I would argue, and what I would urge this committee to take back to Parliament, is that a study analysis should be done. Transparency is required at the UNHCR to ensure that they are fairly and adequately representing all the persecuted religious minorities—Christian, Yazidi and Ahmadiyya Muslims in Pakistan—in the GAR programs.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Thank you, Mr. Ovcjak.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Redekopp. Again, I'm sorry about that. It was the last round that was five minutes.

Mr. Ali, you have six minutes for your round of questioning. Please begin.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank our witnesses for taking the time to give us the benefit of their knowledge and experience.

My question is for Ms. Marfatia and Mr. Jade. It's about online applications. You have both been working in this field for several years. Could you tell us a little bit about your experience with the processing of permanent residence applications? Do you think having the permanent residence portal has improved the processing of permanent residence applications? What are the benefits of having this online portal?

Mr. Dory Jade: I'll defer to Avni on this.

Ms. Avni Marfatia (Chair of the Board, Canadian Association of Professional Immigration Consultants): Thank you, Dory.

Thank you, Madam Chair and committee members.

I've been in practice for 20-plus years. With the APR portal coming into practice in 2015, it surely decreased the processing times of PR applications pre-COVID. The time that was given was within six months. It was duly processed within six months or less, unless there was some issue with the application.

During COVID times and after COVID pandemic times, we have seen an extreme delay in the process. Some applications are processed in 15 months, 18 months, two years, and they're just waiting for background checks. The rest of the information is completed, but they're just waiting for the background checks.

That's my experience.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you, Ms. Marfatia.

Mr. Jade, you talked about study permit extensions. As you know, the Minister of Immigration just today announced a temporary lifting of the restriction on international students' working hours. We're also piloting a program for automatic study permit extensions. What do you think of that?

• (1450)

Mr. Dory Jade: First, it's a decision in the right direction, as I mentioned in my opening remarks. However, we recommend going even further. If a student comes to Canada, you will probably know that the student is authorized to have, or can have, the right to apply for a work permit one year or three years after their graduation.

If you go back several years, we have been advocating for Canada to have a visa of five years or 10 years—similar to the U.S., for example, with fewer security issues. It took 15 years for the government to make this decision. They used to give visas for one month, 15 days, multiple entry, one entry and things like that. It is now much better in terms of processing, and the security level is the same.

Here we're saying the same. When someone wants to come to study in Canada, the person is highly likely to work in Canada for one or three years after graduation. Why do we want to add a burden on the system and ask the individual to submit another work permit application? The individual or the student has already submitted an application. He became a student, and now he can continue working afterwards with the same permit, extended another three years.

The same has happened with the study permit. Before those days, if you recall—probably many of you were here 10 years ago—you used to submit for a study permit. After the student comes here to study, then he submits for a work permit if he wants to work off campus. Those need to be removed. It should be removed faster than it has been.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you, Mr. Jade.

You also suggested a temporary expansion of the list of visa-exempt countries as a method to deal with the backlog and processing times for TRVs. How would you see that working? How would we close that list again after it has temporarily been expanded?

Mr. Dory Jade: You probably are also aware that anyone coming to Canada without a visa is still required to complete an eTA application or form. Approvals are very fast. Within 72 hours, I think, over 98% get approved.

If for a short period of time we get through the backlog.... As we mentioned, the backlog is over 70% temporary residents, so what would happen is that many individuals wanting to come to Canada would go through the eTA if the country is exempt.

You could have something like an enhanced eTA. For example, in a country where you should have an eTA, you add to it two pieces of information—one for security, such as a police certificate that is recent within, let's say, the last five or 10 days, and another document about financial capacity—to come for a short period of time to visit Canada. This is how we see it implemented on the ground.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you.

I'll just quickly ask your thoughts on—

The Chair: Mr. Ali, you just have five seconds.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: I'm sorry.

The Chair: Your time is up.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ali.

We will now proceed to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you will have six minutes. Please begin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thanks to all the witnesses for contributing to this extremely important study.

You caught my attention, Mr. Jade. You mentioned a single visa for students who already have the right to work. The problem we have stems from the fact that most students who are denied a study permit are told that it's because of the risk that they would remain in Canada after they've graduated.

Isn't there a contradiction there?

On the one hand, the act allows students who have been accepted to submit a work permit or permanent residency application, but under the same act, we deny them study permits out of concern that they will stay here afterwards.

Mr. Dory Jade: I'd just like to clarify that. It's what is called dual intent.

That's not exactly how it works. There is likely a misunderstanding of some of the details. The concept is outdated, obsolete, and the act should probably be updated in this respect.

In fact, dual intent for someone means remaining longer than the period authorized on their permit without having applied to do so. It's a matter of something implied, or understood.

Under the act, an immigration officer has the right, after studying the application, to refuse a study permit if that officer believes that the person is likely to remain in the country beyond the period authorized by the permit.

We have reported this problem to IRCC before. We find that the act is becoming increasingly outdated and that it needs to be reviewed.

• (1455)

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: So your solution would address the problem of application processing delays at the IRCC because there would be only one application rather than two.

Is that right?

Mr. Dory Jade: [*Inaudible—Editor*] two or three, it depends...

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: We'll take note of your proposal. Our analysts will be happy to put that into the committee's report.

Meeting after meeting, and study after study, all the witnesses we've heard at the committee have mentioned IRCC's lack of transparency. They talk about the department's opacity. At some point, solutions to this problem have to be found.

We don't want to blame the public servants. I believe the problem is structural. It might require a redesign of the institution's system.

What's your opinion on this?

Mr. Dory Jade: I'm going to give you a very clear answer.

The system hasn't really changed. It's just that since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become even more impenetrable.

In the past, the same thing would happen every time. On the other hand, the access to information system was not used as often, which meant that access to the information was faster, within 30 days.

Now, even though the Access to Information Act requires institutions to respond within 30 days, it can take two years before we get a reply concerning the information requested concerning an application.

We have on several occasions suggested integrating the Global Case Management System, the GCMS, which amounts to checking a box that would correspond to a message like, "Send reply to applicant and mention reason for decision". That would require every officer who rejects an application—we are not talking about applications processed by artificial intelligence software—to provide the reason for the refusal in writing, even if it amounts to just a single sentence.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: So you'd like people to have access to this answer, which would be completely logical.

Is that right?

Mr. Dory Jade: Absolutely.

It would enable the individual to know the reason for the decision. Often, there's simply a document missing. For example, if evidence of financial means is missing, a notification might be sent to people saying that their application is being refused because they do not intend to return to their country.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: And yet all it is is a missing document.

Mr. Dory Jade: That's right.

With the right information in hand, people could submit another application because they would know what's missing right away.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Shouldn't people who have gone to the trouble of completing an application be provided with this information, simply out of transparency?

Mr. Dory Jade: Definitely.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I'd like to briefly discuss the possibility of establishing an ombudsman position at IRCC, an idea that quite a few people have mentioned.

Not everyone agrees on the idea, but most people who have come here to testify have been in favour of it.

I personally haven't made up my mind yet, but I'd like to hear your comments on this matter.

Mr. Dory Jade: It's a proposal that should be given serious consideration. The problem with it is that the act currently assigns con-

siderable authority to the immigration officer. So it might be a good idea to ensure the impartiality of the process.

The act also says that if applicants are not satisfied with the decision, they can submit another application or request a judicial review.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: However, that means that the applicant begins to become tangled up in the justice system.

• (1500)

Mr. Dory Jade: The level of access to justice comes into play, which can become much more complex and expensive. Lawyers are required, and generally speaking, their fees are high.

I don't know whether establishing an ombudsman's position would be a solution to the lack of openness and transparency about why applications are rejected, or why a particular decision was made, while allowing the opportunity to submit another application.

I don't know whether it might have a leveraging effect, because adding to the bureaucracy is not always a good idea.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Okay, but at the moment, my understanding is that litigation concerning the federal government...

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: If most of it was directed against IRCC...

Mr. Dory Jade: If that were the case, then an ombudsman might be a solution.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Exactly.

[Inaudible—Editor]

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, your time is up.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: That's too bad. We were enjoying ourselves.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Jade.

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting. Now we will proceed to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, you will have six minutes for your round of questioning. Please begin.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to the witnesses.

My question really centres around this. What happens a lot is that the government takes the approach of robbing Peter to pay Paul. That is to say, they will introduce new immigration measures without actually providing additional immigration levels or resources to accommodate those new immigration measures. As a result, you have a huge backlog that would be impacted. This means that existing applications would be further delayed. The reality is that, with the privately sponsored refugee stream, there were significant delays even prior to the Afghanistan crisis.

My question is for Deacon Rudy.

When the government introduces new immigration measures, should they introduce them without ensuring that there are new resources and immigration level numbers to accommodate them, or should they do those special immigration measures with additional resources intact, both level numbers and staffing for processing?

Deacon Rudy Ovcjak: Certainly, in my opinion, it would be prudent.... In any of these extraordinary situations like the Afghani or the Ukrainian crisis, where a response is needed and thought important enough for Parliament to act on, additional resources ought to be provided, absolutely.

The problem we've always had is that resources are redeployed from processing existing refugee populations to now process the applications of this newly created target. That's patently unfair to the refugee populations who have been already waiting in the queue for many years and living in very intolerable situations.

I think the levels plan should be adjusted accordingly and resources should be deployed.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

Yes, there's a way to address that, which is to do exactly as you are recommending.

Now, in terms of additional resources put in place, oftentimes the government will, with great fanfare and an announcement, say that they now have additional resources and that, going forward, immigration standards will be met and people will be processed in this period of time. Yet they do not address the fact that there are people in the backlog, thousands of people, and they're at the back of the queue because their standard has already been missed, but there's no measure to really tackle that backlog.

What do you think the government should do to ensure that the backlog and those who have already applied are not being left further behind?

Deacon Rudy Ovcjak: I think it's important to have almost a "first in, first out", a first-come, first-served basis. We have applications that were submitted in 2017-18 and still haven't been processed, so I think first-come, first-served.... As they come in, they ought to be processed, as opposed to the current situation. Now with the Afghani crisis, they are put in the front of the queue, so everybody else is pushed back until we hit that 40,000 target, and there will be little movement in the other refugee populations. I think that's what is going to take place.

It's early in the process right now, but our October number of arrivals has already decreased 50% from the year prior, so that's an

indication that existing refugee populations already in the queue have been slowed.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Could the government not have two parallel processes to ensure that those in the backlog are being targeted as well and, given the urgency of the current situation, that they also have another stream to do it? It's not robbing Peter to pay Paul, but having two parallel processes in place to address both the backlog and new applications.

Deacon Rudy Ovcjak: That's a brilliant approach, and I think it would be one that I would absolutely support. Again, that kind of goes back to the point that, if you're going to set extraordinary targets, additional resources need to be deployed and provided for that additional stream.

• (1505)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

I have the same question for Mr. Jade.

Mr. Dory Jade: In answer to this, we have proposed non-regulatory options, and this is why. If you look at the backlog, there are different sections. While refugees are very important, it is not the largest group. Reducing the largest group, the largest number of applications, which is temporary residents, would lead to resources being available for other streams, like permanent residency, including refugees. This is exactly what we proposed to the government and to IRCC. The fact that you reduce the backlog of temporary files will allow you more space. It's like a big machine that needs to move forward.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Because there are different streams, sometimes for the government to conflate one stream with another doesn't make sense either. Therefore, should the government not ensure that there are adequate resources, both in staffing and in immigration levels, in place for each of the different streams? Otherwise there'll always be a stream left behind—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, but time is up.

With that, our panel comes to an end.

On behalf of all the members of the committee, I really want to thank the witnesses for appearing before this committee on a Friday afternoon and providing important information. If there is anything you would like to bring to the notice of the members, you can send a written submission, and we will take it into consideration when we are drafting the report.

I want to let members know that our next meeting will take place on Tuesday, October 18. We will have one panel on the application processing times and backlogs. We will then have our subcommittee meeting following at 4:30.

With that, I want to wish everyone a happy Thanksgiving. I hope all of you will be able to spend some time with your families, be thankful for all the blessings we have and think about those who need a little extra hand.

Thank you to our staff, who are always there to provide us support. I hope you have a great Thanksgiving with your families.

The meeting is adjourned.

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