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Chair

The Honourable Andrew Telegdi

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• (1150)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order for the purpose of hearing witnesses.

Welcome, and sorry about the wait, but we have to have three people here to hear witnesses, and also we had the vote in the House. We're going to start off with each group making a presentation from five to seven minutes, after which we're going to go into questions.

We'll be going with Mr. Siksay, and for the first time in a long time he will be the first questioner. Normally it is the Conservatives who ask questions, and then it's the Bloc who ask questions, then it's Mr. Siksay for the NDP who gets to ask a question, and then it comes over on the government side. But since those two aren't here, we're going to have Mr. Siksay start.

I'd like to start with Liang Zhang as the first presenter, for five to seven minutes.

Mr. Liang Zhang (Software Engineer, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

My name is Liang and I came to Canada five years ago from the People's Republic of China. I submitted a sponsorship for my mother in 2003 and I have been waiting for almost two years now. My mother is 68 and has been a widow since 1988; she has no living relatives and is living totally alone, in China. I am her only child, living in Canada; we are still apart, and there's no way to know exactly how many years it will be before we can reunite.

Recently the Department of Citizenship and Immigration of Canada announced a new policy to fix the huge backlog it caused in the past years under the parental immigration category. After many years of waiting, and having stress and frustration every day, the new policy for me, like for many sponsors, is something like seeing a light at the end of the tunnel.

However, when we compare the 18,000 quota for each year with the 110,000 backlogged cases, simple math indicates that our parents still have to separate from their family for at least six years. In order to clean up the backlogs under the parental immigration category, I'd like to make the following suggestions.

One, increase the priority for the case processing. For many years the case processing for parental immigration was treated as low priority. Sponsors and their parents have been waiting for years and still are separated from their family members. The only change is the growing number of the backlogs and the case processing time.

Therefore, it is necessary to increase the priority for this category in order to clean up all the backlogs.

Two, increase the quota for the parental immigration category. One of the most important causes for the huge backlog is that the Department of Citizenship and Immigration of Canada is consistently reducing the number of people who will be admitted as parents and grandparents. We have noticed that there has been about a 50% decrease every year since 2003. Although the department announced a new quota for the next two years, it is far too low compared with the 110,000 backlogged cases. Sponsors and their parents will have to wait years and years before they can reunite with their family members. In order to reduce the quota on the waiting time, it is necessary to increase the quota. Furthermore, for us and our aging parents, the endless waiting is just like no.

Three, I would like to ask Citizenship and Immigration Canada to introduce a timetable to clean up all the backlogs. Sponsors and their parents are experiencing delays at every step during the case processing, and the Department of Citizenship and Immigration should introduce a timetable to clean up all these backlogged cases and clearly indicate the current status of each case by setting up a timetable so sponsors and their parents could have a clear idea of how long they have to wait. It would also help the Department of Citizenship and Immigration of Canada to improve its efficiency. I think the department should put every effort into finalizing the backlogs immediately in order to compensate for the time that was wasted in the past years. Our parents never have a chance to win the competition with time.

Four, provide a file number immediately. A file number shall be issued to applicants immediately after the Department of Citizenship and Immigration receives their applications. It also shall be made traceable immediately. For example, I submitted my sponsorship application in 2003 and I haven't received any file number until now. Therefore, there is almost no way for me to trace the status of my case and no way to change my information. The only wish I would have today is that the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada would not use this as a good excuse to make further delays on my case.

Five, provide honest and accurate information. For example, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship should clearly indicate how many backlogged cases are at each post overseas and how many visas will be issued by these posts every year. It should also clearly indicate how many sponsorship applications are backlogged in Canada. It doesn't make sense to accept new applications on the one hand, while totally stopping case processing on the other. By providing honest and accurate information, sponsors and their parents could make better plans for their lives. It will also help those who are seeking permanent residency status in Canada have a clear idea before they come to Canada and to make a good decision before they come to Canada.

• (1155)

Ladies and gentlemen, the above suggestions will help us to reunite these people with their parents and to get them settled in their new country. As sponsors, we cannot bear the stress and the frustration every day. We all cannot bear the tears when we think about our parents. Our parents need care from their children.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Zhang, for your brief.

Ms. Sarita Ahooja (Organizer and Spokesperson, Solidarity Across Borders): I am Sarita Ahooja.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak before the standing committee. We're here on behalf of the Solidarity Across Borders campaign. Solidarity Across Borders is a Montreal-area coalition of self-organized committees of persons directly affected by repressive anti-immigrant and anti-terrorist laws in fortress North America.

Solidarity Across Borders has been together since the summer of 2003. We have organized in opposition to the detention and deportation of migrants as well as the requirement for security certificates. We are for the full regularization of all non-status persons living in Canada. We will touch upon issues of family reunification. We will also consider the urgent need for a full regularization program for all non-status persons in Canada.

The current IRPA aims to promote family reunification, yet the number of family immigrants has declined in the last decade, during which there has been a greater emphasis on skilled workers and business class immigrants. It is evident that the government's economic interests are taking priority over humanitarian concerns and international law. To begin with, the Eurocentric definition of the nuclear family does not recognize the reality of large extended families coming from cultures in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. Restrictions on who constitutes a family member and who can sponsor a family member obstruct genuine family reunification.

Additionally, the biased decisions of visa officers and the unequal distribution of resources for visa offices in certain areas of the world, like Asia and Africa, have conspired to create a system ruled by prejudice and racism instead of law. Appeals on negative decisions take years and bring undue hardship and suffering to families. They are so costly that they impoverish many who are already barely getting by. Poor families depend on the extended family for shared income and mutual support systems like child care and health care.

For example, a Quebec mother of a two-year-old child in Montreal is presently on social assistance. She is trying to sponsor her husband from Algeria, who was deported shortly after the Canadian government lifted the moratorium on removals to Algeria in 2002. He was excluded from the special procedure for regularization of certain Algerians in Quebec because he had a minor charge for shoplifting. He was denied access to the special procedure and has been deported. She has been trying to bring him back so that he could be reunited with his daughter. He was the primary provider for the family, so it's been very difficult for them.

So we can see that the system presently leaves very few options to many people who are already in precarious and vulnerable situations. Yet they are being blamed for the structural problems inherent in this system. Canada, like all first world countries, depends on immigrant labour and large families. For example, the Spanish government recently regularized over 700,000 undocumented people to resolve its pension crisis. Canada faces the same predicament today, with its aging population and diminishing tax base.

Studies estimate that there are as many as 200,000 people living and working without legal status in Canada today. They work in the dull, dirty, and dangerous jobs that Canadians and Quebecers don't want. They keep the economy running. A person becomes non-status when their immigration application is rejected or when their temporary visa or work permit has expired. This system creates a non-status population.

Since 2001, the new Immigration and Refugee Protection Act has exacerbated this systemic racism, discrimination, and arbitrary decision-making. It creates more and more obstacles for people to qualify as refugees and permanent residents. There are thousands upon thousands of individuals and families who live in poverty, insecurity, and fear while working in the fields, the factories, the tourism services, and the taxis of Canada's main cities like Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal. Many non-status families establish roots and form families.

• (1200)

The children of non-status persons are often denied their basic rights to adequate and affordable health care services, governmental family assistance programs, and education, yet they are Canadians. Families live in fear and stress, and suffer unduly due to dangerous and unhealthy working conditions with no recourse to justice.

We believe the solution to these structural problems is to grant full amnesty whereby the Canadian government would implement an inclusive and comprehensive regularization program across the country, which would recognize the social and cultural contribution while affirming the rights and status of people residing in Canada without citizenship or without legal standing. We strongly recommend the government follow the twelve principles on regularization in Canada, drafted at the Status Conference in Toronto in 2004, which we have submitted.

It is important to note that Canada has implemented different regularization programs on several occasions in the past: in 1960, 1968, 1973, 1981, 1983, 1994, and 2002. All these regularization programs illustrate the problems that should be avoided and the actions that are useful. For example, the government can provide different ways for people to apply for a regularization program in person or anonymously in order to allow people living in fear easy access to the program. During the 1960 Chinese adjustment statement program, the government gave people a guarantee that they would not be detained or prosecuted even though they were making their identity known. In the same way, it is essential that the government promote and publicize the regularization program properly. In 1973 the Canadian government publicized the regularization program, in collaboration with agencies, community groups, and organizations, to reach a greater number of non-status persons. It was very successful.

Another problem to avoid is the excess financial burden of application fees for people who often have precarious work conditions. The \$550 fee for H and C and the \$150 for each dependent child adds an extra burden for people already living in very precarious conditions.

We stress the importance of having well-defined rules and clear guidelines for the immigration officers that judge applications in order to avoid arbitrary, racist, and subjective decisions that plague the Canadian bureaucracy and society at large.

We assert that there should be no double punishment for non-status persons who have committed crimes and have a criminal record. Many petty crimes are a result of precarious and poor living conditions. These unjust criteria often used in regularization programs don't recognize the systemic racism within policing and the criminal justice system. For example, a non-status Algerian living in Montreal for the last eight years was picked up by two police officers late one night after work and eventually charged with uttering death threats. He had spoken Arabic on two occasions while the police officers handcuffed him and brought him in. One year later during the trial the two officers didn't even recognize the accused, signalling his close friend sitting in the courtroom who had a beard and looked more Muslim.

I guess I can wrap up by saying that the Solidarity Across Borders will be bringing these demands for full regularization to Ottawa in June. We will be marching for seven days, 30 kilometres each day. It's a 200-kilometre walk. We will be publicizing our demands and requesting that the government respond in a just and respectful way to honour the rights of people that contribute enormously to the construction of Canadian society.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we have, from the Canadian Polish Congress, Maria Krajewska.

Ms. Maria Krajewska (Chair, Immigration Committee, Canadian Polish Congress): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee.

The Canadian Polish Congress is an umbrella organization established by Polish Canadians to coordinate the activities and articulate the concerns of the Polish community on public policy

issues. The Canadian Polish Congress initiates and provides representation to the federal and provincial governments on issues of concern to the Polish community in Canada. It speaks for more than 800,000 Polish Canadians.

I must add that the Canadian Polish Congress always played a very active role in immigration matters—for example, in the eastern European self-exile class program, to which Poland was added in November 1982 in response to the suppression of the Solidarity movement. This program was eliminated following the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1990. During those years, thousands and thousands of Poles immigrated to Canada with the help of the Canadian Polish Congress.

In recent years, the CPC urged immigration ministers to resolve the problem of illegal workers who have an employer and do not have a criminal record. The Canadian Polish Congress is also lobbying to remove the visa requirement for citizens of Poland.

From the point of view of the Canadian Polish Congress, the reunification of families is essential for the well-being of new immigrants. We want to stress that in our community an extended family plays a very important role. Traditionally, the family was the foundation of the society, and the family is not limited only to parents and children but also includes the extended family—grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, and so on.

Each member of the family also has its role to play in raising a child. They are an integral part of the family. Their presence is very important nowadays, with our hectic lives, constant lack of time, and stress. The grandparents, for example, have a very important role to play in the family, often helping the parents with the burden of raising the children. That's why I cannot stress enough how important that issue is, that parents who are new immigrants have more time to focus on work and are able to take additional courses, improving their skills and learning English.

The engagement of the grandparents eliminates a lot of stress and has a positive impact on the whole family. The children have someone who truly loves them and someone who can always devote extra time to them. This can obviously help to eliminate some of the very serious problems that youth are encountering when they are growing up. The grandparents are the backbone of the family. No one can substitute for the role they play, and they love the grandchildren.

In other words, we can't only look at the cost of bringing other people to Canada. We have to look at the benefits, and in our opinion, the benefits, which are not limited to pure economic figures, greatly outweigh the costs.

That is why the Canadian Polish Congress is very pleased with the recent announcement made by the Honourable Minister Joe Volpe that recognizes that reunification of families is a key objective of Canada's immigration law. We welcome the fact that some additional funds will be spent on that issue. Nonetheless, we are afraid that the funds that are being allocated will not be sufficient to reduce the existing backlog.

Unfortunately we do not have much time. The grandparents are older people who cannot wait years and years to be reunited with their families. Waiting periods can even reach five or six years. Going back to the previous numbers is not enough. If we accept more skilled workers, we have to guarantee that they will be able to bring their families as well once they settle in Canada.

Issuing multi-entry visas for family-class applicants can indeed help to alleviate the problem for the time being, but we hope that the applicants will be able to obtain them without any problems. However, this is not a long-term solution, especially for the citizens of Poland.

Poland, as you know, has become a member of the European Union. Thus, the Canadian Polish Congress believes Canada needs to remove the visa requirement for Poland. We also hope that funds will be spread evenly and that the Canadian embassy in Warsaw will also receive some of the funds. We hope that the Canadian embassy in Warsaw improves their service and makes Canada more accessible to potential visitors and immigrants.

The members of our community often complain that the closest members of their families, including brothers and sisters, often cannot even get a visitor visas to visit them in Canada. There is no reason to prevent them from visiting their family members in Canada. We also believe the government should revive some of the old policies that were terminated a few years ago—for example, the right of the last family member to join other family members in Canada, as well as the family business program.

All those possibilities of reuniting families were terminated, yet they offered another opportunity to reunite the family. We think those programs should be re-examined in the context of speeding up the process and offering additional possibilities for immigrants to reunite with their families.

●(1205)

To sum up, we think the recent change regarding reuniting families is a step in the right direction. We recommend and support more funds to be devoted to that issue in order to reduce the existing backlog. The long waiting periods are not benefiting anyone. We want to emphasize the benefits of having the help and support of the grandparents to the families of new immigrants, especially when it comes to raising the grandchildren.

Last but not least, the Canadian Polish Congress thinks that indeed reuniting families should be the key objective of immigration law and that the problems that once existed should be re-examined in the context of facilitating a reunification of the families.

The Canadian Polish Congress is prepared to work with Citizenship and Immigration Canada to improve our existing system and to provide accurate information to the Polish community in Canada and abroad, to provide the necessary leadership, and to ensure a fair and equitable system.

The Canadian Polish Congress needs to be included in the immigration process, and our expertise needs to be harnessed once again, as our track record clearly illustrates.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee.

●(1210)

The Chair: Thank you very much for the presentation.

Next we have Grace Wollensak from the Falun Dafa Association of Canada.

Ms. Grace Wollensak (National Coordinator, Falun Dafa Association of Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee.

I will start very briefly with some background about the Falun Gong and its persecution in China, followed by several issues for which we are seeking help from the committee.

Falun Gong is an ancient traditional practice for improving the mind, body, and spirit. It comprises a system of gentle exercise and meditation combined with moral teachings based on the principles of truthfulness, compassion, and forbearance. Mr. Li Hongzhi introduced Falun Gong in China in 1992 and later began lecturing worldwide. The practice is highly acclaimed for its benefits. Falun Gong is practised by people of all ages, and from all walks of life, in over sixty countries now.

Why is the Chinese communist regime persecuting Falun Gong? Falun Gong teaches high moral standards based on the traditional virtues of truthfulness, compassion, and forbearance. The history of the Chinese Communist Party demonstrates just the opposite. It advocates deception, cover-ups, violence, extreme revolution, and tyranny.

In the late 1990s, when a Chinese government survey showed that over 70 million people were practising Falun Gong in China, it was considered a threat by then Chinese President Jiang Zemin and the CCP. To maintain communist totalitarian control, they launched a brutal persecution against Falun Gong, accompanied by a massive nationwide hate propaganda campaign.

How is the Chinese regime carrying out this persecution? Jiang ordered the use of all measures necessary to eliminate the Falun Gong. Over the past nearly six years, millions of Falun Gong practitioners have been dismissed from their jobs, expelled from schools, fined, arbitrarily arrested, detained or sentenced without due process, sent to forced labour camps or prisons, subjected to brainwashing and torture, and coerced to slander Falun Gong and report on fellow practitioners.

Over a hundred measures of torture have been used, including rape, forced abortion, electric shock, freezing, burning, forced feeding, injection of harmful drugs, psychiatric abuse, and others. Such horrendous human rights abuses are well documented by government and non-governmental organizations worldwide, such as in the reports of the United Nations, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the U.S. State Department.

In the past month alone, 350 Falun Gong deaths in China were reported. Expert sources estimate that the current verified death toll of over 2,000 is merely a small fraction of the actual number of deaths.

In 2001, ABC News in Australia reported that Falun Gong practitioners made up close to half the number of Chinese people being held in labour camps, a process that requires no legal or judicial ruling.

We are requesting permission for victims with Canadian ties to come to Canada. At least 120 victims are currently living in Canada, and 44 of them have family members who are still jailed in China with terms of up to 10 years. Many more of our relatives have been subjected to other forms of persecution, including arbitrary arrest and short-term detentions. They face ongoing, life-threatening danger.

One example is Toronto resident Xiulian Huang's daughter, Xiaoli Huang, and her son-in-law, Yiming Zhang, who are both Falun Gong practitioners. They were in the process of obtaining their immigration visas to Canada when Yiming was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment. Xiaoli is in hiding and is living in extreme danger.

Lin Huixuan is a five-year-old girl. She is a niece of a Canadian resident. Both her parents and her grandparents have been repeatedly arrested and detained. Her parents were forced to leave their jobs in education years ago. Her dad, Lin Yanqing, has been in a forced labour camp since the end of 2002. They lost their estate housing and have become homeless. Her mom was released recently from illegal detention, but nobody has dared to give her a job. Her mom, Xu Lei, is facing arbitrary detention at any time. They are living in an extremely difficult situation. Huixuan and her mom wish to come to Canada.

• (1215)

The next is requesting permission for persecuted children, especially orphans, to come to Canada. The persecution in China is greatly impacting defenceless children. The thousands of cases of practitioners killed have left many children with no parents, or only one parent. Countless children have been expelled from school, thrown into prisons and labour camps, and tortured. The youngest child tortured to death was only eight months old. Many cases occur because the children practise Falun Gong, while most are victimized because their parents are practitioners.

This little girl, Rongrong, is five years old now. She's the niece of a Canadian citizen. Her father was tortured to death in a labour camp when she was 11 months old. Her mother was abducted by police three years ago, and her current whereabouts and condition are unknown. Her grandmother, who was taking care of her, eventually fell ill and died from grief. She's currently living with a family of her parents' friends.

Rongrong is one among hundreds of cases documented in this NGO report on children suffering under the persecution. We seek the help of our Canadian government to rescue these children, particularly the orphans, and to allow them to come to Canada.

Recommendations to the committee. Canada is among the world's leaders in offering human rights and humanitarian protection to those in dire situations. Over the past few years, we have been grateful to our governments for granting minister's permits to allow several practitioners of Falun Gong to come to Canada. At this time, we make the following recommendations, in the hope of receiving further help due to the severe situation in China.

First, we would like to request a full formal hearing on children and their persecution and on cases of Falun Gong practitioners with Canadian ties. Second, we'd also like to ask the committee to pass a motion requesting that the Canadian government issue visas to persecuted Falun Gong practitioners, based on compassionate and

humanitarian grounds. In particular, priority to come should be given to (a) the 17 practitioners listed in the document I have circulated, who were jailed and are now released; (b) the 18 orphans listed in the attached documents, which I circulated; and (c) the practitioners residing in third countries as a result of refugee and human rights protection, who are facing persecution—for example, deportation back to China—by the third country under pressure from the Chinese communist regime.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next, we'll hear from Dr. Bose.

Dr. Anu Bose (Executive Director, National Office, National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada): Thank you, Mr. Telegdi and members of the committee, for being here.

We want to thank you for allowing an all-women's group to appear.

The National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada—no stranger to you, Dr. Fry—is a non-profit, non-partisan, and non-sectarian organization that is seeking equality. It was founded almost two decades ago. The purpose of NOIVMWC is to ensure equality for immigrant and visible minority women within a bilingual Canada. I am the executive director, and the newly elected president is Monica Buchanan-Johnson in British Columbia.

In the past year, NOIVMWC has been focusing on the process of impoverishment of immigrant and visible minority women when they enter Canada. We have held consultations with immigrant women who have been in Canada between zero and five years, in all the large metropolitan areas and from coast to coast. Last month NOIVMWC members and supporters met in Calgary to plan a campaign strategy to give voice to these women's concerns.

Income for most Canadians of working age comes from wages and salaries. The workplace is a way for immigrants to integrate into society. Immigrant families are struggling to survive in 2005, whereas in the 1970s the average male immigrant arriving in Canada found the good life. Within a decade, his annual income caught up with that of the Canadian born. Since the past two decades, this is no longer the picture. In the major metropolitan centres today, we have the seeds of what many social scientists would term an underclass.

Even those who believe that an underclass is not possible in Canada agree that deep poverty is quite visible in large metropolitan areas. You only have to go to the CCSD study prepared for the United Way of Toronto, "Poverty by Postal Code", to see what I mean. It has reported that most low-income immigrant and visible minority families are concentrated in the poorer neighbourhoods.

Poverty rates are rising. In 1981 14.8% of immigrant families lived in poverty. By 2001 it had risen to 24%, or one in four families. Independent immigrants, when admitted, are required to provide evidence that they have the means to survive for six months, or three months in Quebec.

A family of four might arrive with approximately \$25,000 in savings, which is their life savings and then some. They are soon swallowed up by the usual costs of establishing a home and supplementing meagre incomes. I personally know of a family, originally from the Horn of Africa, that was receiving remittances from the wife's sibling in Europe, and a young South Asian family receiving remittances from parents back on the subcontinent.

The irony is that the current wave of immigrants is better educated than ever.

● (1220)

The Chair: Madam Bose, are you going to read the entire brief?

Dr. Anu Bose: It's very short.

The Chair: Okay. I'm looking at the one I have in front of me.

Go ahead.

Dr. Anu Bose: What we are trying to say is that we want to frame our remarks in this wide picture of immigrant impoverishment, as opposed to just immigrant poverty. There's a huge gap between the earnings of Canadian-born women and immigrant women. The former make on average \$50,000 a year compared to the latter's \$34,000.

Immigrant women and men see a stable family life as a basic human right. For them, the reunification of families is a very high priority. Women who participated in the NOIVMWC consultations identified two primary barriers: the eligibility requirements to sponsor a family, and the use of the cost recovery principle by Citizenship and Immigration Canada. For them, both of these are inimical to the best interests of the family unit.

Anyone wishing to sponsor his or her family has to provide conclusive proof that he or she has not been on any form of government assistance, including employment insurance, in the last 12 months, except for reasons of disability. Classifying employment insurance as a form of government assistance is perhaps being economical with facts. Employment insurance is not only a contributory program, but a program that is in surplus.

There is enough evidence to show that immigrants are not work-shy. They participate actively in the labour market, most operating at levels far below their skills and competence, yet they often have to fall back on EI. For example, the SARS scare in Toronto showed conclusively that the eligibility rules for EI have discriminatory effects on part-time workers and youth. We recommend that employment insurance should not be treated as government assistance for purposes of disqualifying potential sponsors seeking to reunify their families.

The financial costs of family reunification are quite formidable. The fee for sponsoring an adult is \$550, and for a minor child it is \$150. These fees have to be paid at the time of filing the application and cannot be reimbursed should an application fail. Once the application is successful, the landing fee is \$975 per adult, which is

reimbursable. We recommend you extend the waiver of the landing fee to low-income families, especially for spouses, children over 22, and orphans.

Should a person discover after landing that he has a child that he never knew existed, section 117 of the CIC regulation bars that person from ever sponsoring this child into Canada. He can be brought in on humanitarian grounds, and that can be refused. This is a clear breach of the Convention of the Rights of the Child, to which Canada is a signatory.

In a world torn by conflict and dominated by failed states, this can have a profound negative impact on the reunification of families. We support the Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council, and we say the CIC should accept reasonable evidence of family ties and the realities in which refugee families find themselves and revoke section 117.

There is a generalized feeling among immigrants that Citizenship and Immigration Canada, especially after 9/11, perceives immigrants as prone to committing fraud and misrepresentation in the area of family reunification. The screening procedure should be clearly explained to applicants and their families. Immigrants may have a good working knowledge of English and French, but they need access to qualified interpreters to ensure that applicants have clearly understood the process and the procedures.

The process of family reunification is long and arduous. The low-wage earner has to make difficult choices between keeping up an establishment here and sending remittances home. Minister Volpe has certainly grasped the nettle, and we thank him for that, but more needs to be done.

The family reunification program needs to be better resourced. Overseas screening should be carried out speedily, and procedures streamlined.

Thank you.

● (1225)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now go to our questions. We're joined by Mr. Pat Martin from the New Democratic Party, a former critic on this committee, as well as Mr. Bagnell, and Hedy Fry.

Mr. Siksay.

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

Thank you all for bringing your testimony this morning. It's all been very helpful. And thank you to those of you who shared personally as well, because I know it's often even more difficult to give us personal details of your family situation. So I appreciate that.

There were many helpful suggestions, and the committee has heard often from people making similar presentations to us as we've travelled across the country recently, and much of what you've said this morning has been raised with us by other people. I hope we can move on that agenda without too much more delay, although we can't be very optimistic about that at the moment.

I wanted to say that a number of you raised the question of our definition of family in our immigration law, and that's something I feel very strongly about, that the New Democrats have felt very strongly about. We made that a priority in this Parliament. I introduced a private member's bill to broaden the definition of family. Unfortunately, that bill wasn't passed by Parliament, but it is something we feel strongly about. We introduced it in the last Parliament as well, and we will keep working on that, because I think the points many of you have raised about our Eurocentric definition of family are very true.

I also share your concerns about fees. The whole question of cost recovery, especially on a program we keep talking about as essential to our country, both in terms of nation-building and in terms of building our economy, seems kind of contradictory to me. That we're expecting the people we need to build this country to pay for the privilege of applying to come here is strange, and it does put some people in very dramatic financial difficulty. Those are a couple of points, and there are many others on which we agree.

I wanted to ask Ms. Wollensak about the Falun Gong people. As for the specific people you mentioned on your list, have any of their Canadian relatives made or attempted to make sponsorship applications for them, either for the orphans or for the people who have been jailed?

• (1230)

Ms. Grace Wollensak: There are a few who tried to apply for visas but were rejected. So there are a few on the list. They are not here yet. A few have come already.

Do you want to know the names?

Mr. Bill Siksay: No, that's fine. I just wanted to know if any had been successful or had applied.

Did they apply for visitors' visas or permanent residency?

Ms. Grace Wollensak: There are different.... The first example I gave you was of an old couple living in Toronto whose daughter wants to apply for a visa for Canada. They were in the process of applying for an immigration visa, but then the primary applicant was sentenced to jail, and so the whole process was stopped. She tried to apply for a visitor's visa to visit her parents and sister here and was rejected.

Mr. Bill Siksay: The little girl whose photo you have—Rongrong—have her relatives in Canada attempted to sponsor her?

Ms. Grace Wollensak: Her aunt lives here, but I asked her and she is not eligible to sponsor, so now we are relying on the government to give her some kind of special permit to come.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Okay. Thank you.

Ms. Ahojja, you mentioned that there had been some successful regularization programs in Canada. You specifically referred to one in 1973 as having been successful. You mentioned that Spain just recently had a regularization program.

I wonder if you could tell us more about what made those programs particularly successful, or are there are any details you can add about what was important about those particular ones.

Ms. Sarita Ahojja: The 1973 program was very well promoted. There were immigration offices opened in different manpower

agency places and they had longer hours. People in different agencies and organizations were well informed about the program and were able to provide accurate information. The promotion was in several different languages and was done throughout the country. So that's one aspect in terms of having a regularization program. It has to be well publicized.

For the Algerian regularization program in Quebec, one of the things was that it was only specific to residents in Quebec, although there was huge publicity around it, as Fawzi could explain to us. He came from out west because there was so much publicity about it, but when he arrived in Quebec, he was told he would not be eligible because he had been residing outside Quebec when the regularization program was handed down. And that's one of the things that we note as problematic when you're looking at ways in which to construct a regularization program. We believe it has to be much more inclusive than having these kinds of residential criteria and so on.

Mr. Fawzi Malik (Organizer and Spokesperson, Solidarity Across Borders): Thank you so much.

To get to the Algerian procedure, it was a kind of humanitarian-compassionate application form that had to be dropped off at CIC offices. But unfortunately, a lot of people were excluded. We know most of the people who are non-status don't have work permits, so usually they're not working; they have no right to work in Canada. So like a lot of people, they were excluded because they had no money to pay for these fees.

We know this family that has five members, and it's going to cost more than \$2,000, at least. They had to fill out this application form, the fees and everything, but they didn't have the money to drop off at a certain time, so they were excluded unfairly. Right now they're facing deportation.

In another case, people who are residing, as she says, outside.... For example, I was in the Yukon. We know in the Yukon there are not a lot of immigrants, but even that.... Right now I'm facing deportation because I was outside of Quebec, even though I have family. My wife is Canadian. Even this reason doesn't prevent deporting somebody to his country where he's facing danger. So unfortunately, we see how cheap life is for the CIC right now.

There are different ways to do it. I see in these papers that we are giving to the members who are here that the principles are to actually prevent having certain kinds of procedures or regulations or amnesties that exclude people for different reasons. So hopefully there will be something to regularize all people and finish with this problem. We hope that all people will get at least the same treatment, equal treatment. We hope we'll at least prevent some discrimination and racism, and we hope that even people who are illegal, or let's call it without status, will have a chance to apply for it.

• (1235)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

You ran over a little bit there.

Mr. Temelkovski.

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

Thank you to everyone who presented today.

As Bill said, we've heard much over the last month. We've been across the country, and now we're in our report stage and we're unable to do much of our work due to the way we're doing business up here these days.

Nevertheless, I have a number of questions, primarily for Liang Zhang. Mr. Zhang, you mentioned that you have put forth a number of recommendations, including to increase the priority for case processing. When you say "increase the priority", do you mean to put them in front of spouses and children?

Which priority list are you working with?

Mr. Liang Zhang: From my point of view, for many years the parents and grandparents were treated as having no priority. For people from other nations, like from the People's Republic of China, our parents are the most important part of our family. Actually, they are the core of our family because they brought us to this world and they raised us with true love. So as the children of our parents, I think, -and lots of immigrants think, that we have the obligation—not obligation, it is what God gives us from the first day we come here—to support and take care of our parents.

So I think, based on this point of view, the priority should be increased. They should be no different from the spouse and the children, because they are part of the family members; they are the core of our family.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: What I hear you saying is that they should be included in the family class.

Mr. Liang Zhang: That's true.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: The second item you mentioned is the quota system. You also mentioned, if I can go back to the priority case, that therefore it is necessary to increase the priority for this category in order to clear up all of the backlog.

You understand that backlog cannot all be cleared up?

Mr. Liang Zhang: Actually, that is the one thing I don't understand, why CIC has 110,000 backlogs. If the CIC cannot comfortably process these cases, why do they keep asking people to pay the processing fee in advance? Actually, once we submit our application, the CIC asks us in the application to pay those fees in advance, and they promise us our parents can reunite with our children much earlier, so—

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Sorry, but it's a question of time. You're really looking to improve the timing, when they can come, rather than clearing the backlog. We're bringing in 250,000 new Canadians this year. They also have parents, and their parents will apply as well, so the backlog is always there. If we understand we need a labour force in Canada more than we need a senior force—

• (1240)

Mr. Liang Zhang: Actually, I have the words of the minister, Joe Volpe, and he said part of the commitment this country made to skilled immigrants and to entrepreneurs when they arrived was that

after they were established, they could apply to sponsor their parents or grandparents. For many cultural communities these parents are an enormous part of their daily lives, and their concept of immediate family includes them. We must keep our commitment to this group and we must also be culturally sensitive to their different attitudes about family.

Based on that, I'm really asking to have all the backlogs cleaned up, because if you don't clean up all the backlogs in a reasonable time and you always have an accumulation of applications, then I don't know what the point is for the Canadian government to attract immigrants here. They say you can sponsor your family in the meantime, but in fact they give us a situation—

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: So what's a reasonable time for parents or grandparents to join their families? One year? Two years? Three? Five?

Mr. Liang Zhang: I have to say that at the time I applied for my immigration visa, the whole processing time was around twelve months. Now we say that is increasing and increasing and increasing. I think it should be a reasonable time for people to wait. That is only my personal idea.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: But what's a reasonable time? One year, two years, three years?

Mr. Liang Zhang: One year or two years.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: And how about for children and spouses, husband and wife? One year, two years, three years?

Mr. Liang Zhang: One year.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Well, when I came to Canada, my father had already been here four years, and then my grandmother came here 15 years later, after my grandfather passed away in Macedonia. She passed away here in Canada. The way we managed that relationship was that my younger uncle remained in Macedonia to look after my grandparents until they decided what to do.

It's not an easy issue, because we have so many people who want to come to Canada, and we have enough resources to bring only so many per year, because we need a labour force.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we're going to go into the five-minute rounds.

Mr. Martin, five minutes.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

That's very generous of you. I didn't know if I'd be allowed time to take part, but I appreciate the opportunity.

I was a member of this committee for a number of years, so many of the themes you've brought forward are obviously still top-of-mind issues for people who are frustrated with the current system. I lament that we don't seem to have made progress on some of these fundamental issues in the interim.

I'd like to have time to address all of you, but there is one specific thing that is new to me that I'd like to focus on. Dr. Bose... Is it Dr. Bose?

Dr. Anu Bose: You can just call me Anu

Mr. Pat Martin: Okay.

It's this issue that EI is viewed as a form of government assistance and therefore people aren't eligible. I'm shocked to hear that, because the federal government doesn't even pay into the EI program. It's 100% funded by employees and employers. There's no federal role, so how they're viewing it as government assistance is beyond me.

Dr. Anu Bose: We consulted with over 300 women across Canada, and this kept coming up. We checked with our counsel, and he said it was not very well known.

Mr. Pat Martin: This is news to me. Clearly, to have an insurance program that you pay for yourself, as per the insurance program's mandate, is not the same as collecting welfare or any other type of social assistance. I'm frustrated to hear this, and I hope that committee members feel as strongly as I do about it. It should be addressed immediately.

You made reference to a report called "Poverty by Postal Code", which I'm interested in seeing. Who wrote that report?

•(1245)

Dr. Anu Bose: It was done by the Canadian Council on Social Development. You can go on their website, CCSD. It was commissioned by the United Way of Greater Toronto, which I think Francis Lankin, a former minister in the Rae government, heads up.

Mr. Pat Martin: Yes, she is currently the chair. I'm very interested.

Dr. Anu Bose: It's quite a comprehensive report.

Mr. Pat Martin: I'm interested in seeing it.

Concerning the Solidarity Across Borders organization, one point that tweaked my interest was that although children of non-status residents may be Canadians by birth, they don't have equal access to health and other government services. Can you think of examples? This would be fundamentally wrong if it's the case. That would be something we need to correct.

Mr. Fawzi Malik: I can give a good example. One of the families here—the parents are Canadian citizens—has Canadian kids who were born here, so they have all rights to allocations familiales. I don't know how to say it in English.

Mr. Pat Martin: Family allowance.

Mr. Fawzi Malik: But if the parents are non-status and the kids are Canadian, they're not allowed to have it.

Mr. Pat Martin: That's a good illustration.

Mr. Fawzi Malik: For example, if a newcomer family comes over with kids, the kids are permanent residents. They haven't become Canadians yet as they have to wait for three years, but they have better rights than kids who were born here with non-status parents. It's too clear. I can't even give comments about it. These kids are Canadian and the other ones are permanent residents. The residents have a better chance. They have allocations familiales, social help, and the Canadian kids do not because the parents are non-status.

Mr. Pat Martin: That's exactly the type of graphic example I was looking for. It is clear when you explain it, but it isn't something I would have identified. It's one of those anomalies in the system that are not apparent until somebody brings them to your attention. That's helpful to us.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next we have Madam Fry.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I want to ask a question, and I want to preface it very clearly, because as you know, Minister Volpe has made looking at undocumented workers one of the points in his six-point plan. That is happening right now. However, I get letters from a lot of people because I happen to be parliamentary secretary, and I have had many letters from people who ask me—and many of them are new immigrants, new citizens—why there should be this amnesty, this forgiveness for people who came illegally, who went underground and stayed underground, when many of them have been waiting in line for five or six years to get their families, their grandparents, or their parents in.

I would like, for their sake, to get the answer to what they have asked me. I think you make a lot of reasonable points as to why we should look at this issue clearly, as Mr. Volpe says, but there is that little question that people have been asking me that I have been unable to answer, and I thought maybe you might give me the answer to that.

Anu, I think you made a very important point. I don't think very many of us understand how poorly immigrant and visible minority women fare at the moment in Canada. They are among, as you said, the poorest of the poor. They live in deep poverty. Not only that, many of them, especially refugee women who come from countries where they have absolutely no papers, no training, no skills at all, and they are really living on social assistance, have no ability to help their children move out of that, and their children are beginning now to feel disenfranchised. This is a real problem, and I think you make some good points about the landing fee for low-income families and for women who come here because of domestic violence on humanitarian and compassionate grounds.

However, the question I wanted to ask is this. You know at the moment that the government, if you cannot afford the landing fee for certain circumstances, "loans it" and pays it for you, but if you can't pay it back in three years, they forgive the debt. So in many ways, this is one way of doing that and not creating extra paperwork for exemptions.

I have another question that I wanted you to comment on. I liked your idea of access to qualified interpreters to help people understand. I think that's a very important piece. But the one I wanted to ask you about is similar to Mr. Martin's. EI currently is an insurance program. It works on basic insurance principles. That doesn't mean there shouldn't be a way of giving people who are not qualified—because they're not in the workforce paying EI—access to EI funds to help them to upgrade their skills and move forward. The thing is, I don't know if EI is the place to go for it. Otherwise, EI will stop working on the principles of insurance. Can you tell me of another way to allow people who do not pay into EI access to skills and training? Could you supply a creative solution for us?

Thanks.

•(1250)

Dr. Anu Bose: I thought, Dr. Fry, creative solutions required more time than just three minutes.

Hon. Hedy Fry: That's my lot...[*Inaudible*]

Dr. Anu Bose: I can certainly give it some thought, but—

Hon. Hedy Fry: You could get back to us, actually.

Dr. Anu Bose: I certainly could do that. I could certainly consult with a few people and get back to you on that.

But as you know, EI has become fairly restrictive of late. When there are restrictions, there are always certain people who will fall through the cracks.

There was one way. If you remember when Mr. Fontana used to sit in Mr. Telegdi's chair, he talked about giving new immigrants a sum of money that they would be able to use only to upgrade their skills, if you remember. I think he gave an arbitrary figure of \$3,000. I remember then you said that's a powerful amount of money.

Hon. Hedy Fry: I was never on that committee. I wasn't there. I'm very sorry.

Dr. Anu Bose: It is a very good solution that he suggested, that they get some kind of a voucher that they could use. This is, again, off the cuff. I have to give it much more thought. Again, EI is an insurance against loss of employment. It's not a benefit as such in the same way as social assistance.

Hon. Hedy Fry: No, it isn't.

Ms. Sarita Ahooja: Can we respond to the question regarding illegals?

The Chair: Very quickly.

Ms. Sarita Ahooja: Ahmed will begin in French and I will follow with the last point. He will explain exactly how people become non-status and illegal. They don't come in as such.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ahmad Hawarneh (Coalition Against the Deportation of Palestinians, Solidarity Across Borders): I'd like to thank everyone for giving me the opportunity to address the committee. My name is Ahmed Hawarneh and I am a refugee. I have been a refugee my entire life. I left Palestine for Syria in 1948. I lived in Palestinian refugee camps and later made my way to Saudi Arabia. I was also without a status in that country. I later came to Canada and sought refugee status. My request has been denied for the reasons mentioned here. My life is unsettled. I am always sad and I do not sleep because my wife and children are still in Syria. I am all alone in this country. I do not sleep at night if I do not take the medication prescribed by the doctor. My life here is unbearable. I'm waiting to be accepted as a citizen and I hope my wife will be able to join me. I am disconsolate, sad and sick at heart.

•(1255)

[*English*]

Ms. Sarita Ahooja: For example, Ahmed is a non-status. Like many Palestinians who are stateless and have no travel documents, he is not deportable.

For example, the thousand Algerians who were residing in Quebec were non-status for over ten years because there was a moratorium on removals to Algeria, yet at the IRB level the refugee claims were constantly refused. It created another class of non-status and illegal people, people who had been served their deportation order, but because of the fear and the constant violence, which has increased in Algeria over the years, they did not obey the deportation order.

For example, there are many non-status people who go through the system. They're refused, but because of... Whether it's the travel document, whether it's a moratorium, or whether it is because they have been fleeced by lawyers—their representation of their case was badly written, badly translated—and they continue to fear for their life and they refuse to obey the deportation order, then they remain here in Canada.

The system actually creates a non-status class. I would like to propose to the committee that they study the documentation provided by the status conference on their website, which explains exactly all the ways in which people become non-status. The system itself is creating this class of non-status people, and you need to respond to it.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

What you're talking about is somebody being in limbo. It's something we in this committee have identified as an issue we want to deal with, and we have heard a number of witnesses on it. I'm not sure if this session of Parliament is going to get to it; it depends on what happens. I certainly wish we could have done a report on it. Actually, Madame Faillie was very concerned about that particular issue, and I really wish she were here to participate in this.

Family reunification is something we heard lots about as we went across the country, and I think this is something the committee is going to have to grapple with. I don't see a problem with letting in 100,000 parents, particularly if they're going to go and live with the kids, but we have two problems. Number one is the people's responses to the cost of health care. I understand there is a situation in Britain where, when they come in, they get a medical bond or something. If we're going to deal with the question, the issue we'll have to address is going to be health care and support. If we could address those issues—and I don't know how we address them in the context of our present laws—then we could have them in tomorrow.

We're going to have to talk about this. Unfortunately, while it's one of the issues we studied across the country, we're not going to be able to come up with a report, but we clearly have to address those issues. If we were able to address those two issues, then I don't think there'd be any opposition from anybody to making that happen.

There are a lot of positive sides to having parents come here. A lot of them have financial resources. Others take care of the kids while both parents are working, so they really make a contribution, and historically they have always done so. We have to deal with those two issues.

As I said, I really wish we could have got into it, because I was looking forward to that debate with this committee. The way things stand, we can't do any reports. We're scheduled to do a report from one till two today, but we're not going to have the opposition members here. It should be of interest to every one of you at this table as it is on citizenship and revocation of citizenship, which is an important part of it. It's one of the reasons I'm on this committee, because I'm concerned about the present system.

So that's where we're at.

Dr. Bose, I wonder if you could do something for us, maybe in the way of a report, and I really hope we get to deal with it. In terms of the way we allocate the numbers for letting people in, I see a problem. Here we have a whole bunch of undocumented workers who are gainfully employed in the construction industry. It seems to me our intake should reflect that, but it doesn't. Instead, we invite a lot of people like engineers in here, and there's a surplus of engineers.

Surely we should maybe try to have a better match, because when you invite somebody in here and they can't get employment, they get pretty angry. They did themselves no favour in coming to this country, and I think we all hear from them in our offices. This is another issue we're all very keen on, so if you could do some kind of response for us on that, it would really be greatly appreciated.

I want to thank you all for coming.

I guess we can run overtime. Is the committee willing to go overtime? We're not going to be getting into our caucus meeting.

Dr. Fry.

• (1300)

Hon. Hedy Fry: Thanks, although I think it's Bill's turn now. Let Bill go, and then I'll go after him.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Thank you, Hedy.

I have a couple of quick questions.

I wanted to thank Mr. Hawarneh for sharing his story. I hope there is some resolution for you and your family very soon, Mr. Hawarneh. It is a very important issue, how people become non-status in Canada and how we just fail to address their situation. I've heard similar stories from people in my own constituency, so it is something that's long overdue for a solution.

I wanted to ask Ms. Krajewska something. You mentioned a couple of programs that used to exist, that have been terminated, but that had been proven useful. I wonder if you could just say a bit more about those, in particular the ones the Polish community had found helpful. That may be helpful for us as well.

Ms. Maria Krajewska: I mentioned a program that was helping to get brothers and sisters to Canada. Under previous immigration laws, brothers and sisters were members of the family class, so some facilitation towards them was used while they were processed for permanent residence. They were given additional points. As you know now, it's only a bonus of five points once you have a family member, but you still have to qualify according to the skilled worker program, so it's extremely difficult for brothers and sisters who are not university-educated or who don't have extremely good English

or French skills to qualify, even with the bonus. My thought was to really enlarge this—well, allow people to be treated as family members, being brothers and sisters; otherwise, they won't qualify.

The other program was also used extensively for getting the new immigrants by entrusting them in a position here in a family business. This was given an additional 10 points as a confirmed job offer. In this way, these people who were coming to a family business were having an employer, and they were able to immigrate quite quickly because of this additional option.

This was unfortunately liquidated. We now have this facilitation by HRDC, once we have the offer approved by them. However, it's quite difficult to get the offer approved, as you know. This family business was a much easier way to get processed through.

I just want to add something in response to Mrs. Fry's question about why we should allow these illegal workers in while others are waiting in a lineup. I think one of your colleagues was mentioning this—economic factors, of course—while discussing why others are waiting, and so on.

I think the answer is very clear. Some of these undocumented workers—I'm from Toronto and I studied this problem as well—have been really successful in establishing in the Toronto area in the construction industry. They have been working for years; they have employers. We are now bringing them in here. We are trying to bring some skilled workers from outside while we are having skilled workers here already employed, and we are not profiting from them because they are not paying taxes. They might be a burden to our system in terms of health care. We have them here; they are willing to pay taxes and regularize their status, and their employers are willing to help them and are giving all kinds of letters of recommendation and so on. The trade unions are involved, showing they are interested in regularizing the situation once and for all. They don't want to have a situation prolonging into infinity.

So the reason is really to get economical; that's the answer.

• (1305)

Mr. Bill Siksay: Thank you.

Dr. Bose, you raised the whole issue of section 117. During our hearings across the country, we've heard some absolutely heart-rending stories of people who came out of refugee situations, thought family members were dead, didn't put them on their applications, and got here to Canada; then they were discovered in another refugee camp or another country, and they've been prevented from rejoining family members here, or it's been extremely difficult for them.

I think you've raised an important point about the revocation of that section. I didn't know if you wanted to comment a bit further on that.

Dr. Anu Bose: One thing upon which I did want to comment comes along with the question of DNA testing. My concern is not only that DNA testing is expensive, but that I wouldn't want my DNA floating around certain countries of the world where protection of privacy is not guaranteed. It's not only a question of expense; it's also breach of privacy in other countries that we are very concerned about.

Mr. Bill Siksay: We've heard, too, of families in which a child was part of the family, but wasn't necessarily the child of both parents. They didn't know this; the DNA testing exposed it, and then ruined the family relationship. It has caused great difficulties that way as well.

Dr. Anu Bose: I would urge the committee to take a very long, hard look at this, given the number of failed states, internal conflicts, and displaced persons we now have. I would certainly urge it on you.

Thank you for bringing it up.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for answering the question so very well, Mr. Hawarneh and Ms. Ahojja.

One of the things that happen at a committee level here is that people come and bear witness on certain issues. At the same time, as you saw when Minister Volpe recently moved forward to triple the number of grandparents and parents being processed, there was an enormous backlash in the newspapers from all kinds of people who said, "But you're bringing all these people, and they're going to use our medical system".

Quite often what I do when I ask a question is hope that it will go on the record that there is another side to the story than the knee-jerk reaction that sometimes come from the public and from the media who don't understand the issue. That's why I asked you the question, and I think Ms. Krajewska's answer really helped also to put it into perspective. I just wanted the perspective there for the record, so that when the media read the record, they see there are other responses.

The chair brought forward the response with regard to the grandparents and parents. What I hear is that in many cases where people bring their parents and grandparents, they give a definite benefit to the family. I personally, as an immigrant, believe I have just as much right as anyone. I'm in the sandwich generation. I have parents who are elderly and I want to take care of them. They took care of me.

There is a fundamental feeling that we want to be with our families, as well. As the chair said, families sometimes come and offer care at home, and they support the family; they beef up some of the support systems for many immigrants who live here, and that is an important, fundamental quality-of-life issue. Again, it's important to get these on the table, to get them on the record.

I want to get something on the record, however. Anu, you suggested I was at some meeting. I have never been on the citizenship and immigration committee until December 2003, so I was not at a committee.... In fact, when you suggested \$3,000 per person, my initial reaction was, what can that buy in terms of skills and training? Very little. So mine was the opposite reaction to the one you attributed to me. I would just like to be corrected for the record—that I was never at such a meeting and I never made such a statement.

• (1310)

Dr. Anu Bose: I stand corrected. But it was not at that meeting; it was at a meeting where we were discussing the credentials of overseas-trained doctors, if you remember. There was a meeting here with Mr. Assadourian, in his very brief tenure as chair of this

committee, and we talked about how much money could be given to people in order to upgrade their skills. Maybe I was wrong in your reaction, but I remember you at that meeting, Dr. Fry. You questioned people very closely, and you questioned me, too.

Hon. Hedy Fry: I questioned you closely?

Dr. Anu Bose: But you did say, "Ahh", when the \$3,000 was said. Maybe you were saying, "What can that buy?"

Hon. Hedy Fry: Well, I'm not actually...because my response to you is that \$3,000 can buy very little.

Dr. Anu Bose: Very little. Maybe that's why you gasped, and I misunderstood your gasp.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Yes, I think misunderstanding sometimes leads to a misunderstanding.

Dr. Anu Bose: Yes, gasping is not a very helpful thing anyway.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Yes, but I think, having been given charge of looking at this issue of internationally trained workers, it was something I was very interested in hearing solutions to, and as you know, we have just brought down an initiative with some of those solutions. But I hardly think that for a foreign-trained physician \$3,000 would buy anything. It doesn't even pay for the two exams. So in fact I have the opposite reaction to the one you attributed to me.

Thank you; that's just for the record.

The Chair: Mr. Malik, for 30 seconds.

Mr. Fawzi Malik: I just want to add something. I forgot to say thank you to the committee for inviting us here.

One thing nobody can ignore or deny is that Immigration are first of all looking for persons

[Translation]

described as good-looking and young, with four degrees.

[English]

I think that's why we're having all these problems about people who are parents or people who are refugees, because refugees do not correspond to these criteria. They come in fear, scared and fleeing to seek some secure place.

That's what actually pushed a lot of them to be without status, because unfortunately we look at the criteria of the system and we find big, huge.... Unfortunately this is the way, because the refugee is risking his life to get here. But the immigrant is actually getting accepted here through the system. We didn't get through the system, unfortunately, because we were risking our lives.

What we're risking.... We were talking about people who ask, why don't we give people a chance who are outside, and why do refugees actually need to be regularized? It's because refugees are here, and they cannot be deported easily. We cannot just let somebody go, or tell him to go after he's spent 10 years here and made a family.

Thanks so much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Wrapping up, I wonder if you could think about those things I mentioned, about getting parents here and the two issues we have a problem with. Unfortunately, the first couple of phone calls I got in my office were complaining about the stress on the health care system. I just find it curious; that's the response I got.

To clarify, when you're sponsoring a member of the family class, Ben, our researcher, says that EI is not looked upon as social assistance, but it's not used in the calculation of income—just to have that on the record.

As for regularization, it's something we're going to have to solve, because for one thing we don't know how many people we have here underground. But we do know that if we were able to get rid of them

all tomorrow, it would hurt the economy and it would hurt revenues. I think there's a feeling that we have to deal with it. This is a problem in the United States as well; it's not just in Canada.

The other one is that the Province of Ontario is going to be getting more money for settlement. Hopefully that will be helpful; we'll be more on a par with some of the other provinces.

I want to thank you all for your input. I'm very impressed, Dr. Bose, that you know all these members of the immigration committee, going back to Mr. Assadourian and Mr. Fontana.

Thank you very much for your input. We would very much appreciate any additional information you can send us.

The meeting is adjourned.

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