



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

CIMM • NUMBER 026 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, March 8, 2012

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Chair

Mr. David Tilson

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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC)): We'll call the meeting to order. This is the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, meeting number 26, on Thursday, March 8, 2012. We are televised. The orders of the day are pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), a study on "Standing on Guard for Thee: Ensuring that Canada's Immigration System is Secure".

Once again that clock is wrong. It is now 3:32 p.m. Second, the issue has been resolved, so we will not be going in camera to discuss committee business.

Our first witnesses are from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. We have Sharon Chomyn, who is the director general of the international region. We have Sidney Frank. I'm sorry we have a hand-drawn nameplate for you because they were calling you Frank Sidney. Mr. Frank is the immigration program manager for New Delhi, India. It's an interesting coincidence that you're here instead of there. We appreciate you being here, the two of you.

Ms. Chomyn is going first.

Ms. Sharon Chomyn (Director General, International Region, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

My name is Sharon Chomyn, and I am the director general of the international region. I'm pleased to appear before you today to talk about the security of Canada's immigration system and the important role our visa offices play in managing access to Canada.

When CIC decision-makers review a visa application, they look at both eligibility and admissibility. Eligibility is the question of whether people will respect the conditions of their stay if a visa is given. Admissibility is the question of whether people can or cannot enter Canada for reasons related to criminality, security, or health, or for other reasons related to the part of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act that deals with inadmissibility. Now, although these two elements are often related, I will speak to eligibility first.

Mr. Chair, perhaps the most challenging types of application for officers are the temporary resident applications from close family members of Canadian citizens or permanent residents. These applicants have a compelling reason to visit, but they might not have as compelling a reason to return home once they've been here. They might have enough money to pay for a ticket to come to Canada, but the expenditure might be disproportionately high, given their overall financial situation. They might have strong family ties in their home country, but these ties might be overshadowed by the

same economic push factors that motivate their countrymen to emigrate. While their relatives in Canada support these visits in writing, they may not be aware of actual intentions. Will the visitors return or will they seek to remain here to work or study without authorization, or seek to access other benefits in Canada? In the end, the visa officer must be satisfied that the applicants will respect the conditions of their visa in order to be able to issue a visa.

In cases of refusal, applicants are informed in writing as to which of the criteria they failed to meet. We understand that some applicants who have been refused a visa feel the officer has made an error or has misunderstood their intentions or their situation. If we provided more detailed reasons to all refused applicants, it would take up valuable and limited resources, and result in much longer visa processing times for everyone. Instead we try to focus our limited resources on processing applications as quickly as possible.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, visa officers also assess admissibility. They are at the front end of the security screening process abroad, where they play an important role in safeguarding the health and security of Canadians.

I will take the next few minutes to describe their work in this regard.

[English]

These officers screen all applications based largely on their knowledge of country conditions and guidance provided by our security partners. To reach a decision, officers will weigh security and criminality considerations with other aspects of the legislation. CIC places a high value on this core service and continues to take steps to enhance screening and to maintain program integrity, while facilitating travel.

CIC has identified a number of priorities related to program integrity. Fraud presents an ongoing challenge. It undermines the integrity of Canada's immigration system, costs taxpayers money, and penalizes honest applicants by slowing down the processing of genuine applications. A number of departmental anti-fraud activities have been undertaken with the aim of preventing and detecting marriages of convenience and fraud by immigration representatives. Visa officers abroad are trained to scrutinize applications for fraud and to prevent abuse of all CIC programs.

CIC has a long tradition of responding to a range of challenges while balancing various priorities. Our programs play a critical role in facilitating family visits and supporting Canada's international competitiveness in the areas of tourism, labour mobility, and international student recruitment. We are constantly looking for ways to better leverage our resources and to improve client service. The global case management system, or GCMS, is already helping CIC move toward an increasingly centralized and integrated business model.

In keeping with Canada's commitment to improve client service for applicants, CIC is also increasing the number of visa application centres, or VACs. Client service agents at the VACs help ensure applications are complete. This helps applicants and CIC by reducing delays and refusals resulting from incomplete applications. This network of VACs will also provide the platform for biometric collection capabilities, which can help visa officers establish the identity of applicants with greater confidence at the outset. Biometrics will also protect the integrity of Canada's immigration system by helping prevent known criminals, failed refugee claimants, and deportees from using a different identity to obtain a visa.

These are just a few examples of our efforts to modernize and explore strategies to manage the immigration system. We want Canada to continue to be a destination of choice for talent, innovation, investment, and opportunity, while finding the right balance so as to protect the health, safety, and security of Canadians.

I will now let my colleague, Sid Frank from New Delhi, provide his perspective.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1540)

The Chair: Go ahead, sir. Thank you.

Mr. Sidney Frank (Immigration Program Manager, New Delhi, India, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the committee for inviting me to speak.

My name is Sidney Frank, and I am program manager of the visa office in New Delhi and area director for the South Asia region. I will talk today about challenges faced by visa offices in India in combatting fraud, and what we are doing about it.

As India's economy continues to grow at record levels, the number of genuine visitors to Canada is also increasing. Nevertheless, for those who have not benefited from this growth, there is a strong incentive to seek better economic opportunities abroad in countries such as Canada. As many do not meet our requirements for obtaining a visa, fraud and misrepresentation are endemic.

In support of temporary resident applications, we have received fraudulent bank statements, bank loans, letters of employment, letters of invitation, language test results, and letters of acceptance from Canadian schools, to name a few. Due to widespread corruption in India, authentic documentation can easily be obtained through fraud, and the collusion of officials and employers makes verifications a considerable challenge.

[*Translation*]

In the permanent resident program, common examples of fraud include misrepresentation of employment experience for economic category applicants, fraudulent arranged employment offers for federal skilled workers, marriages of convenience and the inclusion of ineligible dependents in the applications of sponsored parents.

[*English*]

Marriage fraud is highly organized and can involve the payment of as much as \$50,000. Applicants have been known to memorize an officer's interview questions and subsequently post them on Internet websites dealing with immigration to Canada.

We refused 15% of sponsored spouses during the first nine months of 2011. All officers are trained to screen applications and know how to identify fraud. The visa office in New Delhi has a dedicated anti-fraud unit, with one CBSA anti-fraud officer, and five local staff who conduct telephone verifications, document verifications, and site visits. We welcome the addition of a new anti-fraud position in Chandigarh, which we anticipate will be staffed this summer.

The anti-fraud unit in New Delhi identified a significant amount of fraud through the telephone verifications it undertook in 2011. In targeted field investigations in the Punjab in 2011, fraud was also identified in a significant number of cases of varying types, including provincial nominees.

While some of the fraud is perpetrated by applicants on their own initiative, unscrupulous consultants exploit the desire to migrate to Canada and actively dupe people into submitting applications with fraudulent documentation. The consultants commonly will submit applications with similar misrepresentation in bulk, without declaring that they are representing the applicants. The commonalities in the fraudulent documentation present clear evidence that one source is behind all the applications. But since the consultant is not declared, it is impossible to identify and trace them.

We are also combatting fraud through education and communications. In March 2010, CIC released an overseas campaign on crooked consultants that received widespread media attention in the Punjab. Canadian missions in India work with their close international partners, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States, to get the warning messages out to the community.

In spite of high levels of fraud, roughly 75% of all temporary resident visa applications submitted in New Delhi are approved. In the first nine months of 2011, about half of the visitor applicants received in Chandigarh were accepted. This is a continuous improvement since the office first opened in 2004 when the refusal rate was 38%.

In conclusion, we are hopeful that our efforts are leading to a reduction in the number of fraudulent applications we receive in India. This would lead to a welcome and continued increase in our acceptance rates.

Thank you for your time. I will be pleased to answer any questions the committee may have.

• (1545)

The Chair: Ms. Chomyn and Mr. Frank, thank you for your presentation. The committee members will have some questions.

Mr. Menegakis.

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I want to thank our witnesses for coming here again—coming back again, Ms. Chomyn.

It's interesting to hear of the challenges we face in trying to ascertain how secure each application is to approve a person to come to this country, and the process it takes. It's one thing to hear about it in our constituency offices and on the news, and talk about it around here; it's another thing to have to live with it every single day and make that pretty serious decision.

One of the things we've been discussing quite extensively in this study—we've embarked on the study of security, as you know—is the issue of biometrics. I'd like to ask you a question about that. How will biometrics help the government keep away anyone who is deemed inadmissible to Canada?

Ms. Sharon Chomyn: Biometrics has proven itself over the years since it has been implemented by some of our partner countries. It's a way of anchoring an identity by matching certain biometric information, such as a photograph, fingerprints, or an iris scan, to biographical information like name, date of birth, etc., so identity can be established the first time an individual seeks to apply for a visa or enter Canada.

If that person is issued a visa, when they appear at the port of entry determination can be made whether the person who appears is the same person who was actually issued the visa. Identification can be run against databases to check for impersonation, or to see whether the individual has actually appeared before with a different identity.

Those are a couple of examples of how the integrity of the process and the security of Canada can be protected through the use of biometrics.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: It sounds like it would be an improvement over the current system, which is fingerprinting and photo, I guess.

Do you agree with that?

Ms. Sharon Chomyn: It certainly allows information to be manipulated electronically, and to be shared across the network and accessible at many locations at the same time.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Is that accessible across our own internal network, or could we match it against some of our partners?

Ms. Sharon Chomyn: There are possibilities for sharing information. There are certain elements of information that are shared now with other countries, most notably among the Five Country Conference partners: Canada, U.S., U.K., New Zealand, and Australia.

I'm sure there are other possibilities that can be explored in the future.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: With time, yes.

I have a question on the electronic travel authorization. Can you help us by explaining how the ETA will prevent people who are inadmissible from coming to Canada? How does that help us?

Ms. Sharon Chomyn: I have to admit that I'm not fully briefed on that initiative. I do know that in other countries where it's been used, and I'd assume it would be a similar sort of process in Canada, it's a way of establishing and verifying someone's identity before they get onto an aircraft or before they arrive at a port of entry. Then, if there are some concerns, that individual can be referred to a visa office, or their file or application can be looked at in more detail. Any concerns or issues can be resolved before the individual appears at Canada's border.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Do you think it's fair to assume—and you may not be able to answer this, because as you said, you're not that familiar with this particular file—that the entry-exit will help us prevent the people who are inadmissible to Canada from entering again?

Ms. Sharon Chomyn: The more confidence an official can have in the identity of an individual in front of them—confidence in knowing who that person is, in knowing that person's background and whether there is criminality in their past—and the more accessible that information is, the more reliable it is, the better the screening that can be done and the easier it will be to prevent these individuals from appearing at a port of entry or somehow entering Canada improperly.

• (1550)

Mr. Costas Menegakis: We've heard of some media reports on cases in which a failed refugee claimant has been deported from Canada and then has re-entered Canada.

Ms. Sharon Chomyn: Yes.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: I'm wondering how that's possible, given the current system of fingerprinting.

Ms. Sharon Chomyn: An individual who appears at a port of entry in Canada is not fingerprinted. They may be fingerprinted at the time of deportation, for example, but as the system is currently built, those fingerprints aren't collected on re-entry.

As to how this has happened in the past, I'm not engaged in that kind of activity, so I don't know all of the details, but I do know that people have used photo-substituted passports, for example, and appeared at a port of entry with a new identity. Altered documents can be quite sophisticated in nature, and the fraud can be quite difficult to detect. Something like biometrics, especially linked to a reliable database such as might be kept by the RCMP, really increases the integrity of the system.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: That makes a lot of sense.

Do I still have some time?

The Chair: You have about a minute.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Oh, that's wonderful.

I have a few quick questions.

First, for each of the last five years, how many people have been found inadmissible to Canada before or at their entry into the country? Do you have those statistics?

Ms. Sharon Chomyn: I don't have them with me today, but I'm sure we can get those for you.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Please provide them to the clerk, if you could, so that the chair can distribute them.

On that note, for each of the last five years, how many people have been found inadmissible to Canada after they have already entered Canada? Perhaps you can give us those statistics as well.

Ms. Sharon Chomyn: Mr. Chair, I'd be happy to do that.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Davies.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you to both witnesses for coming to this committee again.

I'm going to focus on security in the temporary resident visa context.

James Bissett testified on Tuesday. He was a member of the Prime Minister's security advisory committee and a senior official in CIC some years ago. He said, and I'll quote, that security checks of people abroad, before they're issued visas, are virtually "non-existent". He also said, by the way, that virtually none of the temporary foreign workers go through security or health checks before entering Canada.

Leaving the TFWs aside, in terms of the TRVs, do you do extensive security checks on people? Let's focus on Chandigarh. Do you do extensive security checks on those people before a decision is made on their TRV? Let's talk visitor visas.

Mr. Sidney Frank: Basically, we have profiles that we work with. We look at a file, and based on our experience and knowledge, we determine which files are potentially risks and which ones aren't.

When there are potential risks, we are in contact with our partners, with CBSA and with CSIS, and we do screening of these applications to ensure that these are not individuals for whom we have concerns.

Mr. Don Davies: Do you do local criminal record checks on people who are applying for visitor visas?

Mr. Sidney Frank: Generally we would not do that for every applicant, but again, it's a question of what the risks are. If we feel that there are risks, then we will do it.

Mr. Don Davies: Okay. What percentage of people would you do a criminal record check on, as a general average?

Mr. Sidney Frank: That's not something we would normally calculate.

Mr. Don Davies: Another witness, Joe Greenholtz, a former immigration officer abroad, testified that he had recently spoken with other immigration officers who process visitor visas. And he said that in those discussions it was revealed that they spend an average of five minutes per application. Would that be approximately what one of your officers spends on a visitor visa application?

Mr. Sidney Frank: It would depend on the type of application and what, in terms of reviewing the file, the risks involved were.

I'd say, actually, that we do the straightforward ones more quickly. That enables us to concentrate our resources on the ones that are more problematic. The more problematic ones could take much more time. We might have to come back to the file again, wait for results for checks, and so on.

Mr. Don Davies: The reason I ask, of course, is that there are two major visitor visa application centres, decision centres, in India: Chandigarh and New Delhi. Chandigarh has an approval rate of 47%. I'm going by figures from the CIC website. New Delhi has an approval rate of 80%, according to these figures. These figures are not secret.

I'm going to ask some questions on this.

First, do the figures for the temporary resident visas processed abroad include visitor visas, student visas, and work visas?

Mr. Sidney Frank: It depends. I'm not sure which statistic you're looking at. We can combine them together. We can say temporary residents, meaning visitors, and have separate statistics for students and separate statistics for temporary foreign workers.

• (1555)

Mr. Don Davies: We can't tell from the sheet. I printed this from the CIC website. You can't tell if that includes them or if it's just visitor visas.

Mr. Sidney Frank: I'm not sure what sheet you're looking at, but certainly we can check that sheet and let you know.

Mr. Don Davies: Could you send that right down to the clerk of the committee, please?

Mr. Sidney Frank: Sure.

Mr. Don Davies: Thanks.

I was in Brampton last weekend. I was visiting extensively with members of the South Asian community from Punjab, in particular, and from Vancouver, and I can tell you, and I'm sure you may know this, that it is an absolute common report to hear that their relatives are being turned down for visitor visas, and they don't know why. There can't possibly be any real reason, in many cases, from their point of view.

They're people who own land. They're people who have relatives there. They're people who have bank accounts. Yet they get rejection letters, and they don't understand why.

It's happening, I must tell you, and from my point of view, far too often to be explained as just a one-off kind of situation.

What could explain an approval rate of 80% in New Delhi and an approval rate of 47%—almost half of that—in Chandigarh, in the same country?

Is there no fraud or forgery or people trying to fool the system in New Delhi, but there is in Chandigarh?

Mr. Sidney Frank: There is definitely fraud and forgery. I would have to say that in the Punjab, based on our experience, there is a greater involvement of unscrupulous consultants who mislead applicants. Sometimes we're puzzled by it too.

I can give you the example of the super visa. It is a special visa that has recently been put forward so that parents can visit their children in Canada.

Our acceptance rate in New Delhi for super visas is higher than it is in the Punjab. The main reason for the refusal of the super visa is that the children in Canada who are inviting their parents in India don't meet the low-income cut-off they would have to meet to sponsor their parents if they were going to sponsor them under the family class sponsorship for parents and grandparents.

What's interesting is that people are submitting their applications, even though it is very clear-cut. We have the notice of assessment—

Mr. Don Davies: They're getting rejected because they don't meet the income requirements in the Punjab.

Mr. Sidney Frank: That's right.

The difference between what happens in the Punjab in Chandigarh and what happens in New Delhi is that the people who don't meet the low-income cut-off are screening themselves out. They're not applying. We believe that there are consultants in the Punjab who are saying to apply anyway, it doesn't matter, don't worry, they'll get them in.

Mr. Don Davies: I understand. I have limited time. I just want to talk about super visas at the moment, actually, unless.... Could you send us the approval rates for super visas from Delhi and the Punjab? The number of applications, and the number of acceptances?

Mr. Sidney Frank: Sure.

Mr. Don Davies: Just quickly, there are no exit controls presently in Canada, so we see a profile of a young Indian, 25 years old, unmarried, doesn't own land, who applies to come to Canada, and who is turned down because he or she doesn't own land and isn't married. I take it that such a person often gets checked off as unlikely to return to India. But Canada doesn't keep any statistics on, when

those people come here, whether they leave or not, so how do you know? How do you have any basis of fact or knowledge to know that those people would or would not ever leave, when we don't keep those statistics?

Mr. Sidney Frank: Actually, we do have statistics for individuals who have made refugee claims, and statistics for individuals who arrive at the port of entry, who arrive at the airports, and are turned around by officers at the airport because the information that they've provided in their application forms doesn't match what they told the officer at the airport. We look at the applications of refugee claimants. We see that applicants have misrepresented themselves. They've misrepresented their intentions. We do have people who go to visit family members of those who make refugee claims.

Mr. Don Davies: So that's a failure of the system, isn't it?

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Davies, we're way over time.

Mr. Don Davies: They got through, you gave a visa, and then they—

The Chair: No, I'm sorry, but we can't carry on.

Go ahead, Mr. Lamoureux.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): I'd like to start off by saying that last Saturday I was at a local restaurant in Winnipeg north, and I had this gentleman come to me—as often happens—and tell me that he had some siblings in Winnipeg, and that he had a sister who's married, and they were trying to get her to be able to come over for a visit. Now, he had applied twice. Both times they were denied, and he asked me, “What do I do now? I have my sister in the Philippines who wants to be able to come to see her mom. Her mom is not in a condition to travel back to the Philippines.”

I often wonder if we are making some serious mistakes, and if we need to look at ways in which we should be allowing those families to be reunited. I look to you as a director general for immigration. Is the government or the department looking at other ways in which we could allow families to be reunited in situations such as this?

I have written letters. The last piece of advice I gave was to try keeping the husband there, and maybe she can come by herself this time. He has to appeal. You can appeal a decision.

•(1600)

Ms. Sharon Chomyn: Perhaps I can answer. There is a provision in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act now to address situations like that, and that is the temporary resident permit, which can be used to overcome a situation where an applicant is inadmissible to Canada, even if it's on the issue of bona fides—if there's a belief that their motivation to remain in Canada might be stronger than their motivation to return.

Officers who feel that there are compelling humanitarian or compassionate situations in an application that would warrant the use of this provision—

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: How often is that utilized?

Ms. Sharon Chomyn: I don't have those statistics, but certainly every officer has the capacity to refer a case to their program manager for—

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: But it has to be the local officer who refers it.

Ms. Sharon Chomyn: The officer who's handling the application, and perhaps Sid can talk about what happens in Delhi as an illustration.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Right, but who initiates the request? Because, if I get a letter and it says no, I can't say, well, now I would like to appeal it to this. Right?

Ms. Sharon Chomyn: The officers can do that themselves without having to have anyone bring it to their attention. They can find merit in the case themselves.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: But can it be initiated by a member of Parliament if someone comes to the member of Parliament and says, "Look, I've tried twice. Now what do I do?"

Can I tell that person to go and make an application for, what did you call it, a temporary...?

Ms. Sharon Chomyn: Temporary resident permit. At missions we very often receive letters from members of Parliament who lay out more detail or provide more circumstances behind the case.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: But if someone is actually rejected, and it's a family member, it's okay for them to submit, as opposed to the normal visiting visa application, that application for a temporary resident permit?

Ms. Sharon Chomyn: They could apply again for a temporary resident visa, but ask that a permit be considered.

Do you agree, Sid?

Mr. Sidney Frank: In Delhi, I have—

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: I'm actually okay with that.

I have limited time. I wanted to ask about biometrics in regards to Chandigarh. There are two big issues that I have with Chandigarh. One is the whole concept of quota. Now I believe you said in your opening remarks that it's just over 50% in terms of rejection. So there is some mild improvement, and hopefully that will continue to happen, but there's this feeling that, if you're an immigration officer there, you have to reject so many in order to move forward. That's the mindset that many people actually do have. That's there.

How many immigration officers do you have who are actually processing applications, and what kind of numbers of applicants do you get in on a daily basis in Chandigarh?

Mr. Sidney Frank: Can I speak to the first part of your question, in terms of—

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: I'm just realizing I've got very little time, but go ahead. You have a minute.

Mr. Sidney Frank: Okay. In terms of the applications process, in 2010 we received 25,521 temporary resident visas. Those are visitors —

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: In Chandigarh.

Mr. Sidney Frank: In Chandigarh. That was 1,076 workers and 12,833 students.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: How many staff do you have?

Ms. Sharon Chomyn: In Chandigarh? We'll have to come back to you with that information. Sorry.

Mr. Sidney Frank: I believe it's five Canada-based officers and one locally engaged officer.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: There is no mean or average in terms of how much time you have with one application that you could provide.

Ms. Sharon Chomyn: There is no quota. There's no minimum or maximum time. The cases are done on a case-by-case basis.

Mr. Sidney Frank: If I could add something, and I think this is important, what we look for in a visa office anywhere is to discourage people from applying who have no possibility of qualifying.

In terms of the student applications in Chandigarh, we were very successful in 2011. Overall applications went down considerably. I don't have the exact statistics, but the refusal rates went down and the acceptance rate went up. In fact we issued the same number of study permits with fewer applications received.

I regard that as a real success. It means we got the word out there: "Don't bother applying if you don't have a chance of being successful. Don't listen to these people who say you can apply and get a visa."

People pay money up front to the consultants, and the consultants don't care if you get a visa or you don't.

To give you the flavour of what it's like in Chandigarh, in the Punjab, we had an individual outside of the consulate general—on the street there—who was saying he was a Canadian visa officer and he could get people visas. He was only taking a small fee. It was a couple of hundred dollars but that was enough for him, and it was enough to dupe a hundred people, until he got caught and was sent away.

That's the climate we're working in.

• (1605)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Frank.

Mr. Leung.

Mr. Chungsen Leung (Willowdale, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to both witnesses.

It is a pleasure to see you again, Sidney Frank—in Canada this time.

There are some operative words that I picked up in Ms. Chomyn's statement, and they are "actual intention". How do you assess "actual intention"? Now I realize in determining admissibility that there's a subjective evaluation, and then obviously there's an objective one.

Could you share with us how you assess actual intention? How do we track that person once he's in this country, even though his intentions were not genuine, to make sure that he leaves?

Ms. Sharon Chomyn: I'll do my best to answer that question, Mr. Chair.

Intention is absolutely a very difficult concept. How can I say it? It's both art and science.

An officer who's processing an application will note the stated reason for a visit. The officer will take a look at the applicant's total circumstances. They'll look at their ties to their home country, ties to Canada, motivation to return, possible motivation to not return after their stated visit. They'll look at their financial circumstances. They'll take a look at their immigration history: whether they've visited Canada before, whether there were any abuses associated with previous visits. They might look to see whether there had been any issues with respect to partner countries and this individual's attempts to travel, or successes in travelling there in the past.

How do you assess intent? At the end of the day, it comes down to judgment. When we prepare visa officers for posting, first, we select them because we believe they do have a good sense of judgment, and then we spend time working with them to help them refine that judgment.

There are always quality assurance exercises that go on with admissions. Program managers follow up on decisions to make sure officers are in fact exercising good judgment. They look for consistency across decision-makers, to make sure it's not the luck of the draw as to whether or not you get a visa depending on which officer you're interacting with.

There are reference materials prepared and reports that are shared amongst officers. Officers inform themselves of the local circumstances.

All of these things come together as both art and science in assessing intent.

Mr. Chungsen Leung: So there is a profile developed for intent, then. There is that type of particular person we do admit into Canada, based on that profile.

Ms. Sharon Chomyn: I wouldn't call it a profile, because that casts a certain image to suggest that there's a recipe for it. It's a set of factors that officers take into account and try to balance in making a judgment about an individual's intentions relative to what they may have stated those intentions to be at the time of application.

I might add that 82% of applicants are actually issued visas. These are temporary resident visas. We consider most individuals to be very low-risk travellers. It's actually separating the low-risk from the not-quite-so-low-risk that's the challenge.

Mr. Chungsen Leung: Okay.

Mr. Frank, the next question has to do with fraudulent documentation. I was also recently in India, and I could see where you could easily pick up an honorary degree of any nature. For a degree of any nature, you could go into a back room and buy some really elaborately decorated ones. I understand you worked in China as well.

Comparatively speaking, when documentation comes in hand, is it not easier just to go to the source and ask if they could verify that? For example, university admissions can be verified with a Canadian university versus just a photocopy of a piece of paper that says "certified to be a true copy". I am sure there are other methods we can use to pretty well eliminate the risk of receiving fraudulent documentation.

• (1610)

Mr. Sidney Frank: Within India, the possibilities for accurate verifications vary considerably. There are some institutions, whether they're schools, public institutions, or private companies, where we can reliably go to them, we can make a call, we can send an e-mail, and we can do a verification. There are others where, unfortunately, that's not possible.

In some instances, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, there could actually be collusion with someone in an institute. Through bribery, he will issue a document to which the holder isn't entitled.

That really is the challenge for us. It's not like in Canada, where you can go to any school and you can verify the authenticity of a document that the school issued. We have to build knowledge in terms of which verifications we can rely on, and which ones we can't. Our anti-fraud unit in Delhi does that.

Mr. Chungsen Leung: The third question is for both of you.

Often to ensure that a temporary visitor or visitor returns to their country, we need to look at the security of his bond to that home country so that when he's here, he will go back.

Now, this comes to the issue of bonding. Do you think that may be a possible tool in our arsenal of security tools to ensure that the temporary visitor to Canada does return?

Ms. Sharon Chomyn: Mr. Chairman, is the question whether Canada would set up a process of accepting bonds to guarantee the veracity of the visit?

Mr. Chungsen Leung: It could be in many forms other than a financial bond.

Ms. Sharon Chomyn: I know that the model has been tried in other countries. In some cases it continues to exist, and in some cases it has been discontinued.

I'm afraid I don't have sufficient information to speak to that today.

Mr. Chungsen Leung: Okay.

That's it for time?

The Chair: Yes. Besides, I want to ask a couple of questions.

First, Canada doesn't have an exit policy. How would an exit policy affect your work?

Mr. Sidney Frank: Certainly an exit policy would tell us more effectively who remained in the country and who didn't. If we had that information, that could better inform our decision-making, and it might enable us eventually, as we gained more knowledge about who's remained in the country and who hasn't, to perhaps apply that to our decision-making.

It would be extremely helpful.

The Chair: Second, the Privacy Commissioner has claimed that a failure rate of 1% is common for biometric systems. What remedies, if any, would be available to people who are erroneously matched with biometrics?

Ms. Sharon Chomyn: I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman, we don't have the expertise to speak to biometrics, unless, Sid, you feel you can answer that question.

Mr. Sidney Frank: No.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Kellway, it's your turn.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I thank you folks for coming before the committee today. It's wonderful to have you here.

I have to tell you that the issue of temporary residence visas takes up an enormous amount of time in my constituency office, and I hear that from my colleagues as well. It's an enormously frustrating issue to deal with both for my staff and in particular for the folks who come in, quite frankly, bewildered about what happened and why they were rejected. Those frustrations I want you to know often take the form of anger. This is a critically important issue. I welcome the opportunity to pull back the curtain a bit on what happens in a visa office.

It seems that some folks who apply for the temporary residence visa get a reason for the rejection, but not all. Is there some percentage of folks who have a reason stated?

•(1615)

Mr. Sidney Frank: I'm a bit puzzled by that because we do have to put a reason in the refusal letter. There are reasons tied to the legislation. They may not provide the kind of detail that some applicants would be hoping for. We simply don't have the resources to go into great detail about why an application has been refused.

One of the more common reasons for refusals is that people don't provide us the documentation that we requested. We have very detailed application kits. Surprisingly, people don't give all of that information. Something that we've seen far too commonly is that someone will include a letter from a member of Parliament, and they will think that this letter in and of itself should guarantee them a visa when they don't provide the supporting documents.

Mr. Matthew Kellway: That's certainly one of the pressures on a member of Parliament, that often people assume it's somehow quite magic or something.

Mr. Sidney Frank: We do listen to what you have to say I can assure you.

Mr. Matthew Kellway: I'm sure you do. You probably look at those with suspicion too.

Pulling that curtain back a bit, can you tell me what the visa officers are looking for? You didn't want to call it a profile but you talk about it being more art than science, so I've got a couple of questions, and I'll ask you if you can be as brief as possible in responding. What exactly are you looking for?

Mr. Sidney Frank: When an application comes in, we look at all the information that has been provided and then we compare that to our knowledge in terms of which applicants have remained in Canada previously. So you develop an expertise about a particular country, and you know that this type of applicant commonly makes a refugee claim.

I'll get back to parents visiting their children in Canada. Long prior to the super visa, we knew, historically, that when children in Canada don't have sufficient income to sponsor their parents legally through the family class program, the incidence of refugee claims for those people is very high.

Chances are pretty good that unless there are extenuating humanitarian and compassionate factors, if the kids don't have the income we're going to refuse.

Mr. Matthew Kellway: I get the income issues. Those are the objective, quantifiable things.

Very recently I had a woman in my office who was very angry because the last time she'd applied for her mother to come over was because she was getting married in this country. As it happens, relationships don't work. They fall apart. Her rejection was on the basis that she didn't get married and the last application said that she was going to get married. Those are the kinds of things that are frustrating people considerably.

It seems to me that there's either a liberal way of instructing visa officers to look at these things or a conservative way. I can only assume from what I see in my office that visa officers are looking at these things through a deep lens of suspicion, or there's something going on internally with respect to how they get evaluated for their assessment.

So what happens to a visa officer if they get something wrong and let somebody in, and it turns out for whatever reasons they shouldn't have?

The Chair: You're way over, sir.

Mr. Matthew Kellway: I would like to get a brief answer.

The Chair: Yes, if you can get a brief answer.

Mr. Matthew Kellway: As an employer, is there some response to that visa officer, for making those kinds of mistakes?

Ms. Sharon Chomyn: If you're suggesting that perhaps the officer should be more motivated to refuse applications than to accept applications, that is not the case at all.

Mr. Matthew Kellway: I'm just wondering, not suggesting.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Sharon Chomyn: I'm sorry, I didn't mean to phrase it that way.

The Chair: Mr. Albas, welcome to the committee.

You have a whole five minutes.

• (1620)

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The whole five minutes? I'll use it wisely, I hope.

We often hear in the media, and I've heard stories as well, about people who obtain fraudulent documentation to gain entry into Canada. From my understanding, applicants are not just getting fake passports anymore. There are fake birth certificates, security checks, diplomas, and the list goes on.

Would you say that document fraud has become much more sophisticated? If so, can you give us some examples of that?

Mr. Sidney Frank: I guess it becomes more sophisticated as technology becomes more sophisticated.

My previous posting was in China, where technology is extremely important. In China, they will blend photos so that individuals can sit language tests for applicants who don't have a high level of English proficiency. This can be for permanent resident applications in the skilled-worker category, or it can be for student applications. It's highly sophisticated how they blend the photo so that when an individual comes to the testing site, and their identity is checked, the

individual who is sitting the exam looks like the individual he or she is replacing.

There is a great deal of sophistication.

Mr. Dan Albas: It's fair to say that it's getting harder to notice whether a document is genuine or not.

Mr. Sidney Frank: Yes, but we're pretty good at it, I would like to say.

Mr. Dan Albas: What is the government doing to keep up with the level of fraud that is occurring then?

Mr. Sidney Frank: We have a constant training of officers. We have an anti-fraud unit. We're finding these things out. As soon as we find them, we tell the officers. We get the word out, and we tell them what to look for. It's a challenge, but it's in some ways an exciting challenge.

Mr. Dan Albas: When reviewing files, how culturally sensitive are you concerning information such as names? A good example would be when we translate into English the name of someone who comes from a culture that doesn't use our alphabet. How secure are we that we are doing it correctly?

From your experience, can you give us some examples of when a name has been mistranslated and resulted in a security risk or a criminal gaining entry into Canada?

Ms. Sharon Chomyn: Application forms are to be filled out in either English or French.

If there are difficulties with translations, the source of that might be the applicant himself or herself and whoever assisted them with the form. Are you still collecting the Chinese script in China?

Mr. Sidney Frank: No, but we look at the passport. All passports will have an English or Western transliteration. That's the name that we use.

We always look at the passports. If somebody puts something on the application form and it doesn't match the passport, then we would have to verify that.

Mr. Dan Albas: There are no examples you can give us of someone gaining entry?

Mr. Sidney Frank: Not that I'm aware of.

Mr. Dan Albas: When someone has multiple names, which is common in many countries, is it not the case that when we miss one of the names or put the names in the wrong order, that we would not pick up on that?

Is it standardized now to offset that issue?

Mr. Sidney Frank: One of the benefits of the new global case management system is that it has a very robust search engine. It will bring up similarities and rank them according to how close they are to what you have put in.

It's extremely good at bringing up similar names. Nothing is 100% reliable, but it's pretty close.

Mr. Dan Albas: It sounds as if it's being dealt with fairly well.

Are there any other recommendations you might have concerning this area?

Ms. Sharon Chomyn: We're certainly looking forward to the introduction of biometrics to see the benefits that system will bring, in terms of protecting the security of Canada and Canadians, and the integrity of the visa system.

Mr. Dan Albas: Thank you. I believe that's it.

The Chair: Mr. Dykstra, go ahead.

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Thank you very much, Chair.

I want to go back a little to the issue of bonding. We've had a number of witnesses come forward on this. We've also had a great deal of discussion or questions from all committee members.

You mentioned, Sharon, that you had seen bonding used in countries still implementing it and countries that had decided against continuing with it. Would you mind describing, from your perspective—not a recommendation as to whether we should do it here—how other countries have been successful with it and the countries that have determined that it's not successful?

•(1625)

Ms. Sharon Chomyn: I'm sorry, Mr. Chair, I have only read that there are varying experiences with the use of bonds. I don't know the details, I'm sorry that I can't answer your question.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Sidney, have you...?

Mr. Sidney Frank: I would have to say the same thing as Ms. Chomyn.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: In any of the countries that you've worked in, have they done the reverse in terms of bonding?

Ms. Sharon Chomyn: What I had read is that the U.S. at one point had a system of bonds, but they no longer do. Why that is the case, I'm afraid I don't know.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Let me move to the issue that continues to come up here.

I'm not sure on the security side that it's about safety. It's more about interpretation of the work that we do in our offices and how we deal with those who come in and have rejection letters. Almost all of the folks that I deal with in my office who have received notice that they hadn't been approved do receive a rejection letter. Those who didn't bring it with them either have lost it or can't remember where they put it. It's not necessarily clear in terms of the specific reasons, but it does give a generalized outcome of what the investigation was about.

There's this mentioning of appeals. I think it's important to note that at any time someone can reapply.

Ms. Sharon Chomyn: That's absolutely true.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: While means for appeal may not be there, certainly means for reapplication.... In fact, that's where I've seen some of the folks who come in to my office be successful with it.

How do you view the fact that we have an over 80% approval rating for visas, and the fact that it was mentioned by the Auditor General as an issue of concern with respect to security. I guess I'm saying, are we allowing too many folks in, or are we at a threshold that we are going to meet the Auditor General's request in terms of getting more details and updating the process that we actually use?

Ms. Sharon Chomyn: I can tell you that as a department, and within individual offices, we are constantly doing program integrity reviews of the decisions, and going back over files and notes to see the basis for the decisions, to see whether decisions are being taken in a consistent matter, and to see whether the right information was being considered in coming to a conclusion and a decision being taken. In some cases, the verification is done after the fact to see whether the applicant has returned, or whether in fact they continued to remain in Canada. There are checks being done on documentation that has been submitted.

All of this gets fed back into an office and into the larger knowledge base in the department. We continually revise training materials. We inform our partners. They do the same type of revision on the reference material that they apply to us. I think there's quite a healthy substance supporting the decisions that are being made right now. The reality, I believe, is that most applicants are very genuine visitors and are low-risk cases. Where we wish to concentrate our scarce resources is on the more complex or challenging cases.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Sidney, you mentioned your experience dealing with crooked consultants. Obviously we just passed new legislation in the previous Parliament that is being implemented. How are we going to get stronger on that end? That is where, in principle, some of these issues lie, and that is, folks hearing from crooked consultants to do things that are obviously going to lead them to a rejection.

Mr. Sidney Frank: One of the ways of doing that is getting the message out in the countries where we have our visa offices to let people know that these consultants will dupe them, and working with the local authorities to have these people arrested and prosecuted. We have been doing that in the Punjab, in coordination with other countries that are part of the Five Country Conference. I think that's a very effective way in addition to having penalties for the consultants here in Canada, which we now have.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Chomyn and Mr. Frank, for making a contribution to the committee. It has been most helpful. Thank you very much.

We will suspend.

- _____ (Pause) _____
-
- (1630)

The Chair: We will reconvene.

We have two witnesses for the second hour. The first is Dr. Gulzar Cheema, who is a medical doctor and politician who has been elected to both the Manitoba and British Columbia legislatures. His responsibilities in the British Columbia government included serving as minister of state for immigration and multicultural services.

Mr. Bohbot is a lawyer practising in Montreal and is a member of an advisory committee on citizenship in the *Bureau d'immigration du Québec*. He is president of the Québec Immigration Lawyers Association.

Welcome to both of you.

Dr. Cheema, you will have up to ten minutes to make a presentation, sir. Thank you for coming.

Dr. Gulzar Cheema (As an Individual): First of all, thank you for giving me this opportunity. I know that I have ten minutes, but I think I will probably finish within five to six minutes. I'll try my best to keep it short and very specific.

The Chair: That's even better, sir.

Dr. Gulzar Cheema: I was elected twice as an MLA in Manitoba, and had the honour of serving the people of British Columbia not only as an MLA, but also as minister of state for the immigration and mental health portfolios. At present, I am a medical practitioner in Surrey, British Columbia, and I have been appointed as a designated medical practitioner for Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

Over many years of my experience in dealing with immigration matters, I have been alarmed by the number of fraudulent cases that flood our system. I must commend our current government and the Ministry of Immigration on their efforts in tackling this issue, which has affected not only our system but honest individuals seeking immigration to Canada who have been misled by unregulated ghost immigration consultants abroad.

Travelling to India over the last few years on a regular basis, I was pleased to see our Canadian officials in New Delhi, as well as, more specifically, those from the Consulate General's office in Chandigarh, working hand in hand with local authorities to crack down on

immigration fraud, as it has been a big problem in some sections of the South Asian community for many years.

Mr. Kenney's recent changes to the spousal sponsorship program are a strong message that CIC not only is aware of this issue, but is also taking swift action in resolving these matters to secure our immigration system.

We are currently spending a large amount of money on removing people who have entered Canada fraudulently. Cross-checking and working together with other governments, such as those of Australia, the U.K., and the U.S.A., will allow us to create a centralized database of people who have tried to enter this country illegally, making it easier for us to screen them initially.

I would like to focus on a few issues with regard to the security checks and medical examinations being done in some places in India.

First, you are aware of the rules for medical examinations for CIC. They are performed by the designated medical practitioners in North America and other parts of the world. The medical examiner completes the physical exam first, and then the applicant has to go through lab tests and X-rays. The medical test results that come out of our labs in Canada are reliable and are verified to be true test results for the applicant, but unfortunately in some places in India the medical test results that are being performed for an applicant from that country have the potential of being tampered with—and thus fraudulent—and may not be the true sample from that applicant.

To solve this problem, CIC should seriously consider establishing a network of a few approved labs where all the samples from the potential applicants can be gathered and analyzed independently. This will avoid a huge cost to the medical system in this country. This information should be shared with countries such as the U.K., U.S.A., and Australia, as these are the common destinations of these applicants.

Second, with regard to obtaining a police clearance certificate in India—and most specifically in Punjab—CIC should establish an independent, credible investigating office for this purpose so that the security checks of all applicants can be done properly. This is essential, because it's very easy to duplicate or produce a fraudulent document for this purpose by any applicant who has the means. For proof, I'm happy to e-mail a copy of this fake police certificate that has been used for these purposes. The cost of security checks should be passed on to the applicant.

Prevention and consistency are the key to saving cost and time, and to maintaining efficiency and accountability. All information should be shared with other countries that have the same or similar standards as Canada, such as the U.S.A., Australia, and the U.K. Since these are the main destination countries of these immigrants, CIC should work with the Indian intelligence services to ensure that everyone has the same information.

●(1635)

Third, all applicants for visitor visas, student visas, or business visas, entertainment groups, religious groups, preachers, school groups, and public officials entering our country should and must have proper security checks, like everyone else. This information must be shared with our neighbours to the south, since these groups travel across the border. To maintain the integrity of our system and keep the rules intact, there must be a zero tolerance policy for violators, whether they are applicants or sponsors. For example, people and organizations abusing our system and these rules should not be given a second chance to offend in any form.

I hope that this will be helpful, and I will answer any specific questions.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Cheema.

I'm sure there will be some questions.

[Translation]

Mr. Bohbot, you have 10 minutes.

Mr. Dan Bohbot (President, Quebec Immigration Lawyers Association (AQAADI)): Thank you very much.

I was asked to come to testify before you today on the subject of biometrics. Basically, this is an invasion of privacy. At school, we read George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and *1984*. When we read them, we told ourselves that the author was describing the situation at the time in communist countries where people's privacy was completely controlled. We told ourselves that it was terrible and we were happy to be in Canada with our freedoms, our right to privacy, our right to free speech, our capitalism and our free enterprise.

The presumption is that people are honest. In every society, the criminals are few, and they are on the society's margins. Must we change the system of applying for a temporary resident visa because of that minority of alleged criminals? Given the cost, is it worth changing the system of applying for a temporary resident visa in order to catch that minority of dishonest people? There will always be dishonest people. There will always be people like Bernie Madoff, Earl Jones and Vincent Lacroix in the world, despite all our legislation and rules and all the penalties for criminals.

Nothing leads us to believe that Canada is being invaded by waves of criminals from outside or that it is necessary to rush to put in place expensive measures such as gathering biometric data.

If it becomes mandatory to gather biometric data, what will happen if the information is not complete? What process will be in place to complete it? Who will do it and how long will it take? If the biometric information contains errors, how will a foreigner be able to have it corrected? Will he be able to lodge an appeal against

decisions that have already been made? What guarantees will our visitors have that their biometric information will be properly used? What recourse will they have in cases of abuse, of loss, of theft, or even just of a change in policy?

Citizenship and Immigration Canada's statistics show that a number of visas are issued to people who would not normally be admissible to Canada. How will biometric data change anything in those cases, for example?

The increasing amount of information involved for each application for a temporary resident visa means more work for visa officers. Where will that money come from? It probably means that it will become a lot more expensive to visit Canada.

This requirement to gather biometric information clearly targets only those countries for which a visa to visit Canada is required. The requirement to gather biometric information therefore discriminates against people from third world countries. What about the criminals from countries that do not require visas? It seems to me that the biggest fraudsters in the world come from countries where no visa to come to Canada is required.

AQAADI feels that Canada is not required to follow in the footsteps of countries like the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom, or even New Zealand. Would it not be more prudent to wait to see how effective the measures are in those countries before imposing them here?

Finally, when biometric data are kept and when some visitors one day become Canadian citizens, we will be in a situation where our government is in possession of biometric information on its own citizens.

Thank you. That is what I had to say.

●(1640)

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Weston.

[Translation]

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I found that very interesting. Thanks to both of you for joining us today.

I really liked those two books, *Animal Farm* and *1984*, even though the implications are quite shameful.

I heard the following:

[English]

“the security people have to get it right all the time, but the terrorists only have to get it right once”. I guess that would explain some of the reasons, Mr. Bohbot, for our going with biometrics.

Here are my questions.

We've heard from a previous witness—and I direct my question to my fellow British Columbian, Mr. Cheema—that because of increased provisions in the consulates in India, the officials believe that many people who might have otherwise been tempted to apply are not applying, so they're screening themselves out. We are in fact proceeding in a cost-effective way.

My question to you, Mr. Cheema, is this. If medical screening is improved, do you think that would also discourage people who would be inadmissible, saving us costs and helping us be more effective? And how can medical screening be improved?

• (1645)

Dr. Gulzar Cheema: Thank you for asking that question.

I think medical screening on the whole is pretty good. What I'm concerned with is a practical problem. For example, if a future immigrant first has to go through a medical examination and the medical examination is done by a designated medical practitioner, and they are certified by the Government of Canada, we don't have a problem there. The problem will come when you have to go to a lab. When the lab is testing an individual for a special test, we have no guarantee that this is the same person.

For example, if I send somebody in British Columbia for a urine test or for a special blood test, I will first sign, and then the lab person signs, and then we get the information back. So it's foolproof; it's totally proven. No one who can tamper with the result you had. But there is a possibility in that country, in some places—I'm not saying all around, but there is a possibility....

I think the way to avoid that possibility is when the X-rays are done. If there is any problem, they all go to New Delhi, and then they're examined properly. For the labs, if you have a collection centre that is certified, and you collect the sample and then send it to New Delhi or a special place, this can be done very effectively. It will save time. It will have more control. It will have accountability. Once people know that they cannot cheat, it will discourage the fraudulent applicants. I think that can be done.

Mr. John Weston: Mr. Cheema, you're saying the chain of evidence has to be more secure, I think, and that makes a lot of sense.

Do you see the changes you are recommending as slowing down the whole application process or making it cost more? These are some of the things Mr. Bohbot was concerned about with other provisions that we're talking about.

Dr. Gulzar Cheema: I don't think it's going to slow down the process. Actually, it will enhance the process.

For example, in Punjab now, once you go through the visa application centres, you put in your application and then they will call you if you are qualified or you are able to come to Canada, either as a visitor or as a potential immigrant.

As a potential immigrant, if you are given a specific doctor.... For example, if somebody comes to me, I have to send them for a lab test. If I believe that the lab may or may not be doing the right thing, how do we actually screen them?

It's not going to slow the process; it will enhance the process.

And costs should be transferred to the potential applicant. I don't think it's the Government of Canada's responsibility to pay the cost. It should be given to the applicant, and I don't think anybody who wants to come here—who is up front and whose medical history is good—will have any problem. So it will not cost us a huge amount of money, and I think it's very well done.

I'll give you a couple of examples. I think what happens at—

Mr. John Weston: Mr. Cheema, can I interrupt you?

Dr. Gulzar Cheema: Sure.

Mr. John Weston: Before you give examples, do you see any incursion upon the person's privacy rights, with the recommendations that you're making?

Dr. Gulzar Cheema: Absolutely not. They're going to go through tests anyway, whether you send them to place A or place B. I'm simply asking to have more accountability and more control, so that the officials will have more access.

Mr. John Weston: To me, as a fellow British Columbian, these sound like good recommendations, and I thank you for your good service to our province, sir.

Dr. Gulzar Cheema: Thank you.

Mr. John Weston: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madam Groguhé.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to our two witnesses. And welcome, Mr. Bohbot. As you indicated, AQAADI has been working in the immigration area for 20 or so years. The expertise you are contributing will likely be quite significant.

You raised a few questions about biometrics. You asked what would happen if the biometric data were incomplete and what means applicants would have at their disposal to have a decision reviewed in case of difficulty. You also brought up the question of gathering and preserving data. Previous witnesses have also brought up the current lack of recourse in the use of biometric data, a recourse which would really allow us to move forward on this. So my questions will be about that.

The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act currently in force contains important provisions that allow the authorities in charge of applying the act to protect Canadians without compromising the constitutional rights of foreigners entering Canada. Mr. Bohbot, I would like to ask you in what way would the current inadmissibility measures be insufficient and would fail to ensure national security.

•(1650)

[English]

Mr. Dan Bohbot: Currently, IRPA allows Immigration Canada to take fingerprints of all refugee claimants anyway, so they are being processed. Biodata is being kept by them and they are being screened with other countries already. So the idea of a fraud is already covered, if you wish, by the current legislation.

What we see now with the future legislation is that basically people who need to apply for a visa are the only ones targeted by biodata information. That information will be kept in the archived file.

I would think that most of those people are honest. So do we need to penalize a huge number—99%—of visa applicants for the 1% or less who may be dishonest? That's the issue. How cost-effective is it, with the limited resources that are available to the government?

[Translation]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Okay.

You also mentioned the idea that this could go counter to personal rights and freedom. I feel that idea is very important. We are also starting from the presumption that people are potential fraudsters, and not from the presumption that you mentioned, that people are by nature honest. That clearly changes the nature and the analysis of the questions.

Nowhere in the act is there a definition of what is meant by “national security”. In your view, Mr. Bohbot, what danger does that omission represent for freedom of the person?

[English]

Mr. Dan Bohbot: That's right, yes. Of course, if we make it a very large net, then it means that everybody is a security risk for the Government of Canada; even citizens are a risk for the Government of Canada. Do we all need to give biodata? That's a big issue.

The government can say that if people have nothing to hide, then they should give it. I disagree. I think people have a right to their privacy and the right to have their intimacy respected, or else we become like those we thought of as terrible in books such as *1984* or *Animal Farm* by George Orwell. I think we have to refrain from going in that direction.

Security risk is something that is very vague and general. Of course, if biodata information is kept for these people who have given this information to the government, there are then two categories of Canadian citizens: those who have given biodata information, and those who haven't, either because they were born in Canada or because they came from countries for which no visa was required in the first place. That creates discrimination between two individual people who are supposed to have equal rights.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Thank you.

My next question deals with the huge influx of foreigners. The Canadian Security Intelligence Service is responsible for preventing a huge influx of illegal aliens in our country. Do you not think that we need to strengthen the act governing our intelligence services in

order to put more tools at their disposal to gather information abroad?

•(1655)

[English]

Mr. Dan Bohbot: The purpose of CSIS is to gather information for the security risk of Canada. CSIS is really not here to provide proof, evidence, or testimony in front of the courts or to Parliament.

We're talking about very limited powers of information. Once that information is gathered and communicated to Citizenship and Immigration Canada or to the Canada Border Service Agency, then it's up to those officials to act upon that information, but it remains only information.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Thank you, Mr. Bohbot.

To finish, could you please take a few words to make some recommendations on this matter to the committee?

[English]

Mr. Dan Bohbot: My recommendations were at the end of my testimony, when I suggested waiting a few years to see how it works with Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. How cost-effective are the measures? Is it really improving the security there? Is it increasing the cost? Is it worth it?

It doesn't cost anything to wait a few months or a few years to see how they fare, and if they fare fine, if the government thinks that this is the best way, and if the government feels that there is such a security risk that we're going to be invaded by visitors who have fraudulent intentions, then of course, they have to go ahead with such biometric data.

Then again, I remind you that more than a year ago there was the underwear bomber who made an attempt in the United States. The United States already had his biodata, but could not prevent that man from boarding the plane and trying to attempt his terrorist act. Even the father of that man, who had tried to advise U.S. Immigration of his son being a dangerous man, was ignored.

There's always a risk that, even with all the biodata, it won't change the intentions of an individual who wants to commit a terrorist act. That's why I think the security risk is not necessarily at the level of biodata.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Lamoureux.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank both presenters for their presentations.

Having said that, Mr. Cheema, I have a couple of questions I would like to ask you. I thought your comments were interesting, given that, just before the two of you came before the committee, we actually had the immigration program manager from New Delhi make a presentation, and I think he picked up on both of your points, Mr. Cheema.

One of them was in regard to these anti-fraud measures that are necessary, and we learned this afternoon that there's going to be one established in Chandigarh sometime this summer, we're anticipating.

You were going to send us an e-mail. Can you explain what you were going to be sending the committee?

Dr. Gulzar Cheema: Thank you, Mr. Lamoureux.

I will e-mail this certificate, and I think everybody from your committee should examine it. It's such a fraudulent document that anybody sitting in Canada or in any part of the world could produce it very easily.

I think we need to have a standard that would meet our code of conduct in this country. If I have to get a clearance certificate in Canada, the RCMP has to go through a vigorous exercise. They have to examine my whole past. In India, especially, these kinds of certificates have been issued, and I think that has to stop.

The only way this can be stopped is if we have a system that will make sure that the investigation is done by people who are approved by the Government of Canada. The Government of Canada can work with the Government of India, or the Government of Punjab, all the intelligence services, but the final say must come from officials in Chandigarh or in New Delhi to make sure these kinds of certificates are not accepted.

I think once you have a look at this, you'll be shocked that any stamp or any certificate can be produced. I think this will prove what I've been saying, that this has to be done, and it should be for everyone. I think there are a lot of law-abiding citizens who want to visit our country, and we should welcome them, but it's our home. You can't allow somebody who has a bad record, a past record that is not acceptable.

● (1700)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Doctor, I know you've been involved in the community for many years. If you were to generalize and give your best estimate, in your opinion is the number of fraudulent documents going to the embassy on the increase, or is it stagnant? Do we have a higher percentage of people turning to fraudulent documents to support their files?

Do you have any sense of that, because I do know you have a lot of communication with Chandigarh.

Dr. Gulzar Cheema: I think overall there has been a significant improvement, but the recent action by the Department of Immigration here, and in Chandigarh and New Delhi, will be very helpful. You have to clamp down on all this illegal consulting. I think they are giving the wrong information. They are exploiting everyone, so I think there has to be an effort by both governments, and so far there has been an improvement, but we need to do more. I think it would be unfair to say that everyone is a crook. That may not be true.

I think a significant number of applicants—if you look at all the records of everyone within the community saying they just came, they didn't have to work hard, they just had a document, and it was done very quickly.

There must be clear-cut guidelines. The message now, through the media and through the Government of Canada working with the governments of Punjab and New Delhi, is very effective.

I must say that Mr. Kenney has done a very effective job conveying the message that fraud is not acceptable, especially by making a bold statement about marriage fraud. That should have ended a long time ago. It's about time the government said that's not acceptable.

Immigration is not open to make money. Our system is to come here, and work here, and build this country.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Am I running out of time?

The Chair: I don't think you can do it in 10 seconds.

Mr. Opitz.

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Dr. Cheema, thank you, first of all, for your very kind comments about our government and in particular Minister Kenney and how he is tackling some of these very complex issues.

I would make a comment to Mr. Bohbot, however, that the use of the term or the inference drawn about Canada possibly becoming an Orwellian state, I don't think is acceptable, quite frankly.

My parents came from places where they faced down two totalitarian regimes in terms of Stalinist communism and Nazi Germany where Orwell got his material. I spent most of my life in uniform preventing that from happening in our country. I don't think we're going to go there.

I think we do have a right in this country to defend our security with biometric and other data, and make sure we are a fair, open, and welcoming country. My parents came here after World War II because they could go nowhere else, and Canada provided us a home.

However, that doesn't mean that we need to be naive, because by your statistics, if we welcomed 254,000 people last year on average, as we have for the last several years, then 254 of them are problematic, if you use that one percentage. As my colleague Mr. Weston pointed out quite clearly, sometimes it just takes that one bad guy to get through that's problematic.

I think this government and our people have a right to make sure that biometric data is in place to prevent those kinds of occurrences, because we do have a responsibility to all citizens to make sure that the safety of this country is guaranteed, and that the people who do come to this country are the people we choose to have and that we want.

I would agree that 99% of the people out there are generally good people. They're not the ones we're targeting. It's the bad ones who can certainly affect us and our way of life. As Mr. Weston rightly pointed out, it just takes one.

Dr. Cheema, you talked about the labs and their recommendations and testing. Would you recommend that lab system you described be a part of a biometric initiative?

Dr. Gulzar Cheema: No, I think that's a separate thing because the labs.... You know, the medical examination has two parts. One is the physical exam, and then the second part is the lab test and X-rays.

The lab tests are being done by labs that must be certified and they may be certified but people.... For example, if I send somebody to a specific lab, how do I know that person is the same person who is giving the urine or blood test? I think there is a chance for fraud or tampering with the results.

To make sure these things don't happen, that we don't give thugs a chance to cheat the system, we need to have a central lab or few collection places. Once you collect the blood and urine samples, they can be sent to, for example, New Delhi or Chandigarh, and those labs can be more effective and efficient, and there will be more accountability. We will know that this sample came from a specific person, the same person who is going to go to Canada.

How do we know that is true all the time now?

• (1705)

Mr. Ted Opitz: Yes, I agree.

Now on the perimeter security, I think it was you who mentioned earlier sharing the data among some of our allies, and we do that. Under the perimeter security agreement, I think that's something that is going to become more prevalent as the biometrics systems align and come online amongst all of these nations.

Would you be in agreement with the sharing of data?

Dr. Gulzar Cheema: Absolutely, but I just want to point out that what has happened....

If I have to get a security certificate, the Government of Canada says, "Mr. A, you are okay. Everything is okay with you. Your medical is good. Your history is good. Everything is good, but now we need a security certificate." The security certificate, I think, is the most important thing to prevent any potential troublemakers or lawbreakers from coming to this country. If you send a strong message that getting our security clearance is of the utmost importance, the same as with the medical examination, that will send a great message. That will send a strong message.

Right now even the potential immigrants are aware of that, that the Government of Canada is serious about making sure these things don't happen. This will not only help our country but it will also help the country where innocent people are being exploited. You have all these ghost immigration consultants, and all these so-called money-makers, and they're using everyone else to come here. So we need to make sure that we have a strong message, a clear message, and the visa officers should be given the final authority.

Personally I feel very strongly that no one, it doesn't matter who it is, should be interfering once the decision is made by the visa officer, because if we have political interference, it sends the wrong message.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Thank you very much for that. I also agree that people often don't pay enough attention to the fact that there's a lot of exploitation that happens to people in those source countries and there's a real negative impact on them, a violation of their rights, and a lot of other things that can occur to them as a result, all not good.

I've got about 45 seconds left, so I'm going to give you an opportunity to make a couple of recommendations to this committee. What would they be, sir?

Dr. Gulzar Cheema: In my opening statement, I gave two recommendations, and those are very clear. I will make sure to e-mail my presentation.

I would highly recommend that we proceed on this as soon as possible. It can be done. It's cost-effective. It's not going to cost any money to us as taxpayers, but I think we'll be doing a service to the potential immigrants, and sending a strong message that if you are honourable and you want to come here, you are most welcome. If you want to come in a deviant way, you are not welcome.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Davies.

Mr. Don Davies: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I just want to straighten out something that I think my honourable colleague, Mr. Opitz, just talked about. We talked about biometrics having a failure rate of 1% with fingerprinting.

Mr. Ted Opitz: No, I didn't say that.

The Chair: I said that.

Mr. Don Davies: You said that? Well, we were talking about the figure 254,000 and 1%, and Mr. Opitz used the figure 254. It's 2,500 cases.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Yes, I was just making a point, in fact. That's okay.

Go ahead.

• (1710)

Mr. Don Davies: I understand. Of course, we're talking about fingerprinting people coming in on visitor visas from countries that don't have visas. We're not talking about fingerprinting permanent residents, I don't think, at this point. I just wanted to clarify that.

Nevertheless we have more visits to Canada than 254,000 entrants per year. A failure rate of, say, 2,500 a year, if we use that figure, would mean that in four years we might have 10,000 people. Well, 1% of 254,000 is 2,500. That's 1%.

So you would have 10,000 people who may have a problem every four years, and I would say that's a pretty significant concern. I would just ask Mr. Bohbot if he has any comment on that.

In particular, do you have any idea, Mr. Bohbot, of the cost of Canada implementing a fingerprinting system for every temporary visitor to Canada?

Mr. Dan Bohbot: I'd just like to clarify that in Canada, according to the Immigration website, there are more than 920,000 visitors or renewals of visitor visas. So it's not 250,000. These are already permanent residents who came to Canada. The number is much higher. And 82% of these people have visas; about 18% have not received their visas.

On your question, I haven't seen a cost-effective assessment of what it would be to implement biodata or biometric information. I'm sorry I cannot help you with that.

Mr. Don Davies: Thank you.

I'm just going to get some numbers. If we have 920,000—

Mr. Rick Dykstra: What did you just say? I just wanted clarification. I apologize. You can have some of our time; I'm not trying to take that. If he could—

Mr. Don Davies: He didn't have any information on the costs.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Sorry?

Mr. Don Davies: He didn't have information on the costs.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: On the costs of what? Biometrics?

Mr. Don Davies: I think so. That's what he said.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Thank you. Sorry again.

Mr. Don Davies: That's okay.

I will delve into the numbers. Let's use 920,000 visitors last year. If about 80% of those require visas, that's approximately 700,000 who will require visas. That's the group we're talking about in terms of implementing fingerprints.

If we have a 1% failure rate with that, it means that 7,000 people per year are potentially inappropriately identified. That doesn't sound like a very strong, ironclad system to me, if any one of those 7,000 people might not be who he or she claims to be.

Do you have any comment on that, Mr. Bohbot?

Mr. Dan Bohbot: On the numbers, I didn't say there were problems with 1% of them. It was just an example. It was not from data that I obtained.

Mr. Don Davies: Let me just interrupt you, Mr. Bohbot. The Privacy Commissioner appeared before the committee and used the figure of biometrics having a 1% failure rate. That's where that comes from.

Mr. Dan Bohbot: All right. I understand.

Could you repeat your question? I'm sorry.

Mr. Don Davies: If we have a 1% failure rate, and there are 700,000 people, that means for the 7,000 people entering Canada a year, we can't count on their fingerprints actually confirming who they say they are. I'm just wondering if you have any comments on that as a security feature.

Mr. Dan Bohbot: I'm surprised because all these people have to come with visas, and to get their visas they have to give all sorts of information to Immigration Canada's offices and to foreign offices in Canadian high commissions abroad. So if 1% of these visitors fail to be identified properly, maybe the problem doesn't lie with the question of biodata—maybe it does. But it seems as though there might be an issue somewhere else and they might try to cover that

shortcoming through biodata information. I'm not sure about the context of your question, but that would be my response.

Mr. Don Davies: Thank you.

Dr. Cheema, in terms of health screening, I think we've received some disturbing information before this committee. The Auditor General, of course, identified serious problems in her report to Parliament, saying that we were testing abroad only for syphilis and tuberculosis. You, of course, I would imagine, do your examinations in Canada. The issue is this. How are we screening for health before people arrive in Canada?

We heard testimony from James Bissett, who was a member of the Prime Minister's security committee. He testified that there was virtually no testing for health for temporary foreign workers. We let in 185,000 of those people last year. Do you have any information about the health of those temporary foreign workers coming into Canada, and Canada's ability to screen them? You testified that you thought the medical screening was, in your words, "pretty good".

● (1715)

Dr. Gulzar Cheema: I think anyone who is coming as a student or temporary worker should go through the same screening we apply to potential immigrants. I think that's the key. Right now, the Government of Canada has special forms and we have special instructions, and those standards are pretty much the same in the U.S.A., Australia, and the U.K. So that part is good. Anybody who is coming to this country to work, study, or to visit for a long time must have medicals done, and those medicals must be done by approved medical practitioners. These people should go through the same procedure that anybody else would go through.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Cheema.

Mr. Menegakis.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and my thanks to both of our witnesses for appearing before us today and for their testimony.

I think a review of the *Hansard* will help clarify the 1% that my colleague was speaking about. In his testimony, I believe Mr. Bohbot asked why we should penalize the 99% of the people who apply and don't pose a security risk. Even if we made that 0.1%, at an entry rate of 250,000 residents, that would allow about 250 people into the country who might pose a security risk.

Mr. Don Davies: I have point of order.

The Chair: We'll see what he says.

Mr. Don Davies: Talking about the record, the comment was 1% of 250,000, and then Mr. Opitz said 254,000; 1% of 254,000 is about 2,500.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: I understand.

Mr. Don Davies: That was what I was trying to clarify.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Perhaps you didn't hear what I said.

The Chair: I'm losing control of the meeting here.

You have the floor. Start the clock.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Thank you.

I understand that, and my point—

The Chair: Don't encourage him, just carry on.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: My point is that if we assume that even 99.9% of the people do not pose any kind of a problem for Canada, that remaining 0.1% would allow about 250 permanent residents into the country per year who pose a security risk.

I was particularly taken aback by your comments, Dr. Cheema, though I must say they tend to justify the purpose of this committee in studying security. You said in your opening remarks that you were alarmed by the number of fraudulent applications. Certainly that is something that is of concern to us. We concur with you. We know there are a number of people who are trying to come into this country. One fraudulent person getting into the country is too many. Our Minister of Immigration is doing the best he can to minimize that, so is this committee and the ministry staff. Our job is to ensure that we make Canadians as secure as possible. If I may take something from the medical profession, Dr. Cheema—Maslow's hierarchy of needs—that second level is security. We want to provide security for Canadians.

What are some of the deficiencies that still exist in the measures used to identify foreign nationals who may be inadmissible either for health, safety, or security reasons?

Dr. Gulzar Cheema: Thank you for giving me this opportunity again to explain. I have two specific, very practical ideas that can be implemented without having additional costs for us.

Number one, it sometimes happens that there is a message within a community or in a country that Canada is open—you can go there, you can cheat, you can have your medical done, which may or may not be 100% on par with what is required, you can go to a lab, or maybe send somebody else there. We try our best, but we lose control because a large number of applicants apply. We want to make sure we have the applicants who want to come, who are honourable, and whose health status and security status are good. Those things can be done only if there is a strong, decisive, clear message to the countries of a region.

In my view, this has been lacking for a period of time. Now I think probably for the last couple of years, we have been seeing the result. More recently, I think some of Mr. Kenney's actions have been very effective. Some of the members of the community may be upset, but I think we are sending a strong and clear message.

There are a few other things I would like to say. I might not be able to say those things openly, but probably someone could call me and we could explain those to them. Just for my own physical well-being and within my own part of the community where I can be open and honest about it, I still need to make sure I convey a message that is in line with our values and our system. This is coming from someone who has been here for 31 years. I have worked very hard. When we see that some of the people who are coming are not on par

with our Canadian values, it just upsets us. We are part of the silent majority.

• (1720)

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Cheema.

Mr. Dykstra.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: Thank you, Chair.

It's an interesting afternoon, actually. We've gone from questioning the rejection of visas to talking about George Orwell, and now we're back to the health and well-being of those who live in other countries and want to come to Canada.

I do, in the end, have to note that Orwell did not actually have a "Ministry of Travel" in 1984. He didn't allude to what would happen if people would travel, because his basis was that everyone should stay home and not go anywhere, and that they'd be able to keep an eye on the proletariat, at least, from the objective of staying within the main four cities.

We're doing the exact opposite, actually. We want to ensure that people can come to this country and enjoy what Canada's all about, but do so with the understanding that we have a culture, we have rules, we have values, we have principles, and we have laws that need to be adhered to. So I don't think it's asking too much if, when you want to have the honour of coming to the country of Canada, there are, in fact, some prerequisites for that visit or that stay. While I appreciate you bringing the point up, I'm not even sure that Orwell was going there with respect to trying to gather information on people. That's for a more philosophical discussion, I suppose, than what we have here at committee.

I do want to thank both of you for your work and efforts on this, especially you, Dr. Cheema, for your comments about some of the actions the government has taken. You're not even our witness. You were called by one of the other parties. I appreciate the fact that you've been as forthright as you have.

I do want to just touch base on one aspect of the security side of things.

Dr. Cheema, you brought up the fact that there should be a more strident approach to take with those coming to Canada, who should be subject to further questions, or further research, or the type of research that goes into a permanent resident application. Doing that would cost us, obviously, a lot more money. It would also take ministry officials much more time to do this type of research. Let's face it—some of the concerns we have are about people trying to turn around, get a visa fairly quickly, and get into the country to go to a particular event. So while security is critical, I wondered how you might balance those two things out.

Dr. Gulzar Cheema: First of all, I don't think it should be the responsibility of the Government of Canada to pay for the security check. We should pass that cost on to someone who wants to come. I think that can be done very effectively and that won't be an additional cost to us.

The second thing is that if people want to come to our home and our country, if they have to go through a security check, so be it. I think you have to send a strong message.

In communities, this is a common saying: “You don’t have to worry. Call an MP. Call a minister of the crown. It will be done.”

I think you have to be very clear that this is a country where you have to respect our values, and when you come here, be as we are.

I think that message has to go out, and I don’t think you have to apologize to anyone.

Thank you.

• (1725)

Mr. Rick Dykstra: No problem.

Mr. Bohbot, there is one aspect I wanted to get your comment on.

Dr. Cheema spoke about health issues, and it was brought up that one of our previous witnesses mentioned that for temporary foreign workers, there really isn’t the type of health requirements that at least meet particular standards.

Mr. Davies actually pointed out, quite rightly, the Auditor General’s concern around there only being checks for two particular strains of a virus.

You didn’t comment much about that in your opening statement, but on the health side of things do you have any recommendations with respect to improving how that part of the security check takes place?

Mr. Dan Bohbot: I’ll disappoint you because I didn’t come prepared for that question. I’m sorry.

Mr. Rick Dykstra: No problem. Thank you.

The Chair: You have about three minutes.

Mr. Don Davies: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. Cheema, I understand what you’re saying about there being fraud or unscrupulous immigration consultants. Particularly, I guess, let’s focus on India. It seems to be the basis of some discussion today.

In Chandigarh, for instance, there is a rejection rate of 53% of visitor visas. That’s CIC’s own figure. I mean, literally thousands and thousands of those applications are rejected every year.

I’ve been a member of Parliament for going on four years, and I can tell you there are many applications for TRVs that are turned down, not because they think an MP can help them, and not because they think there are forged documents or that they haven’t put in documents. Actually, these are applications where they’re putting in bank statements and copies of land titles, and they have family in

India—they come from good solid families in Vancouver, where I’m from—and they’re still turned down.

With your political experience, I think you must know that as well. Surely you’re not saying that every application that’s turned down in Punjab from Chandigarh is because of forgery or fraud, are you?

Dr. Gulzar Cheema: No, absolutely not.

I think that with most individuals who want to visit their families, for example, for a wedding, a death, or a special function, the majority of them are all positive. They have no problem going back.

I’m talking about the individuals who are potential immigrants. With their medical files and how often the medical exams are done, if they have a period of one year or two years to wait, what happens within that period with their health status? If my health status is good today, how do I make sure that within one year it’s still the same thing?

I’m not saying that everyone is not abiding by the rules and the laws. I’m talking about people who are exploiting the community right here and also in Punjab.

I think it’s the responsibility of individuals like you and others to make sure we don’t send a message that the applications are being rejected because it’s the politics. I think we have to say that if you present your documents properly, and you follow the rules and you have gone back, you have not violated the rules—

Mr. Don Davies: I’m sorry. I have limited time.

Dr. Gulzar Cheema: —you’ll most likely be fine.

Mr. Don Davies: I understand. My point is just that, though. I’m seeing many, many cases, and many MPs are seeing cases, where people are putting in those applications and still getting rejected.

That’s the problem.

Dr. Gulzar Cheema: In that case I think you need to make sure you talk to the Minister of Immigration, and maybe the visa officers. Maybe they need to do more outreach.

People forget one thing: when you have 800,000 Indo-Canadians in this country, you’re going to have marriages, you’re going to have deaths, and you’re going to have functions, so you have to allow a certain amount of resources for those applications to be processed.

• (1730)

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Cheema, and Monsieur Bohbot. We appreciate your contributions in assisting the committee on this study. Thank you very much.

This meeting is adjourned.

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