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—
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The Honourable Andrew Telegdi

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• (0800)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.)): Good morning. I call the meeting to order, and on behalf of my colleagues Bill Siksay and Inky Mark, I welcome you to these hearings.

My name is Andrew Telegdi. I have the honour of chairing this committee, and I'm very pleased to welcome you. We're going across Canada studying citizenship legislation. We're studying family reunification and the recognition of international credentials.

Each group will get five minutes to make a presentation. I'll try to wave at you if you get beyond your time. I don't like cutting people off, so when you see that please wrap up. Then we'll have questions going back and forth for five minutes. We get very useful information that way as well. So if you've got a longer report, just summarize it for us and we'll ask you questions on it.

We will start with our individual witnesses.

Mr. Lu.

Mr. Tao Lu (As an Individual): Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for giving me this opportunity.

I am here to express my concern and frustration with the delay in the family reunion cases.

My wife and I are sponsoring her parents and her little sister from Beijing. They sent in their application to the Canadian embassy in Beijing in April 2003. At that time, we were told the application would take 18 months. However, time has kept going, and later it became 24 months and recently 34 months. It looks as if they have stopped processing cases altogether, for some reason, although I don't have exact data about that. As Canadian citizens and taxpayers, we feel very disappointed with this treatment. We think it is unfair and discriminating.

Also, I think it's our right to reunite with our family, and we feel such right is being silently violated by the immigration department. I think there are now thousands of people with cases similar to ours.

We also fear that my wife's little sister would now qualify as a dependant to immigrate with her parents, but if the Beijing office starts to process her case years from now, she won't be qualified because she will be over 20.

I would like to stress five solutions.

First, please restore the quota and reduce the processing time. One of the immigration objectives under the Immigration and Refugee

Protection Act is to see that families are reunited in Canada. In the Chinese culture, we consider parents to be part of the family. We want to look after them once we settle down and establish ourselves here. Both my wife and I have established ourselves well in Canada. We have decent jobs and decent pay. We pay taxes. If our parents have to wait a long time to get into Canada—say, ten, seven or even five years—they probably won't make it during their lifetime. This is unfair.

In the meantime, the Department of Citizenship and Immigration is taking applications and taking fees, but they are not doing anything; they are dragging their feet. We committed to the government by signing this 10-year undertaking, but we expect government to fulfill its commitment to us in a timely manner, not with an indefinite timeframe. This is irresponsible behaviour on the government side.

My second suggestion would be to treat family class immigration as equal to other classes. Right now the family reunion class is given zero priority, in my opinion. It's way down the list. Parents provide important services to working Canadians like us, such as child care and home care. Also, when they come, they are going to bring their savings. They will sell their properties and bring that to Canada. As consumers, they will contribute to the Canadian economy. Some parents, like my father-in-law, are considering getting a job, getting training, and learning English. They are not necessarily burdens.

In my opinion, if I can't get our parents to reunite with us, over the long term Canada will lose status as a choice destination for skilled immigrants.

Third, please publish the exact processing time and keep your promise. This will help us to plan our lives. The government should be accountable and the government should have transparency. This issue is really damaging Canada's reputation for being humane and responsible. The government is misleading us about the processing time. That's a fact of life—the stress, the waiting, the anxiety, and the uncertainty.

●(0805)

Fourth, allow applicants to visit Canada while their cases are being reviewed. Very often if someone applies for immigration the government delays the case for years. In the meantime, often their visitor's visa is denied because of their intention to immigrate. That is absurd, because the government is delaying the cases and not letting them into Canada as visitors. That doesn't make sense. It's also inhumane.

My wife and I suggest that a bond system be put in place. If someone under sponsorship doesn't leave Canada as a visitor in time, I will lose the bond—for example, \$10,000, \$20,000, that's fine. Give me a number. If they don't leave Canada in time I will lose the bond. I have no problem with that.

Fifth, give consideration to the age of dependent children. For example, my sister-in-law was 18 when she applied, but if the government drags its feet long enough she will grow into an adult. There is no doubt about it. Why do you accept it in the first place if you are delaying it so long?

In summary, we are not asking the government to treat our parents' case with special favour. We just want the government to treat them with equality and in a timely manner, please. Don't promise us that we can reunite with our family when in reality you make it almost impossible to happen. It's almost unachievable now. So I just want to say to the government, please keep your promise. That's all I have to say.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: You're welcome.

We're not the government; we're the committee. The government representatives are over there. Anyway, they can pass that on. That's what we deal with. It's up to the minister.

Mr. Tao Lu: That's right.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that.

Next we have Ms. Liang.

Ms. Na (Kalen) Liang (As an Individual): Thank you.

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Kalen Liang. I'm here today to stand with my family and friends who share my frustration and headaches due to the family sponsorship immigration program.

I actually have a case similar to Mr. Lu's. I sponsored my parents in May 2003. After almost two years now, my parents in China and I in Canada still remain apart and are still patiently waiting for an update on the CIC website.

I think Canada is highly respected in the world as being a humanitarian country; they assist people, whoever needs help to settle down in this country, and the provinces have done the best they can. As Canadians, we proudly support our country and our government.

Regrettably, the immigration department stopped processing its own citizenship and immigration parental sponsorship immigration cases without a proper reason. This is unacceptable. It's unfair for my parents; it is unfair for any family who has applied for this.

I appreciate this opportunity to voice my concern and possibly to make a positive difference for future immigrants, so here are four suggestions on issues I need to address today.

First, please provide an accurate timeframe for parental immigration applicants. The processing time is critical for applicants. The delays we face today are unacceptable and have left us concerned about the status of the program. We have no idea where we are; we have no idea how our case is being processed. The immigration department should accurately and clearly indicate how long it will take to finalize the case. Now they are telling us in the first letter—as Mr. Lu said—18 months, but they keep delaying to 24 or 34 months without a proper reason. They just tell you it is delayed.

Our parents get older and older day by day, so we worry about our parents. To us this lack of explanation suggests the immigration department does not want us to be reunited with our parents; that's what I think. Everybody has parents. We want to look up to our parents, and we are very frustrated. The government keeps delaying our reunion. People will accept only an accurate, dependable processing date so we can look forward to planning our life, to our new beginning together with our parents in Canada.

The second suggestion is an increased quota for family reunification immigration. In 2005 the immigration department plans to hit their target of 5,500 to 6,800 for the parent-grandparent class. Obviously, this is way too low compared with the population and the demand. This is about a 50% decrease from the 2004 planned target for the same class of immigrants. I think for any country this is too small, especially a country with a higher population. If the government only planned on targeting such low numbers, why is it still accepting new cases and why doesn't it reveal the truth to the public? Doesn't the ministry officer think this is a dishonest action for applicants, since people would never know it when they apply for immigration, dreaming of the future, like me?

In considering family sponsorship immigration as a whole, the immigration department should immediately increase the quota for this type of immigration and let the public clearly understand the number of approved cases per year according to the target figure, on which we need transparency as to the whole processing.

The third suggestion is, improve the code system on the website. For people like me who have applied for family reunification immigration, the code system on the CIC website doesn't mean anything. The visa officer can't explain those codes in any way. We don't know accurately what position or status we are in the program. Simply looking at the code, people would never know what is going on with their cases. When we send an e-mail and we contact the visa office, they can't explain in any way. Those codes don't mean anything. It's inadequate information for us, and it leaves us in a state of wonder.

•(0810)

People who submit sponsorship applications to the Mississauga processing centre deserve to know the status of their application after they're received by the agency. They deserve a file number. Right now, the Mississauga processing centre has not even issued a file number for those sponsorship applications. The people are frustrated because they have no idea when their applications have been received and processed.

The last suggestion is very important: to allow our parents to come to visit until the immigration cases are finalized and allow them to have health checks, possibly, in Canada for immigration purposes later. Since our parents have to wait such a long time for the visa and the visa office constantly changes the processing time, we have no idea how long it will take to see our parents. The immigration minister should allow them to get more than a six-month visitor's visa and never reject their applications for visiting us.

Surprisingly, there are some officers who reject parents' visitor visas because some parents are trying to immigrate into Canada. If we think the whole thing through logically, this is unacceptable and unfair to our parents. They applied for sponsorship immigration years ago and they trusted that the Canadian government would follow the promise, the processing time, which is 18 months, but the ministry didn't keep their promised processing time. They have no choice to visit us first, so please don't reject their applications.

As my last point, I just want to remind you that we sign an agreement with the government as a pledge for parents' expenses for two years in Canada. Please don't forget about this. Our parents are not a burden for this country.

Thank you very much.

•(0815)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we have Caroline Lindberg and Lisa Wyndels.

Mrs. Caroline Lindberg (Co-ordinating Chair, Inter-Clinic Immigration Working Group): Thank you.

There are actually four of us here today on behalf of the Inter-Clinic Immigration Working Group, a network of lawyers and community legal workers in Ontario community legal clinics. Each of us works as a staff lawyer in a clinic located in Toronto.

Clinics are funded by Legal Aid Ontario to provide services to low-income individuals and disadvantaged communities, and in many clinics, these services include legal matters related to immigration. There are currently almost 30 clinics in Ontario that belong to our group, which has been meeting monthly in Toronto for over 20 years.

Given that we could not possibly address the range of family reunification issues that clinics see on a daily basis, we chose to focus in our brief on three areas as they affect children, a particularly vulnerable group. These three areas are delays in family reunification; paragraph 117(9)(d) of the immigration and refugee protection regulations, the exclusion of unexamined family members; and paragraph 133(1)(k) of the regulations, the ineligibility to sponsor due to receipt of social assistance.

I will speak very briefly on this last point, and then Lisa will use the time remaining to say a little bit about the first two topics.

One of the changes wrought by the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act was the requirement in paragraph 133(1)(k) of the regulations that a sponsor be not in receipt of social assistance for a reason other than disability. Thus, a sponsor who is on social assistance for any other reason is not permitted to sponsor anyone, not even a child. By contrast, the minimum income requirements that apply to family class sponsorships do not have to be met if someone is sponsoring a spouse, common law or conjugal partner, or dependent child, as long as that dependent child does not have children. Thus, the working poor are permitted to sponsor their dependent children, but those who receive social assistance are not.

CIC policy does contemplate possible approval of applications on humanitarian and compassionate grounds in cases where a sponsor is ineligible due to receipt of social assistance. This does not address the fundamental injustice of paragraph 133(1)(k), nor does it, in most cases, provide an effective remedy.

By exempting sponsors from minimum income requirements with respect to certain close family members, the government has acknowledged that the importance of reunifying these family members transcends financial concerns. But because of paragraph 133(1)(k), not all low-income families are seen as equally deserving and equally in need of reunification.

In our view, there is no rational explanation for the distinction between those who are poor because they have low-wage jobs and those who are poor and unemployed or earning so little that they qualify for social assistance. Moreover, the Convention on the Rights of the Child states: "applications by a child or his or her parents to enter or leave a State Party for the purpose of family reunification shall be dealt with by States Parties in a positive, humane and expeditious manner".

In our submission, paragraph 133(1)(k) has the opposite effect, so we are recommending that it be deleted.

I very much hope that you will read our full submission, our written brief on this and other points, and that you will find it persuasive.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Lisa Wyndels (Member, Inter-Clinic Immigration Working Group): I will continue on, if you don't mind, briefly. Do we have any more time?

Thanks for hearing from us today.

With respect to subparagraph 117(9)(d), the exclusion of family members, which is one of the issues that I think you have heard from many people about, on behalf of ICIWG, I want to commend you to Michael Bossin's submission of February 10 before you. He is a colleague of ours, a member of ICIWG and he spoke on behalf of the Canadian Council of Refugees. We fully endorse the position that he articulated, and our own position is consistent with that, so we are not going to speak about that separately.

But I want to make a few points on the delay aspect. I think it's a little bit difficult to speak about.

I am going to begin by telling you quickly about a case there that I think illustrates a number of the problems. This is the case of a girl named Zamzam from Yemen, who as a teenager was—actually, this case will illustrate both the problems with paragraph 117(9)(d), the exclusion aspect of things, as well as delay and DNA problems. Zamzam is from Yemen, from a fundamentalist Muslim family. She was raped by a friend of her brother as a teenager, became pregnant, and gave birth to a child out of wedlock. She left the family home and left the child with a friend of hers whom she trusted. She nursed the child. She visited the child and the child knew her to be the mother. The family did not know that she had had this child, because there were very real risks to the mother of harm for a perceived honour violation.

In 1997 Zamzam married a Canadian citizen and came to Canada. Her brothers in Yemen filled out the paperwork for her. She did not mention the child in the paperwork. There would have been severe implications for her had she. She came to Canada and when she became a citizen in Canada sought to sponsor the child, then 12 years of age, and of course the child was not considered a member of the family class, even though detailed affidavit information was provided explaining the situation.

Zamzam had to go to the immigration appeal division to try to get them to hear the issue. They took no jurisdiction. It had to go to the Federal Court of Canada. The Department of Justice consented ultimately because the facts in the case were very strong. A lot of money and time had to be spent to go that far unnecessarily. Then the High Commission in London had to deal with the question of processing the application. They required DNA testing in spite of the fact that there was an original authenticated birth certificate of the child in existence naming the mother and the child.

So what you have then is a situation where DNA testing has become the new evidentiary threshold, and not only in cases of last resort but in many cases. The cost is prohibitive and further delays involved. Now we are advised at the current time that it will be many months before Yemen even receives the testing package that will be forwarded to them. So you have a situation where the mother has not seen her child since 1997, and much of that is exacerbated by the operational situation of overseas processing.

Should I go further?

• (0820)

The Chair: No, no.

Ms. Lisa Wyndels: A little?

The Chair: Very quickly.

Ms. Lisa Wyndels: We have elaborated on all of these things in our brief, and I hope you will give it some attention. We would be happy to do a follow-up submission if you would care to hear from us further.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Macdonald Scott.

Mr. Macdonald Scott (Immigration Consultant, As an Individual): Thank you.

I am active in the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty and No One Is Illegal. I work on immigration matters for a multi-ethnic law firm in North York, Carranza Barristers and Solicitors .

Problems with family reunification affect our entire system. They are among a host of problems that make it difficult for poor people from other countries to come here, so people end up coming without papers, so-called illegally, through the refugee system or whatever means they can.

We then turn around and try to patch these leaks. We make the refugee system harder. We increase border security. We remove more refugee claimants quicker. Or we talk about amnesties, but not true amnesties, to give status to some while increasing sanctions against others.

The family reunification problem is part of why poor people are forced to use other methods to come to Canada. Even though family reunification is an objective of the current act, we still use an antiquated, Eurocentric definition of family, which is even more restrictive than the definition under the old Immigration Act, which defines family, essentially, as dependent children, fathers or mothers, grandfathers or grandmothers, and spouses. Other than that, unless the family member is an orphan and under 18—and this only applies to brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews and grandchildren, or where the sponsor has no other living relatives, the lone remaining relative category, as it is often referred to—there is no way for family to come.

In other parts of the world, families are considered in larger units. But here, a poor person who wants to bring in a sustainable support network is out of luck. Also, if they are on welfare, they are not even going to be able to bring in the part of their family defined under the act.

What other options are left open for these people? If they don't have the low-income cut-off, good English or French, or post-secondary education, they can't come as skilled workers. Obviously, the investors, the entrepreneurs, and the self-employed categories are not available to them. This leaves getting here and making a refugee claim or sneaking in and then using the humanitarian and compassionate leave application to get status, which takes three to four years and has a 5% to 10% success rate. Then we blame them for coming in this way!

Our population is dependent on immigration. Even Ottawa admits we have a problem. It set a goal of increasing our population through immigration by 1% a year. This would have been 310,000 in 2003, but we actually let in about 225,000. This is from “We Cannot Let Immigrants Fail”, an article on April 14, 2004, in *The Toronto Star*.

Also, our economy is dependent on the over 100,000—50% of whom live in Toronto—undocumented labourers. They take the jobs no one else will take. They pay taxes. They work in our homes, our eating places, our streets, and throughout our communities.

The 2001 census actually showed that we will soon have too few young people of working age. For every person between 55 and 64, there were only 1.4 aged 15 to 24, down 1.6 from a decade ago, leaving us with a future problem where we will not have enough people to pay taxes or work to support our aging population.

At No One Is Illegal and OCAP, we believe the solution is a full amnesty—not dependent on employment or period of stay, but full and accessible amnesty for all those without documents. This needs to be followed by an overhaul of our immigration system to create opportunities for poor people to come to Canada. Even the United States has a lottery system for the green card. Portugal has had open borders for a number of years now, allowing people to come in and get work permits. An improved refugee system for those in danger can be complemented by an improved and regulated system for bringing in poor people throughout the world. This would entail changing family reunification to a wider definition of “family” as well as allowing people to come in regardless of whether their sponsors are on welfare or what their income is.

This will allow for a new immigration system that will not just be accessible for those with money and will lead to a stronger economy and a stronger Canada.

Like a number of others, I am speaking across the country in favour of a full amnesty. We are part of a network, and our movement for a full and accessible amnesty is growing. You will be seeing us at these hearings, you will be seeing us at demonstrations on the street, and you will be seeing us coming to your offices to alert you to this demand. It needs to be acceded to immediately.

Thank you.

• (0825)

The Chair: Thank you.

Next we have Maria Antelo and Lilyam Trujillo.

Ms. Maria Antelo (Co-Chair, Immigrant and Refugee Family Re-unification Support Group): Thank you very much.

We are a support group that lobbies on behalf of convention refugees, meaning people who have been accepted in Canada as protected persons and who are in the process of reuniting with their most immediate family members—children and spouses. We have approximately 200 members right now in Hamilton. We work mainly with the Latin American community. However, we have lots of members from Africa and the Middle East.

The main issue we want to raise today is that the length of processing time to get those children to Canada is incredibly long. We do not need to have a PhD to understand the enormous trauma

and impact separated families have to endure. Social service agencies, settlement agencies, and schools are not equipped to deal with the trauma of these children. We are seeing these cases more and more every day. The length of processing time is really long.

We have to advocate on individual bases, meaning we have to take one case at a time, right to MPs, right to the visa office abroad. Some parents are forced to get DNA testing. Fine, they get the DNA testing, and they prove that these children are theirs. But the processing time is too long. We have contacted immigration and the United Nations, because we want to know what is going on. We've had this unanimous answer: we don't have enough officers to process these applications.

In the meantime, these children will come to Canada sooner or later, because their parents are here, and we as a society will have to take over dealing with the enormous trauma of these families, through the health agencies, doctors, hospitals, schools. These children have been left in their countries sometimes for two, three, four, and in some cases eight years of separation. These children are now accustomed to another family. We re-traumatize them by separating them from their surrogate family. As well, the majority of relatives who take care of these children are grandparents, so grandparents are an important part of the family. Again, we need to have the families united.

All of these problems would be easily avoided if we had a more efficient processing time for applications.

There are some situations where we can accelerate the reunification of these children. We have the resettlement assistance program, which could help these children come to Canada with a minister's permit and process their immigration here in Canada. Protection should be extended to these immediate family members. If we find that someone is a convention refugee and needs our protection, we need to protect those children. We need to respect the human rights of children.

I don't want this to be redundant—a lot of things have been said already—so I want to invite Lilyam to speak now. Lilyam is a member of this group. She is in some way a success story, because she is a convention refugee. She will soon be landed. She will be a permanent resident next week. But she has been waiting for her children, and I want to give her two minutes just to tell you what it feels like to be without your children.

Lilyam.

•(0830)

Ms. Lilyam Trujillo (Member, L.R. Family Reunification Support Group, Immigrant and Refugee Family Re-unification Support Group)(Interpretation): I want to share this with you today. It's very hard for me to talk about this issue. I have not seen my kids for two and a half years. I'm holding three jobs. I'm working weekends and evenings. It's very hard to know my children are constantly asking when they are going to be reunited with me. I don't have an answer for them. I can't tell them it's going to be in a month; I can't tell them it's going to be soon.

As parents, we will do anything that is required for our children. I suffer from this absence, this separation. Right now my children do not have a father or a mother. The anguish and all I feel cannot be described.

I am happy to be in Canada. I've been struggling and working to support my kids and I will continue to do so. It is very hard for me to keep on waiting. I have no family in Canada. My children are desperate every time I call them. They don't understand what I'm telling them.

•(0835)

Ms. Maria Antelo: That's all she has to say. Thank you very much for this time you have allowed us to speak.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next we have Debbie Douglas.

Ms. Debbie Douglas (Executive Director, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants): Good morning. I'm joined here from OCASI by the vice-president of the council, Loly Rico. I will speak first, and then Loly will follow up.

As you heard, my name is Debbie Douglas. I'm the director of the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants. We are the umbrella group here in Ontario for agencies that provide services to immigrants and refugees.

You have my brief in front of you. Because it's a fairly long brief, what I will do is pick particular points to speak to. I trust you will read our brief, with all of the recommendations attached to it. In our brief we talk about both immigrants and refugees, around issues of family reunification.

We believe Canada has many compelling reasons for promoting family reunification. These include our international legal obligations, Canada's tradition of giving priority to family reunification in immigration policies, and the importance of family reunification as a factor in promoting newcomer integration.

Historically, family class immigrants comprise a significant portion of the overall immigrant population in Canada. Since the

early 1990s, when the current government came into power, the percentage of family class immigrants coming to Canada has declined. For the past few years the government has imposed a rule that 60% of immigration should be economic and 40% non-economic, that is, family and refugees.

By limiting admissions in these classes, this government has put all those who wish to be reunited with their family into an intolerable situation, despite Canada's obligation, stated priorities, and clear interest in promoting these admissions. This has especially negatively affected individuals, such as refugees, who may have no other family here in Canada. We just heard that very moving story.

The 60-40 split has resulted in applications for family reunification being delayed in order to allow more immigration in the economic class. The Canadian Council for Refugees report, *More than a Nightmare: Delays in Refugee Family Reunification*, which was published last November, looks at processing times for applications from refugee family members abroad from the time at which a completed family application is received at a visa post. It identifies extensive delays in some visa posts, especially those located in Africa and the Middle East, with the greatest delays in the post in the Ivory Coast, at Abidjan.

Other advocates have noted that resource allocation to visa posts are skewed in favour of Europe and the United States, despite changing trends that show increased immigration from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean. The unequal allocation is consistent with increased waiting times in these regions, where few resources are allocated.

Refugee children in Canada have no way to reunite with family members. While adults can include a spouse, a common law partner, and children on the application, as you've heard as well from my colleagues around the table, refugee children can only apply for themselves. Refugee children who arrive in Canada without family face the prospect of never being able to reunite with parents and siblings.

If the parents or siblings are in Canada but have no independent entitlement to remain in Canada, they may be deported, imposing family separation on the refugee child. This situation puts Canada in violation of its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

These concerns have been identified in another report called *Impacts on children of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*, also published in November 2004.

The increasingly narrow definition of family in IRPA, limiting who can be sponsored as family, also signifies the Canadian government's retreat away from the commitment to family reunification. It is alarming that the definition of family in the Immigration Act has become narrower at a time that Canada is experiencing increased immigration from the global south, where family relationships are often defined to include extended families.

Canadians who wish to be reunited with families abroad must not only demonstrate that these individuals fit Canada's definition of family, but often must satisfy visa officers that the relationship is genuine. Visa officers are allowed to exercise wide discretionary powers in making this determination, in what is often an intrusive, lengthy, and sometimes humiliating process. The lack of guidelines and/or accountability means that the determination process is often fraught with prejudices held by officers making the decisions, most of whom do not share the same cultural, racial, social, and/or economic background as the applicants.

● (0840)

We had a very recent case of this happening in Toronto, with a Jamaican woman and her child and her partner in Jamaica.

I want to end now, so I don't take too much time and can let Loly have some time, but I can't end without speaking about the issue of people without status in Canada, or the undocumented, which Mac Scott talked a bit about.

Many people without status in Canada, including failed refugee claimants, refugee claimants from countries where there is a moratorium on removals, as well as other individuals, have lived and worked here for many years. They have become an integral part of the Canadian economy and society and are usually active, contributing members of the communities in which they live. Some non-status individuals have Canadian-born children, and live and work here while raising their families. There have been many recent cases where these Canadian-born children were at risk of being separated from their parents, when non-status parents were removed from the country, or at risk of losing their rights as a citizen, because parents did not want or could not leave minor children behind.

A process to regularize these individuals would give Canada a means to address the limbo situation in which many refugees live; to abide by Canada's obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; and to legitimize the inclusion and participation in the wage economy, and all other aspects of society, of people without status. We have precedent in Canada for doing this, and we urge this standing committee to put this forward as a strong recommendation.

Loly, you have just a couple of more minutes.

Ms. Loly Rico (Vice-President, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants): I just want to bring in front of you what Debbie was saying, and what I believe everybody around this table is saying.

Specifically, Lilyam's case is not the only case—I want to bring up the case of refugee children, because the time is passing now. I can especially give you the case of children from Angola who are finishing their high school after being here for five years. They are refugees under the UN convention, and there is no way they can reunite with their mother, who lives alone in Angola. I believe it is a violation of human rights that these children, who are graduating with honours this year from high school, cannot be with their mother, because IRPA does not allow it. I believe it would be good if you could review that, because it is a violation of human rights.

That's what I want to finish with you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have been joined by Mr. Temelkovski. Welcome.

Just before we get into the questions, I want you to know that this committee picked three topics on which we wanted to consult Canadians: one is citizenship, the second one is international credentials, and the third is obviously family reunification. There are constituents we see on a regular basis, so that's one of the reasons we came up with those topics. As Mr. Siksay has said, when we deal with some of the issues we have a lot of Kleenex boxes, because they are sad stories, and we are trying to find a resolution to them somehow.

Ms. Grewal has also joined us.

We are going to start a five-minute session of questions and answers, so be concise with the questions and with the answers, so that we can get all the way through. We usually find that this helps us to get at the issues.

Mr. Mark.

Mr. Inky Mark (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to our witnesses for appearing before us today. You can be assured that your stories and your messages are loud and clear, as we have been hearing the same concerns throughout the hearings.

It is almost an ironic twist, because members of Parliament, when they're away from their families even for four days or five days a week, understand how important it is to go home and see their kids and see their spouses. And I said yesterday, Canadians would never put up with being away from their families for any extended amount of time.

I can certainly tell you, as an immigrant myself, in terms of trauma.... I never really knew my father until I was almost seven years of age, again, because of the exclusion act, the laws of this country. I didn't get here until I was seven. My dad had already been in this country for many years, as he came into this country....

There is really no excuse. It was mentioned this morning that this country continues to take applications for families to reunify, and at the same time, it stalls the whole process. It is unfair that people don't know where the application process is at, and that was brought home to us. They keep changing the dates but keep taking your money. So that certainly has to be changed.

I'm glad to hear that the issue of bonds was brought up.

The other thing is to either increase the numbers or change the formula. As was mentioned, 60-40 is the way we are dealing with it today. Perhaps we need to go to a 50-50 formula. Some of you could probably comment on that.

And this whole business of non-disclosure was brought up again. Should there be a limitation for non-disclosure? Again we were told—perhaps it is under the advice of immigration consultants—that people tend not to disclose in terms of their family members.

Another point that was brought up previously was the business of refugee declaration upon entry into the country. There was concern about that, and Mr. Scott, I am certainly glad to hear that you are going to ensure that the message about amnesty is loud, because that topic was discussed by the committee, I think, about three or four years ago, and they did not get too far. I agree that there has to be some vehicle for people to be legitimate in this country and we can't continue to ignore the...I guess it is a problem or it is not a problem, depending on which side of the fence you sit on.

On the amnesty question, we need to have some idea of what kind of process people need to go through to be registered and to become legitimate Canadians.

So you could start with that one, perhaps.

• (0845)

Mr. Macdonald Scott: We favour a full amnesty—I know there is talk at this point of an employment-derived amnesty—giving people a fairly generous period to check in that is not dependent on how long they have been in the country, and either a regularization like a working visa of some sort while their permanent residency is processed or some other form of being able to regularize their status immediately while awaiting permanent residency.

We believe this is important because there is such a large population living without status, and an employment-derived amnesty just favours one sector of that population while leaving the rest out in the cold. We believe this can be done. There have been examples, as pointed out, in the past in Canada, and there are certainly examples internationally, whether in the United States, Portugal, or other countries.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any input on the numbers?

Ms. Na (Kalen) Liang: Thank you.

Actually, I was thinking about one of my friends. She applied for her parents' immigration to Canada in 2002, and she lost her father during the processing time, which was 18 months. So her father passed away before they got a visa. It was very frustrating for her and she told me, "We don't know about our parents. Of course, we have confidence. We believe our parents will come here eventually, but how long will it take?" You don't know if one day something will happen to the parents, and all of a sudden you've lost one of them. Time is very important for parents.

Mr. Inky Mark: If the visitor's visa period was extended to a year or two years, would that help?

Ms. Na (Kalen) Liang: Yes, that would be better, but the main problem is that they didn't even give them visas. When parents apply for visitor's visas, they're rejected. They say it's because they tried to immigrate.

When we think this out logically, yes, I did; I applied first, and you kept delaying, and I have no other choice. I want to see my child.

Children want to see their parents. They're rejected. That's brutal.

• (0850)

The Chair: Please respond very quickly.

Ms. Lisa Wyndels: On the issue of the 60-40 split and the dilemma that gives rise to, I think we're looking at the issue of family reunification particularly in the context of reunification of children who are dependants of convention refugees. It's pretty clear—to me, anyway, and to us, I think—that if Canada decides to admit people as convention refugees and makes its inland determination that says you can stay, that you're on your way to permanent residence, then we can predict with almost certainty how much processing is going to have to happen overseas to complete that family. If you admit a mother as a convention refugee, you're not finishing the process; to finish the process, you have to bring her kids, and it's pretty clear that there need to be sufficient resources on the other side.

So 60-40 seems quite abstract. It's very clear that you have to start from knowing that you have an ongoing obligation to process the family. It's only halfway there if you've only just made the determination.

One other point I want to make in terms of where we would like to see you possibly invest some of your time is that we really do believe a special regime of processing ought to apply to children. The situation of children in the immigration system is very different, and children are not security risks. They are just not the same kind of problem as adults might potentially be, and it is possible to think about ways of expediting the processing without requiring the kind of intense advocacy that we have to do, that you have to do in your constituency offices. It's absurd.

The Chair: Next is Monsieur Clavet.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Clavet (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to thank the witnesses for their outstanding contributions to our discussion and hearings.

There is so much information, I do not know where to start.

I will go back to what Ms. Maria Antelo was saying earlier: one does not require a Ph.D. to understand the trauma experienced by the witnesses. It is true, and I think that all of us around this table regardless of our political stripes, are touched by what we have heard. It breaks our heart to think of Ms. Lilyam Trujillo not seeing her children for two and a half years. We also are parents. When I hear Mr. Scott say that the traditional definition of marriage and family is defunct, I completely agree with him. The members of the Block Québécois share this opinion, as do some other members. I am more directly affected by Ms. Liang's testimony. She spoke of the difficulties she had reuniting the members of her family. Her excellent brief, however, contains a small but significant error: Rahim Jaffer is presented as being a Liberal member from Alberta. The current situation being what it is, this mistake could be far-reaching.

It was stated that there were 2,000 applications for immigration under the family reunification class, in Beijing, whereas the goal was to limit this to 100. I would like to discuss this. I would also like to compare the adoption of Chinese children to family reunification. Adoption is a widespread phenomenon in Canada, particularly in Quebec, and it is not a lengthy process. It requires a lot of money, yes, but it is not difficult. However, when the issue is family reunification, there is a problem.

I would like to hear your comments on adoption and on family reunification. The former seems easy, and the latter very difficult. Do you know why?

[English]

Ms. Na (Kalen) Liang: Sorry, you mean...? I am talking about parents being....

Mr. Roger Clavet: Yes, as it compares to adoption. Every year, roughly 500 children are adopted in Quebec alone. I don't know the figures for the rest of the country, but how is it easy in one sense, and in the other so difficult? Do you have an explanation for that?

• (0855)

Ms. Na (Kalen) Liang: Of course I have no explanation for that, but the thing is they keep delaying. They tell me 18 months at the beginning; it seems to me like cheating. They just tell you, yes, we can bring your parents in 18 months—I paid \$3,000 two years ago for both my parents—and they keep delaying to 34 months. They sent a fax to my MP in 2004. If I hadn't sent an e-mail to them, I wouldn't even know they were already delayed. So many friends have asked them after 18 months; then they were aware that it had been already changed to 34 months. That's unfair.

I am not sure about the thing you mentioned about adopting children, because I never experienced this in my life.

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Clavet: Generally speaking, you will find that Canadian authorities get caught up in too much red tape and delays where sponsoring Chinese immigrants is concerned?

[English]

Ms. Na (Kalen) Liang: Yes, that is what I think.

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Clavet: Thank you.

I now have a question for the representatives of the Inter-Clinic Immigration Working Group.

You tabled an excellent brief. The inaccessibility of sponsorship for those on social assistance troubles me greatly. Can you tell me what this criterion, which to my mind is discriminatory, is based on? I would like to hear your comments on this.

[English]

Mrs. Caroline Lindberg: I agree that it is discriminatory. I don't find any rational explanation for it. As I indicated in my presentation, when someone is not receiving social assistance, a sponsor seeking to bring a spouse, partner, or dependent child does not have to meet the low-income cut-off requirements that would otherwise be required in a family class sponsorship, so there is a

recognition that for those family members, economic concerns will not impede reunification.

I don't understand why, in enacting the regulations to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, a decision was made to bar the possibility of any family class sponsorships for persons on social assistance for a reason other than disability. I don't understand the distinction between working poor and poor people who require social assistance.

I also don't understand why there is a distinction made between those in receipt of social assistance because of disability and those in receipt of social assistance for other reasons. No one chooses to be on social assistance, and in fact, I find it discriminatory in relation to women, to single mothers who may have difficulty obtaining and maintaining employment because of child care responsibilities.

I find it discriminatory in relation to newcomers who may face language barriers and other barriers. One of the other topics on your agenda, I know, relates to that, so in those instances as well, I can't explain it.

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Clavet: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, if I may, I would like to put a final question to Ms. Debbie Douglas of the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants.

Regarding the sponsoring of children from French-speaking Africa, particularly from Abidjan, Ivory Coast, there have been absolutely incredible delays. In one case, it was 10 years, that is from 1992 to 2002.

[English]

So by the time we get a toddler, they have almost become a senior citizen.

Could you elaborate on this?

[Translation]

Could you tell us what is going on?

[English]

Ms. Debbie Douglas: I think it speaks to what we have been saying—that we need to take a look at how we have disbursed our resources in terms of being able to process claims.

We know that with increasing numbers coming from places like Africa—including French-speaking Africa—and Asia, there aren't enough visa posts. We don't have enough visa officers working and able to process the applications that are coming in.

One of the other issues it is important to talk about is the economic cost associated with having to leave one country to go to Ivory Coast, for example, to be able to process your application. We often forget that the dollars aren't equal. A place like Europe, in terms of economics and the amount of money people make, is similar to us here in Canada. In places like Africa that is absolutely not true, and it places another undue burden on people needing to put in applications in places like Ivory Coast.

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Clavet: Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we're going to go on to Mr. Siksay. We have four who are going to ask questions, so let's keep it as close to the line as possible.

Mr. Siksay.

• (0900)

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is really frustrating to only have five minutes for questions and responses, but I'll try to keep it quick.

Thank you all for your presentations. They've been very helpful and very articulate. I wanted to thank especially Mr. Lu, Ms. Liang, and Ms. Trujillo for sharing so personally. I know that's often very difficult in a situation like this, and I really do appreciate it. I hope there is a resolution to your particular situations faster than it appears there'll be right at the moment.

I wanted to come back, though, to the whole issue of people of modest or low income or poor people and our immigration system. The more I have listened to Ms. Lindberg and Mr. Scott, the more it has seemed there is a huge inconsistency in how we deal with that. In my constituency I am meeting a number of people now who are faced with huge bills from the provincial government for social assistance payments for people they sponsored, where the government is now moving to collect on that. I don't think that's happening consistently across the country either, but there are people with bills from the provincial government in British Columbia now for \$80,000 and \$90,000 because they didn't act on it earlier and these costs mounted significantly. It's a huge burden on those families and it's ruining their financial situation.

It seems like the whole system is skewed in the financial sponsorship arrangement, in that we make exceptions for some people but not everyone, and now we're seeing it at that end too, where the government is moving to collect on social assistance payments that were made.

Should we be getting out of the financial obligation or the financial sponsorship aspect of immigration altogether? I'll put that first to you and then to others if they want to speak to that. If these inconsistencies are so significant, why are we doing it at all?

Mrs. Caroline Lindberg: Well, it's a good question.

I think it was a positive move when the length of sponsorship was decreased under IRPA for these spouses. I do think there are problems, because it results in the treatment of sponsored immigrants differently from others in terms of access to benefits and the ramifications for the family member who has sponsored them. It would certainly be something to explore, perhaps shortening it for close family members such as spouses, partners, and dependent children. If we recognize the critical importance of that family unit, then perhaps it's a situation where we shouldn't be looking for a financial commitment from the sponsor.

Underlying that, there's this 60-40 split that has been mentioned in terms of selection. I don't buy into the idea that family reunification is in the 40 part, the non-economic side of things. There are many economic benefits to family reunification, so I think it's a bit of a fallacy to see it as not being on the economic side. If it's looked at that way, it reinforces the idea that perhaps we ought not to be looking at financial responsibility on the part of the sponsor.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Does anyone else want to talk about it?

Ms. Debbie Douglas: I want to follow up on this, but I also wanted to go back to talk about some other financial barriers.

I agree that somehow we see family reunification as not being part of nation-building the way the economic class is; that is the assumption we are operating under. But what we're hearing from agencies, and I think you've heard it all around the table today, is that it's probably more like 70-30 for where the emphasis is and who gets processed in terms of who it is we're looking to bring into Canada.

So I agree, I think we need to change the discourse that somehow people coming in under the family class bring less to Canada. We absolutely don't believe that, and I think we all agree that having your family with you, extended family or otherwise, is one way of sustaining yourself in a new country. As I said in my presentation, it helps the integration process.

But the other thing in terms of financial barriers—and I know Caroline talked a bit about who is not allowed to sponsor—is that for many working families it's difficult because of the right of landing fee. It's something we have to continue to think about, and we have to begin to look at different ways we can begin to remove that as a barrier, so families do not have to wait two and three years before they can put in an application. It costs \$500 for processing and \$975 for an adult. That's also an issue the committee should be paying attention to: financial barriers.

• (0905)

Mr. Bill Siksay: I think it is significant too just in terms of the happiness of the people who come to Canada. There seems to be a real disparity in some ways. Even if family class immigrants end up working at a lower-paying job, they tend to be happier than the skilled immigrants who come and can't use the educational background that they got the points for in the first place. So there seems to be a real disparity developing there.

Mr. Tao Lu: On the working poor, the two ladies I had mentioned, I think partial forgiveness of the loan or social assistance to pay back probably should be considered. But I myself represent people who pay taxes and are not on welfare. So I think a total forgiveness probably would be unfair for my group of people, who work hard and pay taxes and are just trying to get their families in. It's just my opinion, and I represent a certain number of people.

Also, to go back to Mr. Roger Clavet's question—I'm sorry I did not get a chance—I think you were talking about the delay and why it is so difficult to sponsor parents. It used to not be difficult, because it probably took a year or a year and a half before. I think CIC has lowered the quotas since 2003. It dropped from 20,000 to 10,000, and this year I think the unofficial number is around 5,000 or 6,000. That is why this backlog has suddenly occurred, not because there is a big increase in applications, but because there is a huge decrease in the quotas for that class.

That is my explanation.

Mr. Bill Siksay: And if you have a 60-40 split of skilled immigrants, those people are sponsoring their families, and if they all have to fit into the 40% class along with all the other families, that is why we're getting this mess.

The Chair: We are going to move on to Mr. Temelkovski.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski (Oak Ridges—Markham, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I am sorry for the morning delay. I will go over the transcripts and see what everybody said. But we have heard about the issue of family reunification for the last ten days right across the country, and so far it sounds as if the issues are the same, or predominantly the same, all over the country.

I would like to touch on a couple of issues. Is anything working in the family reunification? Should we be starting from scratch?

Mr. Tao Lu: I don't think so.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Are there any comments on that?

Ms. Debbie Douglas: I think one of the positive things we saw coming out of IRPA in terms of family reunification was the fact that we now include same-sex partners under the spouse definition. I think that was probably one of the most positive things to come out.

It is always difficult to answer the question, because we don't want to put out the message that Canada's immigration system is not working at all. But there are very significant issues that I think we need to address. I'm not saying throw out the baby with the bathwater, but I am saying that there is enough wrong for us to reopen the whole conversation about Canada's immigration and refugee protection laws.

Ms. Lisa Wyndels: I would also add that I know at a meeting in January of this year between CIC officials and the CCR, there were statistics provided by CIC that indicated that processing times with respect to processing of dependants of convention refugees had decreased in the preceding period of time. And while we laud that—we have not independently investigated those statistics but we think that's great—what we also understand is that again it is a shifting priority within the 40%.

What may be happening is that there is some nominal decrease in processing times with respect to the dependants of convention refugees, but it's at the expense of perhaps government-assisted refugees who are not seeing the same increase in their processing time. So who is to say what is worse—the kid alone in Cairo or people in a camp in Kenya? I think it is really problematic for us to be in a position of playing off against one another, to some extent. We are all representing under-represented constituencies.

There was a question about adoption earlier—why does that move along and your family reunification stuff doesn't move along? The reason is quite clear to me. People who are adopting children internationally have money, and the adoption system has been substantially streamlined to accommodate the pressures that have been brought to bear by that constituency. Our clients are poor; that is how they qualify for our services. Mostly we see the tip of the iceberg. They are lucky if they get to us, because we can at least do some advocacy for them. Most people who are trying to bring their kids from Africa or wherever don't have legal representation. They don't have any representation. The system is responsive to pressures. The people who are adopting children internationally are a more powerful group than we are.

● (0910)

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: I see in one of the recommendations here it's suggested that the 60-40 split be reviewed. Well, let's move on beyond the review. Give us some recommendations.

I mean, okay, we're going to review it. What do you want it to be? We can pull a 50-50.

The Chair: Somebody right over here is going to tell you how many.

Mr. Macdonald Scott: I just wanted to say that while I agree completely with Ms. Douglas in terms of the same-sex expansion, the definition under the Immigration Act was even more expansive of family than it is under this act, and that was in response to critiques given by immigrant families and people around the world that we had narrowed this definition into a completely Eurocentric definition of what a family is. So one recommendation would be to go back to a more expansive, more global definition of family that understands that family goes beyond a spouse and dependent children.

Also, just briefly, one of the other problems with the IRPA—and this deals with the welfare issue, with the people on welfare not being able to sponsor family—is that it creates situations of double jeopardy. You have a situation where a family on welfare is not only punished by having to live on \$500 a month in Ontario, but they're further punished by the Immigration Act by not being able to bring their family. It does this throughout; it does this around issues of criminality and deportation. This is treatment we would not visit on citizens anywhere. Under the charter, double jeopardy has been seen as a great no-no, but we feel we can do this to immigrants and to non-status people.

I think the IRPA needs to be looked at in that light, and we need to treat immigrants as full members of our society, as entitled to charter rights as anybody else in this country.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Does anybody want to say something on the split?

Ms. Debbie Douglas: It is my issue. We would prefer not to have a 60-40 split. We prefer not to have percentages in terms of economic versus family class versus refugees. I think, as someone presented earlier, if our goal is to bring in immigrants at 1% of population, then I think we need to pay attention to how we begin to accomplish that so that all people who are qualified to and want to come to Canada are processed in a timely way. I think that's the larger issue, as opposed to whether or not we look at economic immigration as something that's good and family reunification as something we have to do because we want the people to come here to work.

I think, as I started to say earlier, we need to go back to talking about immigration to Canada as nation-building and not as bringing in economic widgets who we need here to work because we're all getting old and we need somebody to help pay our pension. I think that is what we are beginning to find a bit annoying, because that has been the tone of the discussion over the last few years.

So I would say—and I know that recommendation is actually coming from OCASI, because we have to start somewhere—at the end of the day we would much prefer to hear Canada say that we have an immigration program, that it is made up of these various groups of people from around the world who come here, and that in order to ensure that they're getting here and being settled and integrated and not being separated, we need to look at where our resources should be going.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: So your recommendation is that we move to 1% or thereabouts, and that will solve our problem?

Ms. Debbie Douglas: No, we already have that as a stated goal in Canada. I think what we do is look at the ways we can reach that goal and consider the 1% to be family class, government-sponsored refugees, immigrants coming in under the independent class, immigrants coming in under the business class, privately sponsored immigrants, government-assisted refugees who are coming from the camps.

I think our immigration program is broad. We just need to streamline it and begin to see it as one program, and not weight it into the good immigrants and the not-so-good immigrants.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Usually you're short, Mr. Temelkovski.

Ms. Grewal.

• (0915)

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, each one of you, for being here. Thank you for your time and your presentations.

My question goes to each one of you.

Could you please tell us in a few lines, in a nutshell, what the drawbacks and flaws in our current immigration and citizenship act are so that we can make our system more efficient for our new immigrants?

Ms. Maria Antelo: The main issue is that we need to have an efficient system where applications can be processed in due time. If

it's 18 months, let it be 18 months. If it's four years, let it be four years—which is appalling, but we need to have a process time that is what is said on the website.

I know this was not your question, but just to add to what my colleague was saying, sometimes independent immigrants, those who bring money, take a longer time to adapt and a longer time to work than other immigrants. So really, this 70-40—or whatever—system is not working, right? We all contribute equally, whether we're refugees, independent immigrants or family class. We contribute equally.

Ms. Loly Rico: I think it would be more efficient to put a little bit of humanity into the processing time, because we are talking about not only the processing time but also the willingness of the visa officers—which we haven't talked about in this room this morning—who, if they take a case, should follow up the case remembering that it's about a human being; it's not just a paper.

I put it this way because sometimes they send the wrong forms to the families and that makes a delay. That's one of the things. We are talking about efficiency, but also we are talking about human beings. We are dealing with human beings, and that's the part that we are losing. When I came here 15 years ago as a refugee, we had that; now we don't have it. We see it as numbers. I believe if we are a country that believes in human rights, we have to do it that way, to see that we are dealing with human beings.

Ms. Na (Kalen) Liang: Thank you.

Yes, as far as our being human goes, I want to mention one point: our parents are old people, so they can't waste their time. They just cannot. My parents were waiting in Beijing for 10 years. They were dying. So it's kind of like killing my parents.

Ms. Lisa Wyndels: The fourth recommendation we made was very specific. It suggested that “children of protected persons be issued temporary resident permits in order to travel immediately to Canada so that their applications for permanent residence can be processed here”.

You know, the visa officers and the overseas processing offices have discretion pursuant to IRPA and the regulations to issue such documents. I think that delay could be virtually eliminated in these cases if that discretion was favourably exercised. I know there was a directive to visa officers in January of this year with respect to children at risk in terms of war situations, but we would propose that it be extended, that it's too narrow a perception of what risk is with respect to children—that all unsupervised children, particularly in underdeveloped situations where there are no social welfare mechanisms to protect them, ought to be removed from those situations, are at risk and should be brought to Canada with the powers available to the officers to bring them. This would solve many problems.

Mr. Lee Tenenhouse (Member, Inter-Clinic Immigration Working Group): If I could just piggyback on that, as Mr. Clavet said, surely if adopted babies from China can get here quickly because they don't have security concerns and so on, then children of refugees can get here quickly as well.

Thank you.

The Chair: Madam Grewal, you are a model to all of us.

As you probably know, there's election fever going on in the country, and this committee is very determined to get some reports out when we get back. It really is to their credit that they are coming out to these hearings, because a lot of people are out there scrambling and getting into campaign mode.

I wonder if I could ask you to think about and send us your thoughts on a number of issues around the Citizenship Act. If you take a look at the situation with revocation, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms does not apply. I encourage you to take a look at this and send us your thoughts.

Obviously the international credentials issue affects many people

On the issue of family reunification and income, I have a case that doesn't make any sense. The case involves a woman with three kids who is on welfare. The person who could get her off welfare is her common law husband, and you know, it's a catch-22. He can't come to this country because she doesn't have the money; she won't have the money and will be on welfare unless he comes to Canada and supports her. It doesn't make sense. I mean, a lot of these things don't make sense.

The other issue is parents. You know, it really flabbergasts me as to why we don't recognize that most parents who live with their kids—certainly it's true in certain cultures—are an economic addition in the sense that they look after the grandchildren while the parents are out working. Somehow, we don't seem to recognize that. And with all the bad things about kids not being with their parents, this is an obvious thing again.

We talked about the numbers. You know, should it be 225,000 or should it be 320,000? Should the split be 60-40 or 40-60? Mr. Siksay mentioned that we found, with people who come to Canada, that somebody who has an engineering degree and makes \$30,000 is very unhappy, but somebody who comes under the family reunification class making the same amount of money is very happy. So we really have to take a look at this issue.

I encourage you to send your input to the committee. We are also on the website of the committee, which is www.parl.gc.ca/cimm. I encourage you to look it up and see some of the discussions we've been having. They've been pretty wide-ranging, and there are a huge number of concerns on the issues that were raised.

We'll do our best to get a report out on family reunification, because it's one thing that I think there is a fair amount of consensus on within the committee, as well as on citizenship. We might not be able to do one on international credentials, because that gets to be a little more difficult, but we'll try to get to the no-brainers, and much of the stuff we've been talking about is really a no-brainer.

Thank you very much. We're going to wrap up this session and suspend for a few minutes. Then we're going to come back with the next session.

Thank you.

● (0924)

(Pause)

● (0935)

The Chair: Order, please.

Ms. Go, you will be presenting first.

Most of you are here. You know the drill. Everybody does a five-minute presentation; then we will go into questions from members. Try to keep the questions short, so we can get responses and make sure all the members around the table get to ask questions.

Ms. Avvy Go, you have five minutes.

Ms. Avvy Yao-Yao Go (Director, Metro Toronto Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic): Thank you.

My name is Avvy Go. I am the current director of the Metro Toronto Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic.

Family reunification has been instilled as one of the core principles in our immigration law. Before 1990, over 50% of the annual immigration to Canada was under the family class; today it's less than 25%. Increasingly our immigration selection policy is geared towards those who are perceived to be of greater economic benefit to Canada, namely the independent class immigrants. The overall trend of the changing immigration pattern is evidenced by specific changes to the definition of family class and the processing of such applications.

Greater requirements are now being imposed on those who wish to sponsor their families, while family class immigration, with an exception in the case of spouses, has become more and more narrowly defined, and the processing delay is getting longer and longer. The family class definition under immigration law is limited to the nuclear family model. It does not include members of the extended family network, which is embraced by many different cultures that make up Canada today.

Coincidentally, the move away from family class immigration is occurring at a time when there is a shift in the source countries of immigration to Canada. Since the 1990s the top source countries contributing to Canada's immigration have been found in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America, in contrast with the early days, when most of our immigrants came from Europe.

The most recent Statistics Canada report confirms that immigrants from South Asia and China will be the largest groups of immigrants in Canada by the year 2017. They are the immigrants who embrace an extended family structure, yet they are going to be faced with more barriers when they attempt to bring their families over to Canada.

In the interests of time, I'm just going to highlight a couple of the problems I have included in my written submission.

First, there is systemic bias in visa officers' determinations of what constitutes genuine relationship when assessing spousal sponsorship and adoption applications. This results in many genuine sponsorship applications being rejected and families being denied the opportunity to be reunited.

I'll just give you one example. I have a client who is a Chinese Canadian man who wants to sponsor his wife from China. His wife happens to have been divorced once and is three years older than he is. His application was rejected in part because the visa officer thinks it is not consistent with the cultural norm for this man to want to marry an older divorced woman. If we apply that standard to our own monarchy, then perhaps Prince Charles would have a problem sponsoring his second wife to Canada, even though his second marriage is the truly genuine one.

Secondly, apart from having to pay a \$550 processing fee and then a \$975 standing fee, Canadian sponsors must also demonstrate that they meet the low-income cut-off requirements in order to qualify to be a sponsor. In addition, IRPA now bans individuals on social assistance from sponsoring their loved ones. Not only that, visa officers in Africa and certain parts of Asia often require applicants to submit to DNA tests to prove their relationship. DNA tests are costly, and sometimes they are simply not available. All these result in huge financial barriers to family reunification. In a nutshell, what we are saying is that only the rich deserve to be with their families.

There is a systemic problem in the way resources are being distributed among the various visa offices around the globe, resulting in longer processing times for applicants in Asia and Africa as compared with those in Europe. The effect of this uneven distribution is felt most profoundly by family class applicants, especially parents and grandparents. This is because these cases are given the lowest of all priorities when much of the limited resources are devoted to processing independent immigrant class and spousal sponsorship applications.

Finally, IRPA prohibits the sponsorship of family members who were not declared at the time the sponsor submitted his own application for permanent resident status, regardless of the reasons for non-declaration. As a result, we have seen that many parents who, for whatever reasons, did not declare the existence of their children are now being banned from bringing the children to Canada.

This absolute prohibition on family sponsorship has a disproportionate impact on refugees and on women, who often are not in control of their own immigration process, let alone able to decide which member they could declare as their own family.

As a taxpayer and as someone who actually came to Canada as a family class immigrant, I truly believe it is now time to stop paying lip service to the principle of family reunification and start making it a reality for many Canadians.

I have many recommendations in my paper. They include the following: extend the definition of family class to include members of extended families; remove the LICO requirement; repeal the ban on sponsorship due to receipt of social assistance; reallocate resources among the various visa offices so that offices located in countries with high immigration and refugee intake will be given adequate resources to process cases; give more priority to all family class sponsorships, including grandparents and parents; and remove the exclusion on family class member sponsorships for those who, for whatever reason, were not included in the sponsor's own application at the time they came to Canada.

That's my five minutes.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Go.

Geraldine Sadoway.

Ms. Geraldine Sadoway (Staff Lawyer, Immigration and Refugee Group, Parkdale Community Legal Services): I am Geraldine Sadoway, and I'm from Parkdale Community Legal Services. You have our brief, and it *is* very brief.

We are talking about money today. We are talking about how money is a barrier to family reunification. It has been such an incredible barrier that over the past few years, our community legal clinic in Toronto has taken this up as a major campaign.

First of all, it is a campaign to have the fees dropped. You will see t-shirts, some in the audience. It takes money to get into Canada. Money is the key that opens the door. And who pays this money? We are asking refugees who are fleeing for their lives, trying to be reunited with their families, to pay this money. This is a really big problem.

In my presentation, I've given you the example of Mr. X, who is here today. Mr. X has a wife and children currently living in Nepal. Everyone has read in the papers about what's going on in Nepal today, under martial law. Mr. X gets e-mails from his children telling him that they can't go to school, it's too dangerous. They are not able to go to school because of the situation there. These are the children who will eventually get to Canada but who have been delayed. And what is the reason for the delay? One reason: money.

Because we are asking refugees who are accepted in Canada to pay \$550 per adult, \$150 per child, in order to apply to be residents, they are delaying, and in many cases not even submitting, their applications for landing, because they don't get that money. In the audience today, we have a whole lot of people who have been reaching into their own pockets, and the pockets of the churches and the other community organizations in Toronto, to pay that money. It's very frustrating to them. The amount of \$550 seems like a little bit if you're here, and you have a job, and so on, but if you're trying to survive on welfare of \$500 a month, and you don't have a job, and your family is overseas, it's a lot of money. It's an absolute barrier.

We have these cards for the Prime Minister. We have over half a million signatures already on these cards, which we are going to be presenting in Parliament. Many members of Parliament have actually signed the cards.

We should also let you know of another injustice, that refugees who are privately sponsored by groups in Canada and refugees who are government sponsored are not required to pay the \$550 fee. They're not required. So why is it that the refugees who come here, who are accepted under our refugee process, have to pay this fee for themselves and their families?

I want to tell you that I took a look at the numbers in the report to Parliament from last year—I wanted to see how much money we were talking about here—and I saw that, from about 15,000 refugees who were landed in Canada last year, we garnered \$5 million. That's a lot for a small number of refugees, only 15,000.

Now, is this a lot of money for Canada for the cost recovery side and the money that comes in? You've already heard our concerns about the money being spent by immigrants. In fact, \$101 million was received from the independent immigrant class and the family class. These are round figures. They don't break down according to age, in the report, so it's not easy to tell how much money is coming in.

• (0940)

But \$5 million compared with \$101 million? It's not a huge amount of money, and yet the difference for a case like Mr. X is that his family could have been here already; his kids could have been going to school in Canada. This delay is unconscionable, when we're talking about refugees.

If it is this simple to remove the barrier... All you have to do is to waive the fee for protected persons—you waive the fee for protected persons. We do it in all of the other cases, as I said, of the privately sponsored refugees and the government-sponsored refugees, where we waive the processing fee. That's all you need to do. It's right there in the regulations; there's nothing to it, as you could do it tomorrow, and this would be one of the barriers down.

We're passing around this flyer. We've also set up an organization, called FAIR, Fee Assistance for Immigrants and Refugees, to help people raise money. Why should we be spending our time doing this type of thing?

Those are my remarks. I'd be happy to answer any questions you have about this.

• (0945)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next, we have Mr. Hakim.

Mr. Robert M. Hakim (Spokesperson, Sponsor your Parents): I'm Robert Hakim, on behalf of Sponsor your Parents. I believe you have received the full draft of our submission. It's a bit too detailed, so I will give a short oral presentation.

Mr. Chair and members of the respectful standing committee, I stand before you this morning to convey the bitter sentiments and desperation of my fellow Canadian sponsors in their efforts to reunite with their parents in this much-beloved country. Unfortunately, the journey is not smooth, mainly because of the inability of the CIC to see eye to eye with the sponsors the very importance of their parents in their lives, and more so because of the reluctance of the CIC to allot the required resources to attend to the expediency of the process.

Because of the limited presentation time, I will recite the curtailed conclusions and recommendations of my submission. There are two more points I would like to bring to your attention.

One is the attitude of some of the MPs approached with our petition. We have in this submission 12 petitions that we submitted. Only four of them were presented to the House. Two are in the process; for six, nothing; and two were rejected. The official response from Mr. Volpe to MP Bains on the submission of one of our petitions to the House is enclosed.

I'm going to read part 4(a) from the redrafted citation of my submission. These are the conclusions reached after our citation.

First, the artificial backlog created by CIC is a political and not a logistical problem.

Second, even though reuniting with close family members in Canada is provided in the policy of CIC, family class sponsorship is assigned the lowest priority.

Third, parental sponsorship mishandling has not only surpassed all reasonable waiting times for efficient case processing, but it has created animosity toward the system that has permitted disparity in the family class.

Fourth, parental sponsorship comes with strings attached at different government levels, as you know. Sponsored parents are not eligible for federal monetary aid for ten years. In Ontario, subsidized nursing home beds are set out of reach for ten years for sponsored parents, further protecting the system from cost and abuse.

Fifth, current CIC policy causes tremendous hardship for Canadian families seeking to reunite with their loved ones. It not only damages the permanent residents' proper integration and the citizens' contribution to Canadian society, it fosters a lack of confidence in the legal system.

In its introduction to the House in March 2002, the third report of this committee was presented by MP Joe Fontana. It was called "Building a Nation". It stated that: "Through the testimony, the Committee had an opportunity to identify the common areas of concern, to assess their significance, and to make the following recommendations as to what changes should be considered by the government".

None of those 76 recommendations then addressed the processing of parental sponsorship applications. Nonetheless, several of those recommendations, though not related to family class, are deemed to present an example of action. I cite recommendations 2, 3, 4, and 5, which will be projected into my recommendations.

Further, a few paragraphs from the same report in part 2 and part 4 are useful for our cause. They will also be projected into my recommendations. Part 2, paragraph G, defines family members. This is very important: for the sake of clarity in paragraph 3(1)(d) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, with reference to its objective of promoting and valuing family reunification, the definition shall be revisited.

In part 4, "Issues Relating to Inadmissibility", paragraph A, "Health—Excessive Demand", recommendations 50 and 51 should be applicable to sponsored applicants as well.

• (0950)

In paragraph B, under "Public Health", recommendation 52 shall be redrafted to apply to parental sponsorship as well.

Quoting parts of the two official oppositions' commentaries in regard to the work of the committee in 2002, the first one was as such: "The long-term problem with the system is an ideological and philosophical one. There needs to be more political courage to act... within a context of administrative simplicity and cost-effectiveness".

The second opinion was: "Canada is a land of immigrants. Immigrants built Canada. Canada will continue to be built by immigration. Our economic future depends on sound immigration policy. If we are to be a pro-immigration country, we need to match our legislation and regulations with our intent and our vision".

My recommendations follow.

The first general recommendation is that Citizenship and Immigration Canada should act to restore parental permanent residents' admissions to the level of 2002-03, which is 20,000 a year, which is always, we are reminded by the ministry, about balance, so I hope this will hit the balance.

Now, processing is basically a two-stage, twofold thing. The first is done at CPC in Mississauga. I'm going to address this with a few recommendations.

Citizenship and Immigration in Mississauga must make a commitment to process its parental sponsorship inventory expeditiously, while not exceeding a year. In the interests of fairness and equity, the government should increase the resources dedicated to processing the applications for parental sponsorship in order to keep regular processing time to six months—as it was—all the while avoiding discrimination in the family class.

Third, which is very important, redefine the family members to include parents and their dependants. Therefore, approval for sponsored parents would be pending health and security checks only.

Fourth, introduce legislation to further fortify the sponsorship undertaking in order to protect the system from any kind of abuse.

The Chair: We have your brief, and if you are going to continue this way you are really going to go way over time. Now you are over two minutes.

Mr. Robert M. Hakim: I'm basically done.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Robert M. Hakim: That's my last minute. That's where I am.

So with regard to processing, basically, introduce legislation that binds the CIC to precise communications and announcements, whether electronic or hard copy. This is one of the main concerns. Anybody can check the CIC. There's no clear message about the time. Every time, if there is any message, there is a different time.

Now, in the last minute I'm going to address the homeland commission. It is about introducing clear guidelines to provide efficient processing while considering pre-approving sponsored applicants for health and security eligibility. Introduce special legislation to allow sponsored parents, in process, to visit with their families in Canada. Apply the necessary enforcement to see that the allowed visit time is respected.

I'll close. I'd like to extend to you sincere gratitude and all due respect to your blessed work in this capacity.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much.

Next, we have Peter Tedoldi.

Mr. Peter Tedoldi (As an Individual): Good morning to everyone. My name is Peter Tedoldi, and these are my colleagues Robert Marsh and Dr. Agnes Lee.

First of all, I would like to thank the committee in general for the work you are doing and also for the time given to me to be able to present my case.

I am here today to present a case, not only for me and my family but for all the adoptive parents and their adopted children. I will also share my experience with you as I am currently going through the process of trying to get my two adopted daughters legal status in Canada.

Currently, the Canadian government requests that adopted children apply for permanent residence or citizenship after they arrive in Canada. Families must wait for months to years for applications to be processed. This is one of the most frustrating and distressing times anybody can go through. I honestly do not wish it on anybody. The policy is wrong and is unacceptable.

Internationally adopted children should be afforded the same rights upon adoption as biological children of Canadians. Denying these children immediate citizenship is discrimination. It is particularly indecent because many of these children are orphans and come from areas of the world where they have already experienced rejection, abandonment, and discrimination.

The process of applying for permanent residence or citizenship for adopted children is very frustrating, very stressful, very costly, and time-consuming. I would like, very briefly, to take you through some of my frustrations due to this process.

My wife and I successfully adopted two girls, who currently reside with us, but the roadblocks we encounter daily are certainly not reflective of what Canada is supposed to be. Among a host of related challenges, we are unable to travel as a family.

The elder of the two daughters is amongst the top performers in her grade 12, yet is finding it extremely difficult to even apply for university. The only way she could be considered was to apply as an international student. My daughter has high marks and early admission to the universities to which she applied, but I, a hard-working, tax-paying Canadian, am being forced to pay international student tuition. It is punitive and unfair to force a family into such a situation. We cannot afford that money, and it is very sad to see that our daughter, who worked so hard, may not be able to further her studies, largely due to bureaucratic red tape. She cannot even qualify for government funding and/or grants, which require her to be either a Canadian or a permanent resident. This is truly regrettable.

I would like to address a common concept that is being bounced around as one of the reasons that internationally adopted children should not be granted Canadian citizenship immediately upon adoption. It is believed that not granting Canadian citizenship to adopted children protects them from abuse and illegal activities such as exploitation and international trading and selling of children.

This belief shows a lack of understanding towards the adoption process. There are no shortcuts or any illegal activities that would go on if the adoption process were followed as required. I will illustrate.

I will use my adoption as an example. There are three levels of government with different requirements that have to be fulfilled before an adoption is finalized. When we were adopting our daughters, we had to satisfy all the requirements of the country we were adopting from, the requirements of the Ontario provincial government, and the requirements of the Canadian federal government, for immigration purposes.

The country I adopted from required that I get a local social worker, hire a local lawyer, and also go for an adoption hearing in a court of law. An adoption order is issued once all requirements are fulfilled, and the judge grants this order. Once the order is granted, an adoption is registered and legalized.

Provincially, I had to deal with a licensed adoption agency in Ontario. The agency recommended a social worker that had to do a home study. This home study involved three visitations to my home. Everybody in my home was interviewed, including my eight-year-old son. Everybody in my home who is over the age of 18 had to go through a local police check and an Interpol security check. All the reports were sent directly to the social worker, and the social worker had to submit a home study report to the agency. The agency had to put all the reports together and send them to the provincial government for approval and acceptance of the adoption.

• (0955)

Once the adoption was approved, the provincial government provided a letter of no objection, which is required for immigration purposes. Without the letter of no objection, the federal government will not even consider your application for immigration.

I agree no system is 100% secure and that some illegal adoptions may slip through, but we have trust with our law enforcement departments to deal with such cases. Just as when immigrants allowed into Canada break the law, they should face the music. Canada has never closed doors to immigrants because a few immigrants broke the law. I do not agree that legitimate adopted children and their families should be punished because of the fear that some groups may take advantage of the adoption law.

In conclusion, I would also like to recommend a reorganization of the application process.

First, all applicants should be given accurate information about what is required and what to expect. For example, when I was applying for permanent residence for my two daughters, I was confused about what application fee to pay, and when I called the CIC office, the gentleman I talked to told me that since they were my children and dependent, I was required to pay \$75 for each child. That is what I paid when I sent off the application. After three months, the application forms were sent back to me indicating that I had underpaid and that the fee was supposed to be \$550 for each child, as the children were considered to be independent applicants. Up to now, I do not understand how these children can be considered independent applicants when they totally depend on me. They do not work; they are minors, and full-time students, who live at home, and they are totally supported by their parents.

Second, applicants should be able to obtain information on the status of their file. It is going on almost two years since I applied for permanent residence for my daughters, but I do not know what their

status is. I have called a number of times, only to find answering machines and no response, even if you leave a message. On a number of occasions, I have managed to talk to someone who does not give any updates but recommends that you fax your concerns to a number that he gives to you. I have faxed my concerns, but have never received any feedback about the status of my children.

Last, all applicants should be given service in a considerate and professional manner. We need someone to talk to us and treat us as human beings. If applicants are updated on the status of their files, there will be less stress and frustration. Whatever the reason may be, please let us know. If it is a backlog, let us know, and you will be amazed how most people will react to that, instead of their being left in the darkness.

Once again, I would like to thank the chair and the entire committee for their time. Thank you.

• (1000)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We are going to start off with our questions.

Mr. Mark.

Mr. Inky Mark: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our witnesses for being here.

One of the Canadian values is that we value families, yet this value doesn't match what's going on today. We have heard a lot about the problems of people waiting to have their families join them. Perhaps we need to do an audit to make sure there are no discrepancies, that there is no bias in the system. Our primary source is Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, and people from these places shouldn't have to wait any longer than people from other parts of the world.

Maybe it's time to have a code of family rights that would cover being united with families and children. Perhaps that could be put together.

Unfortunately, we tend to govern for the exception in this country. You've heard about the two classes of citizens and the great fear that war criminals and the like will enter this country and take over. It's ridiculous, and we are penalizing the six million other Canadians who were born offshore.

I agree that the protected are protected. You can't discriminate within that class. It's astounding to hear you say that if you are not sponsored by government groups or churches, you have to pay the fee. It doesn't make any sense. I don't see how anyone could discriminate within that class, between different types of refugees. There is no doubt that this needs to change.

It's frustrating for committee members to hear the same message repeated over and over again. I have been around Parliament for almost eight years, and it's always the same. It's about people. You have to have good people in leadership positions, and it requires political courage to act. But it requires just as much courage on the part of Canadians to ensure that politicians act. You need to lobby them. You need to embarrass the heck out of them. That's what needs to be done. I hope you continue in your endeavours and don't quit.

The culture has to change. We need to see immigration in a different way. People say we attract the best and the brightest to this country, and we do. It is a brain drain for other countries. At the same time, we don't perceive the needs of immigration on an equal plane. Families are important, just as important an economic considerations. Families are economic drivers in this country. It's better to have family here than elsewhere. As someone said yesterday, we are sending billions of dollars out of this country. Why not keep it here at home? Canadians all want the same things. They want to be with their families. They want to be happy, to raise their kids and grandkids.

That's my comment. Perhaps some of you would like to respond.

• (1005)

Ms. Avvy Yao-Yao Go: If you look at it from an economic point of view, some of the policies don't make sense.

Take the social assistance. There is a ban on sponsorship if your sponsor is on social assistance. I have a client who went on social assistance because his wife lives in Vietnam. He is here in Canada. His children are with him. He became a single father because his wife cannot come here. He is a Canadian citizen, so the children automatically become Canadian citizens when they are born. So he could bring the children over, but not his wife; his wife has to apply through the system. So he left his wife behind and brought the children over so they could go to school here. But once they were here, he became a single father and so he had to go on welfare. He did so under the old law. At that time he could still apply, but he got rejected. Under today's law, he would not even be able to apply, because of the ban on sponsors on social assistance. It doesn't make sense. If his wife were here, he could go to work. But now he has to be on welfare and his wife is in Vietnam.

So even though we think we look at immigration through an economic lens, sometimes our policy goes against some of these economic factors.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lui Temelkovski): Thank you.

Monsieur Clavet.

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Clavet: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[English]

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lui Temelkovski): I'm sorry. Before you start, I have to give you a demonstration. Please use your earpiece if your French is as rusty as mine.

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Clavet: A lot of things have been said, particularly by the director, Ms. Yao-Yao Go, who stated in her brief that there is a double standard with regard to adoption and sponsorship. We have

heard other testimony to that effect. As the Block Québécois critic for the Asia-Pacific region, I am very sensitive to these things.

I would like to ask Ms. Sadoway of Parkdale Community Legal Services a question. Do applications for permanent residency filed by refugees not represent a huge financial burden to charitable organizations such as yours, which are working in difficult circumstances in rather disadvantaged neighbourhoods? If memory serves me well, Parkdale is not a very affluent neighbourhood. If you did not have to give away these funds, you could be using them elsewhere. Is it not somewhat immoral to oblige charitable organizations, that are already doing so much, to pay these fees for people like the Tibetan you mentioned? Such examples make one want to weep.

I would like to hear your comments on the financial burdens borne by charitable organizations.

[English]

Ms. Geraldine Sadoway: Yes, it is a tragedy, and it has become so important in our community when we see people who are unable to raise the fee. We have started court cases to challenge this. There is one right now before the Federal Court.

We have raised money by having fundraising events. In fact, in the audience today are some of the people in charitable organizations who are totally frustrated by having to spend the money they raise to help refugees pay this cost processing fee. As Mr. Mark pointed out, it is unfair because it isn't applied to other refugees, only to the ones who are accepted in Canada. Mr. X, who is here in the audience—you may want to talk to him later about how this has affected his family—has so many things to offer Canada. He works as a volunteer. He has part-time jobs. But this barrier has caused so much delay that he is now wondering if he is going to see his wife and his children here in Canada. He was able to borrow the money eventually, but it is extremely difficult. It is the wrong use for our energies. We could be putting our energies into many other things instead of raising money to pay a cost processing fee.

• (1010)

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Clavet: I am sorry, but we are running out of time. Mr. Hakim said that 30,000 families have been affected by the delays in processing applications for family sponsorships. That means there are 50,000 to 60,000 people waiting.

Mr. Robert M. Hakim: Yes, and furthermore, the 30,000 is a very conservative figure. I have heard that it could be double that number.

Mr. Roger Clavet: You started by saying that the backlog is an artificial political problem caused by CIC. Is it not a logistical problem? You have the impression it is a political problem.

Mr. Robert M. Hakim: It is a cultural and political problem. Canada says it is a country of immigrants, and we fully respect that. However, we should make the effort to adapt our data to this reality, but that is not the case.

Mr. Roger Clavet: We may have heard the answer earlier on. Mr. Tedoldi said that there is too much red tape involved in international adoptions. He said that perhaps there was a wish to avoid the trafficking of children, but that is a myth. If the child is that important, why do we leave him or her somewhere else on the planet for three, four or five years? He is facing significant dangers, whereas the risk of being subject to trafficking is low. There is therefore a lack of political will.

[English]

Mr. Robert Marsh (As an Individual): I think there are a couple of misconceptions that lead to this problem.

One is that somehow there will be, as Peter talked about, some additional protection for the children in this, and that's absolutely false, as Peter has demonstrated. There's so much that goes on in the adoption itself that leads to the children being protected.

Second, there's some fear that the system itself will be somehow deceived and will be a victim in some way, which is a little bit ridiculous with minors. Children, especially infants and toddlers, aren't plotting to get into the country somehow.

It's also another case of our words and our rhetoric not matching up to what we intend. We have this vision of ourselves as one of the most progressive nations, yet here we are somehow saying that adopted children are not of the same status as biological children, and as an adoptive parent myself I find that to be an incredibly offensive sentiment.

We're also out of step with countries that we often characterize as somehow less progressive than us. The United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia all recognize adopted children as citizens immediately upon entry in their countries. Why are we alone in treating adopted children as if they were less the children of their parents than the parents' biological offspring would be?

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Clavet: Thank you very much.

Mr. Hakim, do you have a short comment to add?

Mr. Robert M. Hakim: Yes, I will be very brief.

[English]

I will allow myself to do that in English, though.

I'm going to address both remarks to you and Mr. Mark. About the parental processing—and I am going to read from the official response of the ministry—they're always bombarded by the balance.

The immigration policy is trying to find the balance. Families, like our parents and grandparents, are not part of the balance. What creates the balance is only those people who can produce money. I want to negate that, because if my parents are at home and I am sending them money, or not.... My parents are both ex-workers; they're both in their sixties; they're both retired; they both have an income. If they come here, they would definitely not create a burden on the system. They are well sustained.

What I am looking at is that I'm their only son. They live back in Lebanon. I guess everybody knows what's going on in Lebanon. What's the answer? Thirty-seven months of waiting in Damascus,

which processes five regions, because CIC has Iran, Iraq, Cyprus, Jordan, Lebanon, and Damascus in one office. Here in CIC, we said, it's okay, let's pass the 156 days. When I applied, the wait was 156 days, and its escalation is about balance. So *je m'excuse* but what balance are we talking about here?

My second comment is on the recommendations. Mr. Mark, the recommendations in 2002 were very specific. What happened to those recommendations that were not adopted by the House? Is it about the culture? It is culture. I'm sorry—it's only culture, nothing but political culture.

A second comment on parents is that if you have a parent who is 52 and you can bring them over—and we have here a younger generation whose parents are not even 50, they were talking 48, the 18-year-olds—the parents can come here and sit for them if they don't work. They can do so many things to employ themselves or to release their kids to employ themselves or to be employable in the system. I cannot understand this, I'm sorry. That's why I'm talking about your policy.

• (1015)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lui Temelkovski): Thank you.

Mr. Siksay, you have five minutes.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, all of you, for your presentations this morning. They've been very helpful and very articulate.

Mr. Tedoldi, I can't imagine why we don't do this and why we haven't solved this problem. Mr. Telegdi used the term “no-brainer” earlier this morning. It is such a no-brainer; it should be done, and there's absolutely no excuse for not doing it. I don't know what more to say about it. We have to make sure this government changes that policy right now.

I want to make a few comments. The whole consideration of financial requirements around family class immigration is.... I was having a revelation this morning about this, and people here in Toronto have been very clear on that issue. It seems to me that we've off-loaded our collective responsibility for our immigration system and for our families onto the backs of people who are coming to Canada to make a contribution, onto refugees, and onto community organizations. I'm one of the people here who believes that we as a society, as the country of Canada, and as a government should be taking that responsibility. The government's best placed to handle that. If our immigration policy is so important to this country that we depend on it for our labour force development, our population growth, and for nation-building, then we should start taking that seriously and putting some money where our mouth is on that process.

We can't talk out of both sides of our face on that and we can't keep giving, frankly—and I'll be very political at the moment—billions of dollars of tax cuts to corporate entities and the wealthy in this country and then put it on the backs of the voluntary sector, the non-profit sector, poor people in Canada, and potential immigrants and refugees. It just doesn't make sense. We're abrogating our responsibilities if we continue that process.

I appreciate that you've all been so clear in the presentations you've made on that, and I, for one, want to see the government take more responsibility in this area.

My question is—and for those of you who want to comment on it, it would be great—in terms of our immigration process, should we be getting out of the financial requirement around family class sponsorship altogether? Should that just go by the wayside? Should there be any limitation on that? Should it only be for spouses and children, or should it be for anybody who fits into the family class? I know there's talk about expanding the family class as well.

Ms. Geraldine Sadoway: I'd like to comment.

When we look at the money that's involved, we have to think about how that impacts on people from different parts of the world where the cost of living, where the earnings of people.... To pay the normal immigration fees can equal the amount that a family would earn in an entire year.

I once did a comparison between Argentina and Canada. The average earnings for a well-educated working family came to something like \$3,500 Canadian in a year, and that's how much this family would have to pay to immigrate to Canada. It would be like telling a Canadian family that if they paid \$35,000 or \$40,000 for the application fee, they could come to Canada. It's an outrageous amount of money when we're talking about family reunification.

If we're talking about business entrepreneurs, okay, it rolls off their back, it's part of their cost of business. But with families it's like squeezing them dry at just the time when they're going to be coming here hopefully to be a part of our society, and then they have this additional burden. I don't understand it at all with regard to refugees.

You'll see in our little postcard that we're all so concerned about the cases of sponsorship breakdown where we can't bring an application on humanitarian grounds to help a spouse and a child who are victims of violence because they don't have the fee. We have shelters paying the \$550 fee to start an application on humanitarian grounds. We have people waiting in those abusive situations for years. There shouldn't be these outrageous fees, or there should be some power to waive them when we have people in need.

• (1020)

Ms. Avvy Yao-Yao Go: I guess there are two separate issues, but related. One is the fee, and one is the financial requirement, and both of them are barriers to sponsorship.

The fee itself, as Geraldine has said so eloquently, imposes a barrier for many people, and I think in part it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The more barriers we set up, the more complicated the processing becomes. Then it justifies a greater fee, because we need more money to run the system, which is getting more and more complicated day by day.

I remember that when the government introduced the right of landing fee, the \$975, it was on the basis that there was a deficit at the time. We know since then the deficit has gone, and we have collected hundreds of millions of dollars from this right of landing fee that have gone into the general revenue, supporting all kinds of things—probably including the sponsorship ad campaign in Quebec, because it is not dedicated only to immigration programs. Not only

are we downloading, as you mentioned; we are in effect asking the immigrants to help pay for things they did not agree to.

So the fee itself is a barrier, and then the financial requirement is another barrier. The financial requirement is the one that talks about the income requirement. You have to have a certain income level to be able to sponsor. I would hesitate to agree that we should have that requirement. Right now the requirement does not apply to spousal sponsorship; it only applies to non-spousal situations, although the social assistance ban applies to all classes of sponsorship.

We already have a two-tier sponsorship system that other panel members have talked about. We already ignore the needs of parents and grandparents. This is in fact an example of how the two-tier system works. If you are sponsoring your wife, it does not matter. You can divorce her a year after she comes; we don't look at income. But if you are sponsoring your parents.... I would hesitate to guess, but sponsorship breakdown is probably more likely to happen in the case of wife or husband than in the case of parents, because of the relationship that exists between those parties. There is absolutely no study I am aware of that shows a correlation between the level of income and the success of the sponsorship. Nobody has yet been able to tell me that poor people are more likely to abandon their parents, for instance, and certainly when—

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lui Temelkovski): Thank you, Avvy. We are over two minutes already.

I'll be lenient and give Mr. Hakim one minute and Tatiana one minute. Maybe we will get somebody else to ask the question.

Mr. Robert M. Hakim: I am going to mention just one thing. We are talking all about context, of administrative simplicity and cost-effectiveness. Unfortunately we never achieve that. That is the only thing. In all the discussion from 1990-something until now, we are talking about the same issue; every time, we are stressing again we need to have a context of administrative simplicity. We are only further complicating the issues and costing ourselves more. That's one point.

The second point was about the parents, addressing the same thing. Parents can be economical to...

As for the refugees, I cannot comment on the situation. I would rather join my voice to Mrs. Sadoway's. If you are an established Canadian, you owe your government; it is your country. It is not as if you are contributing to the country. I don't mind paying the fees if I am able to, and there is a way to know if I am able to or not, generally. That is the only thing.

• (1025)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lui Temelkovski): Tatiana.

Mrs. Tatiana Nehotina (Member, Sponsor your Parents): I would like to answer the question presented by Bill Siksay.

What our group is talking about here today—our group is Sponsor Your Parents—is the situation where the fees are paid, we are financially stable, and we are able to bring our family into the country, and yet there is no decision in the process. The process is being stalled, and we are basically being cheated out of our time with our families.

Mr. Robert M. Hakim: And money.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lui Temelkovski): Madame Beaumier.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier (Brampton West, Lib.): Thank you.

Peter, I'm very glad you presented this issue today, because I was not aware of the fact that adopted children are being treated differently from natural children. That's a legislative issue and it should be changed. However, I'm going to just make a little comment.

You spoke about the case being turned down because the immigration officer said that was not indicative of your culture. Well, it is my general finding that there aren't all that many cultural differences, that family is family whether you're born in Canada or Europe or Asia or South Asia. Sometimes I think that when we are making these claims of what's wrong, when we use a lack of understanding of culture, we're wanting it on both sides.

We're wanting to say, well, you don't understand, because this is acceptable to our culture, and then when it's turned down based on myths.... I don't really believe there are cultural differences. I believe there are economic differences that set social conditions for families to depend on each other more. But no one has a monopoly on loving their extended family, their brothers, their sisters, their aunts, or uncles. It's the same thing.

I deal with a lot of South Asians from New Delhi, and cases just like the one you were citing. Well, it's very easy for me to argue that case, because my husband would also not be able to sponsor me. What we keep trying to do as different groups is to differentiate. We say, well, in my culture that wouldn't be acceptable, and we try to pit one against the other, saying, my values are stronger, my family values where I come from are stronger. I think that when we begin to deal with these issues on a humanistic universal value system, then we will get over some of these boundaries.

There's not one of us in this room who doesn't agree with your position on every single issue. Immigration has been my life. My parents started with Hungarian refugees. I think everyone on this committee has a sincere desire to make these changes. They are legislative changes. I believe only the family sponsorship class may have to be a legislative thing. So I think if we can get this out fast enough we may be able to get these changes made.

Having been a volunteer in this sector, I really appreciate everyone who's here today, and I certainly appreciate those of you who are in the same category as I am in: we didn't choose this country, it was just dumb luck that we're Canadians. So I'm grateful to all of you for having shown up. We will take your issues very seriously and get our report done as quickly as possible.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lui Temelkovski): Peter, you wanted to add something?

Mr. Peter Tedoldi: Yes, I just wanted to add to what Bill Siksay said about the fee. I want to illustrate what I've gone through over the fees of my children.

I paid for their visa to come here. I paid for their application form. I have to keep on paying to renew their student visa. I have to get a work permit for my daughter, who got a summer job, and I have to pay for that. So in all this process I'm paying, paying, paying, and these are my kids; these are kids that I adopted. How far do I go?

So what's the fee? Why would they need a student visa? Why would they need a work permit? Those are the issues that are frustrating me, and as we say, it's money, money, money. All this system has put me really in a debt that I didn't expect, because it keeps on coming. For two years I haven't even known the status. I don't know how long I'm going to keep paying.

• (1030)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lui Temelkovski): Thank you.

Madam Grewal.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you all for your time, for your presentations, and for being here.

Sitting here and listening to the frustrations of all those victims about reuniting with their families...we all know that families are important to all of us, and we value families. As Inky said, continue in your endeavours and please don't quit.

Reunification cases used to take 24 months. Now it takes double that time—about 58 months. So why is it taking more time? Do we need more trained staff in our embassies abroad, or what needs to be done so that we can improve our system? Could you elaborate on that?

Mr. Peter Tedoldi: Actually, it's maybe not really the time it takes, but that we want to be treated like human beings.

We all understand that you can get backlogs. You expect maybe 100 refugees and you get 5,000. You see that. But let the system be honest with us and try to explain, because talking to a machine is very frustrating. When my file is there and all this time I don't even have the status on anything, to me, that is the biggest issue.

If we don't get any feedback, if what is going on is not explained to us, humanly speaking...nobody appreciates being left in the dark. To me, that would be the climax of everything. Treat all applicants, irrespective of who they are, as human beings and tell them what's happening. We are humans; we can understand. With the current news, we can know when there is an influx, when there is a problem, but shutting us out and treating us like we are aliens who have no right to know what's happening is unacceptable.

Ms. Avvy Yao-Yao Go: I think there are three reasons the processing time is so long. The first is the resource allocation issue among the various visas.

I have a client, a Chinese national who came from Germany. He told me it had taken 21 days to get his immigration visa. But if the same client came from China, it would be a totally different story. That is the first issue.

The second issue is the various requirements we have added over time, making the process more and more complicated. There are more and more requirements for interviews. More and more, the actual processing is getting longer and longer because more work needs to be done.

Finally, I think there are hidden quotas for various causes in immigrants and for various visa posts. It is not something I can point to in the book to say there is a quota for China and a quota for India, but we know there is a varying processing time. If you get access to information, you will see that from some countries it takes 10 years for parents to come, and from others it takes a lot shorter time, because of these hidden quotas.

Mr. Robert Marsh: There is also a problem with wasted resources. We see that in the adoption case. For our infant, we had to apply for permanent resident status, and then the application for citizenship was a total duplication except that you had to tell them what the permanent residency number was. So resources are being wasted on totally pointless duplicative processes when they could be used to do important things.

• (1035)

Mr. Robert M. Hakim: Ms. Grewal, I just want to make the same comment about two things.

If there are planned numbers—because in the address, the ministry talks about planned immigration levels having been assessed for this year—when those planned numbers have been reached, why are you still taking more applications? It's just not fair.

On top of that, if you're talking about the money issue again, it's costing somebody. Where is this money going? If you are not processing that, where is the money going? God forbid, I am not trying to hint anything, but it's only fair.

Secondly, when you get the file.... I sent my file; I am established, and whatever. I was not pre-scanned. The file was not opened. It was stashed somewhere in Mississauga. It has no number. I did not even get a personal letter, just a flat, insensitive, non-human template that says, number such and such, received your file, and then go on CIC to check. Please go on CIC and check. There are no answers. There is no transparency.

If it's a contract with a non-government association and I give them my share, if they don't present their share, they are liable. That's number one.

Number two, they're taking my money and not giving me a service.

Number three, there is not enough respect. We are Canada; we are the government. Without us, there is no government.

So I don't know...

Ms. Geraldine Sadoway: I did a review of the figures, the amount of money that comes in from immigration applications, including visas and all of these things. In 2002 it was \$420 million,

and we got approximately 230,000 immigrants that year. In one year \$420 million went into general revenue; it didn't go to improving the immigration system.

I think there really is a problem with resources. I've seen understaffing, under-resourcing. Why it takes three years in Toronto to deal with a humanitarian application, a really obvious case that has all the submissions prepared, I don't know. That has to be due to resources.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lui Temelkovski): Thank you.

We will continue with questions from Mr. Mark.

Mr. Inky Mark: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I agree with you, because I asked the system two years ago whether they had actually recovered from the 1994 cutbacks; they were just starting to level out. Meanwhile, the workload has probably increased many times.

There's no doubt this type of thing demands more accountability from the system. It is ridiculous to keep taking application dollars. It's a cash cow, and meanwhile you're not getting any service.

And Mr. Hakim, you're right, the whole system is here to provide public service. That's why we're here as members of Parliament, to provide public service, but unless the public demands service and demands it publicly as well as privately, you're not going to get the service. That's just the way governments are. In essence, you really hit the nail on the head. It always starts from the bottom, so for us to expect the top to move...it ain't going to happen.

I have been sitting on this committee for five years. I've gone through a lot of hearings. We talk about the same things. Over the five years we have probably produced half a dozen reports—Benjamin would know—and we've made a lot of recommendations. Everything we talked about is there somewhere.

But it just doesn't happen without a lot of pressure. It's really ironic, and it's unfortunate it only happens when there is pressure brought to bear on the system or on, well, usually one person, the minister. If the minister doesn't advocate and lobby on behalf of the people, nothing happens. If you just listen to the bureaucracy, then everything stays the same and continues.

Those are the comments I would make.

• (1040)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lui Temelkovski): Comments?

Mrs. Regina Shamrakov (Member, Sponsor your Parents): We talk about humanitarian things in Canada a lot, and I want you to consider sponsorship of our parents an act of humanity. A lot of our parents live in countries all over the world, and they really have challenging lives and challenging life conditions when they are very old. We feel so sorry we cannot help them. We feel so sorry they cannot be with us and share with us this beautiful life.

We don't want it for free. We all agree to take financial responsibility for having our parents here so everybody can have their parents. Everybody, I think, would understand how difficult it is not having our parents with us and having them over the ocean.

So please help us. Help us get our parents and bring them here to be with us.

Thank you.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lui Temelkovski): Thank you.

Monsieur Clavet.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Clavet: Once again, we are hearing very upsetting testimony. During the last presentation in particular, we have been asked to do our part. No one can question the good intentions of the Liberals, the Conservatives, the Bloc and the NDP members.

It seems to me that we are sometimes overwhelmed by the task at hand. My colleague, Inky Mark, has been here for years. I arrived more recently. We always wonder how it is that the reunification process has not been accelerated and that the problems have not yet been resolved.

I am not completely satisfied with some of the answers, but I am not referring to yours. I am not convinced the political will exists. One or two witnesses could perhaps respond quickly to what I have just said.

Do you believe that the hearings we are holding across the country will result in a message being heard at the highest levels, so that we can change things and do so quickly?

It seems realistic to me that we should come to the assistance of charitable organizations, for example, to speed up the reunification process. Do you feel that CIC does not have enough staff to deal with the case load? Do you think there is a lack of political and intellectual honesty, and that the truth is not being told?

I would like to hear some of you comment on that.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Tedoldi: I would like to say something here. A lot of times when we face issues like this, a committee is set up. We've seen court cases. As an example of adoption, there was one case that was taken to court, and the court came out and said it was totally a case of discriminating against adopted children, because there's no difference between a biological child and an adopted child. Even in the Charter of Rights it says so.

We feel that, as you said, this committee has had us here and we hope something will be done. I've presented some different cases to committees where a report was written but was just shoved in the corner. But I hope that when the recommendations go out, all this will be dealt with, that it won't be something to appease people but something that will become reality for everybody, for all the families, for all the citizens.

• (1045)

Ms. Avvy Yao-Yao Go: I think it's because of two barriers that we are still talking about this year after year after year, and the fact that you are aware of it because you have heard this so many times is indicative of one of the reasons. A lot of the issues we talk about here are not issues that are being talked about in the public or in the media. A lot of people are not aware of the various barriers we're talking about today. Often the media, when they talk about

immigration, do not put it in a very positive light, so that's one of the big barriers.

The second barrier as to why there is no change is in part the result of public sentiment, but it is also due to the very powerful bureaucracy we have within the immigration department itself. There is a lot of resistance to change at that level. You see, a minister comes and goes, but the bureaucrats are always there, and I don't know how to get to them. Maybe this committee will have some ideas.

Ms. Geraldine Sadoway: I would second that. For more than 30 years I've been working in this area, and I see the same people at the bureaucratic level. I know what their policies are. They think of immigrants as products. They even refer to them as products they can make money from. Even though we had a report back in 1999 or 1998 that it was about people and not numbers, that didn't penetrate to the bureaucrats. They're able to convince whoever is the minister. I'm hoping you will stand firm and tell the minister this isn't what we're hearing from Canadians, because the bureaucrats really do think that families are burdensome.

I wish they would check on how many of those nice, well-to-do, single men who come to Canada, between the ages of 25 and 44, who find they can't bring their family members here—their sisters, nieces, or cousins—decide to go to the States. They're much better on family class reunification there. It's true; they leave here and go to the States. We're not checking how many people are leaving who come from this sort of desirable, well-educated, well-heeled class. We're not checking how many of them actually remain in Canada. Families are what Canada was built on, and we've got rid of that.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lui Temelkovski): We're going to go to Mr. Siksay for four or five minutes. Then Madam Beaumier will finish it up.

Mr. Bill Siksay: I have just a few comments, Mr. Chair.

I think it's interesting, Ms. Sadoway, that you talk about products and that kind of mentality. Officials have appeared here, and they don't talk about the specific applicants or the families; they talk about the inventory, which is often a difficult word to hear. I think we understand what it means, but the impact of the kinds of statements we've heard here this morning seems to be lost when we hear from the department directly.

I don't think it's just a question of the bureaucracy. I think the first job of a minister is to assert political control over their ministry. If the bureaucracy is running the show, then the government's failing and the minister's failing. I think the bureaucracy is only as good as the minister in charge. That's an important thing to remember. I don't want to blame the bureaucrats particularly, although I know there's a very powerful and entrenched bureaucracy in this department.

Mr. Tedoldi, you mentioned that your children have to pay foreign student tuition fees, and that was punitive. At this point in Canada I think almost any tuition fee is punitive, given the rates of tuition in this country. But when you're paying three times that already punitive rate, I can understand the burden and the unfairness of that situation.

This committee addressed the issue of adoption and citizenship in our report last November, supporting citizenship for your adopted children as soon as you land in Canada. The government has put that in its citizenship legislation in the past as well. The problem is we have made attempts to review the citizenship law a number of times now, but because of the timing of when the government introduced it and the priority they have given to it, it has died on the order paper and never been passed.

Again this year, back in the fall, we were asked by the minister to give her suggestions on changes to the citizenship law. We were told if we did that work she would bring in the legislation when the House resumed in February. We know that the minister changed. The new minister wouldn't maintain that commitment, and said maybe it would happen in June. So we still don't know what's happening with Mr. Volpe and his plans there. Given the fragility of this Parliament, we could get the new law and it wouldn't go anywhere again, which I think speaks to the priority this government is giving these situations.

I think that's unacceptable, given the problems, and I think there's a political motivation too. There's a very serious problem in the Citizenship Act around revocation of citizenship of people who are naturalized Canadians and the second-class status that implies for people who are naturalized Canadians. I think that's what they're trying to avoid our dealing with. I'm really disappointed that we don't have that legislation before us.

This is a department that took a serious cut in the 1990s when Mr. Martin and the Liberals made their cuts to the financing of government programs and services. Citizenship and Immigration and Environment were the two most seriously affected departments as a result of that cutback. This recent budget put some more money into settlement work, which is great, but that's the first new money that's gone into this department in a serious way in a long time. It's no wonder we have these kinds of backlogs and inequities in the system in a department that has been underfunded like that.

That's a bit of commentary, but I think it comes out of the issues you've been raising here this morning.

• (1050)

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lui Temelkovski): Colleen.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: That was more than a commentary; that was a campaign speech.

I'm also going to make a comment. Peter, you and Mr. Hakim say you want to be treated as humans. The truth of the matter is you're not human; you are a number, you are a form. I noticed a big change within the immigration system when the cutbacks came, and now MPs are the only faces anyone has to immigration. In their rush to be efficient, they have become more inefficient. The only thing that is going to change any of this is your involvement, and everyone in this room's involvement, saying we're not going to take this anymore.

Canada's losing a lot with our immigration policies. We just aren't moving forward fast enough. What we're talking about today should have been taken care of ten years ago. It's the same with almost every department. We're reacting instead of being progressive. But I guess the very sad part of all of this is that as we progress in society, we become more and more dehumanized as individuals.

I'd like to congratulate you. I admire you all for the work you're doing. Keep it up, and we will push this report.

The Acting Chair (Mr. Lui Temelkovski): Thank you very much, Madam Beaumier.

Thank you to all the panellists. Thank you for your submissions. We will have a report soon after we get back, if we don't go to the polls. If we do, it will be another game.

We'll take a few minutes to get the next group up. Thank you very much.

• (1054)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1102)

The Chair: We're going to resume our hearings and start with the witnesses.

We'll start with Mr. Davis.

Mr. Kurt H. Davis (Executive Director, Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'm Kurt Davis. I am the executive director for the Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science, and prior to my life as an association executive I actually was a practising professional. So I think I can speak with a fair amount of knowledge of the situation today.

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with the committee to discuss how our profession has been working to enhance the integration of internationally educated medical laboratory professionals into the Canadian health care system.

I'm going to try to address the committee's questions directly, as there is a background document that has been provided in advance, which you can take away for some bedtime reading if you get some insomnia.

Your first question was what our current process looks like for foreign credential recognition. I am going to try to briefly go through the detail on that program.

We developed our current process in 1999. A special committee of our council on national certification worked with our staff to develop this new process, taking into consideration the general principles of prior learning assessment, which were considered best practices at the time.

Our process is paper based, and an applicant portfolio consists of five key items:

An evaluation of formal academic credentials by an external agency. This is to verify the validity of the documents as well as the equivalency to a Canadian education.

Submission of acceptable language testing results to establish eligibility as pre-set criteria for the exams.

Submission of detailed curriculum information on the medical laboratory technology education components. That's the detailed course information about the actual program they took.

Submission of work experience in detail, and employment verification, which must be submitted directly from the employer.

And finally, submission of post-graduate education and other professional credentials from the applicant, along with supporting evidence and documentation.

Once all the above information has been compiled, our prior learning assessment experts review the content of the assessment of equivalency to Canadian medical laboratory technologist training, as defined in our national competency profile. The applicant receives a report of their findings and an indication as to whether they will be allowed to challenge the national certification exams. We do not grant certification without exams.

We have developed a comprehensive package of information on how to apply for the prior learning assessment, and we provide it to all applicants free of charge through the Internet. We do allow applicants to start the process before they come to Canada, as it is much easier for them to access the required information.

Your next question was what the costs and the challenges would be of implementing such a process. The costs are twofold. The costs to CSMLS, to our organization, have been enormous. Our certification processes were already highly supplemented by our general membership in order to keep the examination costs affordable. The same members have supported much of the additional costs for staffing that has had to be added in our national offices in order to cope with the growing numbers of applicants that we have been seeing. We can clearly identify at least three FTEs that are primarily allocated to this task, plus the involvement of a number of other staff. The CSMLS fee for prior learning assessment is in no way cost recovery.

The costs to applicants are not insignificant either. The external evaluation by the ISIS organization costs \$200. Our fee for the prior learning assessment is \$325. There are costs for the language proficiency test, plus any charges the institutions may levy for transcripts. Finally, there will be the examination charges when they establish eligibility. By the time the process is completed, the costs would probably average around \$1,000 per applicant.

As far as the challenges to our system go, applicants will tell you that the largest challenge is the timeliness of the CSMLS process. The average application takes at least a year to complete. Access to the required information can be quite challenging when the applicant is already in Canada. Understanding and, more specifically, acceptance of what is required is a major hurdle. Applicants often want to deviate from what it is that we require and just have us go ahead and evaluate what it is that we have on hand.

Language and cultural barriers create many problems as well. We are often faced with communication challenges when the applicant's language of learning has not been either of Canada's official languages. Many of our applicants are resource intensive. They call

us a lot and they send us an innumerable number of e-mails. They are passionate about their goals, to say the least. We have conducted diversity training amongst our staff to try to better understand our applicants and to serve them better. However, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the stresses that have been placed on our staff internally.

● (1105)

Your next question was with regard to what occupational fields have made progress with respect to skills and credential recognition. We'd like to think we have made significant progress in this process. Compared to our previous process of the general evaluation—go back to school in Canada and do it again was the general consensus answer—we have a very good process, we believe, today.

However, we believe that process could be improved. We'd like to see improved results from the process, because we're concerned about the success rates of our eligible candidates. In that regard, we have just recently completed an agreement with the Government of Canada foreign credential recognition program to conduct a formal audit of our prior learning assessment process. It's been in place for five years now, and we believe it's time to take a serious look at it.

As for problems integrating individuals into the Canadian workforce, our international applicants face a similar challenge to Canadian graduates in finding that first real job. Canadian health care employers have become addicted to part-time occasional staffing. The international applicants are no different in that regard.

We have concerns about success rates of our candidates, and we have seen an improvement in the success rates by those who participate in the bridging programs that have developed.

I'm going to wrap up, because the chairman has given me the signal to move on.

I would like to conclude with three major points. These items are identified in the background document.

There is the need for more bridging programs in Canada to assist international technologists integrating into the workforce. There is the need for clinical placements for those programs. We have a serious situation with clinical placements for our Canadian programs already, and the additional requirements for international programs are placing a serious challenge on the health care system, as well as these students. Finally, there is concern about the burden that we, as a voluntary not-for-profit professional association, have been carrying on behalf of the people of Canada to carry out this process. There's no way that an applicant should be expected to pay the full costs, but we as an organization should not be expected to bear the full burden either.

•(1110)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Hernandez.

Ms. Carmencita R. Hernandez (As an Individual): My name is Carmencita Hernandez. I would like to thank the chair and the members of the panel for giving me the opportunity to appear before you today.

I am confident that you are familiar with the depth and breadth of the immigrant experience in relation to the significant and crucial impact of the recognition of their international experience and credentials on their lives and their families. The recognition of their international experience and credentials will lead to maximizing the social, economic, civic, and cultural contributions to Canada.

Needless to say, to be able to work in their area of knowledge, experience, and expertise would result in increased earning capacity, increased taxes, personal savings, and consumption. In addition, the pressure and tension at home would be lightened. Their lives would be brightened, and this would add to the multicultural mosaic of which we are all part.

In recognition of the difficulties new immigrants face, several programs have been initiated by various organizations. This issue is not a new one; it is an issue that has been recycled all over again and now it needs to be resolved. As far back as the late 1970s, the Kababayan Community Centre, which is a Filipino community centre with the University of the Philippines Alumni Association, and a community paper known as *Balita* initiated forums and conferences in increasing awareness on the call of Filipino immigrants for recognition of their international experience and credentials. Professional groups, such as the Filipino Nurses' Association and the Association of Filipino-Canadian Accountants, led in assisting immigrants by conducting study sessions and educational visits with regulating bodies.

Our networking and linking up with immigrant and visible minority communities led also to our participation in an English-language pilot program for nurses, which was developed and implemented by the Coalition of Visible Minority Women. At this point the Kababayan Community Centre is one of the four organizations that developed the CARE—creating access for regulated employment—for Nurses program. This program is now housed at George Brown College. The centre, which I was part of, continues to work with other groups in other communities in organizing professionals and is also assisting them in terms of capacity building.

In the course of our community work, we know of a growing sector of workers who due to their status are not able to access their profession. These are the caregivers. A number of caregivers have passed requirements of the regulating bodies to practise the nursing profession. However, due to their status they could not qualify to work. We would like to recommend that this policy be reviewed and amended, thus allowing them to practise their profession.

We would also ask that the federal government strengthen and expand programs that connect employers and perspective employees, which would mean covering the workers' insurance. In Ontario the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities is to be

commended for their bridging program, but as Mr. Davis has said, there is a need to have more bridging programs to assist newcomers to this country.

We also encourage that evaluation and assessment of these programs be quantified to validate the benefits and the contributions of immigrants. There is also the need to determine continuation and expansion of this initiative.

It is also important that our federal government continue to support agencies providing settlement and employment services to newcomers. We also call on the federal government to at least review and support the recommendations of the Maytree Foundation in its document entitled "For the New Government of Ontario, Integrating Immigrant Skills into the Ontario Economy, A Ten Point Plan".

We also ask that our federal government consider expanding this ten-point plan to other provinces and territories. It is time to acknowledge that by recognizing international experiences and credentials, Canada's newcomers could at least be given, or be able to make, a lateral, mobile shift in their careers. It is time that our governments take this step.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we have Mr. Cryne.

Mr. Stephen Cryne (Executive Vice-President, Canadian Employee Relocation Council): Mr. Chair, members of the committee, we're delighted to have the opportunity to contribute to the important work of this committee.

I'm Stephen Cryne. I'm the executive director of the Canadian Employee Relocation Council. We'll refer to ourselves as CERC through the balance of the presentation. With me is Mr. Sergio Karas, who will also be participating in the presentation this morning.

I'll give you just a little bit of background about our association. We're a national association of employers representing the interests of organizations who are involved in the movement of their workers.

Relocation of employees is vital to a vibrant and prosperous economy. Each year Canadian employers relocate over 100,000 workers, the majority of whom are skilled and professional employees. Many of them are also immigrants. In addition to domestic relocation, there are 68,000 Canadians who work outside of Canada in very important positions.

Access to skilled labour is of paramount importance to employers in Canada. A survey of Canada's most respected corporations conducted by KPMG in 2003 cited access to skilled labour as the third leading concern for Canadian CEOs.

Immigration has accounted for almost 70% of the growth in Canada's workforce over the past decade, and immigration will be the only viable alternative to building this workforce in the future. Attracting talent—and in many cases foreign talent—is central to the continuing success of the Canadian industry and to its international competitiveness.

A necessary prerequisite for the success of such a strategy is the recognition of foreign professional credentials by Canadian regulatory bodies and industry in Canada. The implementation of a simplified foreign credential evaluation system that facilitates participation by foreign professionals in the Canadian economy is therefore in the public interest and is particularly in the interest of Canadian employers. Facilitating this process is a challenge to federal and provincial governments, professional licensing bodies, and industry alike.

We believe the efficient mobility of foreign professional talent can help to alleviate troubling demographic trends. Recognition of foreign professional qualifications is an essential precondition to such workforce mobility and to attracting the global talent in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

The government policy should be facilitative. Government should move away from the role of gatekeeper, while at the same time continuing to provide a framework that ensures the protection of the public in Canada and maintains the high standards required by industry and professional organizations.

To accomplish this task, the government should embark upon a process of cooperation between stakeholders with a view to simplifying and standardizing recognition of foreign credentials.

I'm going to turn the presentation over now to Mr. Sergio Karas, who'll give you a little more background and also some of the detail around the particular recommendations we have for your committee.

• (1115)

Mr. Sergio Karas (Member, Government Relations Committee, Canadian Employee Relocation Council): Thank you very much, members of the committee. Good morning. *Bonjour, tout le monde.*

I would like to add something to what our executive director, Mr. Cryne, said.

I would like to point out also that I'm an immigration lawyer. I'm a specialist certified in citizenship and immigration law by the Law Society of Upper Canada, and as a matter of fact, once upon a time I was an immigrant myself. I was born in Argentina. So I'm quite familiar with the problems faced by immigrants. I see this not on a daily basis, but on an hourly basis, if I can say so.

What I would like to add to the presentation that you have in writing—the position paper—which lays out in detail what we believe in, is the following.

We have a very serious problem in this country in that we need a credential recognition program that will address two things. Number one, it will address the needs of immigrants, and number two, it will address the need for a competitive labour force in the global marketplace, because we are not doing that right now.

The reason for this is that we have a very fragmented credential recognition program in which there is a series of regulatory bodies and provincial sets of legislation that have been put into it. We need to move into a more structured, more road-map-oriented environment, whereby potential immigrants can see in advance what is going to be required of them in order to fulfill the credential recognition process. We are not advocating that the standards be

lowered or watered down in any way, but we are asking that the process be certain, clear, and transparent.

One of the positive steps, if I can point that out, in this particular credential recognition evaluation for foreign professionals process has been the NAFTA. The NAFTA agreement between the United States and Canada and Mexico creates minimum educational requirements that certain occupations need to have in order to qualify for entry into their respective countries. For example, an engineer needs a bachelor's degree, or a licentiatuara in the case of Mexico, in order to have entry into the other signatory country. We believe that moving into the types of mutual bilateral agreements like NAFTA between Canada and other countries, with a detailed list of professions and minimum educational requirements that have been mutually negotiated by the signatory countries, is a positive step.

We also believe that Canada needs to move more in the direction of sectoral agreements. We are proponents of the fact that the labour market and private industry are the best equipped to determine their own labour needs. I don't see that there is any sense in bringing workers into this country who are not going to find jobs, who are not going to be able to adapt to the labour force. We need people who are going to fill the gaps that exist in a very real sense in our labour force.

Some of the problems are very complex. For example, a lot of those jobs are not in the metropolitan areas, and immigrants have a tendency to concentrate overwhelmingly in metropolitan areas, particularly Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. But what we need is further cooperation between CIC and HRSDC and regulatory bodies. In order to have this particular road map, we need to have a process that is certain, a process that is transparent to the immigrants, and a process that will have as its main goal the advancement of Canada in the global marketplace. We recognize the fact that labour mobility today is not just a choice, but a necessity.

We have our recommendations laid out at the end of the paper, so if you have any questions, we'll be happy to answer them. I know that time is short and we need to wrap up.

Thank you very much.

• (1120)

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Pires.

Mr. Rui Pires (As an Individual): Good morning. I would like to thank you for granting us the opportunity and for hearing us speak today.

My name is Rui Pires. I am a long-standing member of the board of directors of the Alliance of Portuguese Clubs and Associations of Ontario. We are a community group, not a professional group, and we have over 30 organizational members across Ontario.

We are currently engaged in a dialogue with the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, proposing means by which the issue of the large number of undocumented workers in the construction trades can be dealt with in a manner that will not cause a great deal of disruption to the construction industry in southern Ontario. We are engaged in this dialogue with the ministry in cooperation with 11 other employer groups and trade unions, as well as the Canadian Hispanic Congress and the Polish Alliance of Canada as our community partners. We are doing this with the aim of putting together a pilot project. It is an important issue to the economy of southern Ontario, considering the yet-to-be-documented yet undoubtedly large numbers of workers who are working in this field.

However the current administration chooses to deal with this problem, it is our belief that Parliament has to look at the legislation that now exists for recognizing skilled workers, and in particular to this area. It is a section of the Immigration Act that is supposed to address the issue of allowing skilled workers into Canada without throwing Canadians out of work.

Our respectful opinion to the standing committee today is that the six selection factors used to determine who can be a skilled worker are so heavily weighted in favour of formalized education and the ability to speak one of the two official languages of Canada that in fact the selection criteria are too much of a barrier to companies in the construction area to employ construction workers from abroad. The result is that employers begin to hire undocumented workers and there is a further impetus on the part of employers to continue this practice.

We think, based on our knowledge of our own members, who are either legitimate, permanent landed residents of Canada or Canadian citizens who are Portuguese who work in the construction industry, that they themselves would also be hard-pressed to pass the selection criteria, and some of them are actual owners of construction companies.

It is our suggestion that Parliament look at reforming the single broad set of selection criteria that is applied to all applicants in determining their suitability for working in Canada, replacing the single set of criteria with at least three different and separate sets of broad selection criteria; that those sets of selection criteria be differentiated based on reflecting the formalized educational and language skills required to do the variety of different work we see in the Canadian workplace; and that one set of criteria be applied to an applicant, based on the area of the economy in which they wish to work. We suggest this with a view to having selection criteria that are responsive to the needs of the very diverse and changing Canadian economy, and we suggest that the criteria be reviewed on a periodic basis.

I acknowledge that what I have said is an opinion that needs further substantiation. What the Alliance of Portuguese Clubs and Associations of Ontario is prepared to do is engage in community-based research whose purpose is to determine what the specific barriers are in the six selection criteria for determining a skilled worker; whether the criteria make sense to employers for short-term skilled workers in the construction trade; and whether the process of bringing foreign workers to Canada is flexible enough to meet the needs of the construction industry in Canada as new construction projects arise.

We will share our findings and methodology with Parliament in respect to this issue as soon as our information gathering is complete, and we will provide our findings to the larger community, and in particular to our partners in the earlier-mentioned pilot project.

That concludes my remarks. Thank you so much.

• (1125)

The Chair: Thank you very much. We move on to Mr. Cooke.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michael Cooke (As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good morning everyone.

[*English*]

I'm here representing the Association of Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology of Ontario. My name is Michael Cooke, and I'm vice-president, academic excellence and student success, at George Brown College.

I want to put the questions of credential recognition and PLAR in a larger context. There are 200,000-plus students we serve across Ontario, many of whom are immigrants. It's clear that our continuing economic prosperity is highly dependent on effective recruitment and integration of new Canadians into the workforce. However, there're also ample indications of shortcomings in our ability to integrate immigrants into the workplace in a manner that ensures job satisfaction and success for them and maximizes their contribution to the Canadian economy.

Statistics Canada data show that 76% of the nearly 165,000 newcomers to Canada arrived with at least one type of post-secondary, professional, or technical qualification earned overseas. Data from that same study indicate that 67% of the immigrants in the prime working age between 25 and 44 years of age plan further education or retraining in spite of having come with international credentials. According to a study on potential earning power soon to be published by the Institute for Research on Public Policy, foreign education is worth only 70% of Canadian education and foreign experience only 30%. That's a big loss to us here in Canada.

In other Statistics Canada statistics, there's a significant disparity in earnings for immigrants from non-traditional source regions such as Africa, Asia, and eastern Europe compared with those from the U. S. or from northern, western, or southern Europe. These are discouraging realities for new Canadians, but they also imply serious repercussions for our nation as a whole. It's estimated that 60% of skilled immigrants entering Canada take jobs unrelated to their training. They're driving our cabs and working in our convenience stores. The Conference Board of Canada estimates that between \$4.1 billion and \$5.9 billion dollars is lost to the Canadian economy as a result of these unrecognized qualifications. All of this clearly points to the importance of timely, accurate, and credible assessment of international academic credentials and previous work experience.

Over 60% of immigrants to Canada settle in Ontario, so it's especially important for us in this province to ensure successful transition to the workplace. I can tell you that the Ontario colleges, like others across Canada, are ideally placed to launch integration activities and are committed to identifying and implementing solutions. I'm sure the panel is interested in solutions. I'd like to tell you about one.

On January 19, 2004, the Colleges of Ontario Network for Education and Training, known as CON*NECT, in partnership with Centennial, Fanshawe, and George Brown College, launched phase one of an ambitious initiative funded by the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities entitled the Colleges Integrating Immigrants to Employment project, or CIITE.

The project is guided by an overarching vision to provide internationally trained immigrants with access to programs and services in the Ontario college system. These build on their qualifications and expedite securing employment in their field. Phase one, which was completed in December, involved an extensive consultation with Ontario colleges and other key stakeholders including 100 internationally trained immigrants. Our goal was to identify recommendations for the re-engineering of the infrastructure processes and programs at our colleges in order to improve pathways. Based on that research, we have identified a set of problems and barriers that impede the integration of immigrants in the workplace. Recognition of international credentials is just one of the issues to consider.

The Ontario college sector is proposing a systematic solution to the integration of immigrants issue. It would include the following things: language proficiency and delivery of sector-specific language training programs; the provision of advisement and information; assessment and credit for prior learning; and access to Canadian workplace experience, which is absolutely crucial in filling gaps in knowledge and skills with targeted programming.

• (1130)

The CIITE initiative has been enthusiastically embraced by the colleges as an important opportunity and a way that we can work with partners to make integration of immigrants work better, quicker, and more efficiently. My colleague here gave you one example with the CARE project.

We urge the federal government to emerge from these hearings with a clear focus on solutions, the intent to incorporate best practices and processes shared by stakeholders, and the commitment to assume a leadership role in launching integrated comprehensive interventions that will address the barriers faced by immigrants. Specifically, we ask you to consider the following four recommendations.

First, a clear message must be delivered to immigrants on the importance of engaging in the overseas assessment and training process prior to their departure for Canada. A number of other panellists have made the same point.

Secondly, funding for sector-specific language training needs to be increased significantly.

Thirdly, emphasis needs to be placed on delivery of new programs to facilitate employment transition. These initiatives should include support for cooperative education programs, incentives for employers, and the development of training content addressing workplace culture issues. This is absolutely fundamental.

And finally, provision of funding should be directed to appropriate organizations such as regulatory bodies and associations, colleges, and credential assessment organizations to facilitate more thorough and efficient credential recognition.

We are grateful for this opportunity to speak to you, and we look forward to the outcome of your work.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Clearly, this is a challenge for us as the federal government, because we have to work with the provinces to make sure people have access to that credential recognition.

We are going to go to a five-minute round. That's for the question and answers. We are going to start with Ms. Grewal.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you all for your time and your presentations.

Too often immigrants come to Canada with false expectations. They are being led to believe by immigration officials that their degrees and experience will be transferable to Canada and they will have no problem at all in finding employment.

As an immigrant to Canada, I know first-hand the red tape and bureaucratic nonsense involved in getting international credentials recognized in this country. As a new immigrant, you have unbelievable difficulties—stresses in setting up your home, finding housing, schooling, family care, and simply becoming accustomed to a new environment. So not being able to work in your chosen field after your education and work experience got you into this country is a headache that immigrants simply do not want.

In your opinion, what can the federal government do to speed up international credential recognition?

• (1135)

Mr. Michael Cooke: I again want to stress taking advantage of the community college system across the country. It is the best and most extensive network that we have. It is a place where immigrants go naturally. They are well connected to the community agencies where they find themselves when they arrive in the country, and then to integrated planning between the federal and the provincial governments.

I take the president's caution on this, but I think that is a really good place to start. We have an Association of Canadian Community Colleges. There is a good opportunity for federal-provincial cooperation here.

Mr. Kurt H. Davis: I support those comments. We have found that the success of our international applicants has been greatly enhanced through participation in bridging programs, but more important is that they know the expectation of the requirements for when they come. That's one of the reasons we have made significant changes to our program to allow starting that evaluation process before they leave home.

Getting access to documents is one of the biggest challenges our applicants face. It's especially difficult for those who are political refugees, who may not be welcome to inquire of their documents in their home country. We do have an occasional Geneva conference refugee who cannot provide documents, and then we have to go on affidavits and other material submissions.

But it's getting access to those documents. If they can start that process before they come to Canada, then they know what they are facing.

The Chair: Mr. Karas.

Mr. Sergio Karas: Yes, thank you.

Ms. Grewal, I will offer you two solutions to your conundrum. Number one, I support the comments that have been made, and number two, I think the use of sectoral agreements that include cooperation between Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, and the regulatory bodies, whereby there is a clear road map that immigrants can access before coming into Canada will be useful.

Number two, we need sectoral agreements per se that are industry driven, whereby people are able to pre-qualify, so to speak, for jobs and to come into this country with pre-arranged jobs. For example, we have a very successful software development workers' pilot project that had been running for years prior to the Y2K crisis, beginning in 1997 as an initiative between Citizenship and Immigration Canada, HRDC and the Software Human Resource Council, and that is still successful. Thousands of people from all over the world have used it. In particular, but not exclusively, a lot of people from India benefited from it. And those people came in with jobs, with good, well-paying jobs, and they have adapted to the country very nicely. They were able to use those skills and apply for immigration to Canada while they were working here on temporary visas.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Sergio Karas: I think that has been expanded, by the way.

Ms. Carmencita R. Hernandez: I think it is true that people would not believe what really happens to new immigrants when they come to this country. They may be told what not to expect, but basically they want to have a better life so they come as immigrants to this country.

I think one of the important things that have to be considered and which we have a lot of problems with is that the immigration consultants in the country of origin sometimes paint too rosy a picture of what to expect in Canada. They even tell them, you can get a job, we can even give you information about transportation, and all they do is tell you where to go for the TTC and where to go for your SIN. And in terms of jobs, professionals come and work in factories on the graveyard shift, and some of them end up wrapping either Wrigley's chewing gum or some of these boxes that are sent out as kits.

So basically I think what is really encouraging among what other speakers said is that information about what to expect should really be available to new immigrants. This might be something the Canadian immigration department can do in the originating countries. And also it would be very helpful to know the provisions regarding professions, as far as what they have to go through and what they have to practise in is concerned, since it takes at least two years before they get final approval to come to this country.

I wish there could be a way for the Canadian government to really impose a code of ethics for immigration consultants. A bad picture of Canada is being painted, because people think the immigration

consultants represent the Canadian government. I think that is one thing we should look into.

Also, I would like to request that the CIC should really expand and provide sufficient resources for agencies that provide settlement services to newcomers.

Thank you.

• (1140)

The Chair: Thank you very much. That was a good question, and everybody got to answer.

We have our translation devices, and if you don't speak French you will need them. Next we will have Monsieur Roger Clavet.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Clavet: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

In turn, I would like to thank the witnesses who still have faith in politicians. That is good news. We could even announce it in both official languages. I listened with interest to the presentations of the Association of Colleges of Applied Arts and Technologies of Ontario and the Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science.

I have two questions for you. The first is for the Association of Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology of Ontario. First of all, let me congratulate you on your presentation. What I appreciated is the fact that you make suggestions, and that your approach is broader, more global. I believe that George Brown College is involved in the Colleges Integrating Immigrants to Employment project.

You have suggested several solutions, and you talk about getting work experience in Canada for immigrants, because we are discussing the recognition of credentials.

Could this mean creating new programs, internships, for example, of perhaps cooperative education programs? Is this the kind of thing we should be doing to give immigrants a chance to be not only taxi drivers, but to work in our colleges and universities?

Mr. Michael Cooke: Yes, I believe that relations between immigrants and employers are very poor. My colleague has stated that, in the Portuguese community, there are a number of questions and problems because employers and immigrants do not seem to relate very well to one another.

We must have programs and initiatives that would encourage employers to work together with their colleagues and other organizations to prepare training programs. These could be in the form of cooperative experience, internships, or some other program: any type of style or structure could apply, and could vary according to the sector. However, I think we need programs that would involve a larger number of employers in partnership with the colleges, because there are two main problems: language, and experience within the system.

Whenever we provide immigrants with these opportunities, in most cases, the employers are quite surprised and very happy with the outcome, and are prepared to offer these people long-term employment.

Mr. Roger Clavet: Thank you.

I now have a question for the Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science. Mr. Davis, you said there was a shortage of medical laboratory technicians. I would like to know how serious this problem is. Is it critical? Is there an urgent need for medical lab technicians?

[English]

Mr. Kurt H. Davis: Thank you.

We have been working to try to bring this concern to the attention of the Government of Canada and the provincial governments since 1998. We are not unique as a health profession in that we have a bulge of baby boomers in our industry. We estimate that by 2010, 50% of our current Canadian workforce in medical laboratory science will be eligible to retire.

•(1145)

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Clavet: You also said—and this is quite understandable—that the standards for lab technicians, for example, are different in developing countries.

I have a hard time understanding how you operate. I may be mistaken, but I imagine that, for a urine test, the procedure would essentially be the same here as it is abroad; however, the difference must be much greater in the case of medical genetics. Is there a significant difference between a foreign-trained technician and one who is working in a laboratory here?

[English]

Mr. Kurt H. Davis: We see significant variances, depending on the country of origin and the length of time the individual has been formally educated. The more recently educated individuals tend to have more current information.

The reality, though, is there are huge variances in the way medicine is practised around the world. Take a simple example like the use of antibiotics. In Europe they use a totally different spectrum of antibiotics from what they do in Canada, and they use a totally different way of reporting how those antibiotics are used in testing whether the bacterium is sensitive or not.

There's globalization of health care; it's not universal yet. We are fortunate that yes, blood cells are blood cells and urine is urine, but the knowledge that is offered, in developing countries especially, is the basic minimum for them to provide the basic numbers of tests and is not at the comprehensive level we expect on a daily basis. We are not holding international candidates to any higher level of expectation than we are our own Canadian graduates.

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Clavet: In closing, you say that our foreign-trained professionals are experiencing roughly the same unemployment rate as those who are educated here in Canada. Is that not a slight exaggeration? Is that really the case, and do you have the figures to prove it, or are you not stretching the truth just a little?

[English]

Mr. Kurt H. Davis: It's quite similar, actually. It's quite distressing for new graduates who come off the line. They have a large student debt and they have trouble finding that first full-time job.

Despite the reported shortages, employers don't seem to be freeing up the full-time employment; they are addicted to using a part-time, casual workforce, something we encountered in the 1990s. In the mid-1990s there were serious reductions in the health workforce in the medical laboratory. Our workforce was reduced by 28% across Canada in a period of about two and a half years, so we had a surplus of Canadian-trained lab technologists.

In early 2000 and onward we saw a transition and a rebuilding of the Canadian health care system. We took up what was left of the people who were waiting in the wings to work in the Canadian workforce, but many people had given up on health care and gone somewhere else. At that time all our immigrant friends who had come to Canada in the meantime and had not found a job in a lab—they were maybe working as lab assistants—started coming forward for evaluation. We've had a really huge surge of immigrants applying for work in the last five years because of the new job opportunities that are available, and it's going to continue to improve.

I would caution you, however, that this shortage of medical laboratory professionals is not made in Canada; it's an international situation. Canada is a signatory to international agreements about poaching health care workers, yet we're already seeing employers going overseas to recruit. We're really concerned because immigrants are going to be coming to Canada with expectations of jobs, and health care is quite a highly regulated profession.

We're a voluntary, not-for-profit professional association; however, we do set the national standards for the certification exam that is used by all the regulatory bodies across Canada as the basic pre-entry to work.

We're not going to solve our health care human resources problems in Canada through immigration. We have to make a concerted effort to rebuild the Canadian education system as well, because we tore it apart during the nineties, when we had a surplus, and we need to put more money back into that as well.

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Clavet: Thank you, Mr. Davis.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you all for your presentations this morning. They've been very helpful.

I am remembering the testimony we heard in Vancouver from the Filipino Nurses' Association about the situation Filipino nurses in particular find themselves in currently in Canada and about how so many of them are employed as live-in caregivers, not being seen as acceptable workers in our health care system.

They also mentioned that back in the 1960s and 1970s, when Canada was facing a nursing shortage, a policy was implemented to put those people right to work in hospitals and in nursing jobs. I asked at the time if there had been any serious detriment to the health care system, if it had collapsed or if there had been an increase in the death rate of patients in hospitals. No one seemed to think that had been the case. The reality was that they had integrated fairly successfully and easily into the system.

Given the shortages everybody is talking about in all kinds of fields, not just in health care, and all this work being put into accreditation and licensing requirements and bridging programs and what not, are we quickly reaching the place where we're just going to have to say, unless we put these people directly to work in the system right away, the system is going to collapse? Are we on the verge of that kind of decision again, where we have to recognize these people's credentials and put them into work situations where they get that training on the job?

Do any of you want to comment on that?

● (1150)

Ms. Carmencita R. Hernandez: Well, we are not asking that the standards of health care be lowered. We strongly believe they should be maintained and even strengthened.

In Ontario the shortage of nurses was really in the public eye, so there was an immediate need to address it. What happened was not an instant solution. It really came from the communities developing pilot programs, which started with English language training, in particular for nurses. It eventually developed into the CARE program, because the CARE program also involved Yee Hong Centre for Geriatric Care, which is a nursing home for seniors.

Basically, I think we should not wait for the time there is another crisis, when we need more nurses and start to get nurses from other countries. What I think should be looked into is allowing the possibility of developing pilot projects in the different provinces. Get the best practices and see how they work, and hopefully develop this into a concrete centre, wherein people can go through, get the information they need, get the training they need, and at the same time be connected with employers.

Mr. Michael Cooke: I think your question is very helpful. The whole issue around credentials is an input-driven question. The example you give is an example of testing on the basis of performance. I fear to think where our health care system would be today if it hadn't been for that wonderful influx of Filipino nurses during that period.

It's just a further demonstration of the earlier point that where we should really be putting the emphasis is less on credentials and more on workplace experience and language. Those are the two key issues. Then we can see in situ whether or not it's working.

Mr. Kurt H. Davis: The complexity of our Canadian health care system has changed significantly since the late 1960s. At that time, in our profession, we relied on a large immigrant population from the U.K. who were, to be honest, ahead of us technology-wise at the time. Today's Canadian medical laboratory is a very complex place. An average instrument in a medical lab could cost as much as half a million dollars. The range of testing has gone from a basic menu of 20 to over 500. It's a very different world in our profession today.

One of the reasons we're conducting our prior learning assessment audit is to look at what our expectations are and also what the needs should be. We're seeing about 50% of the applicants to our processes being declared eligible to go to exam. Of that 50%, one-third pass the exam on the first try. That's great, and we celebrate those. The next third pass on the second or subsequent try. For many of them it's language familiarity—familiarity with writing an exam. Especially if they've been out of school for a while, they're not used to doing multiple-choice computer-scored examinations. The other third, however, never make it. That's a group, in particular, that we want to look at.

We've done our paper evaluations that said they should be able to pass this exam. When we put those same pools of people into a bridging program for international technologists, we see their success rate become comparable to graduates of Canadian medical laboratory training programs—somewhere around the 85% range. That's the celebration that we have in the success of those programs. We really rely on that to move forward.

● (1155)

The Chair: Mr. Karas

Mr. Sergio Karas: Thank you.

One of the things you need to be concerned with is that one size does not fit all in immigration policy, particularly in connection with credential recognition. We have a lot of jobs in this country that go begging for people, for a variety of reasons. Let's face it, in this country we don't train enough engineers or enough technical people, such as they do in the United States or European countries or countries in Asia, for example. We just don't produce them in the universities. So industry needs to get these workers from somewhere.

Where we are having the problems is that our immigration policy tries to cut across all the needs of everybody and have one standard for everybody. That's why we have PhDs in philosophy driving taxis. We have to come to the realization that the type of immigrant we are bringing into this country in the skilled worker category perhaps needs to be better selected. We need, for example, a lot of engineers for the mining industry. We are not producing them. However, as I said before, we don't need PhDs in philosophy, because they're not going to be able to find a job in their field.

I think that, if anything, this will direct you to the fact that the particular labour sectors and the particular needs of the labour market in specific industries should have greater input into the immigration selection criteria, because those are the people who ultimately will be offering the jobs. A lot of the jobs are not in metropolitan areas. They're not in Toronto, Montreal or Vancouver. They are in the north. They are in Alberta. They are in northern Ontario. We also have a problem of retention in that area, because not everybody wants to live there. People have a tendency to cluster where their family or friends are. That's something that needs to be taken into consideration.

Immigration needs to be retooled in order to account for the needs of the private sector, because they are the ones who have to go into the global marketplace and compete with the companies from China, western Europe, and the United States.

If I may make one final point, during our presentation that you have in writing before you, I mentioned that credential accreditation should not be one size fits all, either. Professionals who are graduates, for example, of U.S. universities or some European universities are just as well or better equipped than Canadian university graduates. I have had many clients, for example, who were originally from Asia and are graduates from MIT or Georgia Tech. They've been having a hard time with credential recognition. There should be no reason for that, because if anything, they're even better equipped than Canadian graduates.

I think we need to look at the whole system of immigration, not just in a piecemeal fashion.

The Chair: Mr. Pires.

Mr. Rui Pires: I can't agree more with what the co-presenters are saying. From our point of view, when we are making a suggestion to break down the six selection criteria and try to apply them, it's a really good example of how the act is trying to take one thing and apply it to all these industries at the same time. It's clearly not serving the needs of a particular industry—the construction industry, as I referred to it—and it's creating problems for a particular ethnic community, or actually a bunch of ethnic communities, concentrated in that area and working in that area.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Beaumier.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: I think all of my questions have been answered.

Well, I do have one on what Mr. Davis was referring to. I'm wondering what the greatest barriers are. Are we talking language or procedural differences, wherein we're talking laboratories where they have the textbook knowledge but not the practical experience with equipment? You also referred to cultural barriers. What are those cultural barriers?

Mr. Kurt H. Davis: The Canadian health care system is its own unique animal, as we're all well aware, and one of the big challenges we've identified—and this has actually been discussed in a forum of five other health professions—are Canadian health care ethics. In particular, how we do health care in Canada and the ethical considerations here present challenges. There have been some very

negative experiences, unfortunately, with ways health care was applied in countries of origin versus how it's done here in Canada.

We also look at gender issues, in how men and women are treated by other people. The health care industry being predominantly female makes for a significant challenge. It's a real issue.

As far as the knowledge goes, our colleagues in the United States, for instance, don't include histopathology as part of their base training. So they need to add that course in order for an American person, who is otherwise quite similarly educated, to become eligible for our certification.

The practice varies from country to country. In some countries, the lab is quite closely related to pharmacy, so they might actually know something about pharmacy and be missing some things in the laboratory. So it depends on the country of origin and the way it's practised.

● (1200)

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Okay, thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Temelkovski.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thanks to all the presenters.

We do need to hear more on this every day, and that's why we're going right across the country.

I have a couple of questions, and they're more philosophical. I'm a philosophy student so...the idea of bringing more PhDs in philosophy here we can discuss later.

Do professionals come to Canada primarily to work and move on, or do they use that as a way to get to Canada?

Mr. Sergio Karas: Everyone who applies as a skilled worker to come to Canada does it, I think, out of a desire to progress and to improve himself or herself and to have a better future, quite frankly.

The question of unrealistic expectations has been raised around the table. I think it's very true. Ms. Hernandez mentioned immigration consultants providing misleading or sometimes even false information and just giving people directions about how to go to the TTC. I agree with that.

I'm an immigration lawyer. Obviously I don't want to get into the area of consultants; we could have a whole different panel here about the unlicensed consultants or the poorly regulated consultants under the Immigration Act. They are not lawyers.

On the main point you are raising, I think everybody wants to get ahead. A lot of people who are professionals overseas do not understand sometimes that it's not going to be easy for them. It's a little bit like the idea that the grass is always greener on the other side. When people are outside of Canada they ask me, for example, as an immigration lawyer, "How quickly can I get there?" or "Why is it taking so long? I want to get there, I want to get there". Once they are here, some of them aren't happy with the results.

Canada is a free enterprise society, and we need to take that into consideration. There's a little bit of *caveat emptor*, or buyer beware, that needs to go into the process of giving information overseas. One of the best solutions, which we are proposing at the CERC, is that people be given information; that a database pooling all the resources of all the different credential recognition bodies be centralized; and also that sectoral agreements between specific industries and Human Resources and Citizenship and Immigration Canada be encouraged, because we believe that when people come in with a job already lined up, they are going to do much better than those who are just getting off the plane and saying, "Where do I go from here?" I think we need to encourage that.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: You are just as lengthy as I am, and we only have so much time. I'd like everybody—or whoever would like to—to answer, but I also have a second question. Maybe if I pose it as well you can deal with it.

How can the federal government speed up a more aggressive strategy of credentialing schools, looking at schools such as George Brown taking a look at colleges and universities in India and in China, and knowing more about their schools before we have these professionals coming to the country—as schools, not as individuals? If we know the school's reputation and the type of training they do for medical or for construction workers, we would maybe have easier integration into the system later on.

Those are the two questions.

• (1205)

The Chair: Give short answers, please.

Mr. Cooke.

Mr. Michael Cooke: Going back to the PhD question, the issue there is that again too much of our assessment is input-driven. Somebody who has a PhD in philosophy actually has a ton of generic skills, and we are missing the opportunity to use them because we focus too much on inputs.

In terms of what the federal government can do, I can't press enough to think about programs that are going to get partnerships going between employers and new immigrants, so that they are actually getting in and demonstrating skill in the situation. That's an area where we don't run into the friction between the federal role and the provincial role, so the feds can move in there and do something.

The second thing I'd say is that we don't have an integrated approach, and again, even though it's self-serving of me, I would say the federal government has a wonderful instrument in its 250 community colleges across the country. Think about favouring them as an instrument for getting a one-stop shopping approach.

The Chair: Ms. Hernandez.

Ms. Carmencita R. Hernandez: Perhaps it is important to get connected to the country's department of education or the department of labour and employment, because that would also assist in giving an idea of what schools are best and where the expertise is.

What could also be considered is that maybe the Canadian embassies in different countries or source countries could have a desk that would look into the different skills and the different professions in the originating country. They would know the

different schools. I must admit that there are also diploma mills that just want to produce, say, nurses, and they're not capable of being nurses. So there could be a way, in the originating countries, to be able to develop certain linkages with different departments, or different NGOs, as a matter of fact.

The Chair: Mr. Pires.

Mr. Rui Pires: What I'd like to point out is that the trade unions in the construction industry in the GTA provide a great deal of training on site and have training centres themselves to train people in terms of their skill development in the construction industry.

So yes, formalized education is great and very necessary for some professions. However, in some industries and in some jobs, people need situational and practical training. Trade unions are doing that a lot now in Ontario. The reason for that is the need to have people in place who can do the job effectively and quickly for construction.

From our point of view, there has been an emphasis on formalized training to the point where it has created legislative barriers to bringing in skilled workers and they're irrelevant to what you need to be a good construction worker.

The Chair: Mr. Davis.

Mr. Kurt H. Davis: Thank you.

We see very little return among those who manage to wade their way through our process. I think they have no desire to repeat that experience in another country again.

To go on to your second part, we use an external agency to verify academic credentials. They give us an academic equivalency as well. So we use them as an expert. We use an agency called ICES, which operates under the British Columbia Institute of Technology, to provide us with that external expertise in a non-biased fashion, but they also do the document validation, and we have unfortunately had several cases of document fraud in the last year that caused us great concern.

The other thing I would note is that prior learning assessment is multi-component. Academic education is only one piece, one component of that. We also rely heavily on work experience and exposure to the testing, the types of work that have been done, and also on post-graduate education, because if you've been out of school for five or eight years, you need to be actively involved in post-graduate education.

Unfortunately, many of our new immigrants to Canada or those who have actually been here for a while, who are now applying to get into the workplace, have not been participating in post-graduate education. They don't have the resources; they haven't had the hope of a job, so they really haven't been interested up until now, and all of a sudden, it's a major deficiency in their portfolio. They need to pick up those additional resources, because health care is a rapidly changing profession.

• (1210)

The Chair: Okay, a short response.

Mr. Sergio Karas: Canada needs more bilateral agreements such as the NAFTA, which in chapter 16 designates certain occupations, and the countries have negotiated that those credentials can be mutually recognized. We need more agreements like NAFTA.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Temelkovski, you've really mastered doubling the time, the five minutes. Only Ms. Grewal stays within limits now, and Ms. Beaumier.

A very short question, Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Oh, a short one, Mr. Chair? I have a whole bunch for these folks.

I want to ask Mr. Karas and Mr. Cryne about the shortage of skilled workers in Canada. I understand that, unlike other countries, there's a lot less workplace training sponsored by employers in Canada. Can you talk about what your members are doing in terms of workplace training for existing workers to give them better skills in the workplace and how that might affect this issue of the need for foreign workers?

Within Canada, we've heard that you can't come in as a temporary worker or a skilled worker if there's a Canadian available to do that job, but recently we've heard as well that the federal government is accepting the fact that foreign workers are cheaper than Canadian workers, and they've approved several temporary worker arrangements on that basis. Does your association find that an acceptable way to go?

Mr. Stephen Cryne: In reference to your first point, Canada has historically relied heavily upon immigration to build the economy. Our automotive industry, our construction industry, our government, our medical profession—all have been built by immigrants. The reality is that we are going to be relying upon immigration in the future. Undoubtedly, Canada needs to do a better job of training its own workforce, and the efforts of the colleges and universities will be crucial in this regard.

There are a number of initiatives under way to improve the apprenticeship program right across the country. One of the challenges for government is to get away from the patchwork of collective apprenticeship. We need to build a national program for apprenticeship and training in this country, rather than having a hybrid of different skill training programs from province to province. It is important that we get a very solid framework if we are going to have a national response to this.

As to the second part of your question, I can't speak to that, particularly in regard to our members. The data show that it takes immigrants a lot longer to begin earning equivalent wages. That is not right, and we have to find ways to overcome it. This is probably beyond the scope of your deliberations here today.

Mr. Rui Pires: I understand your point of view and I like what you are saying about integration. Countries are making agreements so that professionals can move easily between countries in order to fulfill the needs. However, I come from a community that has an incredibly high high-school dropout rate. A lot of us are unskilled workers, and I am very fearful of international agreements that take jobs out of this country. I am fearful of the whole process of bringing

lower-waged labour into an economy. It is going to deeply affect immigrant communities that have been here for a while.

So I have deep reservations about this. I am a social service worker who works with the homeless, and I see the implications of these actions for the Canadian community.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Pires, has your organization looked at a sectoral amnesty agreement, as opposed to a general one? A sectoral amnesty seems more complicated than a general amnesty.

● (1215)

Mr. Rui Pires: This is not directly related to amnesty, but the pilot project I referred to earlier with the Alliance of Portuguese Clubs and a variety of other community groups, trade unions, and employer groups is looking at being able to stay removal orders. The groups have three months to get this large number of undocumented workers to register with Citizenship and Immigration Canada and apply for permanent residence. If Citizenship and Immigration Canada decides that they meet the criteria for permanent residence, then they can stay for another six months and their applications are treated like any other permanent residence applications. If Immigration Canada does not feel they meet the criteria for permanent residence, then all orders for removal continue and the person has to leave. It is a way of dealing with the large number of undocumented workers in the construction industry. That is what we are doing in partnership with Citizenship and Immigration Canada and other groups.

The Chair: Even a short question got into a real long one, so I'm just going to cut that off there.

I would like all of you to address a question that we are dealing with and maybe send in your responses, because it will take some specific preparation, I think, on your part.

Number one, right now the economic class is 60-40 and the number of people we take in is 225,000. Do you see that number changing, and if so, to what?

The other question I have for you is, should the economic category include skilled trades? We are having problems with skilled trades, and what we did with the point allocation has really created a problem in getting skilled trades into Canada. Perhaps you could address that.

Finally, the department is spending a lot of money on portals. It's going to be \$20 million a year for the next five years. So I take it that what it's going to mean is that the applicant—the person who wants to come to Canada—is going to be in a much better position to access information. Perhaps you can put your mind around that.

If you want to respond really quickly, with one-minute responses around the table, then we could do it. But if you can't respond now, we would like to get input on that.

Mr. Cooke.

Mr. Michael Cooke: I think there have been a number of indications this morning that would suggest that the way we define the categories and who is in them needs to get some rethinking. I'm happy that you have asked these questions, and we'll make sure to send you in some more thoughts on that.

But yes, as a point of principle, I think we have to rethink that stuff.

The Chair: Mr. Davis.

Mr. Kurt H. Davis: Just as a matter of philosophy, Canada is a shrinking country, so yes, we have to focus on immigration. In a presentation a couple of years ago at a Canadian Healthcare Association conference, these demographics of Canada were shared with the community. I was sitting in the audience at the time saying, if we are going to have that number, at least I want my share of lab techs from that group.

So from that perspective, especially in the professions that have clearly already articulated shortages, we need to make sure those professions have a partnership with the federal government in helping to define what the needs are and what the qualifications are and how we can better improve the integration of these individuals into the Canadian health care workforce.

The Chair: Mr. Karas.

Mr. Sergio Karas: To the first question, yes, you need to rethink the 60-40 split in immigration due to the needs of the global competitiveness that the industry is in need of.

On your second question as to whether the skilled worker selection criteria should include trades, yes, but in the context of what industry really needs in the sectors that they need it—for example, construction industry or other industries that have specific shortages. That can only be accomplished by negotiations between CIC, HRSDC, and the specific industry groups.

Number three, on access to information, in our recommendations we have set out the idea that it should be one centralized global place where potential immigrants can have this particular road map—that is to say, they can understand what is expected of them and that whatever requirements they can fulfill prior to coming to come into Canada should be so done.

•(1220)

The Chair: Mr. Pires.

Mr. Rui Pires: I agree with many of the things Mr. Karas is saying. However, in terms of the point system we are not advocating to remove selection criteria; we just think they need to be changed to be more relevant.

Right now it's budgeted out of 100 points. And if you don't speak English or French, that's 24 points down the drain, and if you don't have at least a high school education, that's another 25 points out of the drain—you can't pass the test. It's as simple as that.

Mr. Stephen Cryne: I'd like to focus on one comment that's contained in our paper. There is a very forward-thinking person on this who has done a lot of work around the labour shortages that we face in Canada, and that's David Baxter from the Urban Futures Institute in Vancouver, and I'd urge the committee to take a look at some of his predictions. He makes it very clear. He says that there is no echo boom to pour into the labour force and it's not possible to give birth to adults. He says increased immigration and reduced emigration will be required if the labour force is to grow.

So despite the questions we've had this morning around what needs to be done in terms of internal training within Canada, the fact is that we do not have the birth rate population to sustain economic development in this country. We are not reproducing ourselves. Regardless of what we do, we are going to have to bring people in from overseas, whether it's from Portugal, from Italy, from India, from the U.K., or from Sri Lanka. We are going to need those people in the future. The challenge for government is to bring the respective stakeholders together and figure out how best to do that.

The Chair: Ms. Hernandez.

Ms. Carmencita R. Hernandez: Yes, I agree with the statements made. I just want to add that we should not disregard applicants who are philosophers and those who are in the arts, because I believe the country's soul will be a reflection of that contribution.

And with regards to the portals, I think community groups can help ensure that this information is disseminated in an efficient and effective way in the originating countries.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank all of you for your presentations. I look forward to anything else you might have, where you can address the other issues we're looking at, if you want, concerning citizenship. We are looking for a new citizenship oath, a preamble to the citizenship bill, and at the whole issue of family reunification.

Our able researcher will make sure all of you get a copy of the report we hope to produce and get on the record before anything too drastic happens in Ottawa.

Thank you very much.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Keep your presentations handy, because you will be doing this again.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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