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Chair

Mr. Scott Reid

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

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•(1305)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC)): Welcome to the 17th meeting of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. Today is December 15, 2011.

[*English*]

We are continuing our study on the situation in Camp Ashraf. Here today as a witness is Elham Zanjani, who was present in Camp Ashraf and who is a Canadian citizen. She is here at the invitation of the committee following up on a suggestion made by Professor Cotler a while ago.

Ms. Zanjani, I invite you to begin your presentation. I understand you're able to start the video part of the presentation whenever it fits in. After that's done, we'll go to questions from the members of the committee.

Please feel free to begin.

Ms. Elham Zanjani (As an Individual): First of all, thank you, Mr. Chairman and honourable members of the subcommittee, for having me here today to speak about the situation in Camp Ashraf.

I don't know if you've seen the videos in the past, but I have a short two-minute video that I want to show. It's the scene of the attack on me. I was injured in the attack I want to show you. The video clearly shows the situation there. After it, I can continue with my speech if you allow me to.

[*Video Presentation*]

The Chair: We have a technical problem, so I'll have you continue your testimony. I gather this is a bandwidth issue. Rather than taking up time waiting for that, we can always review the video at the appropriate time. Would that seem reasonable?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: Sure, that's no problem.

The Chair: All right, let's do that.

Ms. Elham Zanjani: Once again, I thank you.

I have not only personally witnessed the great crimes that were perpetrated by the Iraqi forces, but as you saw in the video, I was also severely wounded in the attacks.

About 4:30 on the morning of April 8, 2011, Iraqi forces entered the northern flank of Camp Ashraf. They stormed in fully equipped.

At about 7:30 I heard shooting noises, and I went to see what was going on. I rushed to see what was happening, and I noticed that Iraqi army personnel, fully equipped with tanks, Hummers, snipers, grenade launchers, and machine guns were attacking unarmed Ashraf residents. I witnessed Iraqi soldiers pointing and saying "Look over there", and then shooting people.

I was severely wounded in the attack when an Iraqi soldier threw a grenade with a grenade launcher and it exploded between my legs. It destroyed my thigh muscles from my knees to my hips in both legs. Also, as you saw in the picture, the muscles, tendons, and nerves in my left hand were torn apart. I had a wrist fracture in the left hand, left arm. The muscles of my right arm were torn apart as well, and I had three fractures in the elbow area. I still have difficulty walking and I need surgery to continue, but I can't use the left hand at all and I still need help. Despite having five operations, as I said, I still have problems and I'm waiting for further surgery.

Thirty-six unarmed residents were killed in the Ashraf attack. Eight were women. Three hundred and fifty were injured, and among the 350, 250 were directly shot at. Some were run over by Hummers and the rest were beaten.

In the 2009 attack, 11 people were killed and hundreds were wounded.

I was taken to a local hospital, but we were prohibited from receiving full care and immediate medical attention. We were not able to receive free and open medical access. We weren't allowed to go to the hospitals we wanted to go to or to see specialists. I needed to visit nerve or orthopedic specialists, but they denied me that. They did a lot of stonewalling and prevented us from going to see the doctors we wanted to see.

We asked U.S. forces to take us to Balad Hospital. This is a U.S. facility, which is near Ashraf. Before 2009 we used to get medical aid there.

My friend Saba Haftbaradaran, 28, was shot in the thigh. All she needed was blood. They didn't give it to her. Also, my friend Shahnaz Pahlavani needed oxygen. They didn't give it to her.

Every time we wanted to get medical appointments, they would cancel our appointments or delay the appointments, so we had a lot of problems. This caused a lot of deaths of members in the camp. They refused to give us adequate medication and treatment, which made the recovery very difficult for many of us.

•(1310)

Before the 2009 handover of the camp to Iraqi forces, we didn't have any problem accessing medical facilities or treatments for the residents. Moreover, in that period, parliamentarians, our lawyers, families, and personalities had easy access to the camp. I was there. I personally met with a high delegation of European Parliament members who came to visit. It was headed by Mr. Alejo Vidal-Quadras. He's the EP vice-president.

After the attack, despite the fact that the European Parliament delegation and a six-member U.S. congressional delegation wanted to travel to Iraq to meet with officials and visit Camp Ashraf, they were denied access to the camp. That was the cause of the video link that I had with the U.S. Congress: they weren't allowed to come to the camp to visit.

Another issue I would like to inform you about today is the installation of 300 loudspeakers around the camp by agents of the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence, with the complete approval and the help of the Iraqi authorities. They blare profanity and threats against the residents, starting at 4:30 in the morning. It goes on until 2:30 at night, so Camp Ashraf residents have two hours of sleep. This is specifically targeted at women. They insult and, as I said, they use profanity to insult the women in the camp. It's designed so that residents lack sleep. With this kind of psychological torture, they want to affect the residents.

Today is December 15. Considering the arbitrary year-end deadline set by the Iraqi government, there is not much time to act, because the Iraqi government still emphasizes closing down the camp.

Based on the brutality and the intent to kill that I have witnessed, and considering the last two attacks—one in July 2009 and the other one in April of this year—I can assure you, as is evident in Iraq's letter to the European Parliament, that the notion of forcible relocation within Iraq is simply a preamble to annihilation of the residents outside the monitoring of the United Nations and the international community. They did what you saw, knowing the whole world would watch it, so just imagine what they're prepared to do if nobody knows and nobody sees what's going on.

Accepting such a demand is just like voluntarily going to a concentration camp for Camp Ashraf residents. That's unacceptable. It appears to me that what the Iraqi government is trying to achieve is to distract the attention of the international community in order to carry on with this ominous plan to annihilate the residents. What could be scarier than that?

To prevent such a terrifying outcome and a possible wholesale massacre, the international community has to act urgently and swiftly. The United States has more than a moral responsibility. They gave us a promise in writing that they would protect us. U.S. generals promised to protect us. This is an agreement that they made with each and every one of us in the camp. But I believe that in addition to a moral responsibility, a signed assurance must mean something if the world is going to trust the U.S.

The inaction of the United States is obvious. It appears to me that the United Nations blue helmets must be deployed to offer protection for the most vulnerable population in Ashraf.

As I said, time is really running out. The Iraqi government must be told to remove the illegal deadline and must understand that the international community will not accept another massacre. Pressure must be put on the Iraqi government to remove the deadline and allow the UNHCR to start its work and to be able to relocate the residents.

•(1315)

I really want to thank you for giving me this opportunity to tell you just a little about what went on in Ashraf. Particularly, I want to thank you for the resolution that you adopted yesterday about Camp Ashraf. I think it's a very important step, but I think more pressure must be put on the Iraqi government to completely stop the deadline and to prevent killings.

The Chair: Thank you.

I have a question about the document you held up, which you said is the agreement the Americans signed with you. Would you be willing to table that document and leave a copy with us, so we can circulate it to the members of the committee?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: Sure, no problem. It's also signed by General Miller and the multinational forces. I can give you the whole copy.

The Chair: We would very much appreciate that. We'll make sure the members get it.

The next question I have is for Mr. Sweet. You have four government members this time. Under the rules, you're allowed to have four speakers, but given the amount of time we have, there are two choices. We can either have seven speakers or questioners—four from the government and three from the opposition—with six minutes each, or we can have six rounds with seven minutes each. I just want to find out what the plan is.

•(1320)

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): I'm just filling in for David, so it doesn't matter. He can take his round.

The Chair: Okay. In that case, you have seven minutes, Mr. Sweet.

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Thank you very much.

I'll give any extra time to my colleague. I have a couple of questions; then maybe Mr. Lunney can pick it up from there.

Madam Zanjani, thank you for your testimony. We are deeply troubled by what you had to endure. We give our best wishes for your full recovery, and certainly for the use of your hand.

How long were you in the camp?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: Since 1999.

Mr. David Sweet: Since 1999, and you only left after your injury?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: Yes.

Mr. David Sweet: I noticed the white helmets that were on our screen. How large was the UN contingent when you were there?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: UNAMI had an office inside Ashraf before 2009, before it was transferred to the Iraqis. From 2009, Iraqis took over security and the UN stepped out; from that time, everything started.

Camp Ashraf went under siege. Minimum basic requirements any individual might want to buy from outside were prevented. Food was stopped from coming in. As I said, our lawyers and families and personalities were not allowed to come in from 2009, but UNAMI came to visit on a regular basis and met with us.

Mr. David Sweet: So they weren't there all the time?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: No. They were not based in Ashraf.

Mr. David Sweet: It would just be a small group of UN personnel, then. But they happened to be there when this attack occurred?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: No. They were not there at the time of the attack.

Mr. David Sweet: Who were under the helmets?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: Just Ashraf residents.

Mr. David Sweet: Okay.

Did you have a chance to see a copy of Colonel Martin's testimony when he was here?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: No, but I saw it on television. I missed the first part; I didn't see all of it.

Mr. David Sweet: Are you in agreement with him that there's imminent danger of a full-scale attack in Ashraf?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: Definitely. There's no doubt about it.

What's ironic or funny is that the United Nations and the U.S. forces received written promises from the Iraqi government before both attacks, particularly the last attack. The United States forces were near Ashraf, and they were ordered to step out. They saw the increase of Iraqi forces coming in. The UN told us that something would happen, so we told them not to leave because they were going to attack.

Based on what I went through and what I saw—definitely, I can promise you.

Mr. David Sweet: If it's done peaceably, are the residents willing to be relocated?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: Inside Iraq?

Mr. David Sweet: Inside Iraq, or any option the United Nations would be able to offer.

Ms. Elham Zanjani: Residents of Camp Ashraf are willing to be relocated to another country—for example, a country in the European Union, the United States, Canada, or anywhere—if it could be done under the UNHCR.

But the thing is that they don't want to be, and won't accept to be, relocated somewhere inside Iraq without UN blue helmet protection or United States protection. Because who is going to promise that the Iraqi government is not going to attack again?

When we were there and the Iraqi government gave promises to Britain, the United States, and the United Nations, this is what they did. They killed eight women, 36 people. They're going to be away

from the international spotlight and away from any form of security, so they will have an open hand to kill and to just annihilate the people.

Yes, the people of Ashraf accepted Mr. Stevenson's resolution to relocate the people to different countries. They're willing to do it under the conditions that the UNHCR does the question-and-answer and investigates the people, and the camp has security during this time.

● (1325)

Mr. David Sweet: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I'll give the rest of my time to Mr. Lunney.

The Chair: Mr. Lunney, you have two minutes.

Mr. James Lunney: Okay, thanks very much.

I'll just ask two quick questions, because the time is so short. And thank you for the opportunity.

Concerning the attack on April 8, 2011, as you mentioned, 36 people were killed—eight women—and 350 people wounded. Briefly, could you explain the circumstances that led up to that? How and why would Iraqi forces attack the camp under these circumstances? Could you briefly address that?

The second question is about the loudspeakers installed around the camp. You mentioned an Iranian agency. Presumably these messages are in Farsi, are they? Can you just explain to us how and when those speakers were installed, and how you understand the Iraqi cooperation with the Iranian forces to do that?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: On your first question, about the attack, they said they wanted to take the northern part of the camp. In the northern part of the camp there was our cemetery, a living area where people lived, and other small buildings. When the Iraqi government decided they wanted to take the northern part of the camp, Ashraf said we were willing to give them the land. We had no problem. We were willing to offer this to the United Nations and to let the United Nations deal with it.

But the thing is, why the killing? Why? Why did they have to storm with tanks? Why did they have to target us? I was targeted at less than five metres.

Mr. James Lunney: Thank you for that.

Could you briefly address the second question?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: Yes. About the loudspeakers, the reason I say it's from agents of the Iranian regime's intelligence ministry is because they are agents. They speak in Farsi. They threaten to kill; they threaten to hang us; they threaten to cut out our tongues. They degrade the women; they say things, for example, like "We'll come at night and get you". This is in Farsi.

Why I say it was with the help of the Iraqi forces is that we have videos. We see that they helped install the things. They came with Iraqi forces to install these loudspeakers.

The Chair: That's all the time we have for that round.

Does it look like the video is working now? It does? Okay, let's give it a try and then we'll go to Mr. Marston.

[Video Presentation]

• (1330)

Ms. Elham Zanjani: This is Shahnaz, the one I told you about, who needed oxygen, and this is the mother of two who was shot.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm assuming that was the complete video.

Ms. Elham Zanjani: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Marston, it's your turn.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): After watching that, it's difficult to find a place to start.

I want to commend you for your courage in speaking out and bringing before us such a personal thing. Most of us who are in hospitals for a variety of reasons, be it car accidents or whatever, don't have to share that experience with the world like you have.

It helps to put a real face to some of the things. Sitting in a committee of this nature, there's a tendency to think of it as being "over there someplace", so I really appreciate you bringing it here and bringing our attention to this.

I'll ask you a couple of questions.

How long was the camp under U.S. direct command? Also, you saw Colonel Martin's testimony. He described his relationship with the people there. How would you describe the relationship between that camp population and Colonel Martin?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: To answer your first question, U.S. forces were there from 2003 until 2009, until the transfer of security.

On your second question, about Colonel Martin and our relationship with U.S. forces, we had no problems. I mean, we didn't lack anything. We had food and medical aid and they came to visit the camp openly any time they wanted to.

Mr. Wayne Marston: The reason for my question is that Colonel Martin gave what I would describe as glowing testimony of the relationship between the camp people and his troops and himself. In fact, at times he called you among his best allies. I thought it was important to validate some of his testimony here from the perspective of the camp, so I certainly appreciate that.

We have spoken in this committee and there has been testimony about there being a responsibility to protect. There are all kinds of issues that can be raised about the history of the people who are in the camp. Irrespective of that history, it's very clear from the testimony we've heard, your testimony today, and the evidence of the attack on yourself and others, that the potential is definitely there for the people of this camp either to be murdered in one swoop or to be divided among those in the country, and I can understand your fears.

One of the things in the testimony and something you've alluded to is the relationship between the Iraqi government and the Iranian government. We know from experience that the Iranian secret police and others have been effective around the world in a number of situations, not just this one, but it did strike me today that your testimony is that they're right there in part of the camp. That I hadn't heard; I don't believe we've had testimony to that effect.

On the relationship between those two regimes, is it fundamentalism that's doing it? Is it a relationship that has tribal connections, like Shiite, Sunni, or whatever? How would you describe that relationship?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: First of all, I'm sure you know the Iranian regime wants to take over and have an Islamic empire. That's why it's really interested in Iraq.

You asked about Iranians in the camp. I just wanted to tell you something. When I arrived at the scene about 7:30 there were Iraqi soldiers who were dressed in black who would speak in Farsi. I went up to one of them and I said, "What are you doing? What do you want? Do you want to come in the camp? Okay, just come in, but why the gun?" He said, "Long live Iranian Ayatollah Ahmadinejad". This is perfect—understanding that they're affiliated with the Iranian regime.

• (1335)

Mr. Wayne Marston: It seems clear that's the case.

During that attack—and you say there were Iranian military people, you're assuming, or that they were dressed in black and not in uniform—did they appear in any way to be directing that attack?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: Oh, yes.

Mr. Wayne Marston: So your feeling was that the attackers were under the control of these people.

Ms. Elham Zanjani: Yes.

I don't know if you've seen it, but there was one Iraqi colonel who shot a large number of the people that day. He was one of the main people who were there who were pointing at people and saying "Look over there" and shooting.

Mr. Wayne Marston: In military exercises of that nature, that is how it happens, especially if you're dealing with an unarmed force, because he has the ability to take his time and select his targets.

This whole situation, the leadership in Iraq, reminds me of a magician. A magician will distract you with one hand and they'll pick your pocket with the other hand. It seems that they become involved with either the United Nations or the U.S. and talk very reasonable talk to them and then very shortly thereafter there's another attack. It's very troubling. The request that's coming before this committee is very reasonable: to allow the UNHCR to find a place for these people. It's very fundamental.

Under refugee laws in most places, irrespective of history, irrespective of anything else, when a group of people or an individual is under threat of death or torture, then an accommodation is sought to find refuge for them, and after that the history can be dealt with if it needs to be dealt with.

We have an extreme deadline before us. This is the last day our Parliament's going to be sitting. So at the end of this meeting, Mr. Chair, we as a committee need to consider our options, what we can do.

It must be very close to the end of my time.

The Chair: You actually have about ten seconds left.

Mr. Wayne Marston: I'll reiterate that we as a committee should decide what our response is going to be. We've had our two resolutions. Do we want to go further?

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Marston.

We'll turn now to Mr. Hiebert and then after that Professor Cotler.

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Thank you, Ms. Zanjani, for being here. I appreciate your testimony today.

We've heard from a variety of witnesses, some of whom, like Colonel Martin, have been to the camp, some of whom are familiar with the issue, and some of whom are officials, but this is the first time we've had a chance to hear from a resident of the camp.

You mentioned that you went there in 1999. Why did you go there?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: Before I answer, I want to thank you once again for having me here. It's a great honour.

I'm sure you know Ashraf is the hope and aspiration of millions of Iranians, inside Iran and outside of Iran. It's a place where people who have escaped the Iranian regime's tyranny, prisons, or torture are living right now. I went there to visit because I wanted to see what I could do to help my people out of all the torture and execution that was going on in Iran. I went to visit, and I was very happy there. I found friends and decided to stay there.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Where did you go from?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: From here.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: From here, and how did you get there?

• (1340)

Ms. Elham Zanjani: By airplane.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: To Iraq, and then you drove?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: Yes.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Okay.

We're told that there were eleven Canadians, and nine of them have left, including yourself, but there are two other Canadians who are still there. Why do you think they're still there? Why have they not left?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: I can't speak on their behalf. I don't know.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: No idea?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: I don't know.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Okay.

I'm still wondering about the attack. You've provided graphic video evidence of what happened. I just don't understand why they were attacked so indiscriminately. You mentioned conversations you had with the soldiers. Did you get any sense of an explanation? Did you get any sense of what their objective was?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: That's what we're trying to find out as well. Navi Pillay asked after the attack for investigations to be carried out in Ashraf. No investigation was undertaken. That's what we're asking

as well. Why? Why the need to come with armed forces to an unarmed residential area? Why?

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Why did they stop? Did they achieve their objective?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: I don't know. I don't know why they stopped.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Clearly, it must have been a horrific situation for the camp residents, but it's just unimaginable how humans could kill other humans who are unarmed, as you've described. It's just beyond belief.

A lot of talk has been put towards relocating members of the camp. Have you heard from others who have left the camp, either to go back to Iran or to other nations?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: I know people who have citizenship.... I don't if countries other than Canada have accepted people to go back to their.... For example, I was able to come back to my country, Canada, but I don't know about other people. As for people who wanted to go back to Iran, or want to go, there's nothing stopping them.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Have you heard of what has happened to people who have returned to Iran?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: No, I don't follow up on it.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Okay.

One of the accusations we've heard is that the members of Camp Ashraf are part of a cult, or that there's something peculiar—to be kind—about them. Some people use more derogatory terms. Why would people say that? And how would you respond to those accusations?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: A so-called cult, as to what I know, is something where everybody has to follow one command and do whatever one person says, but it's not like that in Ashraf. We're able to speak out. We're able to say what we want to say. We're free there. For example, I don't know if cults have emotions. Do they? When I still speak about my friends...I mean, I can't stop thinking about them, now that I'm here safe in Canada.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: It sounds like a tight-knit community, but it's hard to imagine it being beyond that. People are free to leave when they want?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: Yes.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Come and go?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: Yes.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: You talked about the speakers, the ones that are keeping everyone sleepless. How long have they been in place?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: It's over 20 months, I think, from after 2009. I don't know exactly the specific date, but it's been a long time.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: If residents were given the opportunity to relocate, is it important or is it essential to them to be relocated together, or are they fine being dispersed to different locations outside of Iraq?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: I don't think it's an issue if they'd be together. They just want to be safe and out. But the point is that until this process is carried out and gone through, they have to be protected. That's the issue. I was there, and since August residents who don't have citizenship in other countries have applied at the UNHCR. The UNHCR accepted and approved starting the process, but the Iraqi government hasn't given them the opportunity to come and start the process.

• (1345)

Mr. Russ Hiebert: We've heard testimony that Iraq is actually working very closely with Iran on this issue. You've talked about hearing Iranians and seeing Iranians. Can you provide us any other evidence that would suggest that Iran is either partially or more fully responsible for what is happening?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: Well, I think the two-sided agreement made by Maliki when he went to see Khamenei at the start of 2009 is the best thing that I can tell you. I don't have it in writing right now. I don't know specifically what it is. I can send it to you, but that was an agreement they made. It was from then that the pressure on Ashraf started.

The Chair: That will end this round of questions.

Professor Cotler, it's your turn.

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for being with us today.

I don't know if you had an opportunity to read or become aware of the testimony of Barbara Martin, who came before this committee. She is the director general of the Middle East and Maghreb bureau of the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. I will just read you a portion from her testimony, and then the particular part that I'd like you to maybe react to.

She said as follows, and I'm quoting from her testimony: "The Iraqi government has provided repeated assurances that Camp Ashraf residents will not be forcibly transferred to a country in which they would face persecution and that they will be humanely treated in accordance with Iraq's laws, constitution, and international obligations. The April 8 raid by Iraqi security forces that left 36 members of the camp dead last spring was deeply troubling and completely unacceptable. This episode of recent history must not be repeated."

Then she goes on to make the statement I want to ask you about. She said: "However, in the months since then the Iraqi government has cooperated with the international community to ensure that the security and humanitarian needs of the camp's residents are met. Since the announcement of the closure the Iraqi government has demonstrated its willingness to cooperate with EU states, the United States, Iraq's neighbours, and Iran, in order to resettle Ashrafi residents outside Iraq."

Would that be a correct comment, from your appreciation of the situation?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: Considering what I saw and witnessed through the Iraqi government.... I mean, we're saying that the Iraqi government, before the April attack, gave a written guarantee that

they would not attack or use force against the residents. The next morning they stormed in with their tanks and killed people.

I think that's the best thing I can say. I mean, we cannot listen to the Iraqi government say that they promise and they will do this and they will do that, while in the past two years they have killed 47 people and wounded thousands. I think it's not acceptable to just listen to something the Iraqi government is saying they're promising.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Well, have they, as the witness Barbara Martin tried to suggest, been cooperating with the international community to ensure that the security and humanitarian needs of the camp residents are met?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: Well, if we're speaking about cooperation, then they should have let the UNHCR start its process. Why all the stonewalling? Why all the problems? The Iraqi government is not cooperating.

I mean, when the international community and Mr. Ban Ki-moon are saying that we're worried about the situation, or when Canada itself, in the resolution you released, stated that you're worried about the situation.... So Maliki has to stop that deadline. We cannot.... I believe that Ashraf residents or myself.... I do not trust Maliki and his statements.

• (1350)

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Another statement that was made by Ms. Martin when she appeared before us—and again, I'm just trying to get an appreciation of what has been happening on the ground—was that "The government of Iraq has also allowed international organizations such as the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq—UNAMI—and the International Committee of the Red Cross to visit the camp on a very regular basis. In fact, UNAMI has been visiting weekly of late."

Ms. Elham Zanjani: UNAMI visits on a weekly basis, but monitoring the situation is not enough, because in 15 days we don't know what's going to happen. We don't want another attack to happen, and then just say it's unfortunate. We want something to stop it now.

I don't believe the Iraqi government is working with the international community to find a resolution, because in the international community, everyone is worried about the situation there. The Iraq government could just extend the deadline to perhaps a year. Even better than that, it could take the deadline off, so the UNHCR can start its process, and then allow UN monitors to come in and allow protection to be helped during this process by UN blue helmets and the United States, or any other country that is willing.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: As you know, al-Maliki visited recently with President Obama. As testimony before us has demonstrated, on previous occasions when high-ranking Iraqi officials visited with a high-ranking American official, such as former Secretary of Defense Mr. Gates, attacks followed thereafter. The concern expressed to us was that such an attack could now follow as a result of the visit of al-Maliki with President Obama.

Is it your understanding that any assurances were asked for or given in that meeting? What should the United States be doing at this point?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: As to what went on in that meeting, I don't know. I was hoping the U.S. President would take a firm stance to this issue. The United States promised Ashraf residents, since 2003 until final displacement, that they would protect Ashraf residents. The U.S. colonels gave it to us in writing.

What's important now is that President Obama should tell Maliki to stop the deadline, and to stop the killing. If this is not stated, he's going to have an open hand to continue with this killing at the end of the year.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Thank you very much for your testimony.

I have to go to the House, Scott; I'm sorry about this. I'll have to leave.

The Chair: All right, thank you very much. You timed that perfectly, Professor.

We turn now to Ms. Grewal.

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

And thank you, Ms. Zanjani.

Sitting here, seeing your videos and listening to your testimony of what you have gone through and experienced, I feel very badly for you.

I have read that about one-third of the residents of Camp Ashraf wish to return to Iran. Is this true?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: I don't know exactly, but if anybody wants to go back to Iran, they can.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Do you trust that if the residents return back to Iran, they will be treated fairly there?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: No, not at all.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: In your opinion, what can be done about Camp Ashraf and its residents? Are its residents in immediate danger? If so, what can the international community do to protect them?

•(1355)

Ms. Elham Zanjani: Camp Ashraf residents are in danger. Even today, as we are sitting here, we don't know what's going on at the grounds there.

But there's a lot that the international community can do. First of all, it can strongly tell Maliki's government to stop the deadline to allow the United Nations blue helmets to come in, to allow U.S. forces to have protection of the camp, and to allow the UNHCR to start its process, so they can be granted refugee status in any other country they want to go to. Secondly, the international community should tell Maliki that it's unacceptable, that the two massacres that went on in the past and another massacre are absolutely unacceptable.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Who took the video that you were showing us? Wasn't that person stopped from taking the video at that time?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: The person who took that video was Asieh Rakhshani. She was raised in the United States. She was filming the scene, and she was shot and killed.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: She was killed.

Mr. Chair, do I have some more time? I'll pass to Mr. Lunney.

The Chair: You have four minutes.

Mr. James Lunney: We have about 3,400 inhabitants still out in Camp Ashraf, is that about right—

Ms. Elham Zanjani: Yes.

Mr. James Lunney: —whose lives may be very severely imperiled if Iraq proceeds to dismantle the camp without UN supervision or some kind of agreement.

Have you had any recent contact with people still in the camp to be able to ascertain their feelings right now? Is there a sense of desperation? Are there other negotiations going on that you're aware of?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: Just what I've heard through the news.

Desperation? I think everyone is worried. Nobody doubts that another attack will happen.

Mr. James Lunney: I guess I'm going back to the situation about the cooperation you're describing as Iranian secret service, I think was the term you used, were cooperating with putting those speakers up around the camp. That's the first I've heard of this. It would seem to me this would be something the international community might take note of, and it should be easy to verify from other sources. It would certainly indicate the risk the residents are facing.

Are there published reports on this you could refer to somewhere?

Ms. Elham Zanjani: Yes. I can give you the YouTube videos of what they say, what kinds of threats they blare. I could also give you statements of many European personalities—Mr. Quadras.... Many people have opposed these loud speakers and have asked for them to be removed. I can give these to you.

Mr. James Lunney: Thank you. It would be helpful to the committee.

The Chair: Dr. Sellah.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Chair, thank you for letting me speak even though I am not a member of this committee. I am sitting in for my colleague Ève.

I want to start by praising Elham Zanjani for being brave enough to leave Iraq and come testify in person. I have been to Iraq as a doctor in the past. It was during the first Gulf War, in 1981. On the ground, I witnessed all the negative effects such a war can have on a population, unfortunately. I should point out that, in a war, with confusion reigning, there are no religious distinctions: people get carried away and fire indiscriminately out of wariness and fear.

I would say that our witness today is a survivor of that tragedy. The attacks on this camp have been referred to as a massacre several times. I am especially concerned about the human aspect. We must try to protect the people who I find are caught between a rock and a hard place. All those people are hoping for is more democracy, more freedom, but they unfortunately find themselves outmatched by the local political authorities.

I have some information that worries me, as a doctor. The following statements are not my own; they come from reports. Here is what was said:

In an April 2011 report, Amnesty International states that due to restrictions imposed by the Iraqi government, "Camp Ashraf's medical facility does not have adequate medicines or equipment". The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) believes that the prevailing camp conditions cannot ensure the treatment [...]

There was also mention of applications for refugee status, and so on. I am more concerned by the situation in that camp—if only from the humanitarian point of view—then by the reasons for its creation.

The United States had recognized the protected person status under the Geneva Convention. So why, after it leaves, is it transferring everything to the Iraqi authorities, when everybody knows that the country is unstable and its safety is not ensured? How can anyone believe that those people will be safe? This is a matter of logic.

My colleague asked why white helmets and not blue helmets were on the ground, and I am wondering the same thing. The least that should be done is ensuring those people's safety and rights. We know that, in a war, people are tortured and subjected to physical violence and rape. Oppressors will do whatever it takes to spread terror and, eventually, get people to stop fighting for their rights.

Ms. Elham, I would like to know what you expect from Canada. What do you think Canada should do to help those people?

• (1400)

Ms. Elham Zanjani: Thank you very much, madam.

I do speak French, but I have not used it in a long time. It would be easier for me to speak in English.

Ms. Djaouida Sellah: That's not a problem, as I am bilingual. [*English*]

Ms. Elham Zanjani: I thank you for your questions.

About your first question, about the medical blockade, I don't know what more I can tell you. Everything stopped from 2009. We could not go to see doctors, the ones we wanted to. People died from lack of kidney transplants, from cancer, from simple MS because of no medication, because they did not provide it to us and they just bothered us throughout the period.

There was a hospital that we offered to the Iraqis, but that hospital was not a hospital. It was more like a prison, because the doctor there, whose name was Omar Khaled, was not a doctor. Under physician's oath, he did not treat patients as patients. People would come in, for example, with cancer. Someone who was suffering from cancer they would not help. As I said, my friend's oxygen.... Oxygen is the minimum thing. So people suffered and died. Just before I came out, one of the residents died of MS. He could have had treatment.

About your second question, about what Canada can do, I really thank your committee for what you've done up to now. I think it's very heart-warming, and it's very important what you are doing. I

believe Camp Ashraf residents appreciate all your efforts. I thank you. I don't know how much I can tell you.

But there is more that we can do. As I said, time is running out. We can tell the al-Maliki government to stop. Just make him stop. Tell him that if another massacre occurs, he's responsible—because he is.

Allow the UNHCR to do its process, to meet with the people there, and allow the people to come out of the camp. Allow the people to survive.

Also, perhaps Canada can offer military support so the UNHCR can start its process. I don't know. There are a lot of things we can do, a lot of things we can suggest, but we have to take action now, because it's really too late—I mean, 15 days.

• (1405)

The Chair: Mr. Marston, do you want the floor?

Mr. Wayne Marston: No, I was not asking for the floor, other than the comment I made earlier about the committee giving some consideration to any further action we might recommend. Perhaps we could have an in camera discussion on that.

The Chair: We could do that. We'd have to dismiss our witnesses.

Let's see how we'll do this. Mr. Marston is recommending that we go in camera. That's a non-debatable motion. Is that agreeable to the members?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: All right, so we'll go in camera. We're going to need a moment.

Unfortunately, that means we have to ask everybody who is not either a member or a staffer to leave the room. There is a problem, of course. You have a computer that's yours that you'll want to take, so.... Oh, it's ours, is it? All right.

In the interest of time, I will ask the folks to step outside so we can carry on. We have to be pretty quick, because we have question period coming up.

There is one other thing I should wrap up before we go in camera.

I do want to say, Ms. Zanjani, I very much appreciate your coming here, your openness and your honesty. I can imagine how difficult it is for you to come and talk about this sort of thing, but how important it is as well. We are very grateful that you were able to do so today, and we thank you very much for what you did.

Ms. Elham Zanjani: I'll say again, I really thank you for all you've done, and I thank you for your support. It's a humanitarian issue. We have to save lives. I really thank you for your concern.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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