



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 008

PUBLIC PART ONLY - PARTIE PUBLIQUE SEULEMENT

Monday, December 8, 2025



Chair: Fayçal El-Khoury

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

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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 eight 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 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 participating in person 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. To those on Zoom, at the bottom of your screen, you can select the appropriate channels for interpretation: floor, English or French. Those in the room can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

This is a reminder that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

[Translation]

Next Wednesday, December 10, is Human Rights Day. I want to personally thank my subcommittee colleagues for their hard work and dedication to improving the human condition.

[English]

Our work, done in co-operation with the witnesses we invite each week, is a reminder that even if borders and nationality structure our identity, security and prosperity, we are all human beings in search of dignity, respect and justice. We all have the same goals and needs and we all have more in common than the opposite.

Thank you.

[Translation]

I would now like to welcome the witnesses.

[English]

As an individual, we have Professor François Audet, director of Observatoire canadien sur les crises et l'action humanitaires, Université du Québec à Montréal. He is with us by video conference. Welcome.

We have Dr. Christina Clark-Kazak, professor, public and international affairs from the University of Ottawa.

From the Canadian Council for Refugees, we have Asma Faizi, president, by video conference, and Gauri Sreenivasan, co-executive director.

From the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, we have Tracey Maulfair, representative in Canada, and Azadeh Tamjeedi, senior legal adviser.

We are waiting for Ms. Liu. She will show up soon, hopefully.

Now I would like to give every one of you five minutes for introductory remarks. We will start with Professor François Audet.

You have the floor for five minutes. Please go ahead.

[Translation]

François Audet (Director, Observatoire canadien sur les crises et l'action humanitaires, Université du Québec à Montréal, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Members of the committee, thank you for having me.

I am a professor at the Université du Québec à Montréal's School of Management, where I head up the Canadian observatory on humanitarian crises and aid.

My presentation is taken directly from a short brief that I previously submitted to this committee and that is based on six years of research that I have been conducting on the migrant crisis in the Central American region. This presentation has three objectives: to describe the main characteristics of the migration corridors in the Central American region, to analyze the criminal strategies used to exploit the vulnerability of migrants and to situate these dynamics in a broader geopolitical context in order to inform Canada's foreign policy.

The corridor stretching from the Darien region, the tropical area between Colombia and Panama, to Guatemala is now one of the most dangerous migration corridors in the world. It is characterized by extreme violence, increased criminal control and growing pressure on already highly vulnerable local communities. It is important to remember that this crisis extends far beyond the countries of Central America. Haiti, Colombia, Venezuela and Cuba are also contributing to an unprecedented regional displacement. These four countries alone account for between 60% and 70% of migrants in the region.

Furthermore, in 2024–25, the International Organization for Migration identified 177 nationalities in the Central American migration corridors. Personally, I have interviewed people from China, India, Africa, Afghanistan and just about everywhere in the world.

My field research shows four major realities that I would like to bring to your attention.

First, these corridors have become real criminal economies. Central America's migration corridors are transactional corridors. Migrants must pay for every stage of their journey. For example, they must pay for a taxi, for a customs officer and to bribe a police officer. Each of these steps is then recorded by criminal groups, sometimes referred to as *maras*, drug traffickers or other armed gangs. All of these groups use extortion as their main source of income. In some areas, the migration economy is more lucrative than the drug economy.

In this context, insecurity and violence have become the main drivers of displacement. Criminal groups are not content with simply controlling migration routes; they deliberately and actively provoke displacement to increase the number of people who can be exploited. For example, in slums and poorer urban areas, they commit extortion and acts of violence to provoke displacement and thus, unfortunately, exploit more people.

Second, violence is the main strategy used by these groups. This includes kidnapping, threats and, especially, sexual violence. For example, in 2023, Doctors Without Borders estimated that there was one reported case of sexual violence every three hours. Sexual violence is also sometimes used as payment for passage. More than 80% of women are victims of sexual violence during their journey.

Third, local communities, particularly in the poorest countries of Central America, are not prepared to receive these massive influxes of displaced people. Inflation, social tension and the saturation of social services are skyrocketing, particularly in Honduras and Guatemala. In addition, new American migration policies combined with the closure and even militarization of the U.S. border under President Trump are blocking certain corridors and forcing migrants to stay longer in local communities.

Finally, contrary to popular belief, economic development can, in certain contexts of violence, increase migration rather than reduce it. When crime is deeply rooted, productive investments, whether in infrastructure, trade or development aid projects, generate additional opportunities for extortion and strengthen criminal groups' territorial control.

• (1550)

The Chair: You have 20 seconds left.

François Audet: Unfortunately, I won't have time to go into detail about my four recommendations, but I will just mention them briefly.

Canada should support research, strengthen human-rights-based approaches, support regional coordination efforts and tailor its aid so that it serves as a stabilization tool rather than fuel for the criminal economy.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Professor.

[English]

Now I would like to invite Dr. Christina Clark-Kazak. You have the floor for five minutes. Try to respect the time, please.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Christina Clark-Kazak (Professor, Public and International Affairs, University of Ottawa, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will make my remarks in English, but I can answer questions in French.

[English]

Thank you very much for the opportunity to appear today. I'll first give an overview of the situation of internally and externally displaced peoples globally. Then I'll focus in on what Canada can do to facilitate solutions.

In terms of the global overview, according to our colleagues here at the UN refugee agency, more than one in every 70 people globally is displaced. The root causes of this displacement include violence, conflict, human rights abuses, climate change and environmental disasters. Over 71% of people in forced migration are hosted in low-income and middle-income countries of the global south.

In terms of internally displaced people, they make up the largest percentage of people in forced migration globally—around 67.8 million. Because internally displaced people are citizens, they should benefit from the same legal rights and protections as any other citizen. However, some governments do not have the capacity or the political will to uphold these rights.

The guiding principles on internal displacement build on applicable human rights and humanitarian law. However, country visits by the UN special rapporteur regularly highlight human rights concerns. For example, Sudan has nearly 10 million internally displaced people who face severe risk of famine and grave human rights violations.

Other internally displaced people are trapped behind closed borders. For example, the majority of Gaza is under a displacement order, with 90% of the 2.1 million people displaced. Borders remain closed, preventing Gazans from fleeing the constant bombardment and preventing sufficient aid and medical support from reaching civilians.

I will turn now to external displacement. If a displaced person crosses an international border, they have the right to make an asylum claim under the 1951 UN refugee convention. By mid-2025, there were 8.4 million asylum seekers. However, states—including Canada—are increasingly limiting access to asylum through detention, push-backs, safe third country agreements and externalization policies. These policies, as Professor Audet elaborated, push people into more dangerous journeys and into precarious legal status. So far this year, over 1,000 people have died in the Mediterranean Sea. Despite draconian border enforcement policies and illegal deportations, the United States still has over 11 million undocumented people.

There is a growing tendency to grant temporary protection rather than permanent refugee status. For example, 4.3 million Ukrainians in Europe are under temporary protection. Most of the approximately 300,000 people who came to Canada under the Canada-Ukraine authorization for emergency travel must apply to extend their status because it was only granted for three years.

The UN agency estimates that there are 36.4 million refugees. Again, most of these are in the global south, and many of them are in protracted refugee situations awaiting a durable solution. However, rich countries like Canada are reducing resettlement pathways, including the current freeze on private sponsorship of groups of five.

We have some recommendations for this committee. The Government of Canada should take proactive measures to resolve these displacement issues. To address the root causes, we must first pursue diplomatic interventions to ensure that human rights are respected and to negotiate peaceful resolutions to conflict. Second, we need more bold climate change action to address environmental displacement, both in Canada and globally. Third, we need to ensure the corporate social responsibility of Canadian companies, such as mining companies in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo that are complicit in forced evictions.

In addressing the ongoing internal and external displacement and the manifestation of these displacements, the Government of Canada must first ensure sustained development and humanitarian assistance for people in situations of displacement, particularly in the context of the closure of USAID. The need is dire. Second, we need to increase our resettlement numbers and encourage international co-operation to find durable solutions to protracted displacement. Third, we need to abolish the safe third country agreement with the U.S. and reconsider Bill C-12, both of which severely restrict the right to asylum. Finally, where people are trapped behind closed borders, Canada must waive biometric requirements or cooperate with allies to facilitate paperwork.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for the opportunity to present. I will be pleased to answer your questions.

• (1555)

The Chair: Thank you very much, professor.

[*English*]

That's perfect timing.

Now I would like to invite Madam Asma Faizi, who is appearing by video conference.

You have the floor for five minutes. Please go ahead.

Asma Faizi (President, Canadian Council for Refugees): Thank you.

The CCR is the national voice for more than 200 member agencies that work with, from and for refugee and immigrant communities across Canada. This perspective is critical in the current global context, where forcibly displaced populations around the world, both internally and externally, are growing due to recurring conflicts, political instability, persecution and climate change.

Analyses of displacement frequently focus on immediate triggers and short-term responses, with little attention to the underlying factors that drive people from their homes and to the role that countries like Canada are playing in driving those very forces. This narrow approach has too often justified increased securitization, interdiction, offshore processing, detention and border-focused policies aimed at preventing displaced persons from ever reaching safety.

A major concern for the CCR at this time of growing need is the declining commitment from many countries to refugees and to supporting internally displaced people. We are seeing a rise in authoritarianism, fascism, xenophobia and hate, whether in countries far away like Afghanistan where I am from, or with our neighbour to the south, which has completely suspended its resettlement programs and has now halted its internal system for offering asylum. In the face of global trends that are narrowing the scope of protection, we ask how Canada will respond.

The federal government came to power at a moment when Canadians felt vulnerable in the face of political and economic threats from the Trump administration. Our collective instinct then was to put our elbows up, to defend Canadian values and to forge our own path, yet today the signs are troubling. Canada is not stepping up; we are stepping back.

One of the clearest indicators of this backsliding is a precipitous drop in resettlement commitments with Canada's immigration levels. This year marks the 10th anniversary of Canada's welcome to Syrians fleeing conflict, a moment that galvanized the country and reminded the world of who we are. We are still that country, but we must stand up for those same principles. Instead, we are seeing steps in the opposite direction.

The sponsorship pathway for groups of five is frozen. The private sponsorship of refugees program is being slashed, despite being one of the most respected and effective programs in the world. Even government-assisted refugee numbers are being reduced. Refugees, particularly those in Africa, continue to face significant longer wait times than others, as highlighted in a recent CCR report, including the worrisome case of our inadequate response to the Sudan crisis, as mentioned by previous witnesses.

These decisions misread the capacity of Canadians. Canadians are ready to sponsor. They are waiting. The limitations are not public will; they are government policy.

Compounding these policy choices are the dangerous narratives that have taken over the past two years across all levels of government. These narratives wrongly blame current pressures on housing and social systems on immigration and refugees. This is not only false but also dangerous. It undermines public confidence in the immigration and refugee system, and it unfairly targets those who have always contributed to Canada's social and economic fabric.

We invite you, as members of Parliament, to help push back against these narratives. The CCR, together with over 100 partners, has launched a national public campaign, We're Better Together, to reignite public support for immigration and to remind us of who we are and who we can be. We urge the committee to recommend the need for a positive narrative from government because people in Canada expect our leaders to carry on our proud legacy of welcoming refugees.

I'll pass it on to Gauri now.

• (1600)

The Chair: Madam Sreenivasan, you have the floor. You can have five minutes.

Gauri Sreenivasan (Co-Executive Director, Canadian Council for Refugees): Thank you very much, Asma.

[*Translation*]

I want to thank the members of the subcommittee for their commitment to addressing the subject of forced displacements in the world, a very important issue that also affects Canada.

I will focus my remarks on issues related to the rights of asylum seekers in Canada and the challenges they face.

[*English*]

Canada remains a beacon of hope for many of the forcibly displaced, and anyone who is at or within our borders has the right to seek asylum here. Let us remember, however, that Canada receives a tiny fraction, less than 2%, of asylum seekers worldwide.

We also have a world-respected system for hearing those claims. It is a system that is being denigrated by many recently, but when

the facts are allowed to surface, the picture is quite clear: We have a robust and thorough asylum system, one that includes a substantive security check and one in which each case is assessed on its evidence at an independent tribunal at the Immigration and Refugee Board.

The vast majority of refugee claimants—80%, in this year—are found to be refugees in need of protection from persecution. Canadians can be proud of that. The system can always be improved, but it works well. It works for refugees and it works for Canadians.

Let us recall that the right to asylum and the right to due process are protected under our charter and under international law. These are rights that you or I would want upheld if our families were in danger.

I just want to flag two major concerns about how these rights for the forcibly displaced are in jeopardy now in Canada, through both the safe third country agreement, STCA, with the U.S. and through the current direction of Bill C-12, which is still before the House.

The STCA has been a long-standing element of the overall system for how Canada deals with asylum claims, which turns back most refugees if they cross from the U.S. on the grounds that the asylum system works well there. This has actually never been true for many refugees, because of deep problems with the U.S. system, as the CCR has long held, but the agreement now is absurd, members. The U.S. has completely suspended its asylum system, such as it was. Even people with status in the U.S. are being grabbed in unmarked cars. They are being held in detention. They are being deported to third countries or to their home country, where they may face danger or death. The rule of law has effectively gone out the window.

It is an uncomfortable truth for the Canadian government, but we cannot bury our heads in the sand.

As a country, already we are re-evaluating the Canada-U.S. relationship in a whole range of areas, including as a partner for trade and as a partner for defence. We must also re-evaluate the basis for partnership in matters of human rights and refugees. At this crucial moment in history, we need to defend and strengthen Canada's system for asylum protection in ways that are consistent with our values and consistent with international standards, and in a way that builds on the skills and institutions already in place in this country, rather than by copying other countries or creating wasteful duplicative structures.

Unfortunately, it is the latter that is now reflected in Bill C-12. You are not tasked with this bill, so I will not make specific recommendations or go into the details here, but I do want to say for the record, at this very important committee for human rights, that the bill moves Canada away from human rights standards and norms of procedural fairness for asylum seekers. This includes, for example, the right to a hearing before being deported and the right to an appeal, because decision-makers make mistakes.

The CCR would hold that this bill will not survive a constitutional challenge as it is currently drafted, and we look forward to discussion of the bill in the Senate, where we expect it will go soon. We do hope that you, as a committee, can consider future opportunities to study essentially the human rights implications of new trends and directions in Canada's immigration and refugee system, because it is an approach that currently will see billions spent to shift us as a country towards a U.S.-style machinery, an ICE-style machinery, to remove vulnerable people in violation of their rights, instead of using a fraction of those resources to ensure due process for those seeking protection and setting refugees up for success as future Canadians.

We know we can do better, and we look forward to working with you on it.

[*Translation*]

Thank you.

• (1605)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Now I would like to invite Madam Tracey Maulfair to take the floor for five minutes, please.

Tracey Maulfair (Representative in Canada, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees): I would like to begin by thanking you for your focus on the causes of displacement across the world and the potential solutions to them, particularly at the current time when discussions on these issues are far too few and divisions are far too many.

UNHCR works in 130 countries to respond to and protect refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless people, and to help them find solutions. Currently, more than 117 million people have been forced to flee due to war, conflict and persecution worldwide. This is a massive figure. Really, it's about the same as the entire population of the Philippines. It is a figure that, for the first time in a decade, actually decreased in 2025.

One year ago, we saw the fall of the Assad regime in Syria. Since then, one million people living as refugees have returned home from abroad, and a further two million displaced people within the country have returned to their homes to restart their lives, yet Syria remains a country shattered by war.

Hope is fragile. For families to return, they will need safety, a way to earn an income and schools for their children, which are things we take for granted here. However, there is an important point to underline in this, and that's the reason I'm talking about Syria. When it's safe, returning is the preferred option for most refugees. Finding peaceful solutions to conflict will always be the

best way to ease the displacement challenges we are facing and to stop people from moving.

Unfortunately, Syria remains a bright spot in the world. As war and violence continue to drive displacement, cuts to life-saving aid are making everything worse. Consider what's happening in Sudan right now; the largest displacement crisis in the world. More than 12 million people have been forced to flee. Over four million people are living in neighbouring countries as refugees. Recently, El Fasher, in the Darfur region, faced 500 days under siege before falling to the Rapid Support Forces, triggering a brutal wave of violence.

Neighbouring countries like Chad generously opened their borders and offered safety to those forced to flee. However, the services available are not able to meet the needs. Many of those arriving are deeply traumatized, and not even basic assistance is available, let alone health and psychosocial support services for women and girls who have faced unspeakable violence. This situation is not unique to Chad.

Humanitarian workers are doing what we can, but we are stretched thin, worldwide. In the past year, UNHCR's global budget decreased by 25%, forcing us to make extremely difficult choices, ending critical life-saving programs. As a result, 11.6 million people are not getting the help they need. When people are left without life-saving aid or opportunities, the risks they face multiply.

When displacement spreads, it weakens fragile states. Left unchecked, these crises spill across borders and drive migration, and they disrupt trade and investment opportunities. This means more children are recruited into armed groups, and they fall victim to sexual exploitation and human smuggling. The solution is not to point the blame at those forced to flee. Rather, the more assistance frontline neighbouring countries receive, the better able they are to host refugees, reducing the likelihood of dangerous onward movements.

Investing in humanitarian aid is a practical, cost-effective contribution to regional and global security. Canada's support of UNHCR makes a measurable difference, enabling us to deliver frontline, life-saving support and solutions where few others can. For decades, through successive governments, we have relied on Canada's leadership and support in helping refugees worldwide. Your country sets an important example and serves as a model to other nations. As you consider the challenges of displacement in this difficult moment, we need Canada to continue to be an advocate for peace.

• (1610)

It is also imperative that this committee recognize the vital role of humanitarian funding to provide safety for people forced to flee, prevent further displacement and support people to go back home when they're ready.

Thank you.

The Chair: I thank all of you for your introductions. Now I would like to start the first round of questions and answers.

I would like to invite Mr. Shuvaloy to take the floor for seven minutes, please.

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

Thank you to all our witnesses for providing their perspectives and testimony on a very difficult topic that is obviously gripping the world over. The displacement of people internally and internationally has caused national systems and international systems to breach in many ways, when overrun with issues of integration, failure, successful vertical mobility for people who come into the country and asylum measures that have become discordant in various jurisdictions. All of you did a wonderful job of describing some of those issues.

Having spent some time in Afghanistan myself and watching that crisis unfurl with the disastrous decision made by the Biden administration of withdrawal, we see several consequences for how Afghans have had to deal with their own displacement internally and in the region.

Madam Faizi, what can you share about the internal Afghan displacement that has unfurled over the last years since 2021?

• (1615)

Asma Faizi: The situation that Afghanistan is in right now is not a culmination of what has happened since 2021 but a culmination of almost half a century of conflict, violence, lack of human rights protection, climate change and natural disasters.

Unfortunately for Afghanistan, not only human-made but also natural disasters have caused the state in which the Afghan people are right now, and that state is very dire. Unfortunately, the focus from Afghanistan shifted to other regions of the world, and people don't realize that Afghanistan is still undergoing an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe.

The situation internally is very bad. The economy has collapsed. The infrastructure—both health care and education—is on the brink. Then, in addition to this, I think one of the very concerning

things that is happening inside Afghanistan right now is the forced deportation of Afghans from Pakistan and Iran in particular, but also from other regions of the world, potentially including the U.S. They are deporting Afghans forcibly back into Afghanistan.

In the past year, the statistics or the numbers are that close to 1.2 million people have been forced back into Afghanistan. You can imagine the dire situation Afghanistan was in at the beginning, and then, on top of it, there is this additional pressure coming from these people who have been forcibly deported back into Afghanistan.

It's really important for the Canadian government to pay attention to what is going on in Afghanistan. I think that at other times people have not paid attention, and negative outcomes have grown and have come out of that. We really hope that the Canadian government takes more seriously what's going on inside Afghanistan.

Shuvaloy Majumdar: Thank you for that.

You raise so many important issues here. I wanted to pick up on one.

For Afghans who are inside that country today, I'm grateful that we have an opportunity to platform this and give them a voice through you. What kinds of options do they have to escape into neighbouring countries? Are there any safe options? Obviously, they live in a very dangerous neighbourhood, with hostile regimes that, at the expense of the Afghan people, keep extending their own interests for hegemony and instability.

Could you give us a sense from your perspective on the people you talk to in Afghanistan? Whether it's crossing east, west or north, what options do Afghans really have internally to leave their country?

Asma Faizi: The options are not that many, especially now with these forced deportations. Previously, people could go to Pakistan, to Tajikistan or to Iran for safety. However, in the past year or year and a half, the political instability—the relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan and between Afghanistan and Iran—and also many of the issues that most of the presenters here have spoken about, including the policies of externalization, deportations and keeping people away from seeking safety, have really closed the doors on many Afghans.

I personally get calls all the time from people who want to come to Canada, who want to leave Afghanistan, but there really are no options because, again, those who are able to make it to Pakistan—and, similarly, Tajikistan or Turkey—are afraid of being deported back. The options have really decreased. Unfortunately, Canada is contributing to this. This is because one of the pathways for a lot of Afghans who have family members back home was the groups of five private sponsorship program. That has been halted. Also, the private sponsorship of refugees program has been severely slashed for the next year. There are fewer and fewer opportunities for people who are in severe need, and it's very concerning—what's going on in the U.S. and how it has targeted all Afghans.

Again, it's not only inside Afghanistan; Afghans are suffering all over the world.

• (1620)

Shuvaloy Majumdar: We have a couple of minutes left, so I want to drill further into this.

With regard to the Afghan borders, many of Afghanistan's neighbours think they're pliable, particularly the eastern border. There are many stories that you've definitely heard. These include former colleagues of mine, people I think of very fondly and very closely, who have had to make a very difficult journey from as far west as Herat or as far north as Badakhshan into Pakistan—in some cases, even by foot.

Meanwhile, conflict has broken out on that border. Much of the Pakistani military is wreaking havoc inside Afghanistan itself. With regard to that particular local situation, which always feels like it's very precarious, I'd be curious for your perspective on what can be done to try to bring calm in those relationships so that the people who are being impacted by this can find a way to have some stability to try to begin rebuilding their lives.

The Chair: Give a quick answer, please.

Asma Faizi: It's really important for the international community to come—particularly to Muslim countries around the world—to bring these parties together to come up with a resolution. Unfortunately, every time there's a conflict between Afghanistan and Pakistan, the people who suffer the most are the civilians, particularly refugees. One of the largest refugee populations in the world is in Pakistan, so they take it out on those people. It's incredibly unfortunate. It's really important for diplomatic efforts to be put in place to ensure that there is some kind of resolution to these issues. Otherwise, it's going to be yet another conflict inside Afghanistan or involving Afghanistan, unfortunately.

Women and children are disproportionately impacted, at the end of the day.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'd like to invite Madam Dhillon to take the floor for seven minutes, please.

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

I'll start my questions with Mrs. Faizi.

In your testimony, you were speaking about resettlement, and one of the things you said, which is very interesting and very con-

cerning because we've been seeing it more and more over the past couple of years.... You spoke about dangerous narratives taking place, like blaming refugees and immigrants for a lack of housing and resources.

Why do you think this is? Can you elaborate a little bit on that, please?

Asma Faizi: Well, unfortunately, I think that when times get tough, usually the immigrants and refugees are scapegoated for a lot of problems that are occurring.

In Canada, the problems in terms of housing and social systems cannot be attributed to refugees and immigrants. These are more systemic and structural problems that need to be addressed. Some of the problems include high rent and stagnant wages. These underlying systemic issues need to be dealt with to ensure that refugees and immigrants are not blamed or scapegoated for a lack of attention to these kinds of policies by our governments.

Anju Dhillon: Thank you so much.

Ms. Clark-Kazak, you were talking a little bit about the number of refugees being in the millions. Have you noticed a larger displacement, internal or external, in the past years?

Christina Clark-Kazak: As our UNHCR colleagues mentioned, in terms of refugees, the number has gone down a little bit because of the resolution, or partial resolution, of what's happening in Syria. In terms of internal displacement, we still have large numbers of people. I think a lot of the international focus is on refugees because they cross international borders, but in fact more people are internally displaced. The problem with internal displacement is that their own national governments are supposed to be taking care of them, because they're citizens, but often the governments themselves are the source of insecurity or are unable to provide that kind of human rights protection.

Anju Dhillon: What does internal displacement look like in any given country, or is it different for every country?

Christina Clark-Kazak: It's different for each country, because it depends really on the country conditions. In some cases, it's because of civil war or conflicts—in Sudan, for example. In other cases, you have a combination, as was mentioned by the previous speaker, of unrest and human rights violations and also natural disasters. Afghanistan has also been hit by earthquakes and other national disasters that displace people.

In some cases, such as Gaza, for example, you have an external force that's causing internal displacement. They're trapped there. They cannot get out of the country of Gaza.

• (1625)

Anju Dhillon: Thank you so much.

Ms. Maulfair, thank you for your testimony. You mentioned 117 million displaced people. Does that include internal?

Tracey Maulfair: Yes.

Anju Dhillon: We have also been hearing testimony in this committee about women and girls and even young boys facing extreme violence, sexual violence. Can you talk to us a little bit about this?

Tracey Maulfair: When people are making these journeys, as the professor was talking about earlier, there's often a lot of violence and danger involved in the journeys themselves. A lot of exploitation happens along the way. Oftentimes, when refugees or IDPs arrive at where they're going, they have faced many difficulties, often including sexual or gender-based violence. Typically, UNHCR and our partners are there to try to help people, to try to provide medical assistance and social support, and really help people start to heal. However, as a result of some of the funding cuts that I was speaking about earlier, these services are becoming much less available in the world.

I can give you an example that's a little closer to home. At the border with Mexico, where we used to have a big contingent of partners and ourselves to provide these sorts of services—as you know, the Darién Gap is very dangerous—almost nobody is there anymore because of the cuts to funding. These services are simply not available there.

Survivors need to look further to find any available resources. It's becoming an aggravated problem around the world.

Anju Dhillon: Ms. Clark-Kazak mentioned that a lot of times, governments that are supposed to be protecting their citizens are not. She also mentioned mining in the Congo, which is causing a lot of displacement. I don't know if you want to address, or if Ms. Clark-Kazak does, the situation in, for example, the Congo.

Tracey Maulfair: Do you mean for sexual violence or for what's in the Congo in particular?

Anju Dhillon: I'm wondering who or what is causing the displacement in the mining regions.

Tracey Maulfair: The displacement in those regions often stems from insecurity. The mining companies come in and provide security for the mines themselves and for where their workers are. The area becomes a lot more lawless, because these are areas where there are resources. That's why the mining companies are there in the first place. Control of these resources is a struggle between gangs and criminal enterprises and the lawful states and companies that are lawfully there. It creates a very insecure terrain. People who are already slightly vulnerable, or vulnerable at all, get preyed upon in these settings much more.

Anju Dhillon: Ms. Kazak, would you quickly like to add something?

Christina Clark-Kazak: Just to complement what my UNHCR colleague said—

The Chair: Give a quick answer please because time is up. I'll give you a few seconds.

Christina Clark-Kazak: The mining companies also are forcibly displacing communities from the areas where they're conducting the mining. This is a context where in fact the mining is causing displacement, and also feeding into this sort of securitization, and also, as we heard from the previous professor, there's a criminal enterprise that starts because of the instability.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

I will now give Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe the floor for seven minutes.

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

I want to thank all the witnesses for being here with us today as part of this important study.

Mr. Audet, you did not have the chance to expand on your recommendations in your opening remarks. I would like to give you the opportunity to do that and hear your thoughts in that regard.

• (1630)

François Audet: Thank you. I appreciate it.

I will do so quickly. Obviously, I will repeat what I said but give a bit more detail.

First, I want to mention the importance of continuing to support research to document migration situations. All migration corridors—not just those in Central America, but all of the corridors that my colleagues just mentioned—are evolving much faster than institutional mechanisms are able to understand them, let alone respond to the problems. What we are seeing is a lack of solid evidence, which obviously leaves the door wide open for criminal networks. Documenting the situation has become a tool for protection, a diplomatic lever and an essential prerequisite for humanitarian responses. I believe that the work of this committee today is a prime example.

Second, we need to strengthen our human-rights-based approaches. My colleagues just gave some examples, particularly with regard to the protection of unaccompanied women and children, who are the primary victims of the systems of violence that we see in Central America and elsewhere, such as sexual assault, exploitation, kidnapping and digital and physical extortion.

Third, we must support regional efforts, particularly those aimed at reducing the violence and impunity that fuel the criminal migration market, as I mentioned earlier. Migration has become a criminal industry. Violence is its main tool of production. Combatting this violence is not only a security issue; it is also a strategy for reducing forced displacement and protecting the entire region.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the very positive role that the Canadian embassy in Panama has played in this regard in recent years.

Finally, I strongly recommend tailoring Canadian aid so that it does not inadvertently strengthen criminal economies and so that it is more closely aligned with the realities of transit communities. Canadian aid, like all international aid, must be a tool for stabilization and must not fuel the criminal economy. When there are high levels of insecurity, corruption and extortion will obviously dominate the use of funds and the local economy.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: That is what stood out to me in your opening remarks. If I understand correctly, you said in your fourth recommendation that economic growth is not necessarily an indicator of an improved standard of living when it comes to displaced populations, particularly in your area of expertise, which has to do with the migration corridors in the three Americas.

Does the current government's policy of linking international trade with humanitarian aid create problems? Some may say that such an approach may not necessarily do what it should in terms of humanitarian aid.

François Audet: Yes. It is important to scratch beneath the surface. In contexts where there is insecurity, where criminal groups and armed gangs are present, economic development, development aid, infrastructure investment programs and the like can sometimes fuel crime and so the actions taken do not play a stabilizing role. Instead, they encourage organized crime, which takes over the economy, creating even more migration. I am referring specifically to Central America, but this phenomenon can be seen almost everywhere. When criminal groups take over a sector, they will, in a way, use the entire local economy, including international aid. This happens especially in areas where the informal and criminal sector has a strong presence.

Humanitarian aid works very well. There is evidence to prove it. Humanitarian aid works, especially when insecurity does not reach intolerable levels.

My colleagues at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees have shown that when action is taken to protect the rights of displaced populations and there are no dominant malicious criminal actors, humanitarian aid works and has a significant impact on displaced populations.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you very much. However, I saw that—

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

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Time flies.

Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I will now turn the floor over to Ms. Vandenbeld for five minutes.

• (1635)

[English]

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

Thank you very much to all of our witnesses.

I'd like to start my questions with you, Ms. Maulfair. You said that this past year there has been a slight decline, but if you take Syria out of the equation, what are we actually looking at in terms of numbers?

Tracey Maulfair: If you take Syria out of the equation, we're looking at somewhere between one and two million. Most of these, unfortunately, are people who were either pushed back to their countries or who left because where they were refugees it just became so unwelcoming.

The countries I'm talking about are Sudan and Afghanistan, which we've already heard about from Asma, and people are being pushed back from both Iran and Pakistan. Syria is the bright spot, like I said, but the rest is less bright.

Anita Vandenbeld: I'd like to delve a bit more into what you were saying about how the preference for people is always to want to return home. We talk about numbers of people who are displaced in leaving their countries, but what are the numbers for people who are returning? Are there certain areas, other than Syria, where we do see returns, but returns to safety, not returns because they're being forced back?

We're looking at a lot of the current ones—Sudan and Afghanistan—but there are obviously long-time displacements. I'm thinking of the Rohingya and others who aren't discussed as much anymore, but who are still outside of their home country and displaced.

Could you give us a sense of the numbers who are returning and the numbers who for long periods are not able to return, with no foreseeable future of being able to return and where these areas are in the world?

Tracey Maulfair: When we talk about the number of returns, we're talking both about refugees and about IDPs. That number has gone down by 5.4 million this year. When you talk about IDPs and refugees, these are people who have gone back to their homes. Three million of them are in Syria. The others, I've already discussed.

Unfortunately, we don't have so many large success stories these days. Conflicts are protracted and don't become resolved, which is why I also spoke about the way to actually stop displacement and to have people return home with peace. It's working on the root causes, like Gauri said. That's really where we need to go, because many people are remaining in displacement for longer periods of time. If we don't address that, people are going to continue to move.

Anita Vandenbeld: I wonder, because it's intuitive to me, but not necessarily to everybody who's watching, about this link between development, conflict prevention, migration and refugees. The idea is that if there is in fact sufficient development—not just humanitarian aid, but development—that could have a huge impact in terms of the numbers of refugees that are arriving not just in neighbouring countries, but also distantly, in Europe and North America. Could you maybe delve a bit more into that connection between aid and migration?

Tracey Maulfair: I think that right now we're watching it unfold in Syria, where we've seen that over three million people have gone back to their communities. Now, they're not going back to functioning communities. They're not going back to houses that were as they left them. In many instances, they're having to dispute if they're even their houses, because other people have occupied them.

This is where the development community and the humanitarian community really need to come together, and both need to be funded to do this, obviously. If you work on the development side and can work on the reconstruction of the very basic things—on the schools so children can enter into schools and on ensuring there are roads—then the humanitarian side can really help people with the more direct building of social networks. If we don't succeed in this in Syria, people may move again, and the millions of people who are outside the country won't return.

• (1640)

Anita Vandenberg: In fact, that is also conflict prevention in terms of the next—

Tracey Maulfair: Of course, yes.

The Chair: Thank you.

I would like to invite Ms. Tamara Kronis to take the floor for five minutes, please.

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

Ms. Maulfair, I'd like to start with you. You've spoken eloquently about how important the funding that Canada provides is to your organization.

Of course, we know that there are \$2.7 billion of cuts in foreign aid coming to this global space. There is of course, in Canada, the full range of views about that—whether it's too much, too little, not enough or not at the right time.

I'd like to ask you a few questions about the communications around that. The cuts have been announced. Do you have any sense of how they're going to work in practice?

Tracey Maulfair: No, not at this point in time. We understand, as you do, that there will be cuts, and we have had meetings with the government. We work very closely with the Government of Canada—obviously, it's a big partner—but we don't have clarity on what exactly that will mean in terms of the cuts.

Tamara Kronis: Have there been any principles provided to you indicating that the cuts will be made along any particular kind of value system or sense of any sort of criteria?

Tracey Maulfair: We have heard, which I think is also in the press, that it will be linked more closely to trade in some ways. We don't know what that means—trying to link the goals together with trade and development. I think we are waiting as well to hear what that will mean, but that is about as much clarity as I have at this point in time.

Tamara Kronis: When you say that you've heard, did you hear that from the government or through the grapevine?

Tracey Maulfair: Both.

Tamara Kronis: When Secretary of State Sarai was before the foreign affairs committee, I was there, and I asked him a series of questions. I also got the sense, by the way, that it is going to be around trade.

I asked him a series of questions around how the measurement would happen. When they start talking about return on investment for foreign aid dollars, I think we all have our own personal opinions about the appropriateness of that. Have you gotten any sense that they're putting key performance indicators into place or that they're going to be measuring that in any kind of systemic and predictable way?

Tracey Maulfair: Not at this point, no. We don't.

Tamara Kronis: What does that mean for your organization in terms of planning and in terms of the work that you do?

Tracey Maulfair: It's challenging because the entire humanitarian funding landscape has shifted substantially since last year. The shift happened very quickly and not just in Canada—I'm talking about worldwide. We're still trying to figure out what that means.

We do know that many countries have shifted towards defence and have put funding there at the expense of humanitarian and development funding. I'm not saying that Canada has done that, but we have seen that in other countries. Very few guidelines, performance indicators or things of that nature have been shared to understand how we would be expected to adapt to that.

Tamara Kronis: Do you have any sense of a timeline for the government around when they're going to figure this out or any kind of indication that there's any kind of guidance coming beyond an announcement?

Tracey Maulfair: I do believe there will probably be some guidance, but no, we do not have a timeline for that.

Tamara Kronis: Thanks very much for that. I appreciate your candour on that.

I'd like to move to Ms. Faizi to ask you the same questions.

You've gotten an indication that Canada is stepping back. Do you have any sense of where the cuts are going to be made or whether they're going to be made based on any sort of principles?

Asma Faizi: Well, one of the major problems is that the cuts are being made at all different levels. As I mentioned, they're being made at the private sponsorship level, even with government sponsorship. Government-assisted refugee numbers are being reduced. I think the temporary workers—all of the numbers are being reduced.

I think one of the underlying problems is the immigration levels in the sense that, if those levels had been increased, then we would be able to bring in more people from all of these different groups that are being impacted.

• (1645)

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Ms. Kronis.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, the floor is yours for five minutes.

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

I want to begin by saying that everything we are hearing from this group of witnesses is very interesting.

Mr. Audet, I think we can say that there are weaknesses in the international humanitarian response when it comes to contemporary humanitarian crises, population movement and internal displacement.

How should we change our approach to all this? Clearly, as I said, there are weaknesses.

François Audet: First of all, humanitarian aid does not have the power to prevent migration. With the organizations and systems we have, including what we are talking about today, humanitarian aid does not have that power.

It is less about resources and more about political mandate and power. We are talking here about forced migration. We are talking about people fleeing war, fleeing extremely precarious economic conditions and climate issues. People are fleeing regions. The humanitarian response is to support and protect these populations in situations of migration.

To answer your question, I would say that, if there were a simple solution, we would have found it by now. However, reducing violence is one way to slow down the exodus and help people stay. That is what we want to do, because, as one witness said, most of the people who leave are hoping to return one day.

Canada can also play a proactive role in reducing violence and combatting impunity. Take Haiti, for example. International aid can have an impact in situations where there is local stability.

As you may have noticed, I am dividing my answer into two aspects: development aid, which has a long-term impact, and humanitarian aid, which seeks to provide some type of assistance to populations in migration situations. International aid actors have never claimed to be able to prevent people from leaving. In the global economy, international aid represents very few resources compared to the immense needs. What international aid does is provide a minimum amount of support to a minimum number of people.

However, population displacement issues are related to political issues, regional conflicts and corruption. If a criminal system takes control of a territory, it results in this sort of displacement.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: As you said, this is clearly a business. In some places, it is more profitable than the drug trade.

However, there are laws and agreements, such as the Canada-U.S. safe third country agreement, that support criminal networks. I am thinking of the 14-day measure in that agreement. If a person can prove that they have been in Canada for more than 14 days and that they crossed the border irregularly, then they can claim asylum.

From what I have gathered from my contacts on both sides of the border, namely organizations working to defend migrants, this measure is currently being used by cartels. They are smuggling people across the border illegally and keeping them hidden them for 14 days. This allows them to extort more money. What's more, these people are at the mercy of smuggling networks. We often hear about prostitution rings that, unfortunately, take advantage of young women who cross the border irregularly. These women are then kept hidden for 14 days.

Is doing something about this not one way of addressing the problem?

• (1650)

François Audet: The problem you are describing has been well documented in the media. It highlights the following fact: When a state, however sovereign it may be within its own territory, fails to address an issue or lacks control over its territory, organized crime will step in to fill the gap.

What you are describing is an example of what is happening on a small scale in Canada but on a very large scale everywhere else. When local governments, countries or regions do not have the ability to control their territory, that territory will be left, either in whole or in part, in the hands of malicious organized crime actors who will take advantage of, abuse and extort migrant populations.

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

[*English*]

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

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here today.

[*English*]

I'm going to start off with the safe third country agreement, which has been mentioned a few times by different panellists. It came into effect in 2004 when things were very different, and it's been maintained since then with a number of different governments.

Today we find ourselves in a different reality south of the border. We see a lot of ICE activity and a lot of deep vulnerability for migrants and undocumented people and questionable practices in dealing with these people, including deportation to Venezuela and other countries.

This question is for UNHCR, but others can also contribute.

There are aspects of the safe third country agreement that allow for suspension in exceptional times. Do you want to share a bit about whether we find ourselves in that moment right now? If so, what does the agreement say about suspending certain elements of the safe third country agreement?

Tracey Maulfair: To start with, as you know, the safe third country agreement is a bilateral agreement. UNHCR is not a party to the agreement, but there is a suspension—either party can suspend the agreement—and one of the reasons they would think about doing that is if some of the terms were not as they saw it. It's not really for us to judge that. It's actually for Canada to judge if it is still safe to return people to the U.S. at this point in time.

Do you want to comment on that?

Gauri Sreenivasan: You've said it very well. These are extraordinary times and they are different times, and that really requires of Canada an analysis of the purpose of this agreement: Who is the partner we have the agreement with, and what is the best way for us to pursue Canada's obligations to human rights and our own concerns for the border?

The options available to Canada include, as we've just explained, suspension of the full agreement, and, from the CCR's perspective, it's very hard for the government to not reach that conclusion if it looks at the evidence, because the agreement is predicated on a functioning asylum system. We literally have a head of state in the U.S. who has indicated we have put this entire system on hold. There is no partner right now in a safe third country agreement, so we could suspend the agreement for a period of time.

Also, under article 6, there is the possibility of immediately looking at, for matters of public policy, exceptions for why certain people could be admitted essentially for public interest reasons. While the CCR's position is that it makes the most sense to suspend the agreement and allow people to present themselves at points of entry in order to rely on our very robust system to assess cases on their merits, there is also the option to look at very vulnerable populations who may immediately need access.

For example, earlier this year, President Trump indicated there would only be two genders henceforth and that people who identify as trans—trans people—don't exist anymore. There was the immediate option for the Canadian government to say that article could be used to clarify that people making gender-based violence claims or claims on the basis of discrimination and persecution as trans people should be allowed to make their claims heard in Canada, because they won't be able to be seen at all in the U.S.

We have quite a few options available, including a series of short-term exemptions for vulnerable populations, while we consider what to do, though we're very conscious that for the government it feels like a very big decision and something they don't want to face. I believe the latest quote from the minister was that we have a plan so we're sticking to it, but we know that the U.S. is not sticking to that plan.

It's really a moment for us to ask ourselves where we are at this moment in history. In big moments of crisis in history in other places, such as when countries found themselves beside Nazi Germany or found themselves dealing with complete dictatorships in

other countries, they have had to make decisions about what kind of neighbour they would be and what kind of border they would have. Most people in Canada, as the polling shows us, feel that people deserve a fair process at the border to be able to make a claim heard.

We feel very strongly that it would need a different orientation of resources, but with a reorientation of resources away from a prevention mode to a system support mode, you could have a very orderly process for having claims heard.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Majumdar, you have the floor for five minutes, please.

Shuvaloy Majumdar: I thought we had a witness about to arrive in a second.

The Chair: We'll suspend for a couple of minutes. We're waiting for a witness to arrive.

• (1655)

(Pause)

• (1655)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have five minutes.

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

Ms. Clark-Kazak, I would like to ask you a question.

Earlier, I noticed that you looked taken aback when I mentioned that the Carney government's new policy on international development involves creating a fairly direct link between international trade and international aid.

I think you looked taken aback as well, Ms. Sreenivasan.

I would like to hear your comments on that.

• (1700)

Christina Clark-Kazak: The goal of development aid should be development. Obviously, it is possible to link trade and development in some cases, but, as I said, trade can sometimes cause population displacement if companies invest in mines that have negative environmental impacts. We also talked about internal displacement due to natural disasters.

We are seeing that there is sometimes a direct correlation between trade and negative environmental impacts.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Speaking of mines, let's talk about Canadian mines or Canadian mining companies. At present, the ombud may not have the power needed to change things.

Is that true?

Christina Clark-Kazak: Exactly. We need to be clear about the goal. If the goal is truly to promote development, then there can be no question of putting money into the pockets of Canadian companies.

Gauri Sreenivasan: I have something I'd like to add.

We have seen this happen before. In the 1980s and 1990s, part of our international development aid was explicitly linked to promoting the role of companies in developing countries. If we look at the results of these programs and projects, it is clear that they did nothing in terms of humanitarian aid and long-term development. Instead, the aid was used by companies to integrate themselves into the community. There were also many problems related to human rights violations. Canadian mining companies had many negative impacts in several different countries.

This is not just about international aid. What legislative framework do we have to hold companies accountable for their actions? As you say, the Office of the Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise does not currently have enough power.

Finally, international aid can support development objectives and peace-promoting community organizations. Development must therefore be linked to peace. Many women's groups, civil society groups and human rights groups are leaders in reaching peace agreements, as was the case in Guatemala in the 1990s.

Aid can accomplish many things, and it is important to ensure that our commercial objectives do not lead to any negative repercussions.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you very much.

Mr. Audet, according to your research, emerging trends are likely to amplify population movement over the coming decade. I am talking about climate change, militarization and the collapse of certain governments.

Can you tell us more about that?

François Audet: Of all the risk factors, I believe that cuts to aid funding is the largest risk factor for global displacement. The closure of the United States Agency for International Development, or USAID, the decline in Canadian aid funding and the decline in European aid funding are creating even more instability. Reducing aid will not create conditions conducive to the development of social structures, emerging democracies or emerging regions.

These funding cuts are having a huge impact almost everywhere. I was in Europe a few weeks ago. There are fewer projects and fewer local investments in humanitarian and international aid organizations. That means that some populations who are dealing with states or governments that do not provide them with basic services will no longer be able to meet their basic needs and will thus become even more vulnerable to climate change, unfavourable market conditions and armed or criminal groups.

In addition to the changes in climate we are seeing, we are concerned that the United States' new stance, which is more predatory and less co-operative, and the significant cuts to international aid funding could lead to an increase in population movement. At present, we are talking only about American aid.

• (1705)

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Japan has also reduced its aid.

The Chair: Thank you Mr. Audet and Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

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

[English]

The Chair: Now I would like to welcome, from the CAUKUS Foundation, Madam Dimon Liu, director.

Thank you for being with us. We understand why you were late.

You now have the floor for five minutes.

Dimon Liu (Director, CAUKUS Foundation): Thank you. I apologize for being late.

Honourable chairman and honourable members of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights, it is an honour to speak before you at the Canadian Parliament.

My name is Dimon Liu. My testimony will attempt to explain why China's economic success is built on the backs of the largest number of displaced persons in human history. It is estimated that they range between 300 million to 400 million, equivalent to the total population of the United States being uprooted and forced to relocate.

In 1978, when economic reform began, China's GDP was \$150 billion U.S. In 2000, when China joined the WTO, it was approximately \$1.2 trillion. China's current GDP is approximately \$18 trillion. In 2000, China's manufacturing output was smaller than Italy's. Today, it's larger than America's, Europe's, Japan's and South Korea's combined.

If you have ever wondered how China managed to grow so fast in such a short time, Charles Li, former chief executive of the Hong Kong stock market has the answers for you. He revealed that China owes its farmers a 40-year debt, and he listed four reasons that enabled China's rapid growth: one, the cheapest land; two, the cheapest labour; three, the cheapest capital; and four, a disregard for environmental costs.

Reason one is the cheapest land because the CCP government took the land from the farmers at little to no compensation. Reason two is the cheapest labour because these farmers, without land to farm, were forced to migrate to the city to find work at the lowest possible wages. The communist household registration system ties them perpetually to the rural areas. This means that they are not legal residents in the urban areas and that they cannot receive social benefits that legal urban residents are entitled to. They live in precarious circumstances because they could be evicted at any time. Videos of rural migrants being arrested and abused by urban police are regularly posted on social media.

One well-known incident of eviction occurred in November 2017. Cai Qi, now the second most powerful man in China after Xi Jinping, was a municipal official in Beijing. He evicted tens of thousands of rural migrants into Beijing's harsh winter with only days or just moments of notice. Cai Qi made famous a term that CPP officials often use, "low-end population" or *diduan renkou*, which exposes the officials' contempt towards rural migrants and how they treat them as second-class citizens.

These displaced migrant workers have one tradition that they hold dear, which is to reunite with their families during the Chinese Lunar New Year holidays, making this seasonal migration of about 100 million to 150 million people a spectacular event to behold. In China's economic winter of 2025, with waves of bankruptcies and factory closures, the tide of unemployed migrant workers returning home early to where there's also no work and no land to farm has become instead a worrisome event to the authorities. Historically, in the last 2,000 years, social instability has caused the collapse of many ruling regimes in China.

• (1710)

The cheapest capital is acquired through predatory banking practices. Another means is through the stock markets, first to rake in the savings of Chinese people, and later to rake in international investments by listing opaque and sometimes state-owned enterprises in leading stock markets around the world.

The Chair: I'd like you to wrap it up, please. Time is almost over.

Dimon Liu: Okay. I will go to my concluding statement.

Chinese Communist officials often laud their system of government as superior. The renowned essayist Qin Hui wrote that the Chinese Communist government enjoys a human rights abuse "advantage". This is true. By abusing its own people so brutally, the Chinese Communist regime has created an image of success, which will prove to be a mirage.

For those who are still supportive of the CCP regime in China, I have a message: If you think the CCP will treat foreigners better than its own people when the CCP has power over you, please think again.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Liu.

I will now invite Mr. Majumdar to take the floor for five minutes, please.

Shuvaloy Majumdar: Thank you very much.

Dimon Liu, thank you for being here. I appreciate the weather and your airport troubles. I also appreciate your statement, which was a very strong one.

You started off by saying that 300 million to 400 million people are internally displaced inside China. That is a massive movement of humanity. Why is it that we in the outside world know so little about this massive internal displacement that's happening?

Dimon Liu: It's because of the nature of the China policy. Great Britain, the British Empire, adopted a commercial approach to its China policy, beginning in 1793. Its aim was to open the vast China market to make vast amounts of profit. They did not see Chinese people as human beings but only as workers or consumers. When I was studying in Great Britain, I ran into comments and read in books that a good Chinaman was a dead Chinaman. It was not very humane.

So they do not see. It's not because they don't have eyes. It's because they are wearing goggles or dollar signs.

Shuvaloy Majumdar: Thank you for that.

When you think about the next period of time—the next quarter or two, or the winter this year and the spring next year—as the Chinese economy worsens, what implications will these consequences of internal displacement have for the CCP in Beijing?

Dimon Liu: For 2,000 years, social instability in China has caused the collapse of many ruling regimes in China. At this moment, Xi Jinping will either initiate a war, because he needs a war economy, or the CCP regime will collapse under the weight of social instability. It is fifty-fifty.

• (1715)

Shuvaloy Majumdar: We're talking about very significant consequences for what that might mean for this geography of Asia and for where the people of Asia may end up as a result of this, especially from China internally and externally. That's a massively unstable event.

When you take a step back, why have these massive human rights abuses in China worked so advantageously for the CCP for so long?

Dimon Liu: Again, it's because of the commercial approach to China, the policy that the world adopted, unfortunately, from the British model. It's because they want to make profits. For instance, they committed the June 4 Beijing massacre. Within the month, Scowcroft went to Beijing to make nice with the butcher of Beijing and assure Beijing that the most favoured nation status was safe.

They see that they can kill, murder and abuse. Western democracies are still supporting them by opening their markets, giving them money and giving them prestige. President Trump is going to China to meet with Xi Jinping, who is on the verge of either collapsing or initiating war.

Shuvaloy Majumdar: I don't have too much time. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Dimon Liu: Civilized societies are based on values, and if democracy is competing with tyranny on interests, as it is doing now, it will lose. If democracy is competing with tyranny on values, democracy will win.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Liu.

I invite Ms. Dhillon to take the floor for three minutes this round please.

Anju Dhillon: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll start with Ms. Maulfair.

We were talking about statistics. Can you talk to us about how many women and children are displaced, out of the sum you've mentioned?

Tracey Maulfair: I don't have the exact figure off the top of my head, but typically, over 60% of the displaced people are women and children.

Anju Dhillon: They're very vulnerable, then, to trafficking and....

Tracey Maulfair: Yes, 100%. They are usually the most vulnerable.

In certain situations, up to half of the displaced people are children. This was the case in Lebanon, where I last was, three years ago. I understand it's also the case in the Sudan conflict.

Anju Dhillon: Were both groups internally displaced or also trying to...?

Tracey Maulfair: No, in Lebanon they were refugees. In Sudan, they're both internally displaced people and refugees.

Anju Dhillon: We've been speaking about climate change. There are certain criteria to be a refugee: race, religion, nationality, membership in a group or political opinions. What different types of refugees are there these days, with the evolution of technology and with climate change? Can you talk to us about that please?

Tracey Maulfair: These things, most of the time, don't happen in a vacuum. With the biggest displacement crises, over 80% of them are climate-vulnerable countries. We're talking about Afghanistan, Sudan and Syria. All of these are climate-vulnerable countries anyway, so it's an exacerbation.

Quite often, a climate event happens, and people may move temporarily. If violence or other things happen, people move usually for a bit longer term, but usually, we don't see these things as isolated incidents. If it is an isolated climate incident, then often, people will return faster if the development assistance and the rebuilding happen. The more protracted situations are often the violence and the persecution that we're talking about here.

• (1720)

Anju Dhillon: Basically, it's something that has continued for decades—the political violence....

Tracey Maulfair: Exactly. Again, the solutions are the root causes and peace, as we keep coming back to today.

Anju Dhillon: Thank you so much. I think we're out of time.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dhillon.

I invite Mr. Amarjeet Gill to take the floor for three minutes please.

Amarjeet Gill (Brampton West, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thanks to all the witnesses for coming here and for their testimonies.

Ms. Liu, in your opinion, would you say that Canada has done enough work in helping displaced persons in China?

Dimon Liu: I don't think most human rights activists are even aware of the situation, and certainly most governments aren't. I don't think that anything has been done for them.

Amarjeet Gill: What next steps forward should be taken?

Dimon Liu: The first step is to gain knowledge. Without knowledge there's very little we can do.

The second is that our human rights policies cannot just be virtue signalling; they have to be effective. For instance, for now, human rights policies in most western countries are focusing on the periphery of China—Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, Taiwan. The periphery is important, and Xinjiang people are being abused very badly, but they only comprise less than 5% of China's population.

When the Soviet Union had its captive nation approach, it comprised about 60% of the population—5% of the population is not going to move China. You have to adopt the correct policy. You have to move from a commercial approach to a China policy. Without doing those two, there's very little that can be done. It is the Chinese people who have the numbers to overwhelm the guns. They can bring down an abusive regime, and they have done so for 2,000 years. The Confucian tradition gave the Chinese people the right to rebel, which is popularly known as the Mandate of Heaven. They can withdraw their consent to be ruled, but not when the western democracy is continually subsidizing the tyranny regime in China, propping them up as George Bush Sr. did, as Bill Clinton did, as Richard Nixon did, as Obama did, as Biden did.

The Chair: The time is up. Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have three minutes.

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

Mr. Audet, without research, we would not have gone to the moon. Without research, we would not be holding a House of Commons committee meeting via video conference. That is your first recommendation.

Can you explain to the committee and the analysts who will be writing a report how research can help to address the serious migration crises that are currently affecting many parts of the world?

How can research help us? How can research make a difference?

François Audet: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to answer that question. That is also one of my recommendations.

To keep it simple, I would say that research applies at at least three levels.

First, there is partnership-based research.

I see that you invited representatives from various organizations to attend the meeting. Research is fundamental. As you know, we follow strict protocols, but research cannot be carried out without alliances and partnerships with organizations that have privileged access on the ground. We work in close partnership with organizations so that our research addresses real humanitarian problems and so that it can be useful. We obviously publish the results of our research because that is our job as professors and researchers. We are also providing a service to organizations and the government, in that research can help make public policy more effective and help organizations' programs and projects better meet the needs of populations who are currently experiencing terrible human tragedies. Partnership-based research is thus very important.

Second, research is also fundamental. I will talk about this quickly because I know I don't have much time. There is a significant gap between the changes in issues and our understanding of what is

happening. I go to Central America three or four times a year and, every time, the situation is changing very rapidly. For example, there may be a border closure in one place, a new president elected in another or a natural disaster somewhere else. Understanding humanitarian disasters and crises in real time is fundamental if we want our public policies and organizations to be more relevant and responsive to populations' needs.

Third, we are a democracy. We want our public policies to be based on science and sound evidence. Obviously, research, and not just mine, is why you and I are both here. I am also talking about the work of all my colleagues and of Canadian researchers around the world who conduct applied research on humanitarian issues. Public policy really needs to be based on local day-to-day realities. That is why I think academic research is important in addressing migration issues.

• (1725)

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

You used your time perfectly.

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here as part of our study on internally and externally displaced people across the world.

[*English*]

On behalf of this committee—myself and all the members, the analysts, the clerk, all the staff and the interpreters—I would like to thank you for your presence, your good introductions and your good answers to questions, and for enlightening this committee.

The meeting is suspended.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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