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# Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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Chair: Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal





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• (1715)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

We are meeting in public.

Welcome to meeting number 95 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

Today for a briefing on the temporary immigration measures initiated in response to the ongoing conflicts in Sudan and Gaza, we have the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, the Honourable Marc Miller, with departmental officials.

Madam Kwan, do you have something to say?

**Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP):** I do. Before we begin, Mr. Chair, I know that, because of votes, we've lost almost 45 minutes of the two hours the minister was supposed to appear and then one hour for the officials.

I would like to hear from you how we will be making up that time. Will we be extending the meeting tonight so we can get the full two hours with the minister? If not, then I would—

**The Chair:** I'm coming to that, Madam Kwan. If you can give me time to end, you will know. Let me finish up, then I'll give you the floor.

Joining him are departmental officials, Deputy Minister Dr. Harpreet Singh Kochhar, Assistant Deputy Minister Jennifer MacIntyre and Director General Karim Virani.

Welcome to the meeting.

Minister, you've been very accessible to this committee. I know that almost every week that we sit you are here, and I want to thank you for making the time to come here to be with the members.

The hard stop for the minister is at 6:30. He does not have time today to go beyond 6:30, and the hard stop with the officials will be 7:30.

There are six other motions for him to come back to the committee, so it's up to the committee to make that decision.

I give the floor to Madam Kwan.

Madam Kwan, the floor is yours.

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

At the appropriate time, Mr. Chair, I intend to move a motion to have the minister come back to make up for the lost time. The other times the minister is scheduled to appear before committee are on other issues. This is on Gaza and the many family members who want accountability, transparency and answers from the government, and I think they deserve that.

This motion specifically calls for the minister to appear before the committee for the full two hours and, because of votes—it's not the minister's fault—we have lost that time, and we need to make up that time. At the appropriate time, Mr. Chair, I will be moving a motion to that effect.

**The Chair:** The motion is in order.

Is it the will of the committee to do that?

Does anyone want to speak to it?

**Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC):** I thought she was moving it at the appropriate time. I don't think she moved it.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I'm sorry, Mr. Chair; I don't want to take any more time away from the discussion with the minister, so at the appropriate time, I will be moving that motion to bring the minister back to make up for the time that has been lost today.

**The Chair:** You have not moved the motion yet, thank you.

With that, Minister, as usual, welcome the committee.

Before I start, honourable members, if you want the minister to stop, please raise your hand so I don't eat into your time, and, as I have told members personally, you have your full time and I'm equitable with every member.

Minister, please keep an eye out. If I raise my hand, that means please wrap up, and we'll go back to the members. Thank you.

With that, we'll give the minister five minutes to start.

Minister, go ahead, please.

**Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship):** Thank you, Chair.

I promise to behave.

[*Translation*]

Let me begin by acknowledging that we are meeting today on the traditional, unceded territories of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

Thank you for inviting me to discuss measures my department launched in response to the crises in Sudan and Gaza.

[*English*]

The situations in Sudan and Gaza are devastating and have left Canadians anxious to bring their loved ones to safety. It's also not lost on me that the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza continues through Ramadan, a holy time meant to be cherished with family and friends.

After fighting broke out in Sudan last spring, my department responded by supporting the assisted departure of Canadian citizens, permanent residents, locally engaged staff and their families.

[*Translation*]

Despite challenges keeping Canada's embassy and Visa Application Centre in Sudan running, we're continuing to process applications from Sudan through our global network.

We've prioritized applications for temporary and permanent residence, including refugee applications. We also waived most fees for Canadians and permanent residents who need replacement documents and other assistance to leave Sudan.

Sudanese nationals who want to stay in Canada during the conflict can apply to change or extend their temporary resident status, free of charge through October.

[*English*]

Recently, we also launched a humanitarian pathway to permanent residence for people living in Sudan, where the conflict began, including non-Sudanese nationals. Their Canadian family will support them here and help them integrate, with the assistance of our settlement services.

Every crisis requires a tailored and different response, and the situation in Gaza calls for Canada to respond in ways that meet the unique demands of those on the ground seeking refuge.

[*Translation*]

We've prioritized permanent resident applications from the region within most family-based streams. And for Israelis and Palestinians in Canada who feel unsafe returning, we've waived fees to change or extend their temporary resident status, including applying for study and open work permits.

[*English*]

Many Canadians remain, understandably, deeply worried for their extended family in Gaza. In January, we launched measures to offer them a temporary safe haven here. Family members holding Palestinian passports can apply for temporary resident visas, and their Canadian family will support them for a year once they arrive. They'll also have access to interim federal health coverage and, obviously, federal settlement services.

The policy has, up to now, been currently accepting 1,000 applications into processing, and as we monitor the situation, we're eval-

uating the needs to update that response and to increase the application of people who are covered by our measures. I do not have a specific additional number to offer the committee today, but members should be aware that our teams are working on it. In the past couple of weeks, we have started to increase the number of codes being issued to people seeking to exit Gaza. We can get into this in the question and answer period.

Usually, applicants need to submit fingerprints and a photo before they can be moved out of a country. However, since my department has no presence in Gaza to collect biometrics, applicants provide enhanced biographic information on their forms. This allows us to do preliminary security screening while they're still in Gaza so that we can finalize their applications faster once they leave. Biometrics are then collected in Cairo.

This is standard practice in crises where we have no presence on the ground. This is something we used in Afghanistan as well.

● (1720)

[*Translation*]

We've heard concerns about the form, so we've altered or removed some questions. And since we know applicants may not have access to all the required documents, I've directed my department and officers to be flexible and assess each situation case-by-case.

[*English*]

As you're aware, movement out of Gaza remains limited and out of Canada's control. Though I'm frustrated by this, I can only imagine the desperation families in Canada must feel as they wait for their loved ones to come. I know many are gathered here physically today and are feeling that.

We are also working with local authorities at every level to make sure people's names who we've submitted are approved to exit Gaza. We'll leave no stone unturned in our campaign to have families safely reunited with their families in Canada.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much.

I'll be happy to answer your questions.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

Before I go to the round, I welcome two members here. Mr. Erskine-Smith is here online and we are also joined by Mr. Morrice. It's my understanding that Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe will share his time with Mr. Morrice at some point in time.

With this, I will go to the first round.

Mr. Kmiec, you have six minutes. Please go ahead.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister.

I'm going to start with just a simple numbers question, Minister. Can you give us an update on both programs, Sudan and Gaza, and tell us how many individuals have come in through those programs, and then, separately, how many individuals have come in through all government programs from the region due to the conflict?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** The program in Sudan, first off, as of March 13—a few days ago—has received 2,667 applications. Three hundred and six applications representing 689 persons have been accepted into this.

When it comes to people who have come since the crisis and the terrorist attack on October 7, there have been, in various measures together—I'll put them all together and then I'll break them down, Tom, into the specific pathway, which is obviously limited to 14 people—physically from Israel 1,661 people who were evacuated. There have been 839, which includes Canadians and permanent residents, from Gaza itself, and 79 individuals from the West Bank.

We have currently accepted, as part of the temporary public policy, 986 complete applications into processing. As of March 4, 2024, there have been 14 people who have taken matters into their own hands and have been successfully able to exit the Rafah gates. That number, as I mentioned earlier, is 14.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** For my next question, Minister, you said that 14 exited through the Rafah crossing on their own. Is that correct?

Out of those who have had their applications accepted for both programs—Sudan and Gaza—how many have physically come to Canada?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** With respect to Sudan, I believe the answer is zero. This program was just launched. We expect them to land physically, we hope, later in the year or early in 2025.

There are some nuances to be drawn here. There are a number of people, over the December period and January through to March, who we have been able to extract on an ad hoc basis. Two children and a woman under dire, medically exigent circumstances, we were able to get to Cairo for the medical procedure in question.

Some of them have come to Canada, but the number is very limited and negligible compared to the ambition of this program.

• (1725)

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Minister, can you provide, for both programs, those with approved applications and which country they're in right now?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** We could provide that to you at a later date.

With respect to the program that we launched for family members in Gaza to exit, those people are largely still situated in Gaza, with the exceptions that I mentioned.

In Sudan, it's largely Sudan, but there could be other countries where they are physically present, currently.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** I went to look at the UNHCR's update for the Sudan emergency response. They provided numbers from Egypt. It says there are 508,827 people, according to UNHCR, who have fled Sudan.

They're claiming that about half a million of those people are Sudanese nationals. Then 8,827—again, these are their numbers—are individuals of other nationalities who have crossed into Egypt between April 2023 and March 2024. These are numbers that the UNHCR has received from the Government of Egypt.

Out of that group, how many of those have applications approved to come to Canada?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** I couldn't tell you that, but we could get you that number at a later date.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** That's fine.

What is the security interaction? Have you spoken to your counterpart in Egypt?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** Our officials do coordinate on an active basis.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Is it only happening at an officials level? Is there no minister contact?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** With respect to Egypt, yes, it's officials.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Okay.

In the case of Israel...?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** I have spoken with the ambassador, in particular. Obviously, our heads of mission have spoken.

The Prime Minister, on a number of topics, has spoken to Mr. Netanyahu, as well as Benny Gantz and others.

That's not to mention the work that Minister Joly does as part of her job.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** What about the case of the Palestinian Authority?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** I have not spoken to anyone in the PA.

As you know, Minister Joly met with Mr. Abbas.

We do, as security measures, coordinate at times with those, but on an officials basis.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** My question then is going to be about the interactions with the officials.

Can you describe the security relationship? I ask because the reaction of the Government of Egypt has been different to those who are to come through the Rafah crossing versus those who have fled the civil war in Sudan.

Can you explain what that interaction is like and how that has perhaps complicated the Government of Canada's response?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** Certainly, it's a highly pertinent question, MP Kmicc.

This is not an easy area to extract folks from. Correspondingly, it has been easier to have people exit Ukraine, for example, and perhaps even Sudan. Given the gravity of the crisis in Gaza, there is an intense security perimeter, which you are familiar with. Coordination to get people out requires interaction with the Government of Egypt. It requires cooperation with COGAT, a wing of the Israeli Ministry of Defense. With respect to the Palestinians, who have family members here and whom we are trying desperately to get out, we have submitted a list of well north of 300 people.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister, and Mr. Kmicc.

We will go to Madam Kayabaga for six minutes, please.

Go ahead.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would just like to go back to some of those numbers you just talked about. I wasn't sure if I heard the answer on how many people have exited through this specific program for Gazans, through the official Rafah crossing.

**Hon. Marc Miller:** It has been very few and far between. There are 14 people who have exited. We have, on an ad hoc basis, been able to extract people through intense diplomatic efforts, but not as a result of the names that we have submitted in due course to COGAT—amongst others on the list that we have. That is the preferred way of getting people out in a way that doesn't involve intermediaries and bribing people of dubious backgrounds.

• (1730)

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** Are the 14 people specifically through the program, or are they those who got out on their own, with their own families, using their own money?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** These people got out by their own efforts.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** It was not from this program, then.

**Hon. Marc Miller:** It was not through the efforts of our trying to extract people through this program.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** It's fair to say that nobody has come through with this program.

**Hon. Marc Miller:** They are covered by the program, but they are not covered by the official way in which we are trying to get people out. They have gotten out on their own.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** Is there a way to address the concerns regarding the code requirements for Gazans to be able to submit for temporary resident visas?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** I'm sorry. What requirement...?

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** The code requirement. There has been a code that has been submitted, and you receive it once in a while. I think it's been stopped now.

Can we get some more information on the code? I've never seen the code before.

**Hon. Marc Miller:** As of last week, we started to increase the number of codes. We will be increasing the number of codes in increments of 250 by week, just to—

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** What is the rationale behind the code?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** Well, it's part of the process. When you initiate the application process, you issue people a code as part of their further step in the process. I can defer to officials to describe the step plan.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** Is this a code that we've used before?

Maybe the officials can help with the answer.

**The Chair:** Honourable Deputy Minister Kochhar, please go ahead.

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar (Deputy Minister, Department of Citizenship and Immigration):** Thank you, Chair, for the question.

Basically the code is built in a systematic way to make sure that we have the complete application. When there is an interest from any person, who is an anchor relative here to bring someone from Gaza, they are actually applying through the web form, which triggers a code. That code is actually allowing them an ability to submit an application.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** Just in the interest of time, if I cut you off, I apologize ahead of time.

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** No worries.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** I'm just more curious to know if this is something we have done before, or if this is a special code for Gazans.

**The Chair:** We have the honourable deputy minister.

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** That is a code specifically for this program.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** The program of using codes has never been used before except for this program, for specifically this community.

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** I'm not understanding the question.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** I want to use my time appropriately. Maybe you can submit it later and let us know if this is something that's been done before.

I do have another question as well. Maybe the official can help answer this question, and the minister as well.

We have heard concerns from our communities that when Gazans are applying they have been asked extensive questions that have to do with social media, and identifying specific marks that are on their bodies. I've never heard of this before.

Can you clarify if this is something that we usually do? Why are we asking people about social media? Is this a regular practice?

**The Chair:** Honourable Minister, please go ahead.

**Hon. Marc Miller:** There would be a variety of reasons, obviously, to get a complete background of the people who are applying. They are not Canadian citizens or permanent residents. This is something that was used, for example, in Afghanistan. Obviously, there are at times security reasons for that in order to get the full profile of someone whom we are trying to identify and get out in a very difficult context. Obviously, there's also the humanitarian concern of making sure people just have to stay alive. What I've asked my officials to do in this context is to show some operational flexibility, given the humanitarian concerns.

Yes, it has been used before. The challenge, obviously, is not being able to do biometrics in place, in Gaza. We have to be relatively certain before we take the next step of submitting a list that will be scrubbed by a party or parties with their own security concerns. Then we move on to the next stage of biometrics.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** Can we maybe get the officials to submit, through our committee, other examples of when we've asked folks to submit social media?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** Sure.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** I want to go to the next question, again, because of the time.

This is about the cap on 1,000 applicants for the program. Could we get an understanding of why the decision was made on the cap of 1,000?

On the cap for the Sudanese, how did IRCC decide on 3,250? We have heard that this program has also not had anybody come to Canada. What's the plan to actually make it work?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** In the case of the latter question, MP Kayabaga, the cap and the work that we did with respect to the Sudanese program—which has a permanent aspect to it—was done with a number of Sudanese umbrella organizations across Canada. Our own internal planning and planification have to do with the capacity of the diaspora members. That is something that, at times, can be a bit of an art and a bit of a science. We came to that number of 3,000-plus on the theory that it would translate to about 5,000 actual people.

On the Gaza pathway, there's a bit more context in that it's a temporary measure for a number of reasons, including geopolitical considerations. There's also the fact that we did this is a relatively expedited time frame over the Christmas period. That makes it unique compared with our similarly situated partners, who have not done this.

We are out there as an example with a unique program. We didn't know exactly what the numbers were. Therefore, we established this cap in that optic and context, knowing that, inevitably, we would probably have to increase it once we got a sense of the numbers. We now have a better sense of the numbers, and we are moving to show some flexibility and to increase it.

• (1735)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Madam Kayabaga.

We will go to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Go ahead, for six minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being with us today. I'm sorry I couldn't be there in person and instead have to use Zoom, but this was my only option.

I want to talk about a very specific case that will perhaps give you an idea of why we are having trouble understanding your program, which you put in place around Christmas.

Nibal Lubbad, a Canadian doctor of Palestinian origin who lives in the Niagara region, contacted me about her family in Gaza. Both of her parents managed to get out of Gaza at the eleventh hour and ended up in Egypt. She contacted me because she wasn't getting any help from the Conservative MP who represents her riding. People referred her to me. I tried to contact people in your office to get her parents out of there, but I had one heck of a time, sadly. Her father's name is Khalil Lubbad, and her mother's name is Yosra Lubbad.

It was December 22 or 23, during the holidays. I'm always working, Minister, no matter what time or day it is. To this day, we still haven't received a response from the department. They even asked Mrs. Lubbad to send them some missing documents, which she had already sent. She sent them again and, since then, there has been no contact from your department about this program.

Can I have your assurance today that someone from your office will contact me after the session so that we can resolve the issue and bring these people here to Canada?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** First of all, thank you for bringing this situation to my attention. I'm delighted to know that, at the very least, her family members are safe, even if they are in Egypt. Assuming they meet the program criteria, they can expect to be able to come to Canada as family members. This is the first time you've mentioned this to me in person. I'd be delighted to work with my team and follow up.

Of course, we're working hard to get people with family connections in Canada out of Gaza, even if it means they have to go through Egypt, for example, to be safe and sound before they can come to the country. However, I want you to know that we will be working on this with my team, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** That's wonderful. Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, I'm going to stop the clock for a second. I think the bells are ringing.

Is there unanimous consent in the committee to continue and stop the clock? No?

We don't have unanimous consent. I have to suspend the meeting.

• (1735) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1825)

**The Chair:** I call the meeting back to order.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe has three minutes left of his time. It's my understanding that he is going to take one minute and share two minutes of his time with Mr. Morrice.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, if that is correct, please go ahead for the remaining one minute.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll be brief.

Minister, you told us that this program had to be put in place at the last minute. It was over the holidays, and it was not easy.

Two years ago, I suggested to your government that IRCC set up an emergency division in order to respond to a major international crisis. If this division had been put in place, Minister, we wouldn't be in this situation. You yourself said that your officials were examining the possibility of implementing it. Two years ago, I presented a ready-made strategy, and now, if it were in place, we'd have taken a completely different approach.

Are you going to set up an emergency division at IRCC in the event of an international crisis? If so, when will this happen?

• (1830)

**Hon. Marc Miller:** I can't make any assumptions about how promptly we might have responded to such a situation. I know that a crisis unit exists. It's in place, but there are still guidelines that need to be defined. We have people working on this crisis response framework.

According to the testimonials I received from our international partners, they were surprised at how quickly we were able to put such a program in place, especially over the holidays. I know that my deputy minister and her replacement had to put a lot of effort into ensuring that the program saw the light of day so quickly, in early January.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Were they—

[English]

**The Chair:** We'll go to Mr. Morrice.

I apologize, but you are out of time, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Just a second, Mr. Chair.

Were they surprised with the results, Minister?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** Who is “they”?

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Our international partners.

**Hon. Marc Miller:** No, they weren't surprised in the least. They thought it was incredible that we were able to put it in place, and they're just as frustrated as we are that they haven't been able to achieve more positive results with other measures that were implemented.

This program is, in fact, a model to follow. So far, however, it has not been as successful as we had hoped.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** It's a model to follow, but there have not been any results.

I'll turn the floor over to Mr. Morrice.

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Morrice, you have only 20 seconds of his time. Go ahead, please.

**Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP):** Mr. Minister, I'm glad you got to hear directly from Palestinian Canadians whose families are in Gaza. Their frustration reflects that of folks in my community, including Hazim, who, as I mentioned, we spoke about over a month ago and whose brothers, sister and mother remain in Gaza—some have access codes, some don't—as well as Maha and Saja, whose mom Rada has a TRV. She is still not on an evacuation list; she's still not out.

We have reports of other countries that have been successful—Australia, Italy, Spain—at getting family members out. If they have been able to, why hasn't Canada?

**The Chair:** Thank you. Your time is up.

Minister, if you can, answer briefly.

**Hon. Marc Miller:** There are no other countries that have a similar program of this scope. Australia did, in fact, issue a number of visas. I don't know if they would be saying that it has been successful. Other countries are talking to us. There are at least six or seven that want to reproduce this model; they don't want to reproduce one that will not be successful, but I think we all owe it to ourselves to try. As you know, we have been able to extract folks on an ad hoc basis, but obviously not with the scope and ambition that we have wanted, and for that I don't think we can call this a success.

International support and co-operation is key to this, and, again, I can't reiterate enough that there are elements that are not within our control and are immensely frustrating. It doesn't mean that we should stop trying. I knew when I put this measure in place that it may not be successful—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

**Hon. Marc Miller:** —but I thought I was a good measure because of the people behind us and the people expecting us to have a humanitarian response to a catastrophe.



**The Chair:** Thank you.

I will go to Madam Kwan.

You have six minutes. Please go ahead.

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

How many people crossed the Rafah border as a result of the government program? Can you give just a straight-up number?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** You'd have to clarify the question. Do you mean as a result of the codes, visas or applications that they have received, or because they thought they could get to Egypt and then have the benefit of the program?

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** No.

How many people managed to cross the border as a result of the government's special immigration measure?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** Other than the ad hoc numbers that we have been able to get out individually, the number is 14.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Is the ad hoc number because of the government's program or because they cross on their own?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** There are some people who were able to cross on their own by paying intermediaries. There are some who we have advocated for directly because of their medical conditions that were directly the result of the intervention of the Government of Canada at the highest levels.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** How many people did Canada bring across the border as a result of the Canadian government's actions?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** I assume by that you don't mean the—

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I don't mean the people who did it on their own. I mean the people who actually had the government's assistance.

**The Chair:** Madam Kwan, can you let the minister speak?

Honourable Minister.

**Hon. Marc Miller:** I know you're trying to complete my sentence, but that isn't where I was going. There were, obviously, 839 Canadians and permanent residents who we were able to extract, but as a result of the special program that we put in place, there were none through these lists that we have submitted to COGAT and the Egyptian authorities who were able to be extracted according to that program.

• (1835)

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

So, it's none. None have actually come across.

The people who have come across so far have done it on their own.

The minister says it's only 14. It turns out, actually, through my work from my office, that we have 84 people on the list who've crossed on their own, not because of the government's assistance. The media got a number of 110, but the minister only has 14. You have to wonder what is going on with the government when it can't even get that number right.

Now, I want to ask the minister this question: Of the people who have gotten on this list, 986 of them, how many of them were actually issued a TRV by the government?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** Because of our inability to do biometrics and issue visas inside Gaza, they would have had to proceed to Cairo—which they've not—to get the biometrics and then get the corresponding TRV.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** So, it's none. Nobody has a TRV.

Then what about the people who managed to get across the border on their own, without the government's help, as part of this application process? Why haven't they gotten the TRV?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** ADM MacIntyre can answer that question.

**The Chair:** Madam MacIntyre, go ahead, please.

**Ms. Jennifer MacIntyre (Assistant Deputy Minister, International Affairs and Crisis Response, Department of Citizenship and Immigration):** The number 14 is the number of TRVs that have been issued to individuals who've crossed the border and who have applications under the public policy. It is true that other individuals are crossing, and when they come to Cairo and make contact with our embassy, we are processing their applications.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** So, 14 people got a TRV because they crossed on their own, but not one person through the government's program has been able to get a TRV. Okay, we have that straight.

The minister said that he submitted 300 names to COGAT. Why only 300? There are 986 codes that have been issued. What happened to the rest of them?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** We submitted all of those 287 in terms of making sure that we have a complete family unit. Of the people who applied—of the 986 who are eligible—if there is one or two of them whose identity we cannot confirm, if there is an ineligibility or an inadmissibility, we cannot tear or separate the families. The one family unit has gone to them. That is the number.

As we get more information, we keep on adding those numbers. Every week, we send more numbers and more names to COGAT.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Why are people getting their security blocked—of the names that have been submitted? What is the reason that Israel or Egypt has provided to the government?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** If I were aware of that, I would not be able to provide you that information.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** So far, nobody's received approval, and the minister can't say—or is not aware of—why they're all being blocked. Would that be right?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** We're not talking about all. There has been a list of well over 300 submitted to COGAT. Ideally, they will get approved.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** How many have been approved out of that 300?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** Because people need to exit and need to get to Cairo to do their additional biometrics, there are none, by virtue of the program, who have been issued a TRV. They require consent from both COGAT and the Egyptian authorities.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Out of the 300, how many have received consent?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** Of that list, we have not had any success.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Okay, so it's not one.

Of the 300 names that have been submitted, not one has received consent. Not one has received a TRV through this process.

All right—and the minister wants to blame the NDP for their failure—let's set that aside for a minute.

I just spoke with a family member here who advised that at least 49 people have been killed as they wait for this process to proceed. For the family members who have died waiting for their codes, will they be refunded the cost of their applications?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** Sorry, could you just rephrase that question for a second time?

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** At least 49 people have been killed waiting for their application to be processed, waiting for their code. Because they have now been killed, will they be refunded for the cost of their application?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** I would assume that would be the case, yes.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** All right.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** For the people who have crossed over to Egypt for waiting, how long does the minister expect the processing time to be for those individuals to get their TRVs to get out to Canada to safety?

**The Chair:** You have nine seconds to answer, Minister.

**Hon. Marc Miller:** Again, it's a limited subset but I would expect that once biometrics are completed, rather expeditiously.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** What is the average processing time?

**Hon. Marc Miller:** I'll defer to officials, but given the low numbers, it wouldn't be an accurate sample.

• (1840)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, honourable member and Minister.

Minister, thank you for staying overtime, and I appreciate that. I know you were going to leave at 6:30 but you have accommodated members. Thank you.

I am going to suspend the meeting for up to a minute before we start with the officials.

I call the meeting back to order.

Let me see if the officials are ready.

We will start with Mr. Redekopp for six minutes.

Please go ahead.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC):** Thank you, Deputy Minister, for being here and answering our questions.

I just want to ask some general questions about how Canada deals with people who have passports from entities that may not be recognized as countries. For instance, the Liberal government currently recognizes Israel as a state, but not Palestine; however, they do recognize that the Palestinian Authority can and does issue passports for people in those territories.

That said, before I get into the issue specifically, I just want to know more generally about the process.

What is the IRCC's estimate of the percentage of people who arrive at our border who may have passports but are not from countries that are recognized by Canada?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** The countries that are recognized in terms of entry into Canada are mostly the ones that are through the ICAO guidelines, which is a standard we adhere to. The names of those countries are provided to us, and it's an international component.

For us to actually see what country is really represented on the passport, we have a full list, and it has been made clear internationally that it would be the one that would be identified as the one to which we would allow entry.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** By that do you mean that there are no people who have entered Canada who do not have passports from valid countries?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** Mr. Chair, what I'm referring to is a list that is provided by ICAO and that is the list we work with.

The folks who actually represent with that passport are allowed to enter into Canada.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** Okay.

More specifically, regarding Gaza and the Palestinian people who are living in the strip and the program that you're here for today, on your website it says this:

After entering Canada, in most cases you can stay for up to 3 years as a temporary resident, as long as your passport and biometrics are valid for the entire time. If your passport or biometrics expire in less than 3 years, your status as a temporary resident will expire at the same time. You can apply to extend your status before it expires, but you need to make sure your passport and biometrics are up-to-date before you apply.

I have questions about that statement.

First, is the Israeli-issued identification card valid for Gazans in lieu of a passport for the purposes of this program?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** Chair, this particular public policy is referring to a Palestinian Authority-issued passport.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** Regarding passports for people from Gaza, they're issued by the Palestinian Authority out of the West Bank, and not by Hamas out of Gaza. Is that correct?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** I would say that the Palestinian Authority is the authority we are recognizing as the one that is the valid entity.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** What about passports that are issued by the Jordanian government for Gazans for the purposes of this program?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** Sorry, could you repeat the question, please?

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** What about passports that are issued by the Jordanian government for Gazans for the purposes of this program?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** If they are Jordanian residents or they are actually Jordanian nationals, they will be processed accordingly.

● (1845)

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** Okay.

I want to talk a bit about Egypt. On Canada's Immigration and Refugee Board website, in direct reference to the issue of documents for Gazans, the IRB addresses the issue around Egypt. It clearly states that a person from Gaza requires either a valid identification card issued by Israel or a passport issued by the Palestinian Authority to cross the border into Egypt.

Did the Canadian government consult with the Egyptian government before announcing this program? Obviously, people have to pass through Egypt. I'm just curious to know if our government consulted with the Egyptian government.

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** Mr. Chair, the short answer is yes. We did consult with the Egyptian authorities.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** What specifically has Canada done to coordinate with Egypt on the issue of these passports of people coming from Gaza?

**The Chair:** Ms. MacIntyre, go ahead, please.

**Ms. Jennifer MacIntyre:** Thank you very much.

The engagement with the Government of Egypt was done primarily by our head of mission and our team in Cairo.

What we see often with Palestinians, and we saw this during... Maybe I'll back up. IRCC has actually been very engaged in the departure of foreign national residents from Gaza as part of the assisted departure, because many Canadians had family members who were non-Canadian. What we saw in that context was that often, because of the context in Gaza, people didn't have documents, including their passports, and the Egyptian government was issuing them a document at the airport.

Our officers, when they're processing, don't always need the document. We have lots of ways that we can verify folks' identity, including in conversations and interviews. We've been able to have good co-operation in that sense.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** The department has interviewed people that come in without proper paperwork, and you're able to determine their identity.

**Ms. Jennifer MacIntyre:** I'll be very clear. Most of the TRVs that have been issued to date are foreign nationals who came out of

Gaza as part of the assisted departure. We often saw that individuals did not have all of the documents, but as part of the immigration process, the processing includes interviews.

Individuals came to Cairo as part of assisted departure, and the IRCC team in Cairo, in parallel with the consular operation, set up an operation whereby we did interviews in person of family members when they arrived in Cairo, so yes.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** Can you tell me how many interviews have been done?

**Ms. Jennifer MacIntyre:** I can tell you how many TRVs were issued. I would have to confirm, because for many families we may have done an interview of the parents, for example, but not the children, so that's not a data point I would have, but I think the data point on how many TRVs were issued is a good proxy for the number of interviews.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** As you don't have it, can you supply that information to the committee on the number of interviews that have been done for this program?

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, honourable member, Ms. MacIntyre and deputy minister.

We'll go to Mr. El-Khoury for six minutes.

Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

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

I want to welcome the three witnesses, and thank them for their generosity. They always agree to come back before the committee to enlighten us on certain issues.

Ms. MacIntyre, many Canadians and people in the riding I represent, in particular, are concerned about the safety of their family members and loved ones in Gaza. Under these measures, the number of applications that can be accepted has been capped at 1,000, which has caused a great deal of concern.

Could you explain the objective of this cap to the committee?

**Ms. Jennifer MacIntyre:** Thank you very much for the question.

It's true that the government has set the cap at 1,000 applications. As we said earlier and over the past few weeks, Minister Miller is very open to the idea of increasing that cap if we can set up a program that successfully gets people out of Gaza through the Rafah border crossing. We can then proceed with their application.

● (1850)

**Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury:** Could you tell us if there are any plans to impose a cap on other similar measures?

**Ms. Jennifer MacIntyre:** The deputy minister may want to jump in, but I would say that capping is a tool that is often used in immigration programs to ensure good management. It wasn't unique to Gaza, and it's not unusual for a cap to be set and then changed after the government has gauged interest in the program.

**Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury:** How was the cap of 1,000 applications chosen?

**Ms. Jennifer MacIntyre:** That is a very good question, thank you.

As the minister said earlier, this process is both an art and a science. In the case of Gaza, the government wanted to have a program in place very quickly, at the end of December, and they didn't really know if there would be interest in it.

Now, we have a better understanding of the interest this program is generating among families in Canada. That's why the minister said he was very open to the idea of increasing that cap.

**Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury:** As part of the measures announced, people affected by this conflict, whether on the Gaza or Israel side, also have access to federally funded settlement services.

Can you explain what kind of effect this measure will have?

**Ms. Jennifer MacIntyre:** It's true that people who are going to use this program will have access to settlement services here in Canada, which includes language training, for example.

Normally, under a temporary program, individuals don't have access to these types of settlement services, but, in the case of Gaza, the government decided that people would have access to them, even though it's a temporary program.

**Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury:** Could you tell us how these services will help these people once they're in Canada?

Can you tell us about the positive impact this will have and the hope it will bring, whether it's in terms of finances or helping look for housing?

What impact will this have on newcomers to Canada?

**Ms. Jennifer MacIntyre:** Thank you for the question.

The purpose of the federal government's settlement services is to offer support to newcomers. For example, individuals may not speak either English or French. Offering them language training is a good way to help them integrate into our country, even if they're only here temporarily.

Many services are integrated into our programs for foreign nationals, and those services include things like helping them find housing or opening a bank account, for example.

As I said earlier, the government has made the decision to offer these services to those who will use this program, even if they will only be here temporarily. The goal is for them to integrate successfully while they're in Canada.

• (1855)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. El-Khoury.

We will go to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for six minutes.

Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

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

I want talk about the real issues. When I was vice-chair of the Special Committee on Afghanistan, several witnesses told us that there was a problem within IRCC because there was no emergency division to respond to international crises.

That statement did not fall on deaf ears. Indeed, I had proposed a work plan to set up an emergency division within the department. This included six well-defined points. The deputy minister, Ms. Fox, welcomed this proposal with great interest and even told us she would implement it.

Deputy Minister, I made that proposal two years ago. It's directly related to today's topic. A program was put in place at the last minute in response to an international crisis. Since then, nothing has been done. However, you had a ready-made plan at your disposal.

Deputy Minister, can you explain to me where things stand? Why isn't this already in place?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** Thank you for the question.

[*English*]

Mr. Chair, I want to mention a little background and then go directly to the question. One key component where we can help Canadians, their families and others is through public policy. That's what we have utilized in Gaza, in Sudan and in other situations. I must say, as you suggested, that the department is working on creating that in an imminent way, how we can build a frame.

I would say, Mr. Chair, that we are very advanced in putting together a crisis response framework. That would be something that would allow us to get the lessons learned from what we have seen in Afghanistan and what we are seeing right now in Gaza and how we create that standing capacity and a standing way of how we really get to the point quickly as soon as any such situations arise.

Due to your input and what we heard in the strategic immigration review and from all the other stakeholders, we are very far ahead in creating that crisis response framework that we will be able to use in any of these situations.

[*Translation*]

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

If I understand correctly, things are moving forward. After all, it's been two years since I made this proposal, which was even one of the recommendations included in the report of the Special Committee on Afghanistan.

As you know, I'm capable of collaborating. That's why I make proposals. That said, after all this time, I don't understand why the crisis response framework hasn't been implemented yet.

Can you give us a specific date? When will the crisis response framework be set up within IRCC?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** Again, thank you for the question.

[English]

What I want to mention very clearly is that there are a couple of steps, but we are very advanced with the crisis response framework. We have a very clear idea—and I'm going to be very specific, Mr. Chair—that by the fall we should be able to get the crisis response framework together.

There are a couple of steps that we will have to do in creating a standing capacity, and we are already working on that. We have a small team already working on that one, making sure that we have some way of separating a part of our budget for an immediate action and a situation where we can go to a central agency to seek more when we need it if the operation has to be bigger.

I can assure you, Chair, that we are working towards a clearer timeline, which would be as early as fall, to have the crisis response framework in place and then the subsequent capacity.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you very much, it would have been interesting to collaborate on that.

You say it will be in place by autumn. I'll take your word for it and trust you. I hope you'll give the Bloc Québécois credit for this excellent idea, since it's going to help a lot of people in the future.

So far, the Government of Canada has only given applicants codes to begin the multi-step security screening process. This was necessary to cross the border with Egypt at Rafah.

Can you explain which Gaza authorities are responsible for authorizing extended family members to leave the Gaza Strip?

• (1900)

[English]

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** What we are working with, Mr. Chair, is a common platform with Israel and Egypt, where we have been able to really pull together all the information, which is based on the delivery of codes and the applications that come to us.

We have prepared a list, which we worked on with COGAT. COGAT is an authority that is capable of making sure...or allowing the folks in Gaza to come out. We need their okay for an exit.

That is the authority we are working with. Our head of mission in Cairo and our head of mission in Tel Aviv have all been corresponding and working closely with them to make sure this happens.

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

Thank you, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will go to Madam Kwan.

Go ahead for six minutes, please.

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

I just want to point out the differential treatment. Both the minister and officials have just said that a cap had to be put in place because the government does not know how many people would utilize this program. However, for the Ukrainian initiative, CUAET, there was no cap. The government didn't know how many people would utilize that program.

Why the differential treatment?

**The Chair:** Deputy Minister, please go ahead.

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** I'll take the example of Gaza. We are wanting to see, as the minister mentioned, if we are able to get the people out from where they are. As it becomes more clear that we are able to facilitate that movement or as that movement happens, we want to make sure we are increasing that.

At that time, it was mostly defined to do a very quick adjustment in terms of providing a safe place for the Palestinians who were trapped in that war situation.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Well, the government would be able to achieve the same thing without putting a cap in place. By putting a cap in place, the government has delayed the processing of the application process.

When was the last code issued by the department to reach that 986—I believe it was—prior to the expansion announcement?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** As the minister pointed out, Mr. Chair, the department has continued to send codes out. My department and my folks have told me that as late as Friday of last week we had sent out codes, too.

I believe—

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I'm sorry, I think you misunderstood my question.

What was the date on which the government reached the 986th code? When was the 986th code issued?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** Let me clarify.

What I was getting to is that 986 is not the code; 986 is the number of applicants in the system who have received the code and actually applied with an application. Codes are in much higher numbers as well.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Yes.

When the department processed those 986 applications and they get codes, what was the date on which that last application was processed and they received the code?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** Mr. Chair, can I please clarify something because there's confusion about—

**The Chair:** Sure. I'll stop the watch, Madam Kwan.

Please go ahead.

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** There's confusion about whether the codes trigger the application.

As I started to explain earlier, there is a process in which, first of all, there is a web form through which they apply. A code is issued. A code triggers a way to actually submit a TRV application. Each applicant needs to have one application.

We issued around 1,600 to 2,000 codes already, for which we got applications that we started to completely process. We are at 986 and we will continue to do that.

• (1905)

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

I can tell you that in my office, I have a list of 2,500 applicants, extended family members, who've submitted their application to come to Canada to safety, of which 2,000 of them have yet to receive a code. Without receiving a code, they cannot move into the next phase of the processing application. I believe that the 1,000 cap has blocked at least those 2,000 people from moving forward with their application.

The minister said that he's not lifting the cap but expanding it, but he will not give a number as to what that expansion is. What is the expanded number now? Will those 2,000 who are still waiting for their application to be processed to get a code be able to get one?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** As the minister pointed out, the aspect of expanding our facilitation is mostly based on whether we are able to get people out from there. We have 986 complete applications, but for which we have been unable to secure the people to come out, even though we're working every single day with Israel and Egypt.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** If that's the approach, then the government may as well just give up and go home because, so far, you have brought nobody. Not one person has come out via the government's process. That is a false answer, I'm sorry. It doesn't even make any sense to suggest that we're just going to pause and see how we do, because, so far, you have not been able to get one person out. If that's the case, then go home.

That cannot be the process. The minimum process the government has to do is to facilitate the people here in getting through all of the Canadian bureaucracy so that they can move on to the next phase. But this cap is preventing people from moving forward into that next phase so that they'll be ready to move forward. This is what I'm hearing from the government, and the government is not doing everything it can to move this process as quickly as possible for people. Isn't that the case?

I want to ask the officials this question. We know that other jurisdictions, other countries, have been able to move this forward. They have been able to get visas issued. Canada has not issued one TRV for people. Others have been able to do so. How is it that they have been able to do so? Is Canada talking to those other countries and their officials about what they're doing to facilitate their processes?

**The Chair:** Deputy Minister, you have 12 seconds to answer.

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** Mr. Chair, Canada is the first country with this public policy whereby we have put in place facilitative measures for extended family members. No other country has this program, and any cases, whether they are from Australia or others,

are consular cases. None of them have been able to get out as an extended family member or under the eligibility that we have defined, and Canada stays working with Israel and Egypt on that one. That is where the focus is, to get people out and continue to work and even expand this program, as the minister mentioned.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Madam Kwan and Deputy Minister.

I'll go to Mr. McLean.

Mr. McLean, go ahead for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC):** Thank you very much.

Thank you to all of my colleagues around the table for asking so many excellent questions about the process involved in getting people out of Gaza at this point in time, because it is a mix that we cannot figure out right now, and many people are dialing our offices saying that they're stuck in the process. So thank you, everyone, for your questions.

I do need to ask some questions about Sudan as well. With respect here to everybody who's come here representing people in Gaza, thank you for all of your questions today.

On Sudan, how do you get to 3,250 applicants available to come to Canada from Sudan, first of all?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** Mr. Chair, as mentioned earlier, when the conflict broke out, we started with assisted departures, and we continue to work towards a program that was announced in February of this year. That had 3,250 as a cap, but we expect that over 5,000 people would be coming through that because of the fact that each of the applicants may have further dependants.

• (1910)

**Mr. Greg McLean:** You're telling us that 3,250 is the cap, but you're saying that it's a fluid cap and that there will be dependants that come with that or that people will bring other people with them after that. It's not a hard cap; it's a soft cap, if you will.

Could you confirm that? Can you also tell us where that number is at this point in time? How many have come in from Sudan?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** To make sure that this was captured correctly, 3,250 is the number of applications. That is the cap. The number of people who can come under each application could be more, and that is why I'm saying that it could actually be more than 5,000.

I also have the number for how many applications we have received from Sudan. If you want, I would be able to explain it to you.

**Mr. Greg McLean:** Could you just give me a quick number?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** The applications that have been submitted until now number almost 2,800, as a rough estimate, out of which we have complete applications, which we have confirmed with "anchor" family members, and everything else, of about 458.

**Mr. Greg McLean:** You have three countries here that people have fled to, so you're not really dealing with people in Sudan right now; you're dealing with people in the neighbouring countries because the Sudanese refugees have been fleeing there. Those countries include Chad, South Sudan and Egypt. Egypt is the common link here between these two very difficult situations.

Do you have Canadian personnel on the ground in Egypt who are facilitating how many people we have and how they're actually working to get this through the Egyptian government? Is there a translation of how that works for the people who need to come from Gaza as well?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** Mr. Chair, we do have a presence on the ground in Egypt. We have an embassy in Cairo where we have immigration officials who are working both with Gaza as well as Sudan.

Because we have a global case management system, we can actually work throughout our network. Some of these applications might actually be done in Jordan or any other place also.

As far as the major case load is concerned, it's right that we have different countries that form a cohort of that. These include Egypt, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Uganda and other countries. These are some of the applicants who actually have a different country of residence, and they are a part of the cohort we are seeing at this point.

**Mr. Greg McLean:** Thank you very much.

When you look at all of these processes, one thing you do is to nail yourself to an order.

What is the process when you go through the application here step by step?

The worst thing we do here is to give people false hope and make them jump through a whole bunch of hoops they are never going to get through. So if you look at all the hurdles that everybody has to go through here and you put it down in an actual operational spreadsheet that lists what happens, what their timeline is on that, where they need to respond and the other officials they have to get to at that point in time, is that something you can provide clarity on to all the people applying?

**The Chair:** You have eight seconds to reply, Deputy Minister.

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** Mr. Chair, we have a very refined program for getting the completed applications, the work that is entailed in making sure that the eligibility and admissibility is done. This is a permanent resident program. We have a very defined process that we go with. This is also now a special aspect of that. We have a timeline that would be more defined in such a way that it could take—depending on what we have, all the information—until the end of this year or early next year until actual arrivals happen.

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

Thank you, Mr. McLean and Deputy Minister.

We will go to Mr. Ali for five minutes.

• (1915)

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

Thank you to the officials for being here.

I agree with my colleague Mr. McLean when he said we should not give false hope to the people who are already in that devastating situation.

Deputy Minister, one of my constituents, Ms. Bessan Khalaf, who is present at today's committee meeting, has 15 immediate family members in Gaza: parents and siblings, plus their families, spouse and kids. They have all applied. Six of them had received recourse through the special Gaza stream. A few also received biometric instructions, but they were not able to complete them as they had to go to Egypt to do them and nobody was allowed to leave or cross the borders. Then one member of the family, my constituent's brother, escaped to Egypt by paying a certain amount of money. Now that he's in Egypt, he has been advised by your office to apply for a regular TRV from Egypt and to flag it as a critical urgent case through the web request form.

How is it that someone can pay money to cross the border from Gaza to Egypt but our government can't get Canadians' families out? Who is making money off those peoples' backs?

Who is making money off the backs of those refugees? Why hasn't our government been able to get the same access to the list of the people permitted to exit Gaza when other countries have been able to do so? Finally, do all Canadians have the same status? Do we all have the same privilege?

Thank you.

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** Mr. Chair, I'd start by saying that, first of all, we have put a lot of effort into working with the Egyptian and Israeli authorities in submitting our list through COGAT to get the people out of Gaza. We do hear about people using different ways, including paying, and they are getting out. The Government of Canada is continuing to work with the authorities so that we can make an effort to bring them out. That is where our focus has been.

As such, we have not had success, as the minister pointed out. The folks who have actually come out have come out on their own.

In relation to anyone who is out and we see is trying to apply for a TRV, it is a process in which they will not be captured through the public policy because they don't have a code. However, this is a flexibility and an authority that is vested in our officers, who are actually taking into consideration the humanitarian and the compassionate part of it. They are certainly looking at it on a case-by-case basis and are very much leaning forward to make sure that we can actually provide an easy access through a TRV.

Again, as I said, this is not *carte blanche*, but is being done case by case. Our officers have the ability to use the compassionate and humanitarian situation as they see fit and do that.

Finally, to your point, as a question was asked through you, Mr. Chair, our focus has really been to figure out how we can best support the community that is trapped in Gaza through our diplomatic and bureaucratic efforts—

**Mr. Shafqat Ali:** I'm sorry, Chair, I [*Inaudible—Editor*]

**The Chair:** I'll stop the watch and let the deputy minister finish.

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** I was just going to say that we have put a lot of effort into that one, as earlier mentioned, and we will continue to work our diplomatic channels as such.

• (1920)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Honourable member, go ahead with a quick question.

**Mr. Shafqat Ali:** Mr. Chair, I have 30 seconds to give to Nate, my colleague, as well, and then—

**The Chair:** I think we should start with Mr. Erskine-Smith.

Go ahead, please.

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith (Beaches—East York, Lib.):** Thanks very much.

My understanding is there are about 2,367 applications. We've completed 900 and about 300 have been submitted. The minister said that, unfortunately, it's not in our control, and it's immensely frustrating. Who has that control, and where should Canadians, who are so frustrated, be directing that immense frustration?

**The Chair:** Thank you. The time is up, but Deputy Minister or Assistant Deputy Minister, you can answer the question.

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** To clarify, Chair, 2,300 are the...codes out there. We have 986 applications.

**The Chair:** I'll stop the watch and go back to Mr. Erskine-Smith, please, to clarify.

**Mr. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith:** No, the core question is that there are 300 applications you have submitted, and 900 have been completed, as I understand it. I take your point—there are 2,367 codes that are out there of people who have expressed an interest here. Having said that, the question remains: If it's not in our control, and we are immensely frustrated, where should we be directing that frustration? Who has the ultimate control here?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** The control, as I mentioned earlier, is with COGAT, which is the Israeli authority that has to give the exit...for the people of Gaza who are trapped there.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. The time is up.

It's my understanding that my dear friend, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, is giving his time to Mr. Morrice, Is that correct? That's good.

Mr. Morrice, please go ahead for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Mike Morrice:** Thank you, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, for sharing your time with me.

[*English*]

Thank you, Chair.

Deputy Minister, I appreciate your being here. I would encourage you, if you have a chance, to stick around afterwards to hear from some of the Palestinian Canadians in this room who, to your claim of other countries not being successful at having folks get out of

Gaza, have, in my view, some pretty strong evidence that that's not the case. I'd encourage you to hear from them directly.

I'd like to follow up on a mother of Maha and Saja from my community. I provided a letter to the minister about their case back on February 12, and again on February 27. She has a TRV already.

My question to the minister, and my question to you, is why is it that she's not been able to get out with a TRV already?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** Mr. Chair, if the person has a TRV and they are outside Gaza....

**Mr. Mike Morrice:** She's in Gaza.

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** For a TRV to.... I'm sorry, but I'll just—

**The Chair:** I'll stop the watch if you want to....

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** I want to make sure that I understand the question. The TRV in Gaza is probably not through the public policy. It is that they have a TRV as such.

**The Chair:** Is that the intention?

**Mr. Mike Morrice:** It's a temporary resident visa issued by the Government of Canada—

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** Yes, absolutely.

**Mr. Mike Morrice:** —with confirmation from IRCC officials already. I'd like to understand if it is—as you just responded to my colleague, Mr. Erskine-Smith—that we need to get her onto the COGAT list. Does she need to get onto an evacuation list? What list do we need to advocate for her to get on, given she already has a TRV?

**The Chair:** I'll start the watch.

Deputy Minister, go ahead, please.

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** The COGAT list, to very clearly point out, is the one that is under public policy; however, the work has to be done through the Israeli authorities to actually allow her to come here.

**Mr. Mike Morrice:** Is that including for those who, at the end of the access code process, ideally, would get a TRV? This person already has that TRV. That remains the case for her as well, and everyone else in her same position too?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** Absolutely. As I mentioned, Mr. Chair, our span of control, our reach, does not go into the country itself. It is under the Israeli command that they would be allowing them to come. TRV guarantees her entry into Canada, but a TRV does not guarantee an exit from the place where she is.

**The Chair:** Honourable member, you have 20 seconds.



**Mr. Mike Morrice:** I suggest that's where we need to place far more effort, in that case, given that we're giving out these access codes, and even if they're successful with the access codes, we have no way of getting people out even if they are successful in finally getting a TRV, which we've learned is extremely difficult already.

I'd like to follow up on Sudan as well, but maybe we could have a conversation after this, because I just ran out of time.

Thank you.

• (1925)

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** Absolutely.

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

I'll go to Madam Kwan.

You have two and a half minutes. Please go ahead.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I just want to follow up on the notion that other countries have not been able to get people out, when in fact it is absolutely incorrect. Family members here have lists upon lists of individuals who have actually gotten out.

In fact, one family member said that her friend was able to get her extended family members out across the Rafah border to then board a plane. In fact, they are about to board a plane to go to Australia. Therefore, this is absolutely untrue.

It is so disturbing to know that IRCC officials have no idea that this is happening or what other jurisdictions are doing to facilitate this process. I would absolutely ask the officials to go back, do their homework and then report back to our committee about what the other jurisdictions are doing and how it is that Canada is not achieving the same kind of result.

I just heard the officials confirm that people who cannot get through the official special immigration program to get their TRVs and get to safety are now being asked to use unofficial channels and make a separate application outside of this program.

How is it even possible that this is taking place? Is the government effectively saying that its program is ineffective and people should use whatever channel they can access to try to get to safety?

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** Mr. Chair, just for the record, I did not say that they should use any other channel.

What I am actually mentioning is that anyone who is able to get out still needs to put in an application for a temporary resident visa. If they are not covered in public policy and they have been able to come to Rafah, in order to come Canada they will have to apply for a temporary resident visa.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I understand that, but we just heard from a member of Parliament who was told by the IRCC that people who went through unofficial channels should be making a TRV to IRCC and that they should mark it to say that it should be expedited in the processing. That is trying to bypass the existing program. Effectively, that advice is saying that this existing program is ineffective.

The chaos that's going on there is shocking. I just talked to a family member....

I will just finish with this, Mr. Chair.

They applied at the opening and they got five codes for the same family members who already got codes. Other family members got codes for other family units that aren't related to them. This is the level of chaos that's going on, by the way, with IRCC and with this program.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Madam Kwan, your time is up.

Deputy minister, I'll give you the time, if you want to respond. Otherwise, you don't need to because the time is up right now.

**Dr. Harpreet S. Kochhar:** Mr. Chair, we will take that back and look at whether there are any concerns with the codes. We will look into that in our operational model.

**The Chair:** Is there anything else, officials, that you want to say?

Otherwise, I want to thank you on behalf of the committee and the chair. Thank you for appearing and being with us.

With that, it's 7:30—

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Before you adjourn, Mr. Chair, I would like to move a motion, please.

**The Chair:** Sure. Go ahead.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I move:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee invite the Minister of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, to return to the committee for two hours to discuss the temporary immigration measures initiated in response to the ongoing conflicts in Sudan and Gaza, that this ministerial appearance be prioritized above all other appearances, and further, that officials be invited to return to this committee for one hour.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

Witnesses, you can go.

The motion is on the floor and it is 7:30. I said we would be adjourning the meeting at 7:30.

Is it the will of the committee to go ahead or to adjourn?

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** I want to vote on her motion.

**An hon. member:** No, we can adjourn.

**The Chair:** Do you want to bring a motion to adjourn?

• (1930)

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** I'm sorry, Mr. Chair. Don't you need permission to go beyond 7:30?

Do we have the resources to continue?

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** We do have unlimited resources tonight.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

It is the practice of this committee that when our work gets interrupted, we do get extended time. Are you telling us that we don't have that extended time to debate this motion?

**The Chair:** I'm telling you that I will continue unless there is a motion on the floor to adjourn the meeting.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** There is no motion.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** There is no such motion, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** If there is no such motion we will continue, okay?

Mr. Kmiec.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Chair, I would be fine voting to return the minister because we did lose quite a bit of time today. But the motion says "above all other appearances". I believe that we have also called the minister for the supplementary estimates (C), and there's our Hong Kong pensions issue that is urgent. We also have him for immigration levels, and Parliament has passed a motion asking the minister to redo his work and will very likely be past the deadline set by the House for redoing the immigration levels targets plan. We've also called him to reappear on the Auditor General's report, and we've also passed another motion for the minister to return specifically because of testimony that was contradicted by media news articles, testimony given before the committee on the organized crime issue facing Mexican nationals.

I'm good with voting for the motion if we could just remove the portion that says "above all other appearances", and then we'll vote for it.

**The Chair:** Madam Kwan, do we have your consent to do that?

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** No.

You can put that to a vote if the member is moving that as an amendment.

I will tell you this, though, in speaking to the issue, Mr. Chair. The reality is that people are dying as we speak. I just spoke to a constituent of mine who lost three members of his family, one of whom was a child. I cannot underscore the urgency of this situation. I get it that there are a whole bunch of other things that we need the minister to come before the committee to discuss with us. I want that too on the Hong Kong motion and on all of those other things, absolutely. But none is as urgent as this current situation where every single second of the day matters. We just heard from officials and the minister that not one person has been brought to safety through this program. How is that even possible when other jurisdictions are doing it?

We just heard from officials who say that they have no knowledge of how other jurisdictions have done this.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** No, I'm not finished, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, carry on.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** No, we have to prioritize this! The last time when I moved this motion and called for the minister and officials to come before the committee as a priority, we had a situation where the minister wasn't able to do that and we delayed. We actu-

ally had the issue of international students and fraud come before this. Time is of the essence, Mr. Chair.

We need the minister to come before us. There have been shifts and changes to this program. The minister just before this also blamed the NDP for the motion, for the failure of their program. That's what they said to CBC. It is shocking to me. There's a lot the minister needs to answer for and we need him back at this committee.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** I would like to speak.

**The Chair:** Are you done, Madam Kwan?

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Yes.

**The Chair:** I have the speaking list. I have Mr. Ali, then Ms. Kayabaga.

Mr. McLean, did you want to go ahead too?

**Mr. Greg McLean:** I was going to say that there's recording going on of the meeting right now.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I'm sorry, what?

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** It's still a public meeting.

**The Chair:** It's a public meeting.

Mr. Ali, go ahead, please.

**Mr. Shafqat Ali:** Thank you, Chair.

I agree with Ms. Kwan. It's surprising to see that for my Conservative colleagues this is not an urgent situation. People are dying every day. Kids are dying every day. People are at risk, Canadians are at risk. They voted against the ceasefire and here we come—

• (1935)

**Mr. Greg McLean:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** We're on a point of order right now, Mr. Ali, to entertain it.

Mr. McLean, go ahead.

**Mr. Greg McLean:** Mr. Chair, I don't know where Mr. Ali is getting any of that information, thank you very much. We are here waiting for the minister's attendance. It's a question of what he attends to, and we know it's urgent.

Thank you very much for his intervention, but I would like his intervention to be based on the facts please

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Ali, go ahead, please.

**Mr. Shafqat Ali:** The fact is that Conservatives voted against the ceasefire. The fact is that they want to bring Hong Kong or other issues on top of this Gaza issue, whereas Ms. Kwan is asking that the minister come and answer questions on the Gaza issue. That is a fact.

I agree with this motion. I support it.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I have Ms. Kayabaga next, and then Mr. Redekopp.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I was just going to propose that we eventually get to voting. We've already been here for a while, and we're trying to be efficient. A lot of people who come from far away are ready to go home. As my colleague Jenny said, this is a really important motion that we have to vote on. It is important that we give it the utmost attention. I support her entire motion without removing or adding anything.

I do have to say also that I want to clarify some of the comments the minister made earlier. I've had the opportunity to have a conversation with him on the motion that we all voted for, except for the Conservatives, who want to also continue to delay. He did say that the motion has made it complicated. He's not blaming anybody, because he wouldn't have voted for it if he were in a position to blame—

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** That's shameful.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** —but it has complicated the diplomatic relationships.

That being said, we all care about this issue, both for the Sudanese communities in our ridings and across the country and out-

side this country and for the Gazan families who are here and watching online and in our communities. I would really implore my colleagues to support this motion so that we can actually get out of here in a timely manner.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Redekopp, please go ahead.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Yes, I agree that we should vote. Before we do, I just want to say that the soonest we can do this would be the week of April 8, probably April 10. The other option we have is to try to sneak in a special meeting as well, because this is an important issue. Of course, there are many important issues. The Hong Kong situation and many other things are on our minds here. That's another option.

Anyway, I'm just throwing that out there. I'm fine to vote on this.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

If there are no more speakers on the list, I will ask the clerk to take the vote—unless there's unanimous consent.

There is unanimous consent.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** With that, can I adjourn the meeting now?

There is a consensus to adjourn.

The meeting is adjourned.

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