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# Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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EVIDENCE

**Tuesday, April 27, 2010**

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**Chair**

**Mr. David Tilson**



## Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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• (1540)

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Vaughan—King—Aurora, Lib.)):** I'd like to welcome everyone here this afternoon. This is meeting 11.

The orders of the day, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), are to follow up on the briefing by the Department of Citizenship and Immigration on its role in the Government of Canada's response to the earthquake in Haiti.

We have the pleasure to have with us representatives from the Hamilton Haitian Association, the National Council of Citizens of Haitian Origin, and Église Baptiste Nouvelle Jérusalem.

Welcome to you all.

Some of you have probably appeared in front of a committee before. We will give you five to seven minutes to make remarks. Thereafter we will engage in a question and answer session.

We will begin with Mr. John Abrams, a member of the Hamilton Haitian Association, and with Bernard DuBois, vice-president.

Welcome, and please proceed.

[Translation]

**Mr. Bernard DuBois (Vice-President, Hamilton Haitian Association):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My name is Bernard DuBois. With me is John Abrams. I represent the Hamilton Haitian Association. I would like to thank Olivia Chow, MP, for proposing my name to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

Thank you, members of Parliament, members of the committee, for agreeing to invite me here. I hope that Mr. Abrams and I will be able to tell you about some facts and ideas that will advance the cause of Haitian immigration.

After the earthquake that devastated Port-au-Prince on January 12, the Prime Minister of Canada, Stephen Harper, together with five of his ministers, on a generous impulse, stated, among other things, that the government would expedite the immigration process for Haitians. I believe that by this he meant cases that were in line for permanent residence. In doing this, he wanted to reduce the stress on people from our homeland living here who have made permanent residence applications for their families. That measure was also intended to improve the quality of life of a number of Haitians who were living on the streets of Port-au-Prince, and now in tents. The

Prime Minister's announcement gave hope to Canadians of Haitian origin.

However, like us, they did not know and still do not know what instruction has been given to officials for carrying out the government's very good intention. Associations and agencies have had to make submissions to try to find out what procedures have been put in place to achieve this objective, and then inform and reassure our fellow Haitians about the status of their cases.

Personally, I met with all the members of Parliament in my region before I ended up here. In all the media, CIC asked Haitians to write "Haiti" on the envelope with their application, so that officials would know what applications should be processed faster. As well, CIC published a telephone number Haitians could use to check on the status of their case. I must point out that using that telephone number was a waste of time. When you called the number and finally got to speak to a human being, it was only to be told that the available information was on the CIC website. Otherwise, it went to voicemail. I don't have to tell you how frustrating voicemail is when the information you are looking for isn't there.

In the article he wrote on April 19, 2010, Andrew Chung, a *Toronto Star* journalist, painted a picture of the status of the expedited immigration situation for Haitians. He told us that the Canadian government's immigration target for 2010 was somewhere between 2,358 and 2,435 permanent resident visas. From January 13 to March 27, 2010, 311 visas had been issued. In 2009, for the same period, January to March, 302 visas were issued, for a difference of nine visas for that period of the year. If we go by that number, the speed of visa issuance for Haitians has actually declined, and has hit a plateau of about 1,500 visas for the year. That is far below the objectives set by CIC. I don't believe that our Prime Minister's intention of expediting cases meant issuing fewer visas for the year. We also know that 104 temporary residence permits were issued. Those permits may eventually translate into permanent residence if they were to be extended. It has to be said that there is nothing special about those visas, and that one way or another, a little over 500 of those visas are issued every year. So that has nothing to do with any expediting process.

•(1545)

We see nothing to indicate that the process is being expedited. The absence of anything to show is causing more stress for Canadians of Haitian origin who are waiting for their families and who are sleeping in tents and suffering constant battering from nature. From light rain to downpours, rain can make the difficulties of living in a tent worse, and in some cases has. We are talking about people living in tents in the middle of the rainy season, and we don't know for how long.

Canada tells us that rather than the usual four officers, 30 immigration officers, based in Ottawa and the Dominican Republic, have been assigned to reviewing applications from Haitians. Even though we don't know what they are doing, we want to thank the government for this generous attention. But is this measure effective? Once again, if we go by the number of visas issued by CIC, we would tend to say no.

For strictly humanitarian reasons, when over 200,000 bodies were lying in the streets of Port-au-Prince, Canada transported 1,700 Haitians from Port-au-Prince to Montreal. For the most part, those Haitians were Canadians, and they were presented to the press to show the public that something was being done. The idea of bringing them here was a good one. We thank the government for doing that. But once again, they are not included in the cases that were to be expedited.

Myself, I think the expediting process is underway and we will see the results shortly. I firmly believe this. But I also believe that the stress of not being able to follow what is happening can be harmful for the mental health of some members of the Haitian community living in Canada.

While Haitians are resilient and able to fight against adversity, they do not have the resources they need to overcome it. They need you. They need your help, right away. The Prime Minister's statement that the immigration process would be expedited for Haitians has to have some meaning. Let us work on making it reality. At the Montreal Conference on January 25, the government acknowledged that rebuilding Haiti might take a good 10 years. That tells us, even according to the government's own experts, that the situation for Haitians will not improve until 10 years from now.

At the same time, for humanitarian reasons, Premier Charest took a step forward by stating that Quebec would rearrange its quota in order to accept new sponsorship applications, and Quebec would consider extended family in reviewing those cases. That was a very generous thing for the government of Quebec to do. Unfortunately, Quebec does not have the power to select those immigrants or to give them visas.

Good intentions do not seem to have resulted in good instructions to officials for the process. There are large numbers of Haitians currently living in Canada after claiming refugee status, while waiting for a decision from the Immigration and Refugee Board, the IRB. We know that these people will not be deported. The government has said that.

However, day after day, the Immigration and Refugee Board continues to reject their claims and deny them the right to apply for immigrant status. This approach is certainly not consistent with the

government's intention. Its sole purpose is to increase stress and decrease quality of life for these people. Even worse, these people are living in Canada, they can't leave the country and they also can't sponsor their families. This situation is completely incomprehensible for their family members living in Haiti.

I do not believe that the government of Canada really wants to entrap these people to this point, but that is how it looks. From a strictly humanitarian standpoint, the government should give these cases special consideration.

•(1550)

To reduce the stress felt by Haitians living in Canada with precarious status, to allow all Haitians in Canada to have the option of focusing on the welfare of their families, to enable all Haitians in Canada to make sponsorship applications for their families who are now living and will eventually be living in tents for the next 10 years, and to clarify immigration procedures for Haitians living in Canada, I recommend that Parliament offer permanent residence on a humanitarian basis to all Haitians with precarious status currently living on Canadian soil.

In addition, I suggest that a temporary act of Parliament be passed to expedite applications by Haitians, that is, to define the time they will be allowed, from when a case is first examined until it is completed. That law will also define the procedure to be followed in the case of applications from Haitians for the next 10 years. Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua):** Thank you very much, Monsieur DuBois.

We'll now hear from Monsieur Joseph Jean-Gilles with the National Council of Citizens of Haitian Origin .

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Joseph Jean-Gilles (Member, Immigration Work Committee and General Director of GAP-VIES, National Council of Citizens of Haitian Origin):** Ladies and gentlemen, members of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, distinguished members of Parliament, I sincerely thank the committee for giving CONACOH the opportunity to testify. I will be expanding on the role of Canada since the earthquake, in terms of immigration.

Before that, allow me to briefly introduce CONACOH. The National Council of Citizens of Haitian Origin is an organization that was founded in 1981. It is a platform for coordination and non-partisan political representation for the Haitian communities in the provinces of Canada, and in particular Quebec. Its essential mission is to support its member associations and individual members in advocating for and promoting the collective rights and interests of the Haitian communities in Quebec and Canada. In that role, CONACOH assists in the harmonious integration of Haitian nationals in the host society, by encouraging participation by members of our community in the various spheres of activity in Canadian and Quebec society in relation to employment and to citizenship, education and health. Our mission is also to intensify solidarity activities with Haiti.

Since the earthquake in Haiti, our country of origin, on January 12, the Haitian community has mobilized. CONACOH was the instigator of a committee for solidarity with Haiti, whose objective was to forge links with all actors at various levels, provincial, federal, municipal and educational, and with members of civil society, to support our brothers and sisters here and to support our brothers and sisters in our homeland. The role we intend to play, in that capacity, is not one of support and solidarity with Haiti, but as an advisory body that can provide an informed view of the situation, because of member organizations and we are truly on the ground with people in need who tell us about their needs every day.

The National Council of Citizens of Haitian Origin, CONACOH, would like to congratulate and thank the various governments and government bodies for the promptness and speed with which they have responded, and also the public of Quebec and Canada for their generosity, their support and their solidarity after the disaster that struck our country of origin. We are proud to be citizens of Quebec and Canada. The effort being made at present is remarkable and is appreciated. We have welcomed the decision made to date and the way that actions have been coordinated. We are talking about decisions made and also the intention of making decisions.

My testimony this afternoon will essentially deal with immigration and the role Canada should play in relation to Haiti on the international scene. It can't be said often enough: an exceptional situation calls for exceptional measures, but the situation is urgent at present. More than 100 days after the earthquake, we have the impression, in terms of immigration, that nothing has happened in terms of admitting people directly affected. CONACOH is therefore addressing the government of Canada and saying that we expected, in terms of what we are calling for, at least that people without status would have their situations resolved within three to six months. It is now 100 days, more than three months after.

The other thing, which my colleague before me mentioned, is to make the family reunification criteria more flexible. That criterion needs to be more flexible and allow us to expand the concept of family to include other categories of family members: brothers, sisters and nieces.

•(1555)

We expected that Canada would be able to apply the same measures as those that the UN strongly supported and were applied in Canada in the case of the Kosovars, to allow the people to come directly here and follow the process in Canada. The process takes quite a long time in Port-au-Prince.

When you are in Montreal, you have the impression that Canada stops in Quebec. The federal government should think about developing a national program, in all the provinces and territories, to set a quota and admit Haitian nationals affected by the earthquake. We also think the measures should be harmonized. We know that at present, measures are being taken in Quebec, but we are convinced they are not being harmonized with Ottawa's. If we develop a coast-to-coast program, there has to be some degree of harmonization.

In terms of sponsorship, we think that corporate entities, that is, community organizations, churches and interest groups, can also act as sponsors.

Because of the emergency, we think an exceptional measure should be reinstated. This type of measure would allow Quebeckers and Canadians of origin who want to, to host, for a limited time, six months, for example, orphans, disaster victims or other people. In some cases, people want to come to Canada, but only for the time it takes to get back on their feet a little.

At the international level, we think Canada should take a leadership role in relation to immigration and promote this exceptional measure to the leaders of friendly countries. That is where the example of the Kosovars comes in. Can Canada not present these cases to the UN and arrange for all the countries in the world that want to will admit people of Haitian origin who are victims of the earthquake?

We know that Canada is interested in rebuilding Haiti, but we want it to be increasingly effective, in terms of involvement. The Haitian diaspora, Canadians of Haitian origin, have to contribute.

Since January 12, a lot of community organizations, wherever they are, have been overloaded. That is the case in Montreal, in particular. They are more or less obliged to offer services. If we want to serve people who come from Haiti, we also have to think about offering financial support for those organizations. We are talking here about newcomers and people living in Canada who are fragile. There are a lot of seniors, children and families in distress.

The only other thing I want to say is thank you, on behalf of the Haitian community and the Haitian people, for having us here this afternoon.

•(1600)

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua):** Thank you very much.

We'll now hear from Église Baptiste de la Nouvelle Jérusalem.

Jean-Baptiste Sauveur.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean-Baptiste Sauveur (Pastor, Église Baptiste de la Nouvelle Jérusalem):** Members of Parliament and members of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, my sincere thanks for the honour you have done me by inviting me to appear before you.

Haiti was dealt a body blow by the horrific earthquake that struck on January 12. That natural disaster sowed panic and chaos in the Haitian universe. The earthquake was a magnitude 7 on the Richter scale, and the epicentre was in Port-au-Prince.

Canada, through the voice of the Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, and his ministers was among the first countries to go to the scene to offer aid to an entire population that was thrown into utter confusion and left to its fate. This natural but no less devastating phenomenon brought death to hundreds of thousands of families. Thousands of women, thousands of men and children, from all social classes, were tossed onto the streets of Port-au-Prince and of towns in other provinces. Bodies are still lying in the rubble, abandoned. All government buildings, schools, churches, businesses and residential buildings were not spared. It resembles an apocalypse, the end of the world.

The Haitian people have truly witnessed the depth of the generosity of the Canadian people. In a very short time, we have been given tents, drinking water and food, and roads have been repaired. A landing strip, flying medical teams, technicians: everything was put in place, every effort made, to bring aid to the Haitian people in their distress. During that time, Prime Minister Stephen Harper and ministers from various departments organized press points to express hope, which can be expressed in one sentence: the Haitian people will not be alone in their pain. The Canadian army was brought in, ships were sent, frigates and destroyers, and professionals were sent to Port-au-Prince, Léogâne, Jacmel, and so on, to respond to the emergency and bring speedy help to the people.

Of all the actions taken, there is one that served as the ignition motor and that is worthy of mention this afternoon. During this both natural and human disaster, the country was cut off from the rest of the world and was without its usual means of communication. While Haitian governments stayed silent, of all the other countries that gave humanitarian aid to our people, it was Canada, and specifically Prime Minister Harper, that made the welcome decision to act without waiting for an official request from Haiti. Mr. Harper was also the only head of state in the world who spent a night with the Haitian people, sleeping in Haiti.

• (1605)

It is when things are bad that you find out who your true friends are. I think this is a strong point that is worthy of mention. We are grateful to you, the Canadian people, and your government. We thank you, from the bottom of our heart. The Haitian people will not forget this surge of generosity from Canada and the invaluable help that will continue into the future with the rebuilding of the country.

Haitians both inside and outside Haiti are counting on you and asking you to support them in rebuilding their country. As well, your help in terms of immigration is significant; that is noted. However, we are hoping for more flexibility in processing applications now underway. It is also crucial to implement a project for seasonal agricultural work contracts to help the people of Haiti combat unemployment, as you have done for Cubans and Mexicans.

Thank you very much, members of Parliament, ministers and Prime Minister. I was overjoyed to accept your invitation. God bless you.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua):** Thank you, Mr. Sauveur.

[English]

We will now proceed to one seven-minute round.

We'll begin with Monsieur Coderre.

[Translation]

**Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, gentlemen.

[The member spoke in Créole]

**Hon. Denis Coderre:** The goal of the meeting today is primarily to make constructive suggestions. Obviously, we must not do that from a partisan standpoint. We are talking about a people that has suffered. There are health needs in Haiti. There are construction needs—I don't want to say "reconstruction" because I would not want to see the situation become what it was before. So I will use the word "construction" instead. Haiti has to be guilt. In the domestic circumstances, there is a need for reunification. I was happy to see that adoption was mentioned. But I have always said I am concerned about family reunification, particularly in relation to the domestic issue, the question of immigration. The trauma that has been experienced is truly enormous.

We are privileged, in a way, to have you here to testify, because you help us to understand what you are experiencing on the ground. The purpose of this dialogue is to make sure that we can identify and propose constructive solutions and achieve meaningful results. The Liberal Party of Canada is not satisfied in terms of immigration, in terms of family reunification. I would have liked a program to be developed, somewhat like we did for the Kosovars, but specific to the problem of Haiti. Like you, Mr. Jean-Gilles, I think that an extraordinary situation calls for extraordinary measures.

Now, given that a decision has been made, we have to find concrete ways of expediting the processing of applications. I would like to hear each of you, moving quickly, since we have only seven minutes.

Mr. Jean-Gilles, you have us some very specific recommendations. You yourself took part in an important conference, as a member of CONACOH, to prepare for attending the Montreal Conference.

I am glad to see that there are not just Quebeckers present, and that Mr. DuBois is here from Hamilton. So there are two aspects to this situation: the situation in Quebec with the Canada-Quebec Accord, and the situation for people on the other side of the Ottawa River, which is entirely different.

As a pastor, my friend Mr. Sauveur has to bring all these people together every Sunday to talk to them. He sees some of the despair some people are feeling and he tries to help them.

Quickly, explain for me what people are experiencing at present, on the ground, in terms of immigration. We know what has been done for rebuilding. In terms of immigration, now, what are people telling you at present?

Let's start with Mr. Jean-Gilles.

•(1610)

**Mr. Joseph Jean-Gilles:** Essentially, people are telling us that the bureaucracy is very slow. When people try to bring someone from Haiti, it is very difficult. Even in Port-au-Prince, people do not have access to the embassy.

First, there have been no new measures to allow for expedited processing of applications, as we were told. Everyone verifies that. We, personally, at CONACOH, have worked with people who had their access code for consulting their immigration file. Processing of each of those cases is at the same point. That is one of the things we are told. We are also told that the embassy in Port-au-Prince cannot deliver services. There is probably a human resources problem, or I don't know what. We are told that given the number of applications coming from Haiti and Canada, they can't deliver services.

We, at CONACOH, we just in a meeting on Saturday with people from the community to talk about the immigration question. The people stressed that some cases can be resolved here, in Canada. We keep talking about this because it is what the people instructed us to do. Then tell us that this absolutely has to be done, because things are moving very slowly in Port-au-Prince. I think there are some cases that involve temporary resident visa applications that would be processed in the Dominican Republic. But not everyone is able to go to the Dominican Republic to have their application processed. So we can't talk about an expedited process for the people intended to benefit, the clientele, members of the community.

**Hon. Denis Coderre:** Mr. DuBois, what is happening in Hamilton?

**Mr. Bernard DuBois:** I will give you an example. A family of eight people arrived from Haiti. When they landed in Toronto, they were given visitor visas. When they got on the plane in the Dominican Republic, they were told that at the port of entry they would be given temporary resident visas, which would allow them to do things, to live in the country. With a visitor visa, those people have all the problems in the world.

I will use the term in its narrowest sense. One of those people was a 15-month-old baby born in New York. Those people were in Haiti before arriving here. They were all given a health insurance card, except for the baby. Imagine the situation: a mother who has a 15-month-old baby can go to the doctor, but if her child is sick, she has a Hobson's choice. She can't take her child to the hospital; they won't take the child because she has no money to pay. Otherwise, if she crosses the border with her child, she can't come back, because she has a visa for only one entry.

•(1615)

**Hon. Denis Coderre:** Mr. Sauveur, what do people tell you when they confide in you?

**Mr. Jean-Baptiste Sauveur:** There are a lot of problems with immigration, in terms of adopting children. Regarding adoption, it seems that it's the same thing, it's impossible.

I know the very specific case of a lady who was injured and pulled out of the rubble. She was brought here, but her child was left in Haiti, injured. The woman was brought here alone, and now nobody knows what to do so the child can come and be with its mother again. This is a big problem, and we don't know who to talk to. Every day, we find ourselves looking at all kinds of problems.

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua):** Mr. St-Cyr.

[Translation]

**Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for being here today.

I would like to start with a somewhat technical question. I think it was Mr. Jean-Gilles who talked about the importance of helping the victims of the earthquake. I don't know whether he intended to use that terminology. We often hear debates about clauses adopted by the two levels of government. In their special programs, you have to prove you are a victim of the earthquake, you are affected by the earthquake.

There are arguments pro and con. There are people who say that since there are already a lot of people to help, we should not also be helping people who are not victims of the earthquake. Others say that these are more administrative hassles, and that it is not always easy to prove that one is a victim of the earthquake.

I would like to know what each of you thinks about this requirement.

**Mr. Joseph Jean-Gilles:** The definition says that you have to be personally and directly affected. I think that in terms of both practice and semantics, it is very difficult to prove that one has been directly affected. The definition is fairly broad. I talked to an official and I told him...

**Mr. Thierry St-Cyr:** So you are in favour of eliminating that definition.

**Mr. Joseph Jean-Gilles:** Personally, at CONACOH, we would like that requirement to be eliminated. Port-au-Prince is the engine of Haiti. There are people who were outside the city at the time of the earthquake, but who are directly affected, because where they were living or the house of a family member who was housing them in Port-au-Prince was destroyed. That means that the person is, from my point of view, directly affected by the earthquake.

**Mr. Thierry St-Cyr:** So you think that criterion should be eliminated.

Mr. DuBois?

**Mr. Bernard DuBois:** Me too, I think it should be eliminated. The earthquake happened in Port-au-Prince. Around Port-au-Prince, in a 100 km diameter, people meet that definition. But Haiti is a very small country. So when two million people have to move and leave their place of residence, the other places don't have the necessary infrastructure to take them in. So there is another kind of earthquake happening in those places.

**Mr. Thierry St-Cyr:** Did you want to add something?

**Mr. Jean-Baptiste Sauveur:** Yes. From a psychological point of view, there is a trauma syndrome happening in children now. They don't want to go inside a building, to go to school. That tells you how affected people have really been. The ones who weren't buried under the rubble are still affected by the earthquake.

**Mr. Thierry St-Cyr:** My second questions relates to longer-term measures. It was said that extraordinary measures were called for, but at the same time tragedies like these are common. It happened in Kosovo and it happens all over. Should our Parliament not consider setting up a legal framework, while providing for the flexibility to take into account various circumstances, so future governments can respond rapidly in the case of these kinds of tragedies?

At present, the minister often tells us that he can't act, that it's the law, that it has to be obeyed, and that is all. Do you think we should try to look at the question of long-term measures?

• (1620)

**Mr. Joseph Jean-Gilles:** I think a big country like Canada, the country of liberty and human rights, cannot simply address the issue of immigration piecemeal. To me, this is a fundamental question. It is part of the values of Quebec and Canada to be welcoming.

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua):** If I can interrupt for a second, we're having problems with the translation.

Okay. You're now coming in loud and clear.

Please continue.

[Translation]

**Mr. Joseph Jean-Gilles:** I said that Canada, the country of human rights, cannot simply operate piecemeal. We need immigrants and we know the contribution immigration makes here in Canada, and in Quebec in particular, where I live. It is important to have a real immigration policy. Yes, since I have been here, I have seen Canada take in numerous populations in distress. It is not reasonable for there to be no policy about admitting people in distress who are affected by natural disasters.

**Mr. Thierry St-Cyr:** Mr. DuBois.

**Mr. Bernard DuBois:** I made two recommendations to this committee. My second recommendation was that a law be passed, if only temporarily. If it could be a permanent law, that would be good, but a temporary law should be passed to solve this problem, so the Hon. Jason KenneyHon. Jason Kenney does not constantly have to make agonizing decisions, to say no to dying people. So I think legal rules are needed. In fact, I made that recommendation here myself, to this committee.

**Mr. Thierry St-Cyr:** I will let my colleague have the rest of the time allotted to me.

**Mrs. Ève-Mary Thāi Thi Lac (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ):** Good afternoon, gentlemen, thank you for being here with us.

When you learned about the tragedy in Haiti, Quebecers have been enormously generous, as have the rest of Canadians. A lot of Quebecers of Haitian origin went to lend a hand on the ground. The Haitian diaspora all over the world showed great solidarity with the people of its homeland. That is to your great honour.

You said earlier that you would like to see Canada grant automatic permanent residence on humanitarian grounds in the case of nationals who are here now. Could you tell us the number of Haitians in Canada that this represents?

And last, officials have told us that by the end of April all cases relating to Haiti will be settled. I am a little stupefied. This is April 27 today and the end of the month is approaching. There were 3,000 applications before the earthquake, and since then there have been 2,000 more. You say that in the first quarter, there is a difference of nine cases processed as compared to last year. Do you think the statement by the officials is strictly speaking realistic?

**Mr. Joseph Jean-Gilles:** We think it is unrealistic. At the outset, CONACOH estimated that the number of people who had entered Quebec illegally was in the neighbourhood of 5,000. That is what we thought. In the last three years, a lot of people who were living in the United States have entered Quebec.

When we met with other partners, including the TCRI, the Table de concertation des organismes au service des personnes réfugiées et immigrantes, they confirmed that there were about 8,000 people, and even nearly 9,000 people, with illegal status in Quebec, so this illegal status situation needs to be legalized in Quebec. We are talking here about people of Haitian origin.

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua):** Thank you.

Ms. Hughes.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP):** I would like my colleague to stick to a 45-second statement.

[English]

**Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP):** *Merci.* Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to my colleague.

I have to rush—I have a cab waiting to get me to the airport—but I wanted to come by and thank all the delegates, but especially Monsieur Abrams and Monsieur DuBois from Hamilton.

I want to inform the committee members of the fantastic leadership they've been showing in Hamilton, not only among the Haitian community but in coordinating and bringing in the broader community.

We held a number of ongoing fundraisers. One of their key objectives was to make sure that we kept it at a high profile in Hamilton and across Canada, and they've simply done an outstanding job in Hamilton. I'm so pleased and appreciative of their taking the time and the expense to come here to the committee to share what they've done, their view of things and what more Canada can do.

With that, I thank you, Chair, and I thank my colleague.

To my two fellow Hamiltonians, thank you so much for caring enough to be here so that Canada can improve its response and we can do the job nationally, not just in Hamilton.

Again, *merci beaucoup.*



•(1625)

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Carol Hughes:** Thank you.

As you said, you have a lot of support in the NDP in Hamilton. The caucus is certainly sensitive to what is going on in Haiti. I would like to know whether you have suggestions to make so we can be sure of having the best way of using the financial investments the government has allocated for aid to Haiti.

How could that help to rebuild the foundations to enable Haitians to get through the crisis.

Mr. Sauveur?

**Mr. Jean-Baptiste Sauveur:** Personally, I would recommend that we show more clemency to these young Haitians who are living in misery. In fact, that is why I stressed just now that we could have the project to bring seasonal workers here, to Canada, so we could help the Haitian people and the Haitian government fight unemployment. Misery causes anger and a lot of people have lost their jobs. There are now a lot of epidemics in Haiti. In fact, I have received some news in that regard. We have to think about what we could do to help the Haitian people get out of this rut.

**Mrs. Carol Hughes:** Any other comments.

**Mr. Joseph Jean-Gilles:** In terms of aid in Haiti, there are two ideas: accountability and transparency. I think that Canada, and ourselves as taxpayers, have to make sure the money is spent well in Haiti; and someone somewhere in Canada has to be responsible. Given that we are Canadian taxpayers, responsibility lies with the government of Canada. If it is giving our money, it is going to ask the Haitian government to account for it.

As well, when we talk about development in Haiti, it means making sure that Canadians of Haitian origin are involved in what is being done.

**Mrs. Carol Hughes:** Listening to you, it seems clear that the process put in place, the special immigration measures the government has implemented seem to have encountered a lot of serious obstacles: a shortage of people doing the work, a lack of clarity and too narrow definitions, just to name a few.

Where do you think changes should be made? What should the priorities be? Would you have recommendations to make about the fact that adoptions have been expedited for children, but not for Haitian Canadian children?

**Mr. Bernard DuBois:** To begin with, the changes have to be made to the legislation. A lot of things are done by legislation.

First, we, Haitians, are here before the committee today to tell you what we think, what we feel, because we have no information. Our members are asking us what is happening, where they stand. We can't tell them because we have to refer to the minister, Mr. Kenney. When we do that, we do not get information.

That means that some things are being done, but it is doubtful that by the end of the month the immigration applications are going to be completed. I have been told it would be by the end of June. They can say yes or no, but they say they don't know because the information can't be passed on.

If there is a law, it will follow a certain procedure. The procedure would tell us that our application has to get from point A to point M, and it is now at point D. This is how we can help people. It reassures them. It is a question of legislation. Earlier, Mr. St-Cyr asked whether there should be rules for the process. If there are no rules for the process, there are always going to be questions. That being said, if there are rules, as I am now proposing be done as quickly as possible, if it is done badly, there are always ways of making amendments, but let's do it.

•(1630)

[*English*]

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua):** Thank you. We have to move on to the next questioner.

Go ahead, Mr. Young.

**Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

I want to say welcome to everyone here. Thank you for coming some distance to tell us today how we can make the situation better in Haiti.

Most Canadians were very proud that Canada responded very quickly to the emergency in Haiti in January. We had help on the ground within about 48 hours and helped to keep order, with initial amounts of fresh water and food, etc.

Parallel to that, Canadian immigration services worked quickly on a number of priorities to try to help. As you may know, there was consular assistance. The evacuation of Canadian citizens and permanent residents was first. The evacuation of adoptees from Haiti to Canada was facilitated. There was a temporary suspension on all removals to Haiti. Fee waivers and additional hardship factors were considered for temporary residence in Canada. Visa requirements were suspended for aid workers and evacuees transiting through Canada.

You've told us that priority processing measures were not working as well as we hoped they would. It was for persons directly and significantly affected by the earthquake, including family class sponsorship, citizenship certificates, and reunification of recognized refugees' families.

On the Canadian side, there were applications for spousal sponsorship and protected persons, extensions of temporary resident status, and work permits for Haitians unable to support themselves due to the earthquake.

I'm concerned, as I'm sure everyone here is concerned, with what Mr. Jean-Gilles said in regard to the total number of immigrants based on a fast-track process.

Mr. Jean-Gilles, could you shed some light on this? I don't know how badly the Canadian mission was damaged. I assumed it was a damaged building, as was almost every building in Haiti. They had to rebuild the operation and try to handle a huge volume at the same time. There's no indication of the total volume they handled. There were fairly chaotic conditions from the beginning. They had to do security checks, as they always have, and medical checks. In every case, they had to check that relationships were genuine in order for people to immigrate to Canada, while rebuilding the organization on the ground.

Do you recognize the complexity and the challenges of this requirement, of maintaining the integrity of the immigration process under all these conditions?

As well, you mentioned that having more resources was one solution, Mr. Jean-Gilles. Do you have any suggestions for other possible solutions to facilitate faster immigration?

[Translation]

**Mr. Joseph Jean-Gilles:** Yes, I referred to more resources, but I also talked about other processing methods. I clearly said there were cases that could be processed here, by agreeing for applications to be examined directly here, by bringing the persons concerned to Quebec, or Canada's officials could be brought in so the examination of applications could move ahead.

[English]

**Mr. Terence Young:** That's helpful. Thank you.

Monsieur DuBois, you talked about passing an act of Parliament. I think long term, maybe, that might be a solution to give structure, but of course this situation was totally unique in our history and in the history of Haiti. I'm not sure an act can address such a unique situation, although it might give structure to future aid projects.

Do you have any suggestions on what such an act might say?

•(1635)

[Translation]

**Mr. Bernard DuBois:** As you say, what happened in Haiti is unique. But there have been cases in the past for which decisions were made. For example, in 2004, when the tsunami happened, Canada made decisions quickly. Those decisions were still case by case. Canada is a big country. It is not a country that can be content to make decisions piecemeal, particularly about immigration, because the country is big and needs people. Certainly in the years to come there will be a lot of immigration. So now is when we have to make the rules, which would be very strict at the same time, but very broad also.

When cases like this arise, certainly we will step in, we will give some dollars and even may dollars if called for, but that doesn't solve the problems.

[English]

**Mr. Terence Young:** Thank you.

Can you think of an example of a rule like that? You're talking about a rule that has some flexibility, I think.

**Mr. Bernard DuBois:** The H and C process.

**Mr. Terence Young:** Okay. Thank you.

Do any of you gentlemen have any concern—and I'm thinking of the future of Haiti—that many of the people who are the most skilled and the highest educated, and many of the professionals, would be the ones who would qualify to immigrate to Canada or elsewhere, and that in the long term, those are the same people who would be the best qualified to help rebuild Haiti?

I wonder if you could comment on that, please.

**Mr. Bernard DuBois:** Definitely.

In my case, I'm talking about the family, uniting the family.

[Translation]

Let me say it in French. I came here to argue for expediting residence visas for people who have applied for them. However, I also have to tell you that I find it very hard to accept going to the country and taking our professionals, whose diplomas work very well there, and bringing them here, and once they're here, telling them they don't work. So the country suffers a loss and more problems are created here by admitting Haitians who were professionals there. That is a problem for me. But then there are people whose family,

[English]

loved ones, living in Haiti, sleeping in tents, sleeping on the streets. While here, we are doing everything; we are talking...but we're clearly not dragging them here to get those people the chance to have their family with them.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua):** Thank you very much, Mr. Young.

On behalf of the committee, I'd like to thank you very much for giving us a lot to think about. As you know, we try to do our best, but there are always ways and means to improve our abilities to deal with situations like the Haitian situation. As you know, the country was seized by what happened in Haiti. I think the response that the people of Canada showed the people in Haiti illustrates the type of friendship and warmth that exists between our people.

Thank you so much.

We're going to suspend for two minutes.

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\_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

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•(1640)

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua):** We will now hear from Centre des Femmes Interculturel Claire, from Micheline Cantave, director, and Michel Nemours.

As well, we will hear from Help Services for Newcomers and Immigrants Inc., Keder Hyppolite, executive director, and Serge Bien Aimé, senior immigration counsellor.

We will also hear from Regroupement des Femmes Haïtiennes de la Montérégie, Josette Jacques.

[Translation]

We will here from Micheline Cantave first.

Welcome. You may begin.

**Ms. Micheline Cantave (Director, Centre des Femmes Inter-culturel Claire):** Thank you.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for giving us the opportunity to testify in these precincts about the Canadian government's participation in the vast reconstruction, or "refoundation", process that our country of origin needs after the murderous earthquake that shook it on January 12.

First, on behalf of the Haitian community in Canada, on behalf of the Haitian people and on behalf of myself, I want to say thank you to the Canadian Parliament which mobilized around the issue, thank you to the Canadian people, thank you to the government for its support and its assistance.

The day after the earthquake, the Canadian government expressed its condolences to the Haitian government and people. It took the opportunity to announce significant aid. In addition to that there was the contribution by the Canadian public, which it decided to match. We also have to consider that its offers were adjusted as the damage and need arose. These are all concrete actions that must be applauded and for which we must be grateful.

The Canadian government also deployed heavy equipment to help save many lives of people trapped in the rubble. It also sent specialized teams capable of dealing with this catastrophic situation. The work done by those men and women was very helpful and much appreciated. They cleared some roads in the southeast, and particularly in Jacmel. They treated the victims and put up tents for the homeless. They provided medications, and in short they contributed greatly to improving the fate of our brothers and sisters there.

We must note that the Canadian government brought our fellow Canadians home and recognize that act properly, because it allowed a lot of stressed out, anxious families to take a breath and return to relatively normal life. We should also mention the efforts made by the Canadian government to bring adopted children, to allow the parents of those children to get them home quickly. We are talking here about Operation Stork.

Through the Canadian International Development Agency, the Canadian government promised a lot of things: building hospitals, buildings to house the various government departments, training public servants, and so on. Prime Minister Harper's trip to Haiti, on board a military plane to distribute drugs and sanitation equipment, must not go unnoticed. It demonstrated his sympathy with the Haitian people and the determination of this government to support the Haitian leaders. The Haitian community took note of all these actions. In addition, the efforts of Canadian missions or NGOs on the ground were palpable.

The Canadian Red Cross, Oxfam-Québec, CIDA, the Canadian Embassy in Haiti, all these institutions did their jobs remarkably. The Haitian people will remember, and will also remember what should be done.

The Canadian government has shown generosity to our victims, the Canadian government was one of the first to answer "here" on the ground. Its financial contribution is significant. The human resources deployed in Haiti have been very helpful. But considering

the extent of the situation, the Haitian community's expectations are and remain unmet. Unmet, for the simple and good reason that many of our brothers and sisters are still sleeping in makeshift tents when the rainy season has already started, the season that will be followed by cyclone and hurricane season. The situation is going to get worse. Unmet, because nothing has been done by the federal government to facilitate participation by the Haitian diaspora living in Canada in the reconstruction process.

The Department of Foreign Affairs did facilitate participation by a Canadian delegation composed of Haitians at the Washington Conference. However, we have to go beyond conferences. Many of us in the diaspora would like to be on the ground. We are just waiting for an opening from the federal government. The Haitian community's expectations are and remain unmet because the federal government has not announced its immigration policy.

While Quebec is talking about family reunification, the federal government, when it comes to new measures, is proposing that we put "Haiti" on the envelopes so applications from Haitians will be given priority processing.

● (1645)

We would draw the attention of committee members to the fact that this measure is not sufficient for a country that has been hit by this kind of disaster. We are not asking the federal government to open its doors to one and all. But if Quebec is proposing to admit 3,000 additional Haitians, the federal government can ask the other provinces to follow Quebec's example. In the face of a tragedy like this, the language barrier will not hold up.

Other measures can be made more flexible. For example, why can a child not sponsor their mother or their aunt or uncle? The Haitian concept of family is much broader than the one applied by the federal government. So we think there is urgency and danger in delaying. The federal government can do better. It can start, for example, by regularizing the status of refugee claimants. That is another measure that should be reviewed, and I think this is the time to do it.

When a husband or wife has to wait three or four years to bring the other partner here, that is a serious problem. After so long, the relationship becomes very fragile. As a result, there are separations and single-parent families, and children drop out of school and are delinquent. We think the federal government has to look at this issue. As the director of a woman's centre, I know what I'm talking about. I can give you various examples of this problem, which in my opinion deserves special attention.

We applaud the federal government's generosity to our brothers and sisters who are victims of the earthquake, because it decided, for example, to match all money collected from the Canadian public. But do you know that some NGOs working with vulnerable segments of Haitian society are no longer being funded by CIDA? It seems that the government is giving with one hand and taking with the other, because those vulnerable populations have become more vulnerable. At a time when groups of women, peasants, are in desperate straits after this terrible earthquake, some NGOs are having to discontinue their projects, abandoning these people in their misfortune and their misery, telling them that reconstruction will happen soon. The needs are upstream and downstream at the same time. There must be consistency in order to be effective. The Canadian government's involvement in reconstruction must not prevent CIDA from working with local NGOs.

I will close by saying this, ladies and gentlemen. Whatever your political affiliation, your political ideology, I call on you for what you have done or what you can do to help these people, these women and children who are rotting in misery, hunger and thirst, in the heat and cold. Their suffering knows no political stripe. So I call on you, members of this committee, on behalf of all the women in the world who are standing with the women of Haiti, to make yourselves heard or to bring your expertise and strength to bear to help them relieve their inhuman suffering. The Haitian community, the community organizations, believe in all of Parliament, to once again help this small country whose population wants to continue travelling the path of human existence.

Thank you for your attention.

•(1650)

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua):** Thank you.

Now we'll hear from Keder Hyppolite.

[Translation]

**Mr. Keder Hyppolite (Executive Director, Help Services for Newcomers and Immigrants Inc.):** My dear committee members, I am here today with great interest, and how appropriately, to thank you for the opportunity you have given the Haitian community to testify on various aspects of the devastating earthquake that struck the capital of the Republic of Haiti on January 12. That was the day when Haiti didn't answer. There was no one at the other end of the line. The survivors did what they could, with what they had. May God continue to protect them. They are a faithful people.

The testimony I give you today relates to three essential components of the situation: Canadian pride, Canada's response, and hope.

On the subject of Canadian pride, I have to say that we, the members of the Haitian community, are proud to be Canadian citizens. We will still and always support the maple leaf. We live in a country where rights are protected, and that is no small thing.

Every time we have an opportunity, we ask for something for the Haitian community. We always seize the opportunity, because it is the only way and the only time we can meet with the people and structures responsible, who can allow us to move forward and make

people aware of what is happening in the Haitian community. Ottawa is close to Montreal, but Ottawa is also far away from us.

The timely response of the Canadian government was expressed in concrete actions, including the deployment of the DART team of Canadian army specialists. That was the second time the team was deployed abroad since the tsunami in Asia. This meant providing drinking water for a category of forgotten people and providing immediate medical assistance to people who had not seen a doctor for years. The government expressed its desire to be close to the people in their distress by sending francophones, people who speak French, and people of Haitian origin in whose faces the victims could see themselves reflected.

I will not repeat everything that has been said by the people who spoke before me, but I confirm their words, because they are accurate and appropriate. I will add, however, that Canada has shown that it could lift itself above the fray when it came to flying to the rescue of a friendly country in its own neighbourhood.

The last point, but not the least, is hope. Canada gives us hope. That hope must not become dimmed. Canada must continue to support the victims and their parents and children. There are people suffering because they are unable to reunite their family. And especially, there are the ones who are unable to return to a devastated country. Port-au-Prince truly is Haiti. There are people without papers, refugee claimants waiting for a hearing. We know of nearly 2,000 people who are waiting for a hearing so they can get refugee status. There are people have been under a moratorium for over three years. We are asking what is going to become of these people, most of whom have no work permits. They cannot receive public services because they are neither citizens nor permanent residents. There are students who are no longer receiving support from their parents. Their dreams have been brutally shattered. We have to make sure they are not shattered forever.

Canada cannot slow down at the point when Haitian Canadians need its help the most. Organizations that provide support for the population are no longer receiving support from CIDA, in some cases. Life has to go on during the rebuilding. The people who were receiving that aid still need it, more urgently than ever, because of the displaced persons who are swelling the population in the rural areas. No, it cannot stop there. The Canadian government must not let the work already done, that was applauded by the entire population of Canada, of any origin, be overshadowed. Still today, the Canadian public is aware of the tragic consequences of that earthquake. They are ready to act to come to the aid of the people still living in Haiti and to integrate the people who want to join their families here into Canada.

On behalf of Help Services for Newcomers and Immigrants, which I represent today and which Mr. Bien Aimé will represent in a moment, I congratulate you on this initiative and thank you again for giving the Haitian community an opportunity to speak to you again about the other important decisions Canada will have to make to improve the situation of families and young people.

I will be prepared to provide you with suggestions during the question period. But before we get there, and before Mr. Bien Aimé introduces you to the organization and the services we provide to the displaced persons who are in Montreal, you may notice that the Haitian community is very united. The people came before you today to speak with one voice, to ask for the same things.

• (1655)

We will be in constant contact, from Hamilton, which we have only learned of today, to Ottawa, and from Quebec City to Toronto. I visit the Haitian community in Canada regularly. I have had an opportunity to travel around Canada in the course of my work with immigrants and refugees. This has given me a fairly broad idea of the views of organizations that work on settlement and resettlement of people living in Canada.

If the Canadian government gives these groups the resources, they can provide services to people from other places. We firmly believe, and I am the first to have done it, that people of Haitian origin can integrate into Canada, specifically within francophone groups in the various provinces, including the Fransaskois and Franco-Ontarian communities, and on the other side of the river, with the people of Gatineau.

I am going to stop there for the moment because I want to allow my colleague to address the question of immigration and services. I can then answer any questions you may want to ask me.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua):** You have four minutes.

**Mr. Serge Bien Aimé (Senior Immigration Counsellor, Help Services for Newcomers and Immigrants Inc.):** My dear committee members, I have the very great honour this evening of presenting you with the observations of Help Services for Newcomers and Immigrants on the Canadian and Quebec sponsorship programs in the wake of the terrible earthquake that ravaged the capital of Haiti and the surrounding area.

Help Services for Newcomers and Immigrants is a multi-ethnic non-profit organization. Its primary job is to provide newcomers and immigrants with any service that will facilitate their efforts in integrating into and adapting to Canadian and Quebec society.

At present, our main service is employability development and support for newcomers who are having a lot of trouble entering the Canadian and Quebec labour market, in particular when they are looking for a job that matches their qualifications. In spite of the requirements of its SAE project, employment assistance services, since SANQI was created, on May 30, 1978, it has never abandoned its primary objective: helping visitors, students, independent immigrants, sponsored immigrants, skilled workers, seasonal workers and refugee claimants to overcome their disappointment and understand the North American situation so they can move confidently toward achieving the dreams that prompted them to leave their country of origin.

Since the terrible earthquake that ravaged Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti, and the area around it on January 12, 2010, SANQI has not known where to turn. There is increased demand for information, interviews and help filling out forms. For Quebec, there are 23 pages of forms for the program to get a Quebec selection

certificate, not to mention the federal form. SANQI has no additional staff, because we have no financial resources to enable us to hire someone to handle these cases, numerous as they are. That creates a lot of dissatisfied people who can't all get appropriate service from our organization.

With its own resources, SANQI has been able to provide reply to 215 telephone requests for information and do 47 interviews at which forms have to be completed or corrected. SANQI has been on four community radio broadcasts to explain the Canadian and Quebec programs for relatives who want to sponsor a family member. SANQI has taken part in two workshops organized by the National Council of Citizens of Haitian Origin, CONACOH. It has also taken part in several meetings with the Table de concertation au service des personnes réfugiées et immigrantes.

After analyzing the situation, SANQI determined that the sponsorship program as it is currently designed does not meet the expectations of the Haitian community in Quebec and Canada, for the following reasons. The program is intended first for people seriously affected by the earthquake; that criterion is vague. It talks about their ability to integrate, how these people are going to be able to integrate into Quebec and Canada. In terms of the financial capacity of the sponsors and co-sponsors, the financial assessment of sponsors and co-sponsors is very demanding. The five-year commitment by sponsors and co-sponsors is thought to be too long. The rule about not splitting up members of a family, even if there are some who do not come immediately, who don't want to come or who are already in another country with a family member, could have reduced the financial requirements in some cases.

Quebec's desire to help victims of the earthquake in Haiti on January 12, 2010, is laudable, but the route taken is full of thorns.

The federal government talks about issuing temporary visas for some victims to let them catch their breath in Canada, but the criteria have not been amended and the officers are inflexible. The Canadian Embassy in Haiti cannot consider issuing this kind of visa at the moment. Its capacity is undercut by the earthquake damage. It is busy finalizing the applications in the system.

• (1700)

The Canadian Embassy has opened an office in Santo Domingo. That has had a negative impact on disaster victims who don't have a cent to pay for a Dominican visa, transportation, hotels, taxis and Canadian visa fees, only to be refused on the ground that if they come to Canada they won't want to return to Haiti. And still it is family members in Canada who have to waste money they don't have, most of the time, in addition to meeting their basic needs.

Canada is obstinately maintaining its health and safety standards. At the height of the problems, applicants had to travel to Cap-Haitien in the north or Cayes in the south, at exorbitant expense, to undergo the medical examinations. In addition to that there are the difficulties involved in getting a police certificate, because of the collapse of the department of justice, the courts and the police stations. SANQI is asking, for offenders whom Canada removes, why Canada doesn't wait a little, knowing that the national penitentiary doesn't exist now and all the inmates have run off.

Why can't Canada give visitor visas to minor children of accepted refugee claimants who have filed a permanent resident application for the families? And last, why do Canada and Quebec not combine efforts to offer a flexible program for members of the Haitian community, who have been contributing at all levels to the development of their adopted country for over 60 years?

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua):** Thank you, Mr. Bien Aimé.

Our next witness will be Ms. Josette Jacques.

Welcome.

•(1705)

**Ms. Josette Jacques (Regroupement des Femmes Haïtiennes de la Montérégie):** Good evening, everyone.

I want to congratulate the members of Parliament and members of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration especially.

I also want to thank Eugénia Romain, who made it possible for me to take part in this meeting.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity I have been given this evening to talk to you about the questions, for you to hear my voice and the voices of all the people who are victims of this disaster, who are defenceless and fighting for their survival. I was not able to bring my notes, I left them in my car. I came here with a friend.

The earthquake on January 12 left us all puzzled. I do not want to repeat what others have said, but on behalf of all Haitians in the diaspora and of myself, I want to thank the entire planet, and particularly Canadians and Quebecers, for their outpouring of generosity and their understanding for the victims of the disaster in Haiti.

Since I will be called on this evening to talk about aid to the disaster victims in Haiti, I have to tell you that I am like everyone else, I heard in the media that Canada... I know that Canada was the first country to speak up after the earthquake, the next day. People have received aid, certainly.

But if we go by what people have told me, what I have heard... People talk about aid, but I think Canada could have done better. We have been hearing people talking since this testimony began. Everyone talks about immigration, which is the sensitive point, the sore point, the point that I, personally, really consider to be a farce.

People in Haiti are impatiently waiting for that aid. People in Haiti are voicing criticism. The people who are here say it is bad faith because immigration is open to everyone, even people who are rotting there, who are eating dust. People wonder what is going on.

I am a member of the Regroupement des Femmes Haïtiennes de la Montérégie and I am the president of the Centre haïtien d'action familiale, which has been providing help non-stop since 6:00 on the morning of January 13. We work in the shadow, you don't see us on television, nobody talks about us, but all the things we accomplish are huge. I can't even say that we have resources; we have none. We try to help the people who come in, from morning to night, every day, who call, who want this and want that.

The centre has had the difficult job of accompanying two Montreal city police officers to the home of a mother to tell her that her son is dead. Then, the centre, with the help of the police, was able to bring three children whose mother is in Quebec to Canada. We arrange to find decent housing for people who have been lucky enough to come here and who have no resources. We try to find them apartments for really lower than low rent.

•(1710)

We are wondering how Canada can do more. The people who are rotting in Haiti have enormous needs. They are suffering from malnutrition and from a lack of hygiene, and they are living off the land. They are housed in improvised makeshift tents most of the time. To survive, these people have to stay standing up all night when it rains, because the ground is mud. The so-called tents are made of plastic that costs a dollar at the store. It is thin and of low quality. When it rains and the wind blows, these plastic sheets tear. They have to put on clothing to protect themselves and shelter themselves.

We are wondering what Canada could do to build temporary shelters made of resistant plastic, with a roof and a door, so that people have protection. I am not telling you anything new when I say that children and women are being raped, repeatedly. People do not dare to report these acts, out of fear of reprisals. I have a sister who, in a quirk of fate, went to Haiti. She came back last week. She had gone to work with a group of Americans. She saw that in some tents there were police and soldiers with guns. She wondered whether she was in Afghanistan or Iraq. Why are the people being sent there not doing anything to provide security for people?

A lot has been said about immigration. I hope these recommendations will not fall on deaf ears. The government had promised to expedite the immigration process, but we are wondering to what extent that promise has been kept. If I go by what we see at the centre, one tenth of the people who come here do not have the resources to bring a family member here, because they have nothing.

I would like to say that the centre, which has no resources, has set up a grief workshop for people who were there and have come back, who can't sleep at night, who tremble and have horrific nightmares. People there are dehydrated. They need psychological assistance, but they have nothing. People here need help too, but one way or another the CLSCs are looking after them a little. There are people in Haiti, however, children who can't sleep at night, who have nightmares, who scream, who see things passing in front of their eyes. We wonder what can be done to improve their situation.

Before closing, I would like us to rise and observe a minute of silence in memory of all the people who disappeared in the rubble. This is undoubtedly unusual, but because I have been invited, I am entitled to ask this.

[A moment of silence observed.]

•(1715)

**Ms. Josette Jacques:** Thank you.

I would like to add my sincere apologies for leaving my notes in my car.

Thank you.

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua):** Thank you very much.

Now we'll proceed to questions and comments. We have only four minutes. I would ask for members to please keep their questions to the point and for those responding to keep their answers tight so that we can get more questions and answers in.

Thank you so much.

Mr. Karygiannis will go first.

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.):** I'll share my time with my colleague Monsieur Coderre.

I want to thank you for coming, and certainly, please accept my condolences. My prayers are with you.

When the officials from the ministry were here, they told us that in the first two months, they had allowed in about 260 people, cases, to come up. If you figure that out, if there are 260 people in the first two months, you can put that at 130 per month. And we have thousands of people to come up.

I'm wondering, Mr. Hyppolite, if you would guesstimate the amount of time it was going to take for the people who are applying...and the government is so fast-tracking, how long is it going to take to facilitate the people coming to Canada?

**Mr. Keder Hyppolite:** I know that structures are very tough to move. I think it probably takes too long. They can ease the process by saying we'll create a timeframe of, let's say, six or seven months. It's difficult.

Before the earthquake, the Canadian government had already received about 2,200 demands, and 1,500 from Quebec, so those have not proceeded yet.

Plus, for those we have now in Haiti in line waiting to come here, I cannot imagine how long it would take. I would suggest you take about a six- or seven-month timeframe and give the civil servants a chance to process the files by bringing people over here in Canada, as Mr. Jean-Gilles and Mr. DuBois said, because that would ease the process and create a special moment for people in order to deal with that issue.

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** Do you believe, realistically, sir, that in six months the backlog will be eaten up and dealt with?

**Mr. Keder Hyppolite:** The backlog will not be settled in six months, but if you have a timeframe of six months, you can have more than are asked to be treated now.

**Hon. Jim Karygiannis:** How long do you think it's going to take, realistically?

**Mr. Keder Hyppolite:** Realistically, it should not take more than one year. I know for a fact that immigration matters take a very long time, and they have to check many things. Plus, in Haiti now, you don't have security checks, and you don't have the ability to control many things, so those things can be overseen when you bring people over here. They can do that.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua):** Thank you, Mr. Karygiannis.

Mr. Coderre.

[Translation]

**Hon. Denis Coderre:** As was said earlier, we have to make sure that applications are expedited. Ms. Cantave, we are familiar with the Centre des Femmes Interculturel Claire. You help women there. The trauma experienced in terms of what is happening down there is enormous. People are telling you that they aren't able to bring their family members here and they are finding it completely impossible to get news. We have all heard the same thing. There is apparently a bureaucracy problem. The processing of applications should be expedited. The medical and security checks are also a problem. The embassy has had difficulties, but they are trying to do as much as they can.

How could we use the organizations that have expertise, both in immigration and in assistance for immigrating? I'm not talking about assistance for immigrants, but in assistance for immigrating. How can we use Immigration Canada and the representatives of the Quebec government program to make sure that the backlog is dealt with? How can we get straight to results? Have you been approached in that regard?

Ms. Cantave could answer briefly before turning it over to Mr. Hyppolite.

• (1720)

**Ms. Micheline Cantave:** Myself, I have not been approached. However, as Ms. Jacques said, all the organizations in Montreal or Quebec are involved. A grant made it possible for me to round out my year-ends, but since the disaster, the earthquake, I am seeing a lot of women who have suffered trauma, a lot of requests for housing and clothing. As well, many people are coming to see us to help them fill out forms. Because of a lack of financial resources, those people's requests are being denied. I think we should at least receive a grant so we can help those people. The workload is going up, but we can't say no. When a woman in distress comes in, even if it is 5:00 or 6:00 in the evening, I close the office door and I see her. I have no choice.

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua):** Thank you very much.

Monsieur St-Cyr.

[Translation]

**Mr. Thierry St-Cyr:** Thank you.

**Mr. Keder Hyppolite:** I would like to clarify something.

In the 1980s, there was a program for Sri Lankans. The federal government allowed community groups to support people so they could come to Canada. When the government of Quebec granted permanent residence to people who were here illegally, there was an agreement with our office to help people fill out the documents.

We can create the same kind of atmosphere by giving some responsibility to community organizations like Help Services for Newcomers and Immigrants or SANQI, the Bureau de la Communauté Chrétienne des Haïtiens de Montréal, the Maison d'Haïti or other organizations that have experience in immigration. We have 32 years' experience working in immigration. We can easily help people meet all the requirements of the process.

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua):** Thank you.

Monsieur St-Cyr.

[Translation]

**Mr. Thierry St-Cyr:** Thank you.

The members of the committee wanted to meet with you to compare your experience on the ground with what is being reported to us by immigration officers. On that point, I would like to know your comments and your own perception of three things we were told about by CIC.

First, we were told about the reopening of medical facilities that apparently happened on March 8, and that, according to CIC, would have a positive impact on the processing of applications. Do you have an opinion on that.

Concerning family groups, we were told about the possibility of using DNA tests to establish filiation when people no longer have documents in their possession. What is your perception of that, on the ground?

As well, we were told that the Haitian authorities had started issuing birth certificates, death certificates and passports again, to applicants who lost their documents in the earthquake. Are you aware of that? What is your perception of what is happening on the ground in this regard?

**Mr. Keder Hyppolite:** The Haitian government has no more passports. I was at a meeting on Monday, and the Haitian consulate in Montreal has no more passports. That is what was said by people...

**Mr. Thierry St-Cyr:** Physically, it has no more passports?

**Mr. Keder Hyppolite:** Concretely, it has no more passports to issue. People want to renew their passports in Montreal and can't do it. We got that information yesterday, not two months ago.

**Mr. Thierry St-Cyr:** What about birth certificates and death certificates?

**Mr. Keder Hyppolite:** I don't know what the situation is with birth certificates, but I know that the archives also collapsed. We have no information about birth certificates being issued. It is difficult to find documents like that in Haiti at present, so that people can come here to Canada. However, some people already had documents at the Embassy of Canada. Those documents are on computer and they can be used. That is the situation as we speak.

I am going to let Serge talk about the health program.

**Mr. Serge Bien Aimé:** In terms of death certificates, we have seen the mass graves on television, where thousands of people are being buried without identification. We don't know exactly who died. We

have to take the word of family members who say that their father or their brother or their son has disappeared.

At the height of the earthquake, there were no health certificates in Port-au-Prince. Even though things did pick up somewhat, people had to go to Cayes or Cap, in the north and south. Sometimes they didn't have money or the roads were destroyed. That caused a lot of problems. They may now be starting up gradually.

It has been said that they are starting to recover archives records, but that is mainly the case for police certificates. In Haiti, they look not only at the archives extract, but they also ask for a birth certificate validated by the government department or the archdiocese, but the archdiocese collapsed. Everything is gone, that's why it is difficult to get these certificates. It is very slow.

●(1725)

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua):** Thank you, Mr. St-Cyr. Your time is up; sorry.

Because of the time restriction here, I'm going to ask Ms. Hughes and Ms. Wong if it's okay for both of them to place their questions so that we can get the panellists to respond.

Thank you, Ms. Hughes, and thank you, Ms. Wong.

Ms. Hughes.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Carol Hughes:** I will be brief, because you have talked a lot about the reality in Haiti and the resources you have.

Obviously you do not have a lot of financial resources. Do you have access to more resources, to government funds, to help people who are here in Canada? It also seems like there is a problem in the way the funds sent to Haiti are being used. Can you also tell us, particularly with regard to women, about the way those funds should be directed? I have another question about adoptions. Does a Haitian person living in Canada have more difficulty adopting a child from Haiti?

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua):** Now we'll hear from Ms. Wong.

**Mrs. Alice Wong (Richmond, CPC):** I have two questions, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for coming to let us know more about Haiti and the community needs.

The first question is about the remark by Ms. Cantave about the funding that was cut by CIDA for the NGOs in Haiti. I want to know which organizations have been cut.

The second question is about adoption. I understand that families here would like to adopt Haitian children, but are you aware that the Haitian government has to approve first and then the provincial government here also has to give its approval? So I want to know about that situation in Haiti.



[Translation]

**Ms. Micheline Cantave:** So I will answer first. There is ROCAHD. Yes, CIDA has cut spending, the funding that it was giving in Haiti. I manage a women's centre, and I think it is very important, because the entire infrastructure, the entire base, like the NGOs that were there and worked with women, is under the rubble. So it is really very important.

At the moment, I know that ROCAHD, the Regroupement des organismes canado-haïtiens pour le développement, which was doing work on the ground, is not getting funding any more. That may answer both questions, Mrs. Hughes' question and yours. The NGOs on site, at least the recognized ones, should be getting more funding and continue to be funded because at the moment they are complaining that they are not getting any more funding supposedly because of the reconstruction. We know it isn't easy, because there was no advance notice of the earthquake, but those organizations should continue to receive money so they can continue to help people on site, as they were doing before January 12.

[English]

**Mrs. Alice Wong:** Can I know the names? We were told that we've given \$220 million—it's on the way—and \$150 million has already been given to Haiti, to the non-profit organizations, at least 20 of the international ones. If you could send me those names later, I would appreciate that, because then we can talk to CIDA.

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua):** Just on a point of order with regard to the administration of this committee, when you're sending the names, they have to be forwarded to the chair. Then we will distribute them to all the members.

• (1730)

[Translation]

**Mrs. Carol Hughes:** I was wondering whether Ms. Jacques had any comments to make.

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua):** Yes.

Madame Jacques.

[Translation]

**Ms. Josette Jacques:** Ms. Cantave's answer was perfect. I would have answered the same way as she did. Aid has in fact been cut off. Resources have been reduced, not to say simply suspended. So we are wondering how the organizations can continue to work if they have no resources. So that is basically what I wanted to say, as Ms. Cantave did when she gave her opinion on this subject.

With regard to Ms. Wong's question, we will send you that information, which I have at home. I have the names of the organizations at home. It was in my file. Ms. Cantave will look after sending it to you.

Is that okay, Ms. Cantave? Perfect.

**Mr. Keder Hyppolite:** On the question of adoptions, Haitian families can't easily adopt a child. It is becoming increasingly difficult to adopt a child in Haiti. The Haitian government does have to give its approval because when it comes to international adoption, if the country that allows adopted children to leave does not give its approval, the children can't leave. At this point, however, even here, access to adoption is not being facilitated for Haitian families even before they make an application in Haiti. That is the situation.

In terms of DNA, people who can't prove the relationship between themselves and the children whose parents they say they are, are having a lot of difficulty, and it costs between \$800 and \$1,000 for a DNA test. That is the situation.

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua):** Thank you.

First of all, thank you, Ms. Hughes and Ms. Wong, for your cooperation, given the time restriction that we have.

I'd also like to thank the witnesses. We rely heavily on the insight of Canadians, and you've certainly provided us with a lot to think about in ways to improve the system.

At this point I've been asked by Mr. Coderre to leave the floor to him—for a point of order, I believe.

**Hon. Denis Coderre:** It's a small point of order, and it's on the matter that you've just mentioned, to send names.

What I would appreciate,

[Translation]

given that we have received some good recommendations today, from the organizations here, is that you send us the papers that can be translated so all members of the committee have the benefit of them. The question of Haiti will be discussed again later, and we will still need to check on what has been done in terms of Citizenship and Immigration Canada. We will not be submitting a report to the House, but having these recommendations will help us do our job better.

So send your papers to the attention of the clerk, who will have them translated, if necessary, and will distribute them to us afterward.

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Hon. Maurizio Bevilacqua):** Thank you, Mr. Coderre. It's a point well made.

Once again, thank you so much, and have a safe trip home.

The meeting is adjourned.





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