



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

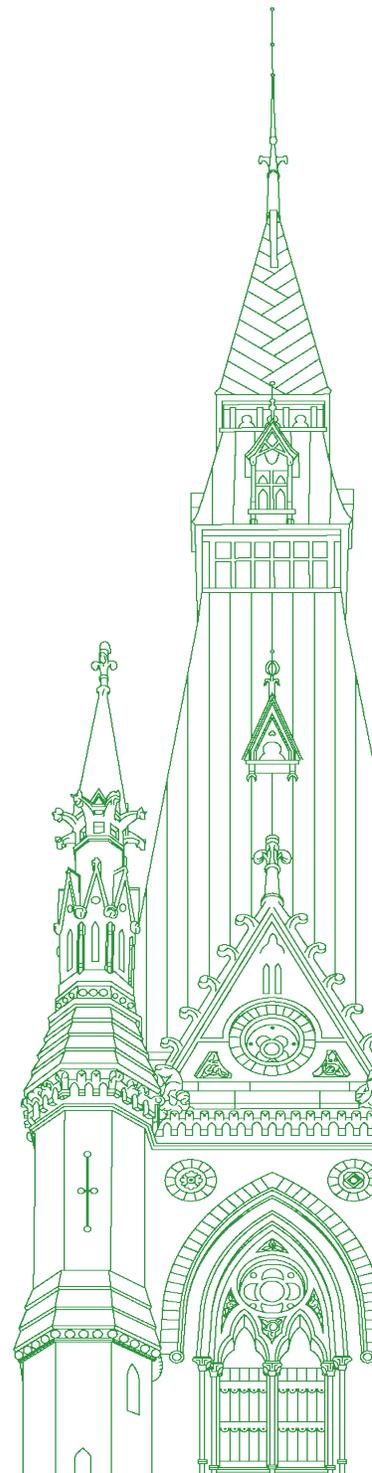
45th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 007

Monday, December 1, 2025



Chair: Fayçal El-Khoury

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• (1540)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number seven of the House of Commons Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the subcommittee is meeting to study the situation of 2SLGBTQ+ people from Uganda.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are participating in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

[*English*]

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses and members.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mic, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking. For those on Zoom, at the bottom of your screen, you can select the appropriate channel for interpretation: floor, English or French. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel. I would remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

Before we welcome our witnesses, I would like to provide this trigger warning. We will be discussing experiences related to violence. This may be triggering to viewers. If any participants feel distressed or need help, please advise the clerk. For all witnesses and for all members of Parliament, it's important to recognize that these are very difficult discussions. I know we'll all be compassionate in our conversation.

[*Translation*]

I would now like to welcome the witnesses.

[*English*]

As an individual, we have Mr. Paul Kanyamu, registered nursing assistant. Joining us by video conference, we have Mr. Nicholas Opiyo, founder and former executive director, Chapter Four Uganda. Also joining us by video conference, from DefendDefenders, we have Hassan Shire, executive director, East and Horn of Africa human rights defenders project. From Rainbow Railroad, we have Madame Rabab Al-Khatib, deputy head of programs; and Mr. Dennis Wamala, program officer, resettlement.

We welcome all the witnesses. Thanks for being with us.

I would like to give every one of you five minutes for your introduction and presentation. Please try to respect the time. Thank you.

We will start with Mr. Paul Kanyamu.

Mr. Kanyamu, the floor is yours.

Paul Kanyamu (Registered Nursing Assistant, As an Individual): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

My name is Paul Kanyamu. I am a nursing assistant at Nanaimo Regional General Hospital on Vancouver Island in B.C.

I am Ugandan and a former refugee from Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya. I'm grateful to be a permanent resident of Canada.

After experiencing persecution in Uganda in 2019, I fled to Kenya seeking safety. As soon as I arrived at the camp, I was beaten with sticks, punched in the face and thrown to the ground, along with my fellow LGBTQIA+ refugees, for identifying as queer. Security told others in the camp that we were homosexuals. Then attacks began. I was pushed into a long ditch and my bones in the right leg were broken. Camp shelters belonging to queer refugees were firebombed, including my own shelter. Lesbians were raped. I witnessed the petrol bombing of a transgender refugee, Atuhwera Chriton, who died due to second-degree burns. May her soul rest in eternal peace.

When queer refugees went to UNHCR to seek protection, the UNHCR instructed the police to disperse us. The police tear-gassed us. This resulted in lots of injuries, and a two-month-old baby died. The police are part of the problem, not the solution. The police undressed us forcibly and pulled our genitals. The police of Kenya threatened us further that they were going to arrest us and even beat us if we continued identifying as queer.

The Kenyan government said they would no longer handle LGBTQIA+ refugee cases.

When I was privately sponsored by Reaching Out Assisting Refugees, ROAR, in Nanaimo, I got some relief and regained some hope.

Informal estimates are that there are about 500 queer refugees in the Gorom refugee camp in South Sudan, and about 150 in Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya. Due to increased attacks in Kakuma refugee camp, queer refugees fled to the neighbouring South Sudan for safety, which is another dangerous place for queer persons. Gorom refugee camp is characterized by insecurity, lawlessness, abduction and homophobia. Queer shelters have also been destroyed in Gorom. There has been much verbal and physical violence targeting queer refugees, particularly those who identify as transgender and lesbian. In both Kenya and South Sudan, the police say they won't offer protection to homosexuals there.

In Kenya, there is no referral by the UNHCR for settlement currently. Kenyan government officials openly told us that no queer refugee would again be resettled to safety because they post a lot on social media and expose every security issue that happens in the camp. Vulnerable queer refugees in Kenya are paying a huge price for speaking up, while non-queer refugees are being resettled through the UNHCR system. Most queer refugees can't work due to discrimination, threats and assaults on their lives, forcing some to participate in survival prostitution.

Kenya refuses to provide queer refugee recognition, which results in no exit permits for those without passports. There is a limit on the number of people UNHCR and Rainbow Railroad are able to refer. This creates many years of long wait for refugees. UNHCR South Sudan has repeatedly told queer refugees that they can't be referred because of limited availability of resettlement opportunities.

Canada must act now to protect these vulnerable populations. You have the power to save lives today, not years from now. The number of refugee resettlement slots has been dramatically decreased in the last budget. The Government of Canada can solve this by directly increasing the resettlement opportunities for LGBTQIA+ refugees to save their lives.

Just this past February, Canada committed to resettling 4,700 refugees fleeing Sudan by the end of 2026. I'm asking this committee to kindly ensure that at least 650 of those spaces are specifically allocated to queer refugees currently trapped in the Gorom refugee settlement in South Sudan and the Kakuma camp. They are already part of the Sudan crisis. They simply need you to recognize that their persecution is just as urgent as the conflict itself.

The rainbow refugee assistance partnership allows sponsorship agreement holders to create sponsorship groups for queer refugees beyond their annual quota. This program agreement expires in 2029, but should be made permanent.

Canada could create an emergency response for hundreds of Ugandan queer refugees now in extremely difficult situations in refugee camps in South Sudan and Kenya. Canada did this for queer Chechens in 2017, and in 2022 relocated more than 600 queer Afghan refugees to Canada.

- (1545)

Canada could diplomatically ask the Government of Kenya to recognize queer refugees to allow resettlement. Most importantly, the IRCC should expedite queer refugee cases from South Sudan

and Kenya, since those persons face daily risks, including physical harm and death.

I thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

I now invite Mr. Nicholas Opiyo to take the floor for five minutes, please.

Nicholas Opiyo (Founder and Former Executive Director, Chapter Four Uganda, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, for the opportunity to testify today on the situation of the LGBTI community in Uganda. I thank you for your continued attention to this matter. I thank the people of Canada for their support to the Ugandan LGBTI community and movement.

I have been providing legal representation for the LGBTI community in Uganda for well over a decade and a half. As a founder and former executive director of Chapter Four Uganda, a civil rights organization, I have been working closely with the LGBTI community. I was the lead lawyer, in 2014, in the successful challenge to the country's anti-gay legislation. I am now part of the legal team that is challenging the current 2023 anti-gay law in the Ugandan Supreme Court.

Since the enactment of the Anti-Homosexuality Act in Uganda, contrary to popular expectation, there has not been a large number of court prosecutions of LGBTI individuals in the country. The Government of Uganda has issued non-binding circulars to limit court prosecutions of individuals under the law. For instance, the director of public prosecutions issued a circular, in August 2023, titled "Management of cases with charges preferred under the Anti-Homosexuality Act". This circular required all files regarding LGBTI individuals to be submitted to the DPP's headquarters and to undertake an organized sensitization training for prosecutors on how to handle cases of LGBTI individuals. The Ministry of Health issued a circular as well, on August 8, 2023, emphasizing the provision and access to health services for all people, without discrimination. The Attorney General also reversed an earlier circular, by the National Council for Science and Technology, that required researchers to disclose the identity of their research subjects, and their sexual orientation and gender identity.

These circulars are not laws. They cannot and do not replace the laws enacted by Parliament. The possibility of enforcement of the LGBTI law in Uganda remains an ever-present threat to the LGBTI community, a real possibility hanging over their heads, creating an unsettling uncertainty. The steps mentioned above were taken, in large part, due to the sustained pressure and condemnation of Uganda by the international community, the challenge to the laws in court and the robust advocacy of the community and their allies against the law.

However, police and state agencies-sanctioned arrests and intimidation continue to be pervasive. These arrests do not end up in court prosecutions, but they often involve prolonged detentions in police cells, extortion, intimidation and, in many cases, public outing of individuals. Many individuals who are arrested are subjected to forced non-consensual anal exams, which include insertion of objects into their anal cavities, often in the presence of several individuals. The results of these unlawful examinations are then made public. The practice has no legal basis and, as such, any evidence obtained is inadmissible in a court of law for being obtained by means of torture. Such evidence is incapable of proving anything. They are without any basis in science. The sole objective is to dehumanize LGBTI individuals and to degrade them in society.

• (1550)

Mr. Chair and members of the committee, the most debilitating and perhaps the most tragic form of persecution of LGBTI individuals in Uganda may not be in a court of law but in the social terror unleashed on LGBTI individuals as a result of the enactment of this law. These are often unreported. They happen in private spaces, but do so in a drip-drip fashion. They are the lived experiences of individuals who express themselves in many ways, first within families and close relatives, then within wider societies. Documentation of such abuse since the law has passed has shown increased cases of homelessness due to family expulsion, due to expulsion from their own communities by people in the community, due to denial of rental property and evictions by landlords for those who already have houses.

Yet the world has moved on and attention to the situation in Uganda has waned.

The Chair: Can you please wrap it up? Time is over. Take a few seconds to wrap it up.

Thank you.

Nicholas Opiyo: Thank you very much.

The challenge to the sweeping anti-gay law continues in the Supreme Court, but we have limited hope in that legal solution resolving the problem.

We require the political commitment of governments such as Canada to ensure that LGBTI individuals are saved. Support for frontline activists who are doing the work to provide safety for those in-country would be important for the Government of Canada to provide.

I thank you, Mr. Chair, and I yield back to you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now I invite Mr. Hassan Shire to take the floor for five minutes, please.

Hassan Shire (Executive Director, East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project, DefendDefenders): Thank you, honourable Chair. Thank you, members of the subcommittee. To all the people in the room, I bring you warm greetings from warm Kampala.

I am Hassan Shire, executive director of DefendDefenders, as the chair has said.

Only a few weeks back, in Kampala, DefendDefenders celebrated 20 years of presence and work in this subregion, providing protection for the lives of human rights defenders across the African continent.

In Uganda, as my brother Nicholas Opiyo said, there's a current law, the Anti-Homosexuality Act, 2023, that criminalizes LGBTIQ+ rights. Petitions were filed—I was part of the people who filed it—in the Constitutional Court of Uganda challenging the law on grounds including violation of equality and privacy, among others. The Constitutional Court upheld most provisions of the act, and an appeal was lodged again in the Supreme Court of Uganda, seeking to declare the law null and void. The appeal is pending in the Supreme Court. A similar law passed in 2014 was nullified by the Constitutional Court of Uganda on procedural grounds.

In August 2023, the director general of health services in Uganda issued a statement to all health workers, asserting that access to health services is a fundamental right for all people in Uganda, without discrimination. In September, the director of public prosecutions [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] files related to the Anti-Homosexuality Act be sent to DPP headquarters for guidance before charges are formally laid.

A recent report by the Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum, a local NGO in Kampala, indicates that there have been a total 926 cases of LGBTIQ+ motivated violations reported from June 2023 to October 2025, which affected 1,240 people.

Lately, homophobia and transphobia have become widespread, with violations against the LGBTIQ+ community in Uganda mostly emanating from non-state actors, particularly communities they live in, rather than from government-sanctioned actors. Many of these violations remain unreported. The risks faced by LGBTIQ+ persons include eviction, physical assault, blackmail, legal persecution, discrimination, exclusion and online harassment. There have been cases of LGBTIQ+ persons found murdered, with the reasons for the killing not yet revealed by the police. The killing is believed to be happening because of their sexual orientation and gender identity.

The situation has further exposed members of the LGBTIQ+ community to a vulnerable social and economic life. Many are unemployed because of discrimination and persecution at workplaces. Many have been forced into exile and to seek asylum in other countries, including Canada. It's important to note that the majority are still in Uganda and in the subregion, and remain vulnerable.

The anti-gender policies globally announced and the freezing of international aid by the current U.S. administration appear to have emboldened the anti-rights sentiment and crippled community organizations in Uganda. A case in point is the Uganda Key Populations Consortium, UKPC, a Ugandan government partner organization that was engaging in the delivery of health services with LGBTIQ+ community persons across Uganda, which has experienced 70% of their programs impacted by the cut of the USAID money.

• (1555)

Delivery and access to health services by LGBTIQ+ persons in Uganda post-U.S. funding cuts were impacted. The current UN reform agenda, which envisages that UNAIDS will be dismantled totally next year, will have a severe impact on LGBTIQ+ persons in Uganda.

The Chair: Can you please wrap it up? Your time is over.

I'll give you a few seconds to wrap it up.

Hassan Shire: Mr. Chair, I want to note that Global Affairs Canada hasn't been active in the protection of LGBTIQ+ persons in Uganda and the wider subregion.

I urge you, with your committee, to recommend and avail Canadian foreign aid to provide comprehensive funding to the structures both at the UN and within the LGBTIQ+ community in Uganda.

Lastly, facilitate safe passage for LGBTIQ+ individuals who are fleeing persecution by redoubling the support given to LGBTIQ+ individuals who are seeking asylum in Canada through strengthening engagement with organizations working directly with them, particularly the Rainbow Railroad.

Thank you.

The Chair: Now I would like to invite Madame Rabab Al-Khatib from Rainbow Railroad to take the floor for five minutes.

The floor is yours.

Rabab Al-Khatib (Deputy Head of Programs, Rainbow Railroad): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's actually my colleague who's going to go ahead with the statement first.

The Chair: Mr. Wamala, the floor is yours.

Dennis Wamala (Program Officer, Resettlement, Rainbow Railroad): Thank you.

Chair of the committee and members, thank you for inviting Rainbow Railroad to deliver testimony on the situation of LGBTIQ+ Ugandans.

I was born and raised in Uganda and spent many years working as an activist for LGBTIQ+ rights. My work placed me in direct contact with the regressive systems, institutions and actors that

shape LGBTIQ+ persecution across the region. I also sit before you as someone who was forcibly displaced as a result of this persecution. Today, I am a proud Canadian with a strong commitment to the LGBTIQ+ community in Uganda.

Rainbow Railroad operates globally at the intersection of forced displacement and LGBTIQ+ persecution. Over the past three years, Uganda has become one of the most significant drivers of our increasing caseload. Since 2023, we have received over 3,000 requests for help from Uganda, including a 2,057% spike in March 2023, when the Anti-Homosexuality Act was introduced.

This is not an isolated reality. Uganda's crisis is part of a coordinated regional anti-LGBTIQ+ movement mirrored in laws, rhetoric and enforcement practices emerging across East Africa. The impact on everyday life is profound. LGBTIQ+ Ugandans report police intimidation, denial of legal protection, forced eviction, firing and barriers to health care.

To respond to this, Rainbow Railroad has built 15 partnerships with Ugandan organizations since March 2023, collectively supporting over 2,500 individuals with shelter, relocation, legal aid, medical care, basic needs and mental health assistance. For many, however, escape from Uganda is the only life-saving option, but this also leads directly to new risks.

In 2025, we tracked 162 Ugandans in Kenya and 123 in South Sudan. Alongside others dispersed across the region, these individuals often find themselves in environments where the same patterns of homophobia, transphobia and violence continue. In Kakuma refugee camp, Ugandans are frequently profiled as LGBTIQ+, resulting in targeted violence. Many have spent as many as 10 years without documentation or a pathway to durable protection. In Nairobi, the absence of legal status forces individuals into homelessness, unsafe work and exploitative environments. Conditions in South Sudan's Gorom camp are similarly precarious and lack any LGBTIQ+ competent protection.

These realities are echoed in our queer forced displacement initiative consultations, where refugees consistently identify three barriers: one, prolonged or stalled registration and refugee status determination processes; two, continued exposure to violence in camps and urban settings; three, lack of any credible pathway out. Many refugees describe their situation as being trapped between danger in the camps and danger at home. The challenge is not simply flight from Uganda, but a lack of access to protection pathways for LGBTIQ+ persons across the region.

Canada has the tools to address these gaps in a targeted and effective way. Rainbow Railroad offers the following recommendations to the Government of Canada.

One, expand the government-assisted refugees partnership with Rainbow Railroad to include a dedicated allocation for Ugandan LGBTQI+ refugees in Kenya, South Sudan and neighbouring countries in the region.

Two, expand funding for Canada's LGBTQI+ international assistance program that sustains the queer forced displacement initiative, which recognizes LGBTQI+ forced displacement as a priority within international human rights programming.

Three, establish a standing rapid response mechanism for sudden anti-LGBTQI+ crackdowns across all Canadian missions.

I'm here in Canada because of the compassion of the Canadian government. The individuals currently stranded in camps and cities across East Africa need that compassion today. Canada's leadership, applied through existing mechanisms and informed by on-the-ground expertise, can create the pathways to protection that LGBTQI+ Ugandans need today.

I thank you.

• (1600)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Al-Khatib, would you like to make a statement?

Rabab Al-Khatib: It's not a statement. I can wait for the questions and I can answer, or I can add a couple of points. I don't know if we have time.

The Chair: You will answer the questions after this.

If you would like to say something now, I will give you the floor.

Rabab Al-Khatib: Thank you so much. I'm always lucky with more time, I think, in the committees.

Hearing all the testimonies, I have to say that from what we have already seen through the cases that we have received from Ugandans in Uganda or Ugandans outside Uganda, mainly Kenya and South Sudan, the situation is dire. LGBTQI+ Ugandans in Uganda and outside Uganda need support.

I will just double down on the recommendations of Rainbow Railroad. Mainly, there is an opportunity here to grab, which is the GAR, the government-assisted refugee partnership with Rainbow Railroad, in which the Government of Canada has already reiterated its commitment to human rights. I think there is a way today to increase the resources and increase the slots for resettlement to make sure that we are supporting the most at-risk LGBTQI+ Ugandans, whether in Uganda or outside Uganda.

I'll stop here, and I'm happy also to answer more questions. Thank you so much.

• (1605)

The Chair: Thank you.

We have another witness, who is not here yet. We'll continue.

I would like to thank all the witnesses.

Now we'll open the floor for a question and answer session. We will start with Madame Tamara Kronis.

You have the floor for seven minutes, please.

Tamara Kronis (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all the witnesses for describing the situation so clearly, and particularly I want to thank Mr. Kanyamu and Mr. Wamala for sharing their personal experiences in Uganda. Everything that we know and everything that we've heard about the situation on the ground in Uganda paints it as a situation where fear and precarity dominate and where people are struggling to lead lives that are safe and fruitful.

To start, I'll ask Mr. Wamala this particular question. There are about 49 million or 50 million people in Uganda. It's a country that's a little bit bigger than Canada, more or less, population-wise. How many people are there at risk in Uganda?

Dennis Wamala: Thank you, Tamara. That's a question that always gets us using percentages, because we have not had a census to say that this is the number of LGBTQI+ people. It's not even a recognized community in the country, but we know that at least 1% of the population has an inclination or at least identifies in some way as an LGBTQI+ person.

I would say there are about four million Ugandans at risk in the country right now. Most of those are in hiding. Most of those are in the closet.

Tamara Kronis: In terms of the active population, how big is the crisis in Uganda? I'm sorry, but that's what I meant to ask.

Dennis Wamala: Right now, since 2003, we've seen an escalation in reporting in terms of evictions, in terms of police arrests, in terms of [*Inaudible—Editor*] in the country, and these are in the hundreds.

For example, in March 2023, when the second bill was passed, we had at least 800 people reporting evictions or arrests or intimidation of some kind, less than three months after the bill passed. These numbers keep on fluctuating, but they're in the high hundreds and sometimes over 1,000, depending on what the political rhetoric is and how much the police are going after people.

Tamara Kronis: In terms of your experience with Rainbow Railroad, one thing that we know happens is that when opportunities come to leave and go to a place of safety, the number of applications goes up dramatically.

You said you've received 3,000 applications since 2023. Is that number growing? Has it stabilized? What's the situation there?

• (1610)

Rabab Al-Khatib: On the matter of numbers, we know for sure that between 2023 and late 2025, we received more than 2,800 requests for help from Ugandans in Uganda. We're also receiving requests for help from Ugandans outside of Uganda. The two biggest numbers are from South Sudan and Kenya.

These numbers did stabilize a little bit. We saw a big spike when the bill was passed, of course, in 2023. Up until now, when LGBTQI+ people moved outside of Uganda, they moved to find safety, but the reality is that the danger was actually exacerbated. With the displacement, another layer of protection is needed for LGBTQI+ people that we don't see.

Tamara Kronis: That's the protection in the camps.

Just to be a little bit more specific about it, it sounds like it's 2,800 people in Uganda, and then an additional cohort in the camps.

Rabab Al-Khatib: Yes.

Tamara Kronis: That's part of the probably several million people in Uganda who are queer and who are facing the anxiety and fear of being found out or being exposed and the things they could lose under those circumstances.

Perhaps I could turn back to Mr. Kanyamu.

Can you share a little bit more about what it's like to be in that situation? What is the situation in the camps like? What is the situation in Uganda in terms of what it does for family dynamics and what people's lives are like?

Paul Kanyamu: Thank you so much, Tamara.

First, it all starts from home. Maybe your parents find out, or the community, that you're gay. You're subjected to persecution. Some people end up losing their lives. From there, people run to neighbouring countries, particularly Kenya, in Kakuma refugee camp, and South Sudan, in Gorom camp. From here we are promised registration. The UNHCR receives us. They register us and then they promise us safety: You are going to be safe. Of course, the UNHCR is an internationally recognized refugee organization. When we reach these camps, they say that everything will be okay.

But it's a different story. As I told you earlier, as soon as I arrived in the camp I was attacked, even more than I was attacked back in my home country. I faced extreme homophobia. My leg got broken. I feel traumatized even sharing my story right now. I saw people getting petrol-bombed and losing their lives in the camp. We couldn't access basic medication in the camp. There was discrimination by the health officials, who are meant to provide services equally to all refugees. There is a lot of persecution, even by the people mandated to protect us. I was assaulted by the police several times on camera: "You are gay. Kenya doesn't allow homosexuality. Please go back to your country."

A lot of stuff is happening in the camps. An increase in homophobia cases was brought back from Uganda because of this law that was passed. How is life in the camps? It's horrible. It's so horrible. People have sleepless nights thinking they would be attacked by someone, thinking, "I'm going to be attacked. I can't sleep." We sleep in shifts from seven o'clock to two o'clock, and then from two

o'clock to seven o'clock. It's not easy in the camps. The UNHCR tells us that no country is ready to receive us simply because they are not open. Yet we see non-LGBTQI+ refugees—Somalians, Congolese and other non-LGBTQI+ refugees—being resettled. We see flights every day. They're moving in big numbers. Queer people are being discriminated against. I don't understand.

It's so horrible on the ground, Tamara.

• (1615)

Tamara Kronis: Can you talk about your journey to Canada? What was it like? How did Reaching Out Assisting Refugees, or ROAR, identify you? What was your journey like? When did you first feel safe?

Paul Kanyamu: Thank you so much for the question.

ROAR identified me in November 2019 after reading my story online. They saw me and we got in touch. I explained to them that I used to post a lot on social media and I used to act as an advocate for my fellow LGBTQI+ persons. Still, we were threatened by the UNHCR and the police not to post, because the donors might say, "Oh, people are getting attacked. How will donors give money to UNHCR if people are being attacked?" They used to discourage us from posting on social media, and this is what is happening in South Sudan right now.

When ROAR came in 2019, they identified me and Meddie, and I got a chance and they opted to resettle me to safety. That's when the hope came in. I was like, "Oh, I'm hopeful that I'll be safe tomorrow," because despite all these private sponsorship options, still I was attacked by the refugees and received lots of discrimination.

The process ran, and I'm so grateful to the Canadian government because I got through the process so quickly. The visa official really saw my story and saw what I was going through. He asked for my social media. I gave it to him and he was like, "Oh, this is so bad." That was the time when my leg got broken. I was on crutches. I was in such a bad situation back then. In a few months, I was referred to the IOM, the International Organization for Migration, for my medical needs, and security checks were done and my visa was issued in September 2021.

Unfortunately, because I was such a vocal advocate for the people, the Government of Kenya and the UNHCR said I could not fly, so it was another battle for me to engage in.

The Chair: Can you wrap up? We've almost exceeded two minutes.

Paul Kanyamu: Okay, I will wind up.

ROAR—Reaching Out Assisting Refugees—is an organization in Nanaimo. They resettle LGBTQI+ refugees from across the globe through private sponsorships. It's the organization I came through, and I started feeling safe the day I landed in Canada. I really felt safe, and I'm so grateful for that.

I'm working and I'm a permanent resident. I'm giving to Canada. I'm a registered nursing assistant. I help seniors in long-term care and also in hospitals. For those who know the Nanaimo Regional General Hospital, it's where I work, and I'm helping the seniors there.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. We are happy to have you in Canada, a safe and welcoming country.

Now I would like to invite Madame Vandenberg to take the floor for seven minutes.

Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses.

Paul, thank you for telling your story. It has impacts, so I appreciate that.

I want to start my questions with Nicholas Opiyo.

You said something in your testimony about external pressure. You successfully fought the law against LGBTI in Uganda in 2014, and I know the 2023 law is in the courts right now.

To what extent does something like this—this committee, the airing of these things and pressure from outside—make a difference?

Nicholas Opiyo: Thank you very much, Madame Vandenberg, and thank you, Mr. Chair.

External pressure is perhaps the only thing that has kept many LGBTI folks in Uganda safe. If it were not for external pressure, worse things could have happened to so many people in the country. It shines a light and creates restraint on the part of the authorities in Uganda. In moments when this pressure is waning, you begin to see worse rhetoric and abuse of the LGBTI community, so the pressure is perhaps the only thing—the only place where many LGBTI folks can speak.

I doubt that an LGBTI person could address the Ugandan parliament or a committee of parliament in the way that we are addressing you now, so external pressure means these platforms in many cases are the only places to hear the plight of LGBTI individuals.

Second, external pressure is also the only pressure that has helped in so many cases where people are being prosecuted. When they know that people are watching and when they know that the cases are being reported, there is fairer treatment in an already bad situation for many LGBTI folks in Uganda.

• (1620)

Anita Vandenberg: I recall that in 2020, when you were part of the World Movement for Democracy, and, as a lawyer, you were arrested, there was a tremendous amount of mobilization for your release.

We've heard that in a number of countries, there's a weaponization of the law. When people are being charged because of their human rights work, they will use other things, like tax evasion or, in your case, money laundering. They're trumped-up charges. We've seen that in the Philippines with Maria Ressa and others.

Can you tell us how the authorities are using that kind of legal repression to target not just LGBTI people, but also their legal counsel?

Nicholas Opiyo: The law and the court systems in Uganda have become a political tool. First of all, we must recognize that, in large part, the problem of the LGBTI community is also a political problem, because the issue of the LGBTI community has been used by politicians in moments of political convenience to attack their opponents and characterize them as being funded by foreign LGBTI groups. The intention is to drive the population against them. This has also happened to allies and allied organizations.

In our case, part of the reason we were suspended and closed by the government of Uganda in 2021 was that we were working with the LGBTI community. The accusations against us for money laundering came because the funding was coming from an American LGBTI funding organization called the American Jewish World Service.

The law and the court systems, which are supposed to be tools of protection, have become tools of punishment and persecution against the LGBTI community. I've appeared in many cases in which judges and magistrates quoted the Bible, not the law, in condemning LGBTI folks to imprisonment or detention.

In so many instances, the use of the small LGBTI minority in Uganda as a political tool has become commonplace. Just two days ago, the speaker of the national assembly, who was the speaker of the house and who championed the passing of the law, was using the LGBTI issue to attack her opponents on a campaign platform. This issue has been weaponized and used in so many other ways, much to the detriment of the country's LGBTI community.

If I may seek your indulgence to make a small comment on the previous question on numbers, I think Uganda is not about just the numbers—the numbers might be small—but about what it means for the region. We are seeing the spread of anti-LGBTI laws across the region, starting from Uganda. Whether it works or fails in Uganda will determine how far this spreads in the region. We must treat Uganda as a test case to make the point that LGBTI folks have allies and can be protected, rather than focus on the numbers of LGBTI folks in Uganda, which are difficult to know. People are closeted. So many people come to me for legal representation who are in heterosexual relationships but are maintaining quiet gay relationships. You can't even know the number because nobody counts them, and people are afraid to come out.

Anita Vandenberg: Thank you for your perseverance in that.

I know I don't have much time, but I'd like to ask Mr. Shire a question.

You said it isn't just the legal authorities; all of this political inflammation also creates a lot of social repression. What is the capacity or willingness of the authorities to protect LGBTI members of the community when they face this kind of repression from others in society?

• (1625)

Hassan Shire: Thank you, Anita.

The society here is 98% homophobic, and this is a fact that has been established by BBC and by other neutral bodies, that they truly hate LGBTI people. These children who are now here, Dennis and Paul, were born to parents who.... Neighbours, boda boda riders, schoolmates, the principals in the schools and the universities, and the workmates, they all revolt whenever you mention LGBTI people.

Therefore, in a situation like that, if you turn to the disinformation and misinformation being spread by people in authority to drum up so-called support that appeals to people with those kinds of negative attitudes toward the LGBTI persons, you could see that there are no law and order people who might be able to protect you—

The Chair: Can you wrap it up, please? We have exceeded the time by one minute.

Go ahead for a few seconds.

Hassan Shire: Okay, Mr. Chair.

There won't be any, because the law and order people maintain the order in other places. They're not guarding the safety and security of the LGBTI people, so they are vulnerable.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you now have the floor for seven minutes.

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

Thank you very much to all the witnesses for being here.

Our study is on a really important topic. We're here to try to make a difference.

My first questions are for the representatives of the Rainbow Railroad.

Mr. Wamala, you made some recommendations and I believe that the third recommendation was to establish an emergency mechanism in the event of sudden crackdowns. This would be a Canadian program that could be applied in the event of a sudden crackdown on the LGBTQ+ community. I do believe that Canada needs to be ready in case that happens.

However, there are two aspects to this recommendation. The first is that no such program currently exists. The second is that it means that you fear a sudden crackdown in Uganda. If I understand correctly, there is therefore a sense of urgency.

[*English*]

Rabab Al-Khatib: I'm going to answer that. Thank you so much.

We are not suggesting any new mechanism with the third recommendation in here, but rather we are capitalizing on whatever the Canadian government already has around the world as missions. We are asking for, or recommending, a trigger that would emphasize the crisis once it happens.

We are recommending mainly three things, or this can be done through three other ways.

The first one is to disseminate the message to the missions of Canada around the world to expedite cases of LGBTQI+ people once we have a crisis happening or a crackdown.

The second one is more related to documentation, and it's to temporarily ease or relax the documentation that the Government of Canada usually requests from people, because people under persecution may not be able to access public institutions.

In addition, it would be to focus also on explaining to the missions around the world the importance of flagging SOGIESC cases. We are not, by any chance, speaking about any new structure, but rather we are building on the structures the Government of Canada has in the missions around the world but with more focus, specifically speaking, around the need to identify the high-risk cases of LGBTQI+ people and to expedite the processing of these cases.

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Are you currently facing any obstacles in resettling people in Canada? If so, what are they? How can we make improvements to make things better for your organization and, above all, for the people you help?

[*English*]

Rabab Al-Khatib: Thank you so much.

I'm going to stress again the partnership between Rainbow Railroad and the Government of Canada when it comes to government-assisted refugees, through which, today, Rainbow Railroad is able to resettle 250-plus LGBTQI+ persons per year, or we refer them to the Canadian government for resettlement.

The very first obstacle is that the needs are huge and the spots are very limited. One of the main requests or recommendations from Rainbow Railroad would be to add more spots so that we can resettle more people who are in need, especially while we are looking at a world where more and more queer people are facing crisis. That's the first one. The second one is more related to resources. Spots are one thing, but spots come with an investment from the Canadian government to be able to process those cases.

With the challenges, I want to speak about an opportunity. When we speak about this partnership between Rainbow Railroad and the Government of Canada, Rainbow Railroad is mainly the one who is doing the verification process and preparing the case for resettlement. In one way or another, there is an opportunity for the Government of Canada to capitalize on this, because civil society is taking the biggest part of the work of resettlement. If we push more cases and more people towards resettlement to Canada, this kind of partnership with civil society is really an opportunity to capitalize on it to be able to find the most at-risk people and expedite the processing time as well.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you very much for your answer.

Mr. Kanyamu, thank you for your testimony. It was hard to listen to, but it was absolutely necessary for the committee to hear it and, above all, for it to reach the executive branch and the government. Thank you so much for sharing your story.

You said that it was when you arrived in Canada that you felt safe for the first time. I would like to know if you are still receiving threats, for example on social media or online. Are you still living with certain threats, even though you are on Canadian soil?

[English]

Paul Kanyamu: Thank you so much.

Some time ago, I received threats because, even when I came here, I continued advocating for the LGBTQIA+ community back in Africa and the rest of the countries that persecute queer people.

I can say I'm safe here, and I haven't received any threats in Canada on the ground, except a few on social media. I'm safe in Canada, I can confidently say.

Before I wind up, I would kindly request this committee to at least grant more settlement slots to LGBTQIA+ refugees, particularly in South Sudan and Kenya, because those people are really going through hardships right now. Also, expedite your settlement for vulnerable LGBTQIA+ persons already in the pipeline, because we have people who are privately sponsored right now, but their cases are taking way too long, despite the fact that the sponsored are being attacked. I have a friend in Gorom right now who was attacked yesterday. He's bleeding. I can't show pictures right now because they're gross.

I also urge the Government of Kenya to resume LGBTQIA+ registration to ease resettlement.

Thank you.

• (1635)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Your time has expired by one minute, but I didn't want to interrupt the witness.

Mr. Zuberi, I now invite you to take the floor for five minutes.

Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Thank you Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here.

[English]

Thank you for your personal courage. We respect the ordeal that you have gone through to come to Canada, for those of you who migrated here.

We are focusing today on Uganda, but South Sudan and Kenya have both been mentioned. In a brief period of time, can you elaborate on what's happening in these two countries?

Paul, maybe you could start, and we could turn it over to the legal experts also if they want to add something.

Paul, do you want to share a bit about that?

Paul Kanyamu: As I said, most of the LGBTQIA+ refugees we are discussing today are from Uganda. A big percentage are from Uganda. The reason why South Sudan and Kenya are appearing in this talk is that when they leave Uganda, they go to refugee camps in South Sudan and Kenya. There is that migration of LGBTQIA+ persons who have left their countries or Uganda and they go to Kenya and South Sudan because they can't be refugees in their own countries. That's why we're talking about them.

The situation there, as I've said, is bad because they're getting attacked every day. The police are checking people's phones, by the way. If they find you with any LGBTQIA+ stuff in your phone, you either sleep at the police barracks and go back home the next day after you've been beaten.... There are forced examinations, despite the fact that they are registered and allowed in that country. The police still check and say, "No, it's a sovereign country. We don't allow homosexuality here. Take your habit anywhere else."

In Kenya, I was accused of being an agent of COVID-19. They said that LGBTQIA+ persons are agents of COVID-19. They said, "It's you people creating problems for us in the world. You are gay and you are bringing COVID-19 and other issues." That's how it is in these camps.

Sameer Zuberi: You mentioned that the people who are supposed to be protecting society are not doing their job. We've heard a lot about police, but what about other humanitarian workers? Are you finding that's also the case for other humanitarian workers?

Paul Kanyamu: Other humanitarian workers are trying to do their jobs. I can say that. I can give them credit for that, like for case assessments and other stuff. However, yes, you go to some other organizations and they are like, “No, you’re gay. We help refugees, but not specifically gay people. Do you mind changing from being gay to straight? How about if you change your case from being LGBTQIA+ to another case, so that you can get resettled?” They can’t resettle you, because you’re gay. They do that under cover to save their face, of course, as an organization. As an international NGO, they’re not supposed to discriminate, of course. They’ll maybe face the.... These other organizations are trying, though they’re not doing the needful. They’re not doing much because they have that element of “these people are gay”. They quote the Bible. They say, “No, in the Bible, it says this and that, so please, you need to change.” They are going to give us hope, but we need to change from this to this.

Then, with the police, it’s direct confrontation with LGBTQIA+ persons. They don’t fear. They do it openly in front of UNHCR because the police are part of government and are sovereign in that place. They say, “No, we don’t allow LGBTQIA+ persons here.” If you register any case as an LGBTQIA+ person, the case will not be followed up at all.

Sameer Zuberi: Ms. Al-Khatib, I know you wanted to share something in your opening remarks. In the time that I have left, if you have anything that you want to add, I want to give that time to you right now.

Rabab Al-Khatib: Actually, I’ll add a little bit on the situation of the camps, if I may.

To Paul’s point, what we know through the queer forced displacement initiative consultation—for which the last round table happened in Kenya, actually, and where LGBTQI+ refugees from Uganda were present around the table—is that with the problem of documentation or being undocumented, some people cannot get registered for more than 10 years. If we look at what this means, it means no right to work. This means they need to live under the radar, in addition to all of what Paul has also mentioned. We know it and we saw it.

If this means anything, this means that there is a possibility that people are also being pushed into sex work to survive, for example, or being exploited just because they are part of the LGBTQI+ community.

All of this is to say, finding protection pathways and finding resettlement pathways for LGBTQI+ people from Uganda, be it in Kenya or South Sudan, is really a matter of life or death for those people over there.

Thank you so much.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Zuberi.

Now I invite Madame Kronis to take the floor for five minutes, please.

Tamara Kronis: Thank you very much.

I really want to thank both the representatives from Rainbow Railroad and Paul for the testimony they’ve provided so far.

What I’d actually like to do with this round is turn back to Mr. Opiyo in Uganda.

One of the reasons I was asking about the numbers is that in the short term and in the emergency situation, we can help bring people out and help rescue people, but in the long term something has to change in Uganda. I wanted to ask a little bit more about that longer-term question.

The appeal is ongoing in the Supreme Court of Uganda. Is there a sense of when the decision is going to come out? If it’s positive, will it make a difference? I know there are lawmakers in Uganda who are trying to make change. We’re actually hoping to have some of them come to this committee. How are they doing? Are they having an impact? What are the barriers to making change legally and in civil society in Uganda?

It’s a big question, but I’m hoping you might be able to tackle it and, if possible, solve all the problems within five minutes.

Nicholas Opiyo: Well, thank you very much.

The Ugandan courts are not known for being expeditious in the way they dispose of cases. They are very slow. We had hoped that the Ugandan Supreme Court would have heard us by now and rendered a decision before the elections, but that is now unlikely. That situation is now being complicated further by the impending retirement of the chief justice on January 18. We do not think that the court is going to hear us any time soon. We don’t have a timeline. It is difficult to guess when the courts might even hear the case.

Second, on the government side, the attorney general has not submitted his pleadings to the Supreme Court. The petitioners who have appealed this case have complied with all the directions that the court has given them, but the attorney general has not prioritized this case and has not responded to the submissions that have been filed by the groups that went to court. We have no idea when this case will be heard and a judgment rendered.

In any case, I am not optimistic that we shall get a positive judgment. If the recent trends are anything to go by, evangelical groups have infiltrated the court, so much so that decisions coming from that court now reflect more dogma than legal positions. Nonetheless, we will fight on, hoping that the court can hear us.

Now, what can make a difference long-term? I don’t think the nullification of the law will make a big difference. It will no doubt provide reprieve and some sort of ease for many people, but what remains an ever-present threat is the radicalized population. Anti-LGBTI sentiments run very deep in our society, from the lowest level to the highest level. Just two months ago, university students were trying to lynch their own colleagues on suspicion of being gay. In a high school in western Uganda, the same thing happened. The long-term focus has to be on changing narratives and has to target, in my view, the youngest population in our country, because it’s going to take a generational effort for this debate to take a turn.

• (1645)

Tamara Kronis: Along that line, in the few seconds I have left, because time is getting short.... The picture you're painting is quite dire. There is no relief coming from the law. There is a society that is quite entrenched in terms of anti-LGBTQI+ values. Are there allies? Where is the hope? Young people are always the hope. What is the landscape like for allies?

Nicholas Opiyo: We have begun to see parents of LGBTI folks coming out to advocate for their own children. It is difficult to argue against a mother who says, "That is my child. I love them the way they are. That is how they were born. That is who they are." Therefore, groups like mothers of LGBTI kids need to be supported because they provide new perspectives, and that is difficult to argue against.

We have begun to see industries, such as the creative industry... The creative industry is the largest employer of LGBTI folks in Uganda, people who are in the arts, people who are doing work in salons. We have to amplify that kind of industry and make sure they continue doing what they are doing.

Lastly—

The Chair: Can you wrap it up, please? The time is exceeded.

Nicholas Opiyo: Yes.

Lastly, I think there is also a growing community of local NGOs, or non-profit organizations, many of which include preachers and groups like DefendDefenders, which are not LGBTI groups but work with the community. These groups give me hope that, over time, we shall make a movement and overcome the challenges we have.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have the floor for five minutes.

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

Mr. Opiyo, I'm going to follow the line of questioning of Ms. Kronis, who just asked you a question.

In your view, how can the international community, including Canada, provide help in a tangible way to legal stakeholders, such as yourself, who are working in Uganda?

[English]

Nicholas Opiyo: I think Hassan mentioned the need to provide increased support to frontline organizations that are working to promote the rights of LGBTI folks. Those groups come under attack as well, and require attention and your support as well. This support may not necessarily be resources. It could also be platforming them, giving them a voice and space to share their experiences, working as allies. When other allies see allies being supported, they get encouraged and will be able to join the cause.

The second one is that we have to use multinational institutions, such as the World Bank, where Canada has some sort of support, voice and access, because these multinational institutions have proven to be, in many cases, very helpful. UNAIDS in Uganda has

been one of the most important allies to the community and to the allies of the community, and so, in working with international institutions, we can amplify their role and make them more active.

Lastly, if I may say, Canada and other countries in the global west have accountability mechanisms. Target, with visa bans, individuals who are promoting anti-LGBTI sentiments in Uganda, so that they know there are consequences to promoting homophobia, hatred and transphobia against the LGBTI community. Now, target the individuals but not the country—smart, targeted sanctions against these individuals. Deny them access to your country, your visas. That has to be a point you make because, in diplomacy, a posture is as important as the actual action you might want to take. Take the posture that you reject this, and do not entertain people who are promoting anti-LGBTI sentiment in Uganda: Sanction them.

• (1650)

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: We could even go as far as implementing economic sanctions against certain individuals by targeting their assets, which may have been moved abroad.

Mr. Shire, in your opening remarks, you talked, among other things, about the fact that the U.S. government has decided to slash the U.S. International Development Agency, or USAID. It's a global phenomenon right now. We're seeing this in a number of European countries and in Japan, which has radically cut its funding for international assistance. Unfortunately, here in Canada, the federal government announced in its budget two or three weeks ago that it planned to cut \$2.7 billion from the international assistance budget.

Given that Canada's presence in Africa has been decreasing over time, shouldn't we in fact strengthen our presence in Africa and increase international assistance instead of following this global trend? Given what is happening with our American neighbours and the rest of Europe, shouldn't we increase international assistance and be more present in East Africa, among other places?

[English]

Hassan Shire: Thank you, Monsieur Duceppe.

Exactly—

The Chair: We have a maximum of one minute, please.

Go ahead.

Hassan Shire: There is a global recession.

I am also Canadian, Mr. Chair, so equally, I am entitled to speak like other panellists.

The global recession of financial support for non-governmental and international human rights institutions has been widespread. It's not only in the U.S.A., but also in other countries. Because of the security challenges they are facing from the war in Ukraine and other places, they start building up their own armaments. The victim all the time is foreign development aid.

Canada can take leadership in advocating a revamp of that line and bringing like-minded governments—mostly the Nordic and other countries—to support initiatives that are impacting the socio-economic life of the communities. We cannot pretend to be able to bring all LGBTI people to Canada, but where they are, they must be supported to support their families and themselves.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

You're welcome at the committee, but when we give you time, you have to respect the time also, please. I'm sorry.

Madame Dhillon, you have the floor for five minutes.

Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll start with Mr. Opiyo.

You were speaking a lot about how it's more dogma than law that's presented in court. You say that the law would provide a reprieve, but there is the ever-present threat of radicalized violence by civilians. Can you tell us a little bit more? It seems that ever since this law was passed, the violence has increased. It's very extreme. Do those who take the law into their own hands against members of the LGBTQ community face consequences?

Nicholas Opiyo: I have yet to come across a case in which a person who has attacked or perpetuated violence against the LGBTI community is held to account.

In many cases where violations have been reported, the authorities have shown no interest in investigating the violations reported, but oftentimes stand around to investigate the LGBTI individual who is reporting a violation against themselves. Organizations have been attacked and set on fire. There's not been any report about the arsonists in the offices of LGBTI organizations.

It seems that there is a blank cheque. There are no consequences for violations against LGBTI individuals, much less even a commitment on the part of the authorities to investigate. You can't even argue that this does not amount to tacit approval of these unlawful actions on the part of individuals.

I have done cases where parents have had their daughters raped in the hope that once they are raped, they can abandon being lesbian. These parents face no consequences. For doctors who are doing forced anal exams, there are no consequences for them from the medical association, from the state or from anybody.

• (1655)

Anju Dhillon: They're being emboldened when no action is taken against them. They're not only taking the law into their own hands, but committing violence against fellow citizens.

You mentioned that this can happen just on suspicion of someone being part of the LGBTQ community—just on suspicion. Can you talk to us about that, please?

Nicholas Opiyo: In the two cases that I cited, one was at the oldest university in the country, in a male residence. Two individuals who were sharing a room were suspected by their fellow colleagues of being involved in same-sex conduct. One evening, the students

organized, sounded alarms and descended upon these two individuals in an act to try to lynch them. They're lucky they were not lynched, because they ran away and found safety elsewhere.

In a secondary school in western Uganda, called Ntare School, the same thing happened. These two young boys were never caught in any sexual intercourse. They were merely suspected of being involved in same-sex conduct, perhaps because they were close to each other or they were holding hands. Students in this secondary school did the same thing: In the night, they pulled them out of their dormitory and tried to lynch them. They ran into the dark. These attacks have never been investigated.

It's just the appearance of being gay. In some cases, you have been mentioned in a tabloid newspaper. The tabloid newspapers are notorious for outing individuals. Once you're mentioned there, it can easily attract violence.

In my own case, I've lost count of the times people have attacked me for being a lawyer for the LGBTI community. People have walked up to me and spat in my face when I was doing my grocery shopping and accused me of being an agent of foreigners and promoting foreign interests.

You don't have to be found in same-sex conduct; just being suspected can have dire consequences. It is worse for trans individuals. They face the harshest response from society. Most of the cases of evictions and cases of more violence have been against trans individuals. Because of the way they dress and because of the transition they have gone through—people have known you as a man and you have now transitioned into a woman or vice versa—these individuals face the harshest attacks in our society.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dhillon.

Now I invite Mr. Davies to take the floor for five minutes, please.

Fred Davies (Niagara South, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to commend everybody who has appeared here today. Your courage and your stories are moving to all of us. As a new member of Parliament, this is a new experience for me, to be able to engage with people from around the world who have a story to share. Canada needs to hear these stories and recognize the issues that you face.

I have to say that I'm not very encouraged today. I'm encouraged that your stories have been made public, but I'm not very encouraged about what I'm hearing is going on in East Africa. Mr. Shire said that 98% of the population is homophobic. Government, police and social groups are all buying into the homophobia and promoting it.

I'm wondering, Mr. Kanyamu, if you could—or anybody, actually.... You've spoken about Uganda, South Sudan and Kenya, but in the rest of Africa, which is obviously a big continent, if you're moving west, are the same trends happening in other countries?

• (1700)

Paul Kanyamu: I think in Africa we have only South Africa that is somewhat LGBTQ-friendly. It's only South Africa, if I recall well, and South Africa is way too far from Uganda and other neighbouring countries in the east. I don't think one will even find time to run to South Africa to seek safety. You have to cross something like eight countries to go there, and of course, you have to meet challenges along the way, and violence.

Fred Davies: I'm interested in—

Yes, go ahead, Mr. Wamala.

Dennis Wamala: I'll just add to what Paul was saying.

The origin of this anti-gay rhetoric is the same foundation. It's the same people who are spreading this. If you read the laws that are going up in Uganda, Kenya, Ghana and all these countries, the wording is the same. It's the same group who are just sharing the same material all over the place. It's the same movement moving from one country to another. It's just like a snowball effect.

Fred Davies: For example, Tanzania might have the same sort of groundswell of homophobia.

Dennis Wamala: It already does.

Fred Davies: It does.

Mr. Kanyamu, you escaped to a refugee camp and found your way to Canada. Do the camps attract a disproportionate number of gay people because they are perceived to be zones of greater safety? If so, how many are currently sitting in camps now who are at risk? Do you have any data on that? Is it disproportionate to other refugees around the world? This is a unique situation in Africa. I'm curious to know the number of people who could possibly be rescued.

Paul Kanyamu: When I left Uganda, I went to Kenya. The Kenyan government has an encampment policy whereby all refugees are supposed to live in the camp, with the exception of a very small percentage who can support themselves and are allowed to reside in the urban area. For LGBTQ persons, they're all supposed to be in the camp.

Fred Davies: You would agree, then, that there is a greater proportion of LGBTQ individuals who are in camps in Kenya now. Obviously, they're at risk for violence.

Of the number of people that you are aware of, how many have found their way out? We know the numbers coming to Canada, but are there any other countries that are providing safe passage for these individuals?

Paul Kanyamu: For Kenya, in the Kakuma refugee camp in particular, we have around 150 LGBTQ persons, according to some sources on the ground, refugees themselves. Then in the Gorom settlement camp in South Sudan, I know of around 650 LGBTQ persons. These people in South Sudan, they all left Kenya because Kenya was the first country of asylum. Then they had to run away from Kenya because of too much homophobia. They went to South

Sudan. In South Sudan, there are around 650 and, in Kenya at the Kakuma camp, there are about 150 of them.

Fred Davies: Since you—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Davies. Your time is over.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have the floor for five minutes.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you Mr. Chair.

Ms. Al-Khatib, I will give you the floor, since you seemed to want to respond.

[*English*]

Rabab Al-Khatib: Thank you so much.

I just want to add on to the numbers. What we know for LGBTQ Ugandans outside of Uganda is that, until today, only in 2025, we have more than 300 requests for support. From Kenya, the number is 162, and there are 128 from South Sudan, just to be clearer on the numbers.

Of course, these people do not have a clear path to resettlement and protection.

• (1705)

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I imagine that this is an urgent matter, given what's happening in the areas where these people are.

[*English*]

Rabab Al-Khatib: Exactly, 100%. These are LGBTQ people in a lot of distress in two camps, in South Sudan and in Kenya, where they have no access to registration and no access to health care. They are under constant attack. Their shelters are being burned. They don't have the right to work. They don't have the right to even express their sexual orientation and gender identity. Yes, they are the top priority cases at risk who need to be resettled and who need, for sure, a path to protection.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: We've been talking a lot about the people who need help to get out of those areas and that we need to bring them to Canada or other safe countries as quickly as possible.

I imagine that, when they arrive here, after experiencing this trauma, they receive some form of psychological support. We can't just let them down once they get here. They have experienced a type of stress that no one here can understand.

What do you think, Ms. Al-Khatib and Mr. Kanyamu?

Rabab Al-Khatib: Are you asking me?

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Yes, but I'd like Mr. Kanyamu to answer as well.

Rabab Al-Khatib: Okay.

[English]

Yes, of course. I think this is a very important point. The path to protection is not only resettlement. It's not only to move a person from danger to Canada, where we know it's safe. The ultimate goal is that Canada becomes their home. For Canada to become their home, there should be a way to support folks who are being resettled through the journey of resettlement.

Rainbow Railroad already has started working on community support groups, for example, in Canada. One of the recommendations that we always try to pass and voice to the Canadian government is that resettlement organizations in Canada need to be more focused and need to have the expertise to work with resettled LGBTQI+ people who came from places where there was a lot of trauma or where they have been persecuted, which we don't see right now. We are also trying to fill in the gaps through the community support groups that we have.

Definitely, there's a big need to work on the resettlement component, because it's not enough to just move people to Canada. You need to help them integrate and you need to have the expertise to deal with people who have been under that kind of trauma.

Paul Kanyamu: As a supplement to Rabab's point, we have organizations here on Vancouver Island such as Reaching Out Assisting Refugees. Such organizations help to receive refugees. They provide support right from the time a refugee is approved for sponsorship. They provide post-arrival support, financial support and psychosocial services and other services when a refugee arrives here. When a refugee arrives in Canada, he or she is given support for one full year.

The government could maybe help to support these grassroots organizations in capacity building, through financial help, because most of the time the funds are from Canadians themselves, from volunteers. We form a group of 10 people to sponsor someone from Afghanistan or from Kenya. Maybe the government could help by supporting these grassroots organizations on the ground.

• (1710)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[English]

Madame Vandenbeld, you have the floor for five minutes.

Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you to all of you for your testimony today.

Paul, you told a story that is quite compelling and terrible, but I think it will certainly help inform this committee and others in terms of recommendations going forward.

You've spoken about asylum. You've spoken about the need to make it faster to bring people out of these camps because of the impossible choice between the persecution at home in Uganda or the persecution that happens in the camps.

I think it was you, or perhaps Dennis, who mentioned a rapid response mechanism. I'd be very curious to hear more about what that would look like. I know that in the past this committee has recom-

mended a human rights defenders stream of asylum or immigration. I wonder what that rapid response would look like.

I open that to anybody who wants to answer.

Paul Kanyamu: I'll start.

First, these refugees are registered with UNHCR. UNHCR works directly with the Government of Canada and other resettlement countries. I'm talking about Canada in particular in this case. In South Sudan, as an example, refugees can be referred for resettlement. They can be given priority.

By the way, I didn't mention to this committee that most of these refugees in South Sudan were under the U.S. refugee admissions program. When the new administration came in, all the resettlement spots were stalled. They were instead channelled back and told, no, we can no longer take you because of the new policies at hand. This included those who had finished medicals, security screening and all that stuff.

What the committee could do, or what I would ask the committee to do, is liaise with the Canadian offices abroad, such as the embassies, to connect with UNHCR and identify these LGBTQIA+ persons. There are not many. There are around 650 in South Sudan and around 150 in Kenya, as far as I know. They could refer these cases for resettlement.

Second, similar to this issue, there are refugees who are privately sponsored by Canadians on the ground who may be sponsoring somebody out there. The cases of those people who are sponsored could be expedited, because they already have the support on the ground. We are ready to receive these people. It's only that their cases are not flowing smoothly.

Anita Vandenbeld: I'm limited for time, and I do want to go to Nicholas, Hassan and the Rainbow Railroad, of course, to talk about the importance of global networks. I'm thinking of global networks of support for human rights defenders that bring together human rights defenders from around the world to build support but also to share best practices and experiences on what works and build global coalitions. I know that the Rainbow Railroad is one such coalition.

I'd like to also quickly go to Hassan and Nicholas about things like the World Movement for Democracy and what that has meant to the work you do and have done over the years.

Hassan Shire: Let me start.

Global networks for human rights defenders are now galvanizing the platforms where other human rights defenders are defending the rights of everyone, including the LGBTI, to find sanctuary and voice their voices. As you will recall, honourable member, when I was in Peru, I was chairing an entire panel of transgender women from Latin America and Africa. Everybody, including members of Parliament, testified to the violence and what's happening to transgender people, transgender people in academia and particularly women in the transgender community.

Right now, as I speak to you, the front line has galvanized operations that used to be hosted and funded by the United States government. The leadership has been taken by Lifeline, which has now been reinstated. The major contributors are governments other than the United States government. Other governments are now chipping in as it's forming.

I'm glad you have advocated for this program where human rights defenders, or a limited number of them, are being given a straight pathway to resettle in Canada. We know that a number of them in this program, as I was trying to imply here, were trained socio-economically. The moment they landed in Canada, they started the same work they were trained in to contribute to the local economy. The LGBTI community is no exception.

• (1715)

The Chair: Thank you.

I invite Madame Kronis to take the floor for five minutes, please.

Tamara Kronis: I really appreciate it.

I want to use the last bit of time I will have to give each of you a chance to make some suggestions about what Canada could do, not just for refugees here but also in Uganda, on the ground, to help move civil society there and alleviate the need. In our briefing notes for this session, all we have so far is a statement from Canada condemning the situation. That's in quite a stark relief to things we've done in other countries.

I'm wondering if you could each spend about 45 seconds sharing your insights on what we could do. This is particularly for those of you who have experience on the ground. What can Canada do to help make change in Uganda?

Dennis Wamala: Thank you so much, Tamara.

Like my colleagues Hassan and Mr. Opiyo have implied, it's about building a movement. The anti-LGBT rhetoric is being driven by a movement that has been built over time.

Canada already has the mechanism, and as a person who lived in Uganda, I worked with the missions in Canada in supporting our movement. It is something we need to strengthen, because when you strengthen the support of the actual movements on the ground—for example, the movement in Uganda was built on support from the feminist movement—and when you continue supporting the civil society organizations, which Canada has done before and just needs to strengthen, it builds a movement, and that movement changes the 98% that Hassan mentioned and starts bringing it down.

Coupled with all the other legal things we are doing, we need to support the civil society organizations. That is how we change the rhetoric. That's how we change the perceptions in the country.

Nicholas Opiyo: Besides investing in the local civil society groups, we have to think about a thematic approach to this issue in the sense that human rights are what we are dealing with. Some people think that if you mention LGBTI rights, you're asking about a new form of rights. We are talking about human rights, so support the human rights movement with a very clear demand for inclusion of LGBTI rights in Uganda.

Second, there is a void in the global voices around this issue. The U.S. has withdrawn. Canada has the moral voice and the power to lead the campaign globally to shine a light on what's happening in Uganda. We've had a leader in power for 40 years who's retaining power by means of repression. That repression is what creates a migration crisis and sends people out of our country and into yours. Many of these people who are in your country would like to go back to their country, but they cannot do so because of the political situation in Uganda.

Address that and become the voice for Uganda, for what's happening in the region: in Tanzania, in South Sudan and in Sudan. Canada can be that voice because it has the moral authority, the clarity of purpose and the commitment to defend democratic values across the world.

Tamara Kronis: Is there anything you think we can do to help relieve some of the pressure in the camps?

• (1720)

Paul Kanyamu: Yes, but before I answer that, I'll go to your first question, Tamara.

In Canada, as a great humanitarian country, I understand we champion humanitarian values. Canada gives Uganda more than \$2 million in aid. Can there be a pause and a renegotiation with the government? “We see such things are happening, and there are a lot of human rights violations. In order to continue with the aid, we would like this and this to be done.” I don't know if that is practical, but that's just my suggestion.

Then, to your point, Tamara, about relieving the camps, yes, it's a matter of engaging with the host governments, like the government of South Sudan, and UNHCR to track and expedite the resettlement cases of these people so that it can be solved. The longer they stay there, the more they're going to get attacked, and some of them have been killed so far. It's really so tragic.

Tamara Kronis: It certainly is.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, the floor is yours.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you Mr. Chair.

I believe this will be the last intervention for each witness, so I'm going to give each of them one minute. They can tell us something that hasn't been said or highlight something that has already been said.

I'd like Mr. Shire to speak first, followed by Mr. Opiyo, a representative of the Rainbow Railroad and, lastly, Mr. Kanyamu.

[*English*]

Hassan Shire: Thank you, Chair, for giving me this opportunity.

I'm sorry that I can only really speak about this for one minute.

The one thing I want to emphasize is that the numbers Paul and others spoke about are outside Uganda and are not the majority of the people who live in Uganda who are members of the LGBTI community.

My recommendation is to let us build the resilience of the artists Mr. Opiyo has spoken about who have paths, who have skills, who can produce plays, who have salons and who are fashion designers. Let us train those young people like any other Ugandans and give them start-up capital to remain dignified in their own country and become contributing persons with dignity in their country.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you very much.

Mr. Opiyo, the floor is yours.

[*English*]

Nicholas Opiyo: I want to thank you for the opportunity and for your interest in continuing to support the Ugandan LGBTI and human rights movement.

I do not have much to say in conclusion, but just to say thank you, and we look forward to hearing back from you soon.

Dennis Wamala: Thank you so much.

I would like to reiterate what my colleagues have said before. We need to make it very difficult and expensive for anti-LGBT rhetoric.

A lot of the rhetoric in East Africa and Africa comes from very many evangelicals in North America. We need to find a way of showing them that the world is watching and that there are consequences for exporting such hate, because it propagates the already negative attitudes within the country. Therefore, we need to make it very difficult and to show people that there might be consequences for spreading this hate.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Mr. Kanyamu, you have the last word today. I'm giving you free rein.

[*English*]

Paul Kanyamu: Thank you so much.

I would like to thank this committee for inviting us to this important session. It really means a lot. To the Canadian government, we are very proud. Thank you so much for showing the world that, yes, we still have people of great value and morals who care about others.

I have nothing much more to say. I'm just looking forward to hearing from you the next time.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I think I have some time left. Ms. Al-Khatib, would you like to add anything?

[*English*]

Rabab Al-Khatib: I'll be super brief.

Just on the question of what we can do to help Ugandans in Uganda, I would say lean into the partners, the civil society organizations.

At Rainbow Railroad, we have supported more than 15 organizations so far. We know that the best way is to let the organizations on the ground, the community itself, decide what it needs. We need to communicate with them. We need to support them, mainly financially, especially after the big cuts that we are seeing around the world. That's number one.

Number two is resettlement, resettlement, resettlement. I would say, regarding the spots, that we need to capitalize on what we have as partnership and help resettle and find protection pathways for at-risk LGBTQI+ from Uganda.

• (1725)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Al-Khatib.

Personally and on behalf of the committee, all members, staff and interpreters, I would like to thank you all for your presence here and your testimony on the situation of the members of the LGBTQI+ community. Your presence, your explanations and your answers to the questions of the committee gave us a clear-cut idea about what's going on. Thank you for that and your presence here. It is profoundly appreciated.

Next week, there will be 30 minutes of committee business following the meeting on internally and externally displaced people across the world. We will be discussing drafting instructions for the report on the human rights situation in Sudan and scheduling the next few months of subcommittee work following the winter break. Please come with new ideas for studies. If there is anything to distribute, please send it to the clerk in advance of the meeting.

Now, is it the will of the committee to adjourn the meeting?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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