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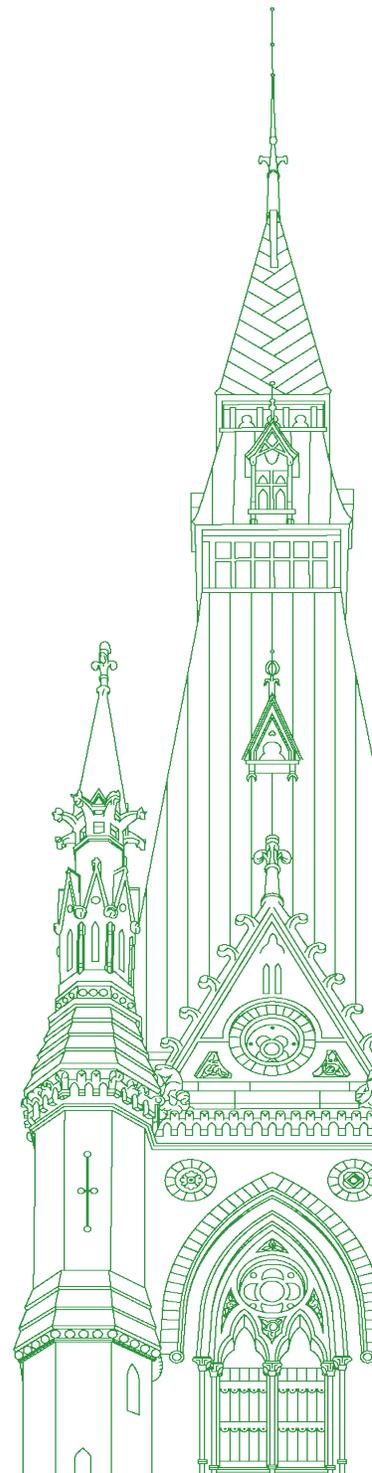
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Chair: Fayçal El-Khoury

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• (1545)

[*Translation*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 12 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) and the motion adopted by the subcommittee on Tuesday, October 28, 2025, the subcommittee is meeting on its study of internally and externally displaced people across the world.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending 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.

[*Translation*]

I would now like to welcome our first witness, David Smolansky,
[*English*]

senior adviser to Nobel Peace Prize laureate María Corina Machado, by video conference. I would like to mention to the committee that Mr. Smolansky did not go through the process of testing, but there seems to be no flag from interpretation, so we can welcome him.

We'd also like to welcome Dr. Einat Wilf, author and teacher of Zionism, by video conference. From Climate Refugees, we have Amali Tower, founder and executive director, by video conference. From Conflict and Resilience Research Institute Canada, we have Dr. Kawser Ahmed, executive director and adjunct professor, by video conference. From International Organization for Migration, we have Anne Kathrin Schaefer, deputy director, department of humanitarian response and recovery. From the observatory on interna-

tional migration, refugees, stateless persons and asylum, we have Ndeye Dieynaba Ndiaye, founder and professor of law.

Welcome to you all.

I would like to give each of you five minutes for your introduction. I will insist that you please try to respect the time, due to the number of witnesses.

I would like to invite Mr. David Smolansky to take the floor for five minutes, please.

The floor is yours.

• (1550)

David Smolansky (Senior Adviser to Nobel Peace Prize Laureate María Corina Machado, As an Individual): Thank you, honourable Chair and distinguished members of the subcommittee. It is an honour to be invited to the Parliament of Canada to testify about internally and externally displaced people around the world.

According to the United Nations, approximately 123 million people have been forcibly displaced. From South Sudan to Haiti, we witness people fleeing their villages, towns, cities and nations every year due to war, repression and natural disasters. In my case, I come before you as a witness to what is now the largest migration and refugee outflow in the world—that of Venezuela.

The United Nations estimates that nearly eight million Venezuelans have been forced to flee our homeland. Civil society organizations suggest that the number may be closer to nine million. If Venezuelan migrants made up a country, the country would be roughly the size of Portugal, or twice the size of Panama and Croatia. This outflow has not been caused by war or a natural disaster. It is the direct result of a brutal dictatorship responsible, over the past decade, for at least 20,000 arbitrary detentions, 18,000 extrajudicial killings and more than 2,000 documented cases of torture.

Venezuelans have fled a country where access to food, medicine and basic goods has collapsed. An estimated 7.3 million people in my country cannot eat three times a day. The humanitarian conditions can be compared with those of such nations as the Democratic Republic of Congo or Yemen. Between 2022 and 2024, more than 670,000 Venezuelans crossed the Darién Gap in Panama, a 10-day journey through extreme weather, with criminal groups and human traffickers there. Millions have walked from Venezuela's border with Colombia to Ecuador, Peru and Chile. To put this into Canadian perspective, the distance is comparable to walking from Vancouver to Toronto. How severe must conditions be for thousands of mothers to walk that distance carrying their children in their arms? How desperate must a population be to cross nearly an entire continent simply to survive?

The lesson Venezuela teaches the world is clear: War and natural disasters are not the only drivers of mass displacement. When democracy collapses, when liberties are stripped away and when access to justice disappears, a country can lose its population at levels greater than those caused by armed conflicts or earthquakes. Today, approximately 2.3 million people have fled South Sudan. Nearly seven million have fled Ukraine since Russia's invasion. A similar number fled Syria during its civil war. More Venezuelans have fled their country than Syrians or Ukrainians.

The regional impact has been enormous. The vast majority of Venezuelan migrants have been received by Latin American countries, which have shown remarkable generosity. However, infrastructure, public services, health care and education systems are under strain. This is the largest migration outflow in Latin American history, and its consequences are still unfolding. Moreover, the regime that relies on repression and illicit economic activities to remain in power has allowed organized criminal groups to expand beyond our borders. One example is Tren de Aragua, which has been designated as a terrorist entity in Canada. This organization has expanded its operation in at least nine countries across the Americas, engaging in murder, extortion and human smuggling.

Let me be absolutely clear: The vast majority of Venezuelan migrants are honest, hard-working people. We are the first to demand that members of this criminal organization and others face justice. These groups were also a source of insecurity that forced many Venezuelans to flee. It is essential not to generalize. A few criminals must not overshadow the sacrifice and dignity of millions.

I would also like to address the current situation in Venezuela. Since the July 28, 2024, presidential elections, at least 600,000 additional Venezuelans have fled the country, for the largest outflow directly linked to political repression. Poll watchers, volunteers and opposition members were threatened and persecuted. As the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has stated, Venezuelans are living under a state of terrorism.

- (1555)

The Chair: Could you wrap it up, please? The time is almost up.

David Smolansky: Despite this, hope has returned for millions of Venezuelans under the leadership of President-elect Edmundo González and Nobel Peace Prize laureate María Corina Machado. Many feel renewed optimism following the January 3 military op-

eration in Venezuela that ended with the capture of Nicolás Maduro and Cilia Flores.

I will end with this: Protection remains essential. The Speaker of the legitimate National Assembly, Jorge Rodríguez, has stated that Venezuelans under asylum or refugee status would not qualify for the regime's so-called amnesty. The international community will understand that the only sustainable way to stop forced displacement from Venezuela and encourage millions to go back is the full restoration of democracy and freedom.

Thank you so much for this opportunity.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now I'd like to invite Dr. Einat Wilf to take the floor for five minutes, please.

The floor is yours.

Einat Wilf (Author and Teacher of Zionism, As an Individual): Thank you so much, and thank you for this opportunity to testify before the subcommittee.

What I would like to do today is raise a very strong red flag at the possibility of mass displacement of Jews around the world as a result of rising anti-Zionism. One thing we know—I'm sure you know the history going back to the Israelites, the Hebrews and the Judeans—is that we have a long history of mass displacement of the Jewish people that comes not from war, not from problems of starvation, but from ideology. The case of Jewish displacement frequently follows ideology.

Since World War II, which is when most people know, the largest displacement of Jews happened in the Arab world. Nearly one million Jews were forced out of Arab countries from Morocco to Afghanistan, ending the existence of Jewish communities that predated the Arab and Islamic conquests of the Levant and North Africa. There has been a mass displacement of Jews from Iran with the rise of the Islamic Republic. There has been a mass displacement of Jews from the Soviet Union and from eastern Europe.

All of these displacements have taken place under the ideology of anti-Zionism. All of these places have claimed, in real time, to have nothing against Jews and to only be against Zionists, but that was merely the respectable, updated way to push out Jews once anti-Semitism, in its 19th- and 20th-century racialized form, had been discredited by the Holocaust and World War II. The replacement, created by the Soviet Union after World War II, has allowed the Arab world, Iran, the Soviet Union and eastern Europe to displace en masse millions of Jews; to strip them of their dignity, their homes and their assets; and essentially to engage in one of the lesser-known en masse acts of ethnic cleansing of Jews after World War II from the Arab world, the Islamic world and the Soviet Union and eastern Europe.

We are now seeing the rise of anti-Zionism and its insertion into the west. We see a rise in Canada, in the U.S., in Europe and in Australia. I want to raise the red flag to say the following: Everywhere in the world—you will find no exception—wherever anti-Zionism was allowed to become a dominant, respectable institutional ideology, two things happened. The first is that the environment turned hostile to Jewish life, both individually and collectively, even as those countries claimed—as Canada claims today—to love Jews and have nothing against Jews, only against Zionists. What happened next is that the Jews were gone because the playbook everywhere in the world—from the Arab world to Iran, the Soviet Union and eastern Europe—was that first they claimed to have nothing against Jews, but they demonized and criminalized Zionism, which I know Canada is now planning to do under the guise of anti-Palestinian racism. Wherever Zionism was demonized and criminalized, ultimately, Jewish life became impossible and Jews had to flee.

I'm using this testimony to take the long history of Jewish displacement and raise the flag that if you allow anti-Zionism to become institutionalized, legislated and respectable in Canada, your Jewish community will be gone.

- (1600)

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Wilf.

Now I would like to invite Madame Amali Tower to take the floor for five minutes, please.

Amali Tower (Founder and Executive Director, Climate Refugees): Thank you, Chair.

Good afternoon and thank you to the committee for this kind invitation.

Last year, 117 million people globally were displaced. This year, that number is expected to rise by 6.7 million, to 130 million people displaced due to conflict, climate change, declining funding and major policy shifts.

This is forecast amidst declining foreign assistance. More than 30% of humanitarian funding has disappeared over the past two years. This has severely impacted migration, asylum and refugee protection systems in refugee host countries. Overseas development assistance is being reduced by \$62 billion this year.

We generally think of human displacement as happening to people far from our borders. At a time when global displacement and

antimigration policies are on the rise, Canada can take measures to help people in its immediate vicinity right now.

When the Taliban regained control of Afghanistan in 2021, I was called to help evacuate thousands of Afghans. Now, resettled Afghan refugees in the United States are being targeted for removal. Canada can protect Afghan refugees, a majority of whom supported Canada and NATO-led forces, through bypassing safe third country agreements to allow Afghans in U.S. detention or facing removal to enter Canada. Canada can expand special immigration measures for Afghan refugees, especially by resuming its visionary private sponsorship program.

Instead of border fortresses, Canada can fund humane and knowledgeable border programs based on international legal obligations to welcome asylum seekers fleeing U.S. deportation. Canada can be a better partner to Central and South American countries whose citizens are on the move but cannot stay in the U.S. To this end, if passed, Canada's Bill C-12 would be detrimental to refugee protection, leaving refugees and asylum seekers even more vulnerable to the U.S. immigration system.

Since my first time working in Palestine, I have wondered how much more the world expects Palestinian refugees to survive. As recommended locally, Canada should reopen and transform the temporary resident visa program for Gaza. Canada can also open its doors to refugee and displaced students in Gaza with scholarship initiatives. Canada's resumption of aid to UNRWA is welcomed, as is the leadership shown. More is needed, though, as is pushing back against Israel's ban of 37 aid agencies in Gaza.

Conflicts are at record highs, and Gaza and Sudan exemplify the human toll. More than 12 million people have been displaced from Sudan. Globally, 2.5 million refugees will need resettlement this year. I have been privileged to witness the intergenerational gift that resettlement is, not just for refugees but for receiving countries as well. Instead of lowering immigration targets this year, Canada should redouble its refugee admissions targets. Canada must also introduce new mobility pathways for climate-displaced people.

The Center for Climate and Security—I serve on its advisory board in D.C.—notes that over 40% of NATO member states, including Canada, identify climate-driven migration as a key concern in their national security strategies. Since 2016, there have been 250 million people internally displaced by climate-related disasters. Despite this, protections are scant, and less than 1% of climate finance goes to fund adaptation in conflict and climate-vulnerable countries; the outlook for loss and damage finance is even worse.

Canada plans to double current military spending to \$81 billion while cutting \$2.7 billion in foreign assistance. Instead of slashing budgets, Canada must redouble its foreign assistance and lead partners to do the same.

In Davos last month, Prime Minister Mark Carney said, “Collective investments in resilience are cheaper than everyone building their own fortresses”, and I couldn't agree more.

Canada sits on the board of the fund for responding to loss and damage at the UNFCCC and can champion resilience by supporting grants-based, rapid, community-access climate finance to populations increasingly displaced by climate change. Canada, which has championed participation, must now push for the inclusion of refugees, migrants and displaced persons to meaningfully participate in the UNFCCC's consultative forums and ensure that the fund is responsive to frontline communities. Canada must scale its own pledge of \$16 million, which is far below its obligations as a historic carbon emitter, and mobilize resources through innovative taxes and levies.

Many are also fighting for their right to stay. I interviewed dozens from such communities in Guatemala's dry corridor region and in Kenya, who told me their deepest wish is to be able to afford a life at home, which climate change and rising inequality are making impossible. Scaling and disbursing public climate finance now is integral to decreasing displacement.

● (1605)

Canada has an opportunity to fill the U.S. void in international co-operation and lead other countries to follow suit. Long known for its welcoming policies and pioneering initiatives, Canada can step into a bigger leadership position internationally when it comes to addressing displacement and shaping climate policy. That time is now.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Tower.

I would now invite Dr. Kawser Ahmed to take the floor for five minutes, please.

Kawser Ahmed (Executive Director, Conflict and Resilience Research Institute Canada): Mr. Chair and honourable members of the committee, thank you very much for inviting me to appear before you today.

I teach at the University of Winnipeg and lead the Conflict and Resilience Research Institute Canada.

Since 2017, we have researched and engaged in policy work on the Rohingya forced displacement in Myanmar and Bangladesh. We are currently implementing a Global Affairs Canada-funded project on charting a path to lasting peace in Myanmar, under Indo-Pacific strategy programming.

Our scholarship and practice focus on South and Southeast Asia, including both internally and externally displaced persons, as well as cross-border refugees. Across contexts, our work aligns with a consistent finding, which is that forced displacement is driven primarily by political unrest with escalation into armed conflict, often compounded by military rule, repression and systemic exclusion.

Policy responses to mitigate displacement tend to follow five pathways: bilateral arrangements, multilateral coordination, sanctions and other levers, United Nations and regional mediation, and justice and accountability. Each can matter, but each takes time. However, the danger is protracted displacement, in which the status quo hardens, families languish in camps and return becomes less feasible with each passing year.

Third country resettlement remains vital for protection, especially for the most vulnerable, but it cannot resolve mass displacement. It cannot substitute for addressing political drivers that cause the displacement in the first place.

Our current work, therefore, emphasizes that durable solutions require addressing at least one root cause rather than merely managing the symptom. In the Myanmar conflict, which we believe is replicable in other cases, we advanced a five-pronged approach.

First, we identify credible alternatives to indefinite war by mapping the incentives that keep parties fighting and the conditions that could move them toward a peace deal.

Second, we outline a reconstruction pathway. Conflict destroys institutions and infrastructure. Without an actionable recovery plan, peace becomes a slogan rather than a viable choice.

Third, we strengthen regional engagement, particularly through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN. Canada is an ASEAN dialogue partner, and the ASEAN-Canada strategic partnership can and will create opportunities to support regional conflict diplomacy and implement peace intervention.

Fourth, we build coalitions of like-minded civil society groups to advocate for conflict resolution in the region and co-create channels of influence.

Fifth, we urge investment in capacity building, with help from diaspora communities, among displaced people languishing in the camps—where they are now—and link it with the reconstruction pathway, so that when return is possible, it is sustainable.

There is then the concept of humanitarian diplomacy, which I'm a big advocate of. It connects protection to development and peace-building, reduces long-term dependency and can create space for dialogue for peace.

Finally, what can we do as a country?

First, Canada can further engage its consulates and diplomatic presence in sustained, practical capacity building. I'm not saying this is not happening. However, my observation is that these things are occurring piecemeal and not within a broader Canadian approach to dealing with forced displacements and sustainable capacity building for the displaced.

Second, we suggest that token resettlement is not a realistic long-term primary solution. Thus, Canada should consider building a framework of humanitarian diplomacy with willing partners like Qatar. The greatest justice you can give to the displaced is a door back to where they belong. Every return is thus a defeat for those who drove them out.

Third, Canada should intensify engagement with regional powers in the ASEAN. In that effort, Canada should also build on working channels in the Canada-China relationship through issue-based engagement on humanitarian access and reconstruction.

Fourth, Canada can leverage its civil society and research ecosystem as a peace asset. The Oslo back channel and the Aceh peace process show how sustained non-governmental facilitation can open channels, build trust and support peace implementation.

Mr. Chair, my core message is this: Humanitarian assistance is essential, but it is not a substitute for a political and development strategy for internally and externally displaced persons, particularly in the case of the Rohingya.

- (1610)

If Canada wants fewer protracted crises and fewer generations stranded in limbo, our policy must match compassion with sustained conflict resolution capacity at the root of the conflict.

Thank you once again, and I welcome any further questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Kawser Ahmed.

I now invite Madame Anne Kathrin Schaefer to take the floor for five minutes, please.

Anne Kathrin Schaefer (Deputy Director, Department of Humanitarian Response and Recovery, International Organization for Migration): Chair, honourable members, thank you for the opportunity to appear here today.

The International Organization for Migration, IOM, is the United Nations system's agency dedicated to migration. We work closely with governments and partners worldwide to save lives, reduce vulnerabilities and support practical solutions for internally and externally displaced persons and the communities that host them. At the outset, allow me to note that IOM's intervention here today is provided on a voluntary basis.

Displacement today is both unprecedented in scale and changing in character. At the end of 2024, 83.4 million people were living in internal displacement across 117 countries; this is the highest level recorded. Nearly 45% of those displaced by conflict and violence were in just two countries: Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Displacement has become increasingly protracted. Across major crises, nearly half of internally displaced persons have remained displaced for more than five years, generating profound human, so-

cial and economic consequences for affected states and communities. Protracted displacement reshapes demographics, deepens socio-economic fragility and places sustained pressure on public services, often in regions that are already vulnerable. Evidence consistently shows that areas affected by internal displacement experience lower income levels, reduced educational attainment and shorter life expectancy. Children represent a growing share of displaced populations; this share increased from 28% in 2018 to 40% in 2024.

These trends highlight a critical reality. Solutions must be designed from the onset of a crisis and be grounded in the lived realities of displaced populations rather than being constrained by short-term emergency cycles.

Root causes of internal displacement are converging. Conflict and violence remain the primary drivers while climate- and disaster-related hazards increasingly act as risk multipliers. Most IDPs displaced by conflicts live in countries with high or very high climate vulnerability. Fragile governance, economic contraction and services collapse deepen the pressures that force people to move or that prevent them from rebuilding their lives. Understanding and addressing internal displacement fundamentally depend on robust and interoperable data systems to inform evidence-based interventions.

IOM's displacement tracking matrix, the DTM, represents the world's largest source of primary data on displacement. Active in more than 90 countries, it delivers thousands of assessments each year, tracking population movements, locations, vulnerabilities, access to services, housing conditions, protection risks and future intentions. This evidence base enables the global community to develop solutions that are tailored to needs, localized and focused on highest-needs populations—or, as presented in the “Global Humanitarian Overview”, hyper-prioritized populations.

Complementing this operational data, IOM's progress report and global profiles for internal displacements analyze displacement environments over time. For example, IOM's last report highlighted that a clear majority—approximately 60%—of internally displaced persons expressed the intention to remain and pursue solutions through local integration. However, they consistently faced barriers in doing so. These tools help identify the structural barriers to solutions, including inadequate housing, limited livelihood opportunities, lack of documentation and persistent safety constraints. Together, these systems enable governments and the United Nations to cost, sequence and monitor solutions and strategies, helping to shift displacement responses from reactive crisis management toward measurable, nationally led long-term solutions.

When national protection systems are overwhelmed and safe options within countries are limited, people cross borders in search of safety. External displacement—people crossing an international border in search of safety—remains a distinct yet interconnected phenomenon from internal displacement. Unlike IDPs, who remain under the authority and responsibility of their own government, externally displaced people require international protection frameworks, asylum systems and cross-border coordination. Resettlement remains one of the most durable and impactful solutions for people facing protracted displacement. It is a protection tool that offers safety and stability to refugees who cannot return home, and it contributes to global solidarity at a time when needs are rising.

It is also important to note that risks along major migratory routes are acute. Since 2014, IOM's missing migrants project has recorded more than 80,000 deaths and disappearances, with over three-quarters occurring in crisis-affected countries, underscoring how conflict, disasters and state fragility push people into dangerous cross-border movements.

• (1615)

The Chair: Could you wrap it up, please?

Anne Kathrin Schaefer: As a system, we strive to move beyond displacement management in order to focus on resources and solutions. With coherent and sustained support, countries can translate policy commitments into measurable outcomes, ensuring that solutions are safe, voluntary and dignified.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Schaefer.

I would now like to invite Madame Ndeye Dieynaba Ndiaye to take the floor.

[*Translation*]

Ndeye Dieynaba Ndiaye (Founder, Professor of Law, Observatory on International Migration, Refugees, Stateless Persons and Asylum): Mr. Chair, honourable members, good afternoon.

Thank you for inviting us today to present a small part of what we do at the Observatory on International Migration, Refugees, Stateless Persons and Asylum, or OMIRAS. It's a research group at the Université du Québec à Montréal, or UQAM.

Displacement of people is an integral part of humanity. Wars and conflicts, social inequalities, poverty, climate change, serious human rights violations, persecution, rape and violence against wom-

en, among other causes, are all things that push women, men and children onto migration routes. Only 3.6% of the world's population live in a country other than their country of origin. The migrant population accounts for 3.6% of the eight billion people in the world right now.

The cradle of humanity, Africa has recorded mass displacements of peoples who spread to other continents several million years ago. Migration is an ancestral practice that has taken many forms. In the west, the 19th century was marked by significant European emigration. There are a number of examples, including France and Ireland. I would also like to quote Paul Rivet, who told us that, in 1919, there were more than 5 million Italians abroad, including some in South America. In 1921, Canada also had a fairly split population. This included English, Irish, Scottish and French people. Asians have always experienced displacements to the west, especially during the Vietnam War and the First Indochina War, among others.

This is to say that migration is a social fact rooted in human traditions. Immigration is not a problem; it's a social fact. Currently, immigration is characterized by a kind of prioritization that places nationals from countries in the global south at the bottom. They have difficulty accessing immigration, unlike nationals from countries in the global north, who can move around the planet quite easily.

Our research group argues that Canada has one of the most organized and structured immigration systems in the world. A legal framework and institutions are the foundation of migration governance that is functional but, at the same time, unrealistic, because it considers the status of migrants to be static rather than evolving and dynamic. The non-linear nature of migration trajectories and the changes on the ground make it necessary to review our migration policy so that it can better address challenges and issues.

Temporary migration offers some short and medium-term solutions, but the solution would lie in gradual and long-term programming, that is, at least 10 years, that incorporates needs based on demographics, the economy and the provision of services that accompany integration into host societies.

Another example is the management of the irregular migration crisis. Before the 1990s, migration was circular and mostly legal, because it was facilitated by open and inclusive migration policies. A historical comparison offers conclusive results on the link between border closures and irregular immigration, corroborated in the 2018 Marrakesh compact, which guides states to develop safe and orderly migration to better contain irregular migration.

Canada, like the rest of the world, is facing migration movements. The many issues and challenges, compounded with controversy, sometimes discredit its immigration policy. The 2017 crisis, marked by migration flows mainly from the United States-Canada border, helped bring irregular migration back to the forefront of immigration policies. While health and social services were working at full capacity to provide solutions, the issue of the distribution of asylum seekers and migrants, financial issues related to their care and the issuance of work permits—in short, the division of responsibilities between the two levels of government—dominated not only the national stage, but also the international stage.

Canada has also had a policy of outsourcing migration and asylum management for a number of years. Pushed to the borders of the global south, migration flows are controlled and managed in third countries. As—

• (1620)

[English]

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

[Translation]

Ndeye Dieynaba Ndiaye: I'll finish very quickly.

With regard to this practice of outsourcing, there are examples in the document that show that Canada is intervening on African soil to prevent asylum seekers from arriving on Canadian soil.

I'm available to answer your questions, given that my colleague already addressed the issue of climate migration earlier.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now begin the first round of questions and answers.

I invite Mr. Majumdar to take the floor for seven minutes.

Shuvaloy Majumdar (Calgary Heritage, CPC): Thank you.

[English]

Thanks very much to our panellists, who have described the very difficult challenge of forced displacement and mass displacement.

Dr. Wilf, I'll start with you.

The story of communism and colonial uprisings over the last 70 years resulted in regimes for dealing with the question of refugees. Two principal regimes emerged, one of which is specialized for one group of people in the world. In your excellent testimony, you described how Jewish displacement over the same period resulted in the migration pressures that we now have to deal with today as anti-Zionism.

Let me ask you this, if I may, Dr. Wilf: In the context of the international regimes governing how refugees are dealt with and trying to bring resolution to disputes around ill-defined borders, what's your assessment of these two regimes, and how would you suggest the world focus on building long-term peace?

Einat Wilf: Essentially, after World War II, the world organized itself to deal with the massive refugee issues taking place. Broadly speaking—and this is still in many ways the case—many of the refugee situations, certainly after World War II, were the direct re-

sult of the fall of empires, of the end of various empires and colonial rules, and the rise of nation-states—when they were lucky. When they were less lucky, their borders were not drawn through a process of self-determination but through colonial drawing.

Through the creation of new borders, tens of millions of people became refugees. Generally, all of them got the message that even though they may have lost their homes and livelihoods, they were expected to move on and to settle wherever they have settled: in new places, in new countries and maybe in third countries. The main message to refugees, the one that actually created a world of peace, was that it's tough and it's tragic, but you move on.

The refugee convention was based on the ideas that people ultimately can and should be resettled, that there's no right for people to go back home as such and that what matters is individuals' finding protection in new countries rather than reclaiming a particular home. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees is essentially charged with carrying out that form, and this is the smart and successful form of refugee settlement.

The one that is basically bizarre was established by UNRWA, the UN Relief and Works Agency. It was not bizarre to begin with. It was established as a temporary mechanism—which it still is.

In order to settle both the Arab and Jewish refugees from the war of 1948, the Jewish refugees who were ethnically cleansed from Jerusalem, from Gaza, were settled by Israel, and the Jews who were ethnically cleansed from Judea and Samaria were settled by Israel, but the Arab refugees, who were supposed to be settled within 18 months by UNRWA—even though they got citizenship in the Kingdom of Jordan—essentially hijacked UNRWA and took it over to ensure that they are not settled. They understood, as was the message in the world, that settling refugees is the way that you end wars. They understood that if the Arab refugees from the war they had just waged, with the purpose they had declared to ensure the Jews had no sovereignty anywhere in the land...it meant they would have to admit they were defeated in the war in their goal of preventing Jewish statehood, and they would have to live with the idea of a Jewish state, which they found shameful and unacceptable.

UNRWA remains today, after 76 years, a temporary, hijacked organization that abides by its own invented rules, which are not the international regime's. As a result, you have a bizarre situation: People who have received Canadian citizenship, one of the most coveted citizenships in the world, remain registered as Palestinian refugees by UNRWA. For all other refugees in the world, if you receive Canadian citizenship, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees is thrilled to remove you from the refugee list and to list you as having found a home.

UNRWA has basically maintained itself as an organization for the purpose of perpetuating an endless intergenerational refugee registration, even though, by every international standard, they're not refugees. They're Jordanian citizens who were born in Jordan or they live in Gaza and under the Palestinian Authority—even by their own telling, they live in Palestine, and they can't be Palestinian refugees and live in Palestine.... Also, some of them, as I've said, have Canadian citizenship.

• (1625)

Therefore, UNRWA is a unique regime that actually hijacks and uses the word “refugees” for people who, by any proper international standard, are not refugees. They're citizens. Many of them are middle class or wealthy. They enjoy the citizenship of some of the best countries in the world, yet for political purposes, they've hijacked a refugee regime to continue a war against Jewish sovereignty.

• (1630)

Shuvaloy Majumdar: This might explain why the German chancellor recently decided to no longer fund UNRWA.

David Smolansky, my last question is for you in my very brief time. Secretary Rubio had testified to how regimes in Venezuela, Cuba and Iran used forced displacement of people to hide their operatives. Very briefly, can you please provide your views on how that is executed?

The Chair: Answer quickly, please, because the time is over.

David Smolansky: The most important information gathered after the military operation on January 3, which ended with the capture of Nicolás Maduro and Cilia Flores, proved that there are Cubans in Venezuela who are not exactly attending people who are suffering from the humanitarian crisis but protecting a dictator. During that operation, 32 agents from Cuba were killed.

We have also learned that over 26 years, Venezuela sent an estimated \$63 billion in oil in exchange for a sophisticated, repressive apparatus in which, according to victims and dissidents, Cuban agents have participated under—

The Chair: We have exceeded one minute. Please try to finish.

David Smolansky: Cuban agents have participated in oppression and persecution, and one of the root causes of having almost nine million Venezuelans flee the country is human rights violations and crimes against humanity.

The Chair: I would like to invite Mr. Zuberi to take the floor for seven minutes.

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

I want to thank the witnesses for being here today.

I was interested in what Dr. Ahmed said about dealing with long-term displacement and how we deal with the root causes of displacement and off-ramps.

If you want to add anything else to your testimony that you haven't already said, now's the time.

If you can, please be brief. I have a number of questions.

Kawser Ahmed: Thank you.

I intended to explain that our shortcut approach to dealing with mass displacement is a humanitarian approach, which is absolutely needed, and at some point it is possibly the only thing we can do.

However, we often neglect the idea of dealing with the conflict where it originated. The case study that we are now running, generously funded by Global Affairs Canada, is trying to find out exactly what model we can come up with. We are at the midway point of the project, and we have had a series of discussions in Bangladesh, the largest host of refugees in that part of the world. In April or May, we are going to the ASEAN region to shape up this model of intervention so that conflict can be addressed right in the root. In whatever dialogue we have had with Rohingyas, all of them wanted to go back. Most don't want to come to Canada.

Sameer Zuberi: I've seen that. I've visited Cox's Bazar and the Rohingya refugees, and it was exactly as you said: The Rohingya wanted to go back to their homeland. They wanted to return to their homeland, which is the hope of each and every refugee I've spoken with.

I'd like to turn to Ms. Schaefer. We're also talking about the Middle East and Palestinians in this testimony. I know that you're with a UN agency, which was born out of the horrors of the Holocaust and World War II. The UN system and the international law that was born out of such darkness is really what guides us today.

Can you explain to us the importance of UNRWA and how it plays a critical role in the lives of Palestinian refugees?

Anne Kathrin Schaefer: Just to clarify, IOM is the UN system's migration agency, but we are a member state-driven institution, with Canada as a member state. We're not a fund or a program and not directly....

Sameer Zuberi: I'm aware. I'm just asking you—somebody involved in the UN system—to elaborate a bit upon that.

• (1635)

Anne Kathrin Schaefer: While it is well understood that the overall mandate of UNRWA has greatly expanded over the last years, there is currently no alternative to UNRWA as an agency that provides continuous, life-saving assistance to people in continuous need. The humanitarian situation overall in OPT remains extraordinarily precarious. It's still very challenging to get life-saving assistance into the country and to the people in need. This is for the entire territory.

There is no alternative to UNRWA, currently, to support this. That's really the short answer.

Sameer Zuberi: I will also ask a follow-up.

We're talking about externally and internally displaced people. We just heard about the example of the Rohingya, who are externally displaced. Within Gaza, Palestinian people are being internally displaced.

To your knowledge, how many times have residents within Gaza been internally displaced? You might not have an exact answer, but it seems to have been multiple times. Is that correct?

Anne Kathrin Schaefer: That is correct.

Sameer Zuberi: Are you familiar with what's happening in the West Bank right now?

Anne Kathrin Schaefer: I am, to the extent that it's possible.

Sameer Zuberi: What's happening with respect to coercion of people and settler violence in the West Bank, and how is that impacting patterns of migration?

Anne Kathrin Schaefer: It is not possible for me to answer that. It's better to ask someone in a specialized agency.

Sameer Zuberi: I understand and respect that.

I want to go to an earlier witness.

Ms. Tower, you spoke about the program Canada has to welcome those who are going through the horror in Gaza, including students. The other program we have reunites loved ones who are now under such dire conditions.

Do you want to elaborate any further upon those two points—the students and the general program?

Amali Tower: I can tell you that I'm not a specialist in Canadian immigration.

I have done the vast majority of my resettlement work with UNHCR and the U.S. State Department's refugee program, which is currently being gutted. I looked at Canada and the hemispheric border, at partnerships and at the very strong, robust resettlement and immigration system Canada has always had. When I was at UNHCR—maybe you won't be at all surprised to hear this, sir—the number of refugees who asked to be resettled in Canada versus the United States.... It always broke my heart to tell them that I had many fewer slots and opportunities for people to be considered for Canada rather than the U.S. There are a number of reasons for this.

I'll add that, from my own experience, now is the time to create more opportunities for people who have no durable solutions, with the extent to which numbers of displaced people keep growing, the

continuous narrowing of political co-operation, the absolute dismantling of multilateralism and international law, and the financial architecture that underpins humanitarian and development assistance....

To this I'll add the climate crisis and how it underpins and inflames every single thing that we already know is driving displacement.

Sameer Zuberi: Thank you.

I'd like to ask this of Dr. Wilf: Do you believe Palestinian people exist?

Einat Wilf: Of course they do. That is a very odd question.

The tragedy, of course, is that the ideology they have constructed around themselves as a collective is an ideology of destruction that has, for a century, prioritized—

Sameer Zuberi: On the point about destruction, do you believe there's a humanitarian crisis happening in Gaza right now? I know you are a former Israeli elected official in the Knesset. Do you currently believe there's a humanitarian crisis in Gaza?

Einat Wilf: It's not a matter of belief. At the moment, there are—

• (1640)

Sameer Zuberi: Maybe my microphone wasn't working properly.

Is there a humanitarian crisis right now in Gaza, in your opinion?

Einat Wilf: Right now there are thousands of trucks entering Gaza every day and going to areas under enemy control. Ultimately, the question is—

Sameer Zuberi: I'm not sure if you heard. My mic, when it goes red, usually works properly.

Is there a humanitarian crisis in Gaza?

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Einat Wilf: At the moment, there are—

The Chair: Excuse me. There is a point of order.

Einat Wilf: —thousands of trucks entering Gaza every day—

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Einat Wilf: —above and beyond to—

The Chair: Madame, excuse me. We have a point of order. Can you stop for just a second, please?

Go ahead, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Mr. Chair, I just want us to stay polite with the witnesses. When someone insinuates that the microphone isn't working, I think that's a bit of an inappropriate joke. We're in a serious meeting. I think the member knows full well that his microphone is working. There are other ways to talk to witnesses.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: I believe everyone should go with the parliamentary rules and obligations. We're all doing that.

Continue, please, but give a quick answer because we are over time.

Einat Wilf: My answer is that the people of Gaza have invaded Israel, massacred people and launched a terrible, global war on the Jewish people. These are now the consequences of war.

I hope that the day they end the war against Jewish sovereignty is the day we can finally make peace.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Zuberi.

Sameer Zuberi: For the record, we all condemn what happened on October 7. Also, Canada's position is that there is a humanitarian crisis. It's sad that we didn't hear that today.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Zuberi.

We've exceeded the time by one minute and a [Technical difficulty—Editor] Madam Wilf enough time to answer.

[Translation]

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

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for being with us for this important study.

We're going to focus on the motion at hand, which is the motion on displaced persons.

Ms. Tower, you talked about the decline in international aid earlier, and you also talked about international law.

To what extent does international law adequately protect, or not adequately protect, people displaced for climate reasons, in particular?

[English]

Amali Tower: That's quite a complex question—with a complex answer, unfortunately.

Very clearly speaking, the 1951 refugee convention provides the framework for who can be protected by international law. That's specifically for people who have crossed an international border. Once you have crossed an international border and are seeking asylum, you have five bases under which you can do this: race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or your

political opinion. In 1951, when the convention was formed, it did not have the rigours of climate change driving it.

In 1967, when the convention was amended, it represented the breakdown of colonial pasts, the birth of new countries and a rise in intra-state and interstate conflict and violence. That's why originally, in 1951, the convention had only a geographic limitation and a temporal limitation. The geographic limitation was for people fleeing World War I and only Europeans fleeing—or people fleeing Europe, to be more accurate. The temporal limitation was that it shouldn't have existed this long, yet here we are. This is a representation of what I mentioned with regard to 1967 and many other crises.

That said, in 2020 and 2021, UNHCR—which has the mandate under the 1951 convention to protect people displaced across international boundaries—put out two legal considerations. These are two papers, if you will, stating that the convention can apply to people whose—very simply put, sir—protection, asylum needs and persecution on the basis of those five grounds are increased, furthered or worsened by the climate crisis.

A great example is if you are already marginalized on the basis of your ethnicity. You are an ethnic minority in your country. You don't have the political power for more democratic representation. You then face all kinds of marginality that affect your civil and political rights. You can say you're persecuted on this basis. When the climate crisis hits, and your place in the country sees less aid, for example—or is more acutely vulnerable to the climate crisis because you are politically marginalized and, therefore, economically deprived, etc.—that can put you at greater harm. Then you can talk about what we consider a nexus ground of why you are further, shall we say, persecuted. Those are my words. That's not really a legal or appropriate way to say it, but it's how I tend to hear people describe the climate crisis' effects on them based on their political, civil or ethnic marginalization.

I hope this answers the question. I'm happy to elaborate.

● (1645)

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Yes, you answered the question very well.

Are you saying—we're having a chat, as they say—that there's a possibility, or at least a proposal, to amend the convention to include the concept of climate refugees?

If that's the case, things might be a lot simpler. An amended convention would ensure additional protection or, in any case, institutionalize the protection of climate refugees at the international level.

I understand that that isn't easy to do, but do you think that would be a sensible proposal?

[English]

Amali Tower: First, I should say what I said in my opening statement, which is that based on what we know, the vast tendency in cases of people displaced as a result of the climate crisis is to be displaced within their own countries. Now, I want to caveat that with several things.

First, that is all we know, because we're quite limited in learning about people displaced by the climate crisis when they move across borders. There are a number of reasons for that as well. One very logical reason is that if you were to ask somebody whether the climate crisis was a factor, it might actually weaken their protection needs rather than strengthening them, because of what I already pointed out as the limitations of the convention. There's also another logical point, which is that not everybody who's displaced is even afforded the opportunity of such an in-depth interview.

Second, there are the border and visa regimes. The militarization of borders and the externalization of borders, which another colleague in the chamber tried to speak about, greatly limit how people can move. It's why you might also see that 70% to 80% of the globally displaced in the world live in neighbouring countries. It's because it is extremely difficult—it's impossible—and very expensive to move across international borders. While the global north shores up its borders and builds fortresses, it's not representative of the data: People are actually more on the move in the global south.

Last, I want to say that if we were to reopen the convention today to include a wider definition of climate, as you posed in your question, the sentiment of antimigration.... The fact is that although the vast majority of countries have acceded to the convention, we have a massive problem with upholding its obligations. If we were to open the convention today, I think you would have less collegiality and co-operation than you did in the early 1950s. Side-by-side bilateral and regional co-operation and partnerships—and there are some I can speak to if we have time—are a better step in the right direction right now.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Absolutely. Thank you.

It's commonly said and heard that climate refugees often come from countries that are much less responsible for the climate crisis than wealthier countries, for example.

You talked about Canada's role in your opening remarks. Maybe there's something else it could do. It's one of the biggest oil exporters in the world right now. The current government wants to develop more and more oil and gas pipeline projects and produce more and more oil.

Instead of investing heavily in fossil fuel development, shouldn't Canada turn to clean energy so that the climate crisis can be resolved one day and so that there are ultimately fewer and fewer climate refugees?

Isn't that the role of a country like Canada?

• (1650)

[English]

The Chair: Give a quick answer, please, because we've gone past the time by one minute.

Amali Tower: I couldn't agree more. The greatest intervention any country can make right now is ameliorating the climate crisis by mitigating and lowering its emissions. A handful of countries—we're talking about eight historic carbon emitters here—have the vast amount of responsibility to, quite honestly, save the planet and proceeding generations.

The biggest effort Canada can make is to change its global economy to one that isn't fossil fuel-dependent. That is the greatest sign of leadership and the greatest gift you can give the most marginalized people on the planet. That is a measure of climate justice.

It also needs to begin at home for first nations people, ethnic minorities and immigrants, who are bearing the brunt of the climate crisis, even in global north countries. Historically, Black, disenfranchised and indigenous people right here in the United States.... I'm talking to you from New York; the blizzard has not allowed me to be there in person. However, I can tell you that domestically and across borders, this is a massive crisis of justice.

The Chair: I will now invite Ms. Dhillon to take the floor for five minutes, please.

Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Thank you so much.

I will start with Mrs. Tower. You mentioned that, with everything going on in the world today, there has been a certain level of uprooting of aid organizations and international law. We are, disturbingly, seeing this increasingly happening. I think most people did not expect to see this kind of dismantling, especially with the need that we're seeing more and more. There is more and more displacement.

You mentioned that there are 117 million people displaced. We've heard previous testimony as well that this number is going to increase. Maybe you could start first with what you foresee in the future in terms of those who are displaced both internally and externally. What does the future look like for them?

Amali Tower: It's a really good question, because we often talk about things in terms of numbers and the data. We have enough science to tell us that the larger the data is, honestly, the more insensitive we become, because we're not able to actually comprehend it.

Let me tell you what it's like to work with refugees and forcibly displaced people for over 20 years. Well, before I talk about that, let me say this to you: We've talked a bit about resettlement; would it surprise you to know that you're not even considered for resettlement as a durable solution unless you have reached what's called at least 10 years of displacement? Can you imagine living in a refugee camp for 10 years? Less than 1% of the people in the world are even resettled. This number has diminished greatly since 2017. It's why I gave the example earlier about how many refugees wanted to go to Canada, but the slots were so few.

The need is massive. To what my other colleagues said, resettlement is a “durable solution”—that’s UNHCR’s words—but it is by no means the solution that we should be pursuing as nation-states. It is the obliteration of war. If we have so much money for militarism and for invading countries and subjugating people, we have a problem that is probably more a matter of the soul and the heart. We have to really look at how we respect fellow human beings. Why do we live in a multilateral system—and even international law—that governs how people can live and say that it’s okay to have an infrastructure and a system that allows people to spend the rest of their lives, and the foreseeable generations of their descendants, in exile from their home?

Last, I will say to you that I have yet to meet anybody who didn’t want to either stay in their country or return home to their country. This “global north” narrative of everybody wanting to come to our countries is a fallacy I have yet to experience.

Anju Dhillon: I thank you for saying that, because previous witnesses have also said there is nobody who wants to leave their home, their community, their loved ones and everything they’ve ever known their entire life. This is what we’re hearing over and over. It’s not by choice that they come or that they want to live in a refugee camp for 10 years.

I did not know that this was one of the strict conditions, as opposed to.... I think another witness said that the conditions are not strict enough. It doesn’t get any worse than this. You have to be a refugee or displaced for 10 years before any sort of concrete solution to your problem is considered. Entire families are suffering this way.

You also mentioned that invading and committing cruelty toward each other is more a problem of, I would say, morality from what you testified. Can you please talk to us about that and how women and children are affected by everything that is decided, whether it’s politically or through climate?

• (1655)

The Chair: I have to ask you for a quick answer. Time is up.

Amali Tower: I will just say to you that it’s at least 10 years before someone would even come up for resettlement. It’s multiple decades.

Women and children are by far the most affected and vulnerable. I find that if it weren’t for women, the meagre food aid and programs that are extended to refugees wouldn’t even have the weight of impact.

As for water in camps, girls go to fetch that. Think about that in the era of the climate crisis. I have met refugee girls, refugee women and people internally displaced who now have to choose between education and going to fetch water, because it takes seven hours to find water. You’re doing this under extreme heat. I’ve also met people in Kenya who have died and capsized under water holes that they continue to dig because they’ve run dry, and it’s almost always girls. When we talk about sustainable development goals and how we want to empower and educate women and girls, and eradicate illiteracy, we’re actually seeing setbacks. That’s what the climate crisis looks like for displaced people.

Thank you.

The Chair: Now I would like to invite Madame Kronis to take the floor for five minutes, please.

Tamara Kronis (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, CPC): Thank you so much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses for sharing your experiences and your perspectives on this important issue.

We have heard universally that displacement in the world is growing, but I’d like to pick it apart a bit in terms of its two main sources. Whether displacement is internal or external, these days, it’s a combination of the concept of forced displacement, which is the involuntary movement of people, and a more insidious form of displacement that has been occurring: strategic depopulation. In some cases, it is not clear who the actor is who is instigating it, but nonetheless, this tactic is often used indiscriminately to intentionally empty a geographic area for one reason or another.

Mr. Smolansky, I was hoping that you might expand a bit, because I think you hinted at this in your opening remarks, on the potential political impacts of this kind of displacement on things like voter eligibility or participation in key electoral districts. I suspect you’ve experienced this and have some knowledge of it happening in Venezuela.

David Smolansky: I can say regarding voting eligibility that, at least in the case of Venezuela, Venezuelan migrants and refugees have been illegally banned from voting. We have not been eligible to vote for more than a decade. It is estimated that approximately five million out of the nine million Venezuelan migrants and refugees could vote, because they are over 18 years old. That is what the constitution says, but we have not been able to do it. This is political discrimination. If I may add, we are suffering from a violation of our political rights—in this case, to vote—but at the same time, one of the tragedies that we are facing more and more is our right to our identity.

Millions of Venezuelans—it is difficult to estimate how many today—have an expired passport or don’t have a passport. They have restrictions on mobility. I don’t want to put this in the first person, but let me just share my story. I’ve been banned; I have a legal ban for life from public service in Venezuela. I was mayor, and I was illegally removed from office, forced to be in hiding for 35 days until I fled my country disguised as a priest and went to Brazil. I’ve been in exile for nine years, and my passport expired in 2019. There is no possibility to renew my passport, due to political reasons. However, I have the opportunity in front of this Parliament, in front of these witnesses, to share my story. This is the story of millions of Venezuelans. As I said in my remarks, if we want to have a true restoration of democracy and freedom in Venezuela, we need what started in July 2024 with the elections and with people voting in free and fair elections.

• (1700)

Tamara Kronis: I believe you were in Canada when the most recent episode in Venezuela's political history occurred. I'm wondering if you might comment on the role that disinformation played in your own experiences and in Venezuela's situation, as well as how it benefits actors in international relations who may not want the best outcome for countries in terms of democracy.

David Smolansky: The role of misinformation in Venezuela is huge. The regime has a very strong propaganda apparatus with support from nondemocratic external actors, such as China. There are different reports on how Chinese technology has helped Venezuela's regime with expansion of propaganda and, at the same time, with censorship.

For example, if Venezuelans in Venezuela don't have a VPN, they cannot access X, Twitter. They don't have access to independent media. They have to use a VPN. It has become a very important issue and a concerning one.

This started 16 years ago. When Twitter was starting, Hugo Chávez created what he called the communicational guerrilla, with thousands of users of X—now it's bigger, with trolls and bots—attacking and threatening anyone who thinks differently from the regime and doing so every single day.

By the way, I have to add something regarding expired passports. I have to be grateful to Canada, which is one of the few countries—

The Chair: Quickly, please.

David Smolansky: Canada is one of the few countries that allow expired Venezuelan passports.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Ms. Kronis.

[*Translation*]

I would like to invite Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe to take the floor for five minutes.

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

Ms. Schaefer, we're obviously talking about displaced persons. We often talk about externally displaced people. However, many populations are internally displaced in conflict zones.

What are the most significant operational challenges you face in meeting the needs of internally displaced persons where there's conflict?

[*English*]

Anne Kathrin Schaefer: Operational challenges to respond to people who are internally displaced in conflict situations are quite different from natural disasters, even though the two cannot really be delinked. In the majority of cases, especially today, as we were looking at with Sudan, Somalia or Mozambique, we have an overlap of both natural disasters and conflict drivers.

The majority of the challenges are either directly linked to political funding or availability of local opportunities. The Secretary-General has implemented something that's called the solutions agenda. Canada was a champion in 2025.

In the solutions agenda, the entire system, the humanitarian architecture, is trying to pivot towards so-called solutions for internal displacement, in which locally led, internationally supported policies are created in order to support local integration, to support communities and to absorb the number of people who have been displaced. In the countries that we're mostly dealing with—say, Sudan or the Democratic Republic of the Congo—we have a huge number of internally displaced who are not able to be absorbed. The local system is simply unable to deal with such a shock because it is a weak system to begin with.

The absence of long-term funding through, for example, the international development banks is one of the main continuous drivers. Of course, we need strong local governments that are able to lead development so that we don't have a situation in which we create aid dependency or in which an international team is dictating how local solutions should look. This should be a locally driven and a locally owned process that is primarily implemented by local governments and local communities.

• (1705)

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Given what's happening just about everywhere in wealthy countries, it's clear that international aid and development assistance are melting away like snow in the sun. This can also be seen with the Canadian government.

There's currently a fairly considerable reduction in international aid and development assistance. At the same time, there's much more investment in defence. There's a kind of connection there. A number of governments—not just the Canadian government—are reducing international aid but increasing their defence budgets. We have seen this in Europe. We have seen this with the United States Agency for International Development, or USAID. We have seen this in Japan, where there's almost nothing left.

At that point, we're inevitably headed in the wrong direction when it comes to displaced persons. In countries like Canada, we're going completely against the current of what we should be doing.

Right?

[*English*]

Anne Kathrin Schaefer: Yes, the international funding landscape for humanitarian assistance right now is dire. We don't have to sugar-coat that. This is the reality we live in. This is why it is more important to ensure that, when we talk about humanitarian assistance, we do not limit humanitarian assistance to life-saving assistance but that we pivot from the onset—we call it “solutions from the start”—towards systems in which we ensure that people can try to get empowered and self-reliant as quickly as possible without needing continuous assistance through humanitarian aid.

It's very simple. You can start with handing out a tent, or you can start by building a temporary shelter that can be transferred or converted into a more permanent shelter. If you start with a tent in a camp, it is much more difficult to pivot than if you start with local absorption capacities and the ability to build a shelter that can be transformed into something more permanent. This is how simply it starts.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you.

Ms. Ndiaye, you work in an important observatory on international migration, refugees, stateless persons and asylum.

Can you give us a specific example of an initiative that's working and that could serve as an international model?

Ndeye Dieynaba Ndiaye: Thank you for the question.

International law is currently struggling to address the issues, but there are indeed initiatives.

In terms of a model that works, I can give the example of the Norwegian model. It works. It's not perfect, but it works because it enables immigrants to settle through a gradual immigration policy. It also enables them to return to their country if they want to.

Canada is capable of doing that. However, as I mentioned earlier in my remarks, Canada should redefine its immigration policy based on the needs in the country, but especially based on what's happening around Canada. I'm thinking in particular of the crises, conflicts and wars that cause people to leave their country.

As part of our research projects, we're currently studying the cases of people who left Senegal and travelled through Nicaragua then Mexico and the United States to arrive in Canada.

There are other models in Europe that work.

I can also give the example of the Economic Community of West African States, or ECOWAS, zone in Africa. From a legal standpoint, there's free movement. People should be able to move around to settle, but the challenges on the ground are extremely complex. In our work, we often encourage Canada to develop partnerships with these populations to build wealth, while involving diasporas in the development of migration policies. We mobilize all existing theories, such as that of codevelopment. Diasporas currently provide three-quarters of development assistance.

There's a growing imbalance, then. Financial contributions are important. It's also important to mobilize expertise and skills.

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you. I let you speak for two more minutes, because it was the first time you were asked a question.

[*English*]

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

Welcome, Anita.

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

My first question is for Mr. Smolansky.

You said something that is quite telling. It was that, more so than war and more so than natural disaster, erosion of democracy is a driver of migration. That's particularly obvious in Venezuela, with a lack of civic space, a lack of freedom and a lack of rule of law. You also mentioned returning, and having those democratic freedoms is one of the conditions people look for before they're able to return. I wonder if you could elaborate specifically on how the lack of democracy drives people to leave and what the conditions for return would be in that regard.

David Smolansky: Thank you for the question.

For us, this has been our main lesson, especially because Venezuela, during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, was a country that received at least four million migrants. They were not only from Latin America but also from Europe, like my family.

As of right now, hundreds of Venezuelans are fleeing the country daily. Since the last presidential election, a bit more than 600,000 Venezuelans have fled. We estimate that this might be the largest outflow for political reasons. There is hope right now that democracy could be restored soon, but until it's restored, people do not feel safe to go back.

As I said in my remarks, there is a so-called amnesty law being discussed now in Venezuela. The president of the Venezuelan National Assembly, which is an illegitimate national assembly, said that Venezuelans who have requested asylum and refuge will not be included in this so-called amnesty law. Therefore, it is concerning that you will have almost one million Venezuelans who have already been recognized as refugees or who are waiting for a response for asylum as refugees. If they decide to go back because things may be getting better, they will not be protected. In that regard, their integrity could be at risk, and they could be illegally detained by this regime that, as I said, has illegally detained more than 20,000 innocents during the last decade.

Anita Vandenberg: Thank you very much.

Dr. Ahmed, you talked about something similar: conditions of return. Can you elaborate with regard to the Rohingya?

• (1715)

Kawser Ahmed: Thank you very much for the question.

Conditions of return for Rohingyas are incumbent on safety and dignity. These are the two primary conditions. However, as we know, Rohingyas are stateless people. They were made stateless intentionally by the state of Myanmar, starting in 1982. Whenever we talk about their safe repatriation with dignity, we have to really remind ourselves about their legality when they go back. Will they be regular citizens of Myanmar?

In the International Court of Justice, the case was launched in 2020. At the end of last year, the case was heard again in terms of giving a verdict. This question came up again regarding how to deal with the identity of Rohingyas, because from the beginning, the state of Myanmar consistently denied the identity of Rohingyas as Rohingyas.

As some of you might also know, once they have crossed the border and have been hosted in Bangladesh, the Bangladeshis also, technically, do not recognize or acknowledge them as Rohingyas. Officially, they are “forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals”, or FDMN.

This aspect of citizenship is super critical for Rohingyas in terms of their repatriation. However, from our side—research and advocacy—we say that the conditions should be enabled with the discussions of the state of Myanmar. As many of you might know, there are now additional layers, with armed ethnic organizations, especially the Arakan Army operating in that area.

Discussion has not yet taken place, to the best of our knowledge, but this ought to be done.

Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you very much.

Ms. Schaefer, you talked about the amount of time. The longer the time that goes by, the more difficult it is to return. I think you said that half of displaced people right now have been displaced for more than five years.

Can you talk about how to prevent long-term displacement and a little about the conditions of return?

The Chair: Can you provide a quick answer, please? The time is up.

Anne Kathrin Schaefer: As I mentioned, the one pathway we have as an international community is to invest more heavily in these solutions from the start in order to enable an environment in which people do not need to remain displaced extensively.

I'd be happy to elaborate later.

Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you, Anita.

I would like to invite Mr. Majumdar to take the floor for five minutes, please.

Shuvaloy Majumdar: Thank you very much, Chair.

Let me start with Mr. Smolansky.

You were talking a bit, sir, about how authoritarian regimes work through Venezuela and others—in Cuba, Iran and Russia. I want to give you a chance to unpack that idea further, if you wish.

David Smolansky: Thank you.

In the case of Venezuela, we have seen the presence of nondemocratic external actors. I would mention Cuba, Russia, Iran and China.

In the case of Cuba, as I was describing in answer to the first question, it was proven that on January 3, the protection of Maduro depended on foreign agents—in this case, Cubans. It is estimated that almost 20,000 Cubans have been around Venezuela since 1999. I was describing how approximately \$63 billion was given to Cuba. That was not free. In exchange, they provided a very sophisticated repressive apparatus. According to reports from UN fact-finding missions, victims and dissidents have said that Cuban agents have participated in and advised on the repression, persecution and torture of innocent Venezuelans.

In the case of China, they have provided technology for surveillance, social control and repression, especially in the peaceful and non-violent protests that happened in 2017. The equipment used was provided by China. Since that year, the International Criminal Court has investigated crimes against humanity in Venezuela.

I also have to say that Russia and Iran have become the main arms providers to Venezuela's regime. In the case of Iran, they have provided technology for drones, not only for surveillance but also for war. At the same time, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has given capacity building to elite forces in Venezuela to make it more sophisticated in its repression and persecution. In the case of Russia, there has been at least \$13 billion invested in military equipment.

I want to remark on the AK-47. It is estimated that almost 250,000 AK-47s were bought by Chávez and Maduro. A lot of those AK-47s were given not only to elite forces but also to non-state armed groups that, in Venezuela, are known as *colectivos*. They are sometimes used to repress, kidnap and force the disappearance of innocent Venezuelans.

This is an autocracy network that has been heavily executed in Venezuela and that has caused, obviously, this situation of human rights violations, crimes against humanity and people fleeing, looking for the opportunities and liberties they don't have in Venezuela.

• (1720)

Shuvaloy Majumdar: Thank you very much.

Dr. Wilf, you were exposed to a remarkably defunct set of assumptions that have informed a logic train creating a distortion of our understanding of displacement in not just the Middle East but also Gaza. Would you like to take a few minutes of my remaining time to continue to rebut some of the things you were exposed to?

Einat Wilf: One of the greatest things that need to be understood is, of course, the role of UNRWA, the Orwellian-named United Nations Relief and Works Agency. It tries to pretend it is the firefighter, but it is actually the arsonist. UNRWA has tremendous responsibility for the fact that Gazans chose to invest years and billions in building the infrastructure of tunnels and in planning and executing the invasion into Israel and the massacre.

UNRWA that essentially allowed the people of Gaza to plan and invest in this. Moreover, UNRWA has allowed the people of Gaza, as well as the Palestinians in the West Bank, to continue to believe that they are legitimized and that they have global support, UN support and Western support through the funding for the idea that it is legitimate to pursue the destruction of the Jewish state as a goal—

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

Einat Wilf: Ultimately, when people ask what will replace UNRWA, it's quite simple. Ultimately, it's Palestinian responsibility. The day when they finally choose to build for themselves rather than destroy the Jewish state, they will no longer need the money or that terrible goal.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

I would now like to invite Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe to take the floor for five minutes.

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

[*Member spoke in Spanish*]

[*Translation*]

I will continue in French because it's the official language here, and I have to continue in French.

I was in Berlin last Monday, and I had the opportunity to meet Leopoldo Lopez, an extraordinary orator. We didn't have a chance to talk much, but I'd like to hear your opinion on the current situation in terms of the conditions that should be in place to allow for the voluntary and safe return of Venezuelans who are currently displaced.

• (1725)

[*English*]

David Smolansky: Thank you for the question.

To guarantee a safe return of millions of Venezuelan migrants and refugees, we first need to have a complete restoration of democracy. Second, the political rights in the cases of political leaders who have been forced into exile need to be guaranteed. Third, we need a country that is completely free, not partially free. I would add that we need a nation that guarantees access to justice, which we have lacked for almost three decades. Fourth, we need a country in which the people who can go back could have access to education, health care and work. I would say that those are the conditions that we need for people to go back.

I'm aware that nine million Venezuelans will not go back. This has not happened with any other migration outflow or diaspora, but

it might be a unique case in which you see 30% or 40% of the population going back if the conditions are improved.

Definitely, democracy, freedom and access to justice are mandatory for that to happen.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Can you tell us which country has the largest number of displaced Venezuelans right now?

Is it Colombia or another country?

[*English*]

David Smolansky: Colombia right now has approximately 3.7 million Venezuelan migrants and refugees, surpassing the Syrians in Turkey. Then there is Peru, which has 1.7 million Venezuelan migrants and refugees. The U.S. has 1.3 million. You have very similar numbers in Brazil, Ecuador and Chile—between 500,000 and 600,000 Venezuelans. That's in regard to the Americas.

If you go to Europe, the largest Venezuelan community is in Spain, and it is estimated to have between 500,000 and 600,000 Venezuelans.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: [*Member spoke in Spanish*]

[*Translation*]

Ms. Schaefer, Ms. Ndiaye gave us the example of Norway earlier. We talked about funding just before. Maybe this has changed, but the last time I checked, I think Norway was one of the only countries to meet the target of 0.7% of gross domestic product, or GDP, for international development assistance, a value that the UN requested. I would point out that Canada is currently not far below the 0.3% mark.

Isn't that not only a structural example of programs that work, but also an example of how a country should behave on the international scene to prevent international crises upstream, that is, by funding international aid at the level requested by the UN, as Norway is doing?

My question is for both of you.

Ndeye Dieynaba Ndiaye: Thank you very much.

Yes, Canada should play its role, especially since Canada is internationally recognized as a country that truly cares about the rights of migrants and, above all, people in vulnerable situations.

I completely agree that Canada should contribute more to aid, especially in terms of support. We're mainly talking about co-operation and partnership where everyone wins, since that enables these populations to develop skills and, ultimately, be a little more independent. Indeed, the goal is not to propose short-term solutions, but to propose long-term solutions. That's what the European Return Fund does, for example, to support people who want to return to their country, people who want to develop businesses, and so on.

Canada can do that, and it's starting to do so. However, above all, it will have to expand its immigration and international funding policies. It will have to put that at the heart of its policies. Canada has always done so. I don't know why that's starting to change a bit, especially in the last few years, because—

• (1730)

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt. Please finish your answer, because time is up.

Ndeye Dieynaba Ndiaye: In my opinion, Canada should not only provide funding, but also provide more funding to populations that are currently very vulnerable. I'm thinking in particular of people who are displaced for climate reasons.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ndiaye.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for their testimony regarding internally and externally displaced people across the world.

[*English*]

On behalf of the subcommittee—myself, all the members, the staff and the interpreters—I would like to thank all of our witnesses for their presence. Your good introductions and good answers to our questions have enlightened this subcommittee.

If any of you would like to contact the subcommittee to give additional information, you can write to me, as the chair, or to the clerk. We welcome anything from your side.

We thank you again, and we wish you the best.

The meeting is over. We're adjourned.

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