



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

CIMM • NUMBER 017 • 2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, March 25, 2014

—
Chair

Mr. David Tilson

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

Tuesday, March 25, 2014

• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC)): Good afternoon. I call the committee to order.

This is the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are studying the strengthening of the protection of women in our immigration system. This meeting is televised. We have three witnesses before us today.

We have Debbie Douglas, who is the executive director of the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants. Good afternoon to you, Ms. Douglas.

We have Queenie Choo, who is the chief executive officer of S.U.C.C.E.S.S., and we have Amel Belhassen, who is the representative of the women's file. Good afternoon to you.

We will let you go first, Ms. Belhassen. You have up to eight minutes to make a presentation to the committee.

[Translation]

Ms. Amel Belhassen (representative, Women's file, Table de concertation des organismes au service des personnes réfugiées et immigrantes): Thank you kindly, Mr. Chair.

Honourable members, thank you. I am delighted to be here. This is my first time appearing before a committee. Since I don't have a lot of time, I will speak directly to the issue.

I am from Montreal and I represent the Table de concertation des organismes au service des personnes réfugiées et immigrantes as well as the Réseau d'action pour l'égalité des femmes immigrées et racisées du Québec. Professionally, I teach the sociology of immigration at UQAM, so I'm a sociologist by trade.

I'd like to discuss two things today. The first has to do with the status of being an immigrant and the consequences of some precarious status-related issues on the living conditions of immigrant women. The second issue is also tied to status and concerns the economic uncertainty of immigrant and racialized women.

I will now discuss the first issue, the consequences of immigrant status, more specifically as they relate to sponsorship.

Before I begin, I should tell you that I also work on the front lines, and we are in contact with immigrant women. My remarks today are based on the experiences of women on the ground and on findings that have allowed us to give immigrant women a voice. This is the reality on the ground.

In October 2012, the federal government announced the introduction of a two-year conditional permanent residence period for certain sponsored spouses. Following that announcement, we realized that, as a result of the new immigration rule, the sponsored spouses in question could face deportation if they did not live with their spouse for the full two years of the conditional permanent residence period.

In the view of the Table de concertation des organismes au service des personnes réfugiées et immigrantes and Réseau d'action pour l'égalité des femmes immigrées et racisées du Québec, implementing a conditional permanent residence period is a step backward in Canada's immigration policy. It exacerbates inequalities in marriage relationships and makes women, in particular, more vulnerable to violence, despite the exception for spouses who are victims of abuse.

The new measure diminishes women's safety and, above all, significantly empowers the guarantor. The guarantor would have the ability to pressure the woman into doing whatever he wants, by threatening the sponsored spouse with the possibility of losing her permanent residence status at any time.

It is our view that this new rule also represents a step backward for all Canadian women and immigrant women, who are already overrepresented in the most vulnerable immigrant groups. The new sexist measures are a direct attack on them.

Although an exception was set out for spouses suffering abuse or neglect, we believe that women cannot benefit from it. Many of them are not familiar enough with Canada's laws or, specifically, the exception tied to the conditional two-year period. It is our opinion that sponsored spouses suffering from abuse, especially women, will not be able to benefit from the exception owing to a number of barriers such as the lack of access to information, the inability to speak the language and social isolation.

A number of cultural factors come into play as well. Speaking out against domestic abuse is frowned upon in certain cultures. Something of a code of silence exists and it forces women to keep quiet, out of fear that they will be shunned or rejected by their family, among other things.

For example, an arranged marriage is a situation where a woman cannot speak up about domestic abuse. If she does, she runs the risk of facing some rather negative consequences. Last year, for that matter, we observed situations involving honour crimes and the like. A forced marriage is another example of a vulnerable situation for women.

•(1535)

Women do not report abuse for many reasons. It is also important that immigrant women have the right understanding and definition of abuse. Some equate abuse with physical violence, even though we all know abuse comes in many forms, physical, psychological, economic and so forth.

That is why we believe there are other ways to deter people from committing marriage fraud, one of the objectives underlying the new measures. Steps could be taken to verify the legitimacy of a marriage or union in the home country. Different approaches could be used to verify that.

Furthermore, it is no longer good enough to judge the guarantor by the information they, themselves, supply. It is necessary to meet with them and look them in the eye. That is the person who will be sponsoring the woman. Making a determination on the sponsor should not be limited to reviewing the information in their file.

A great deal of immigrant women don't know the laws or even what it means to be sponsored. They should perhaps be advised in their home countries of the various issues related to being an immigrant and, especially, the sponsorship mechanism. In some countries, Canadian embassies frequently offer information sessions on Canada and Quebec to successful immigration applicants. It would be very beneficial to organize similar information sessions on Canada's immigration laws.

[English]

The Chair: You have one minute to wind up, Ms. Belhassen.

[Translation]

Mrs. Amel Belhassen: My second point concerns new measures in effect related to sponsorship. The spouse being sponsored will be required to speak English or French and to have job skills. The spouse also has to have a minimum level of income to be a sponsor. We believe measures of this nature hinder permanent residence under the family class. When a woman marries a husband, she marries a country. Usually women who are sponsored by their spouses do not choose to immigrate; they are following their husbands to another country. We do not see the point of requiring them to have job skills, given that people here are already struggling because their skills aren't recognized.

Thank you very much.

•(1540)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Choo, you are next, for eight minutes, please.

Ms. Queenie Choo (Chief Executive Officer, S.U.C.C.E.S.S.): Thank you very much.

Violence against women happens in all cultures and religions, in all ethnic and racial communities, at every age, in every income group. Immigrant women under the spousal sponsorship program are more vulnerable to abuses or domestic violence due to the sheer nature of the power imbalance in the relationship between them and their sponsor partners. This is compounded by their economic dependence, conceivable language and cultural barriers, controlling

attitudes, threats by their sponsor partners who keep them deliberately isolated from the outside world, withholding their passports and immigration documents, for example.

A woman's fear of her children's safety and welfare as well as her uncertainty of her PR status will keep her continuing in an abusive relationship. Furthermore, the lack of knowledge of her legal rights, community, and protective support services adds a further complication and challenge for her.

Refugees who arrive in Canada traumatized by war or oppressive governments are much less likely to report physical or sexual violence to the authorities for fear of further victimization, or even deportation. There are also cases where sponsored immigrant women are abused by extended family members of the sponsor partner.

Breaking the cycle of domestic abuse and violence is very difficult and challenging. Helping the sponsored immigrant woman to decide to walk away from the battered relationship with all the odds against her has proven to be very challenging and complicated as well.

It is important that we recognize there are some systems in place. Canada has well-intended laws to protect abused women and immigration policies to guard against sponsorship frauds; however, the application of these rules has sometimes created unintended barriers for immigrant women in abusive and domestic violence relationships. For example, as soon as the sponsor partner terminates the sponsorship when the immigrant woman leaves the marriage or tries to leave an abusive relationship, she loses her legal status to stay in Canada.

Settlement agencies and transitional house providers are seeing an increasing number of mothers without legal status across the country. There are cases where sponsorship applications are incomplete or the process has not even started and the woman's status has expired. Given that their children's primary residence is in Canada, they cannot leave the country to return to their own country of origin with their children without consent from their ex-partner. This means they must stay in Canada without status.

Our legal system, as a result, would not grant much favour to the mothers without legal status application for child custody or access decisions. Taking the child out of the country or away from an abusive partner would make the mother without legal status run the risk of being accused of child abduction. Even in situations where the children can stay with her under a protection order in a transition house, the father's access to the children in a neutral place, like a transition house, sometimes leads to violence. The women usually have no means to get a trustworthy third person to take the children to a place to enable the father's access to the children.

The YWCA has launched a national campaign requesting CIC to expedite the first stage approval of the legal status for mothers without legal status, or immigrant women leaving spousal abusive relationships who apply on humanitarian and compassionate grounds as they are living in danger. We, S.U.C.C.E.S.S., agree that this is one critical solution that opens doors to improve both the short-term and long-term livelihood of these immigrant women; however, the success rates for these applications are usually low and the whole process to receive legal status, ranging from two to three years, remains too long. Help is not happening soon enough for these immigrant women in crisis. We would like Parliament to strengthen and speed up the legal status issue for these sponsored immigrant women who find themselves in abusive relationships with their spouse.

From another angle, from the perpetrator's side, we agree that the abusive sponsor partner should carry their share of responsibility and punitive consequence of their doings.

● (1545)

The issue is the perpetrators have to see that they are the problem, not their spousal partner. The problem stops with the abuser. It is more practical to really make the perpetrators pay or owe the government for the costs of all the supportive government and social services to help the immigrant women leaving an abusive sponsorship relationship to rebuild their lives and the welfare of their children to economic independence. The government can even make this a condition in the spousal sponsorship application in the event of a spousal sponsorship breakdown in any abusive and also violent situation.

Beyond support services and legal protection for the abused women, it is important to look at the safety and custody of children, crisis intervention by transition houses, continued legal aid services and legal education, medical health services, mental health services, counselling support services, both long-term and short-term affordable housing, settlement services, access to education and language skill training, income assistance, child care services, bridging services for immigrant women—there are too many to mention in here.

I am pleased to learn that currently there are tools being developed by the BC Society of Transition Houses and the AMSSA, Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC, which is an umbrella organization for all settlement services. These will be distributed by the B.C. government ministry to train and assist settlement practitioners in a sector to become more sensitized to the issue, and to know how to address it and refer people to the appropriate resources.

Let me conclude by citing for you two real cases encountered by our agency's front-line settlement workers:

In case one, an immigrant wife from China sponsored by her spouse had been verbally abused since the beginning of the marriage. He set strict rules in the house and if she didn't do things his way, he was verbally abusive to her. She thought that he was the breadwinner and worked hard outside and that she should be able to put up with him. Later she got sick and found out she had cancer. After that the situation became worse. Even after her chemotherapy,

her treatment for cancer, when she was still very weak, she had to cook for him and clean the house.

Her parents came to visit from China to help her. They found out their daughter was abused and called the police many times when the abuse increased. But due to the language barrier, the parents of our client could not explain well to the police, and yet the husband, the abuser, who could speak English always told the police, "These are family arguments, no big deal." So the police left without any actions.

Some of the wife's friends offered help, but the husband refused most of the time. He said taking care of her was his responsibility and if she got help from outside, that meant he hadn't done a good enough job. Friends could only come to her place when the husband was working.

With other people's help, her parents informed the Ministry of Children and Family Development that the spouse beat up their three-year-old son. The ministry sent a social worker for a home visit, but again no further action was taken. Social workers in the hospital were aware of her situation. With their help she was moved to a shelter for a couple of days, but was forced to leave because the shelter could not take care of a sick person like her.

Her parents tried to draw media attention for help, but the story was published by one Chinese newspaper—

The Chair: We have to move on soon, Ms. Choo. I'm sorry. You're a minute over already.

Ms. Queenie Choo: Okay.

Then she passed away at the age of 30. She did not get the help she needed.

● (1550)

The Chair: I'm sorry. It's an important story, but we have to move on.

Ms. Douglas, it's your turn. Thank you for coming.

Ms. Debbie Douglas (Executive Director, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI)): Thank you.

Thank you for that story, Queenie. I think it underscores how front-line workers are dealing with these issues on a daily basis.

Thank you for this opportunity. I'm from the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, OCASI. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the study undertaken by this committee on strengthening protection of women in our immigration system.

OCASI is the umbrella organization for Ontario's immigrant and refugee serving sector, with more than 230 agencies across the province. A number of my member agencies provide a range of violence prevention, emergency housing for abused women, immigration support, health care, employment and skills training, among other services. You have heard from some of them and will hear in the coming weeks particularly from organizations such as the South Asian Women's Centre and the Afghan Women's Organization. We are very pleased that the work being done in Ontario will be coming to you along with our concerns.

OCASI has appeared as a witness on numerous occasions before the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration as well as before other parliamentary and Senate committees to share our expertise and experience on issues that impact upon immigrants and refugees.

We have also had the opportunity to contribute to this and other committees' studies of proposed and existing legislation through written submissions. I must apologize that you do not have my presentation for today in front of you.

In the few minutes that I have, I would like to offer some thoughts on two issues: on the proposal to impose an education and skills requirement as well as a language requirement for spousal sponsorship as a violence prevention measure; and on the two-year conditional permanent residency that both of my colleagues have also spoken about.

First, let me deal with the proposed requirements.

Distressingly, violence against women in Canada is a very real phenomenon, and it's a phenomenon that cuts across race, ethnicity, economic and social class, ability, and age. The one unifying truth, I think it's fair to say, is that violence against women is a function of patriarchy.

In its report, the Canadian Women's Foundation said that half of all women in Canada have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence since the age of 16, and that 67% of Canadians say they personally know at least one woman who has been sexually or physically assaulted.

OCASI has heard from our front-line practitioners in the immigrant and refugee serving sector that in their experience spousal violence is significantly under-reported.

The 2009 StatsCan study "Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile" noted, "Disclosing spousal violence can be difficult for many victims", and "not all incidents are reported to the police"; that "fewer than 3 in 10...victims of spousal violence reported the abuse to the police". The study noted, "Other forms of spousal abuse, such as emotional, psychological or financial abuse... are not offences chargeable under the Criminal Code and...are not included in this analysis".

As I said earlier, violence against women can occur in all communities, regardless of culture, religion, language, age, or ethnicity. It is not limited to low-income women, to unemployed women, to women with limited education, or to immigrant and refugee women.

Some women are at greater risk because of other factors, such as a lack of knowledge of their rights or their ability to pursue them, lack of access to services or resources, or because of racial and other forms of discrimination when they try to access protection or services.

The Canadian Women's Foundation further found:

Immigrant women may be more vulnerable to domestic violence due to economic dependence, language barriers, and a lack of knowledge about community resources. Newcomers who arrive in Canada traumatized by war or oppressive governments are much less likely to report physical or sexual violence to the authorities, for fear of further victimization or even deportation.

Many racialized women face barriers to reporting incidents of physical or sexual assault or seeking help. "A study with young women of colour in Toronto found that one-in-five experienced racism in the health care system which included cultural insensitivity, racial slurs, and poor quality [of] care."

That was particularly for young women of colour who had experienced sexual assault.

Let me state again that in spite of these findings, women are not more prone to violence or abuse because of a lack of education or a lack of labour market access.

• (1555)

A recent Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives report noted that 70% of Canadian women who report having experienced spousal violence are working women, and 71% have a university or college degree.

We are therefore very doubtful that imposing an education and skills requirement as well as a language requirement on a sponsor's spouse would do anything to address spousal violence and instead may become another factor that can contribute to the vulnerability of the sponsored spouse.

At present, the only requirement for marriage in most Canadian provinces and territories is an age limit, which is meant to ensure protection for minors. I want to add here that we support the proposal that is on the table to increase the age of spousal sponsorship from 16 to 18. The council absolutely welcomes that change.

We find it deeply troubling, however, that the Canadian government is now contemplating telling Canadians who they can and cannot marry by imposing language, education, and skills requirements. This is akin to the government acting as a marriage broker for Canadian spouses.

What will happen in the event that a Canadian has married overseas to a spouse who does not meet these requirements? Are they to live apart? Is the Canadian sponsor expected to divorce the spouse and find one more palatable to meet CIC requirements? While they might sound very far-fetched, these are the kinds of questions that arise when we look at imposing these kinds of requirements concerning who can be married and sponsored into our country.

Further, given that spousal violence and violence against women are issues that impact all Canadian women regardless of immigration status and place of birth, we are extremely puzzled at the proposal to address this very serious issue through an immigration lens. We believe that these proposals would not address the issue and would instead punish certain Canadians and certain immigrants.

The Chair: You have less than a minute, Ms. Douglas.

Ms. Debbie Douglas: The committee is also looking at the issue of forced marriage. I want to say that this is a very serious issue, giving cause for grave concern not only to this committee but to all departments federally, particularly Status of Women. You have heard from the witness from the South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario who did her study on forced marriage that the research shows that forced marriage is an issue that impacts many Canadians and is not restricted to a particular geographic region or culture but is an issue that we must address as a nation.

Before I conclude, there are three or four key recommendations that we want to make that we believe will address the issues my colleagues have spoken on, especially around the two-year sponsorship, which I don't have time to speak to, as well as general issues of violence against women.

The Chair: We have a problem, Ms. Douglas. You're at eight minutes and you're just getting to your summaries.

Ms. Debbie Douglas: May I have one minute?

The Chair: Okay, you have one minute.

Ms. Debbie Douglas: Thank you.

We need to invest in a national campaign to build awareness and education on preventing violence against women, including forced marriage. This would include investing in education for service providers broadly defined, who include those working with immigrants and refugees in shelters and housing, within the health care field, in law enforcement, in immigration, and in community and other social work.

We need to invest in services for women, including specialized services for aboriginal women, refugee and immigrant women, women with disabilities, and older women, so that we can support them in breaking out of isolation and in their movement to economic independence.

We need a national housing strategy that would include providing affordable housing as well as emergency and transition housing for all women who need it.

Last, we need a national child care strategy that would free up women to enter the labour market.

I look forward to our conversation.

The Chair: Thank you very much, the three of you, for your presentations.

Committee members will now have some questions.

Mr. Menegakis.

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): Thank you to all of our witnesses for the very insightful comments this afternoon.

I'm going to start by asking you a question, Ms. Choo.

In your organization, do you get requests for assistance from individuals who are forced into marriage? If you do, what steps do you tell them to take?

Ms. Queenie Choo: As an immigrant-serving organization, we offer the information that is available based on the immigration directions and rules to help them, because for many of those women language is a barrier. We help them to understand. We provide the tools that are available for them.

However, this is a very challenging and complicated issue in households. Many of them, when they return to their home, get back to their own situation again. It's a kind of self-perpetuating situation.

• (1600)

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Do you find that in those situations where they're facing forced marriage, they are aware of their rights with respect to moving forward and what they can do here in Canada?

Ms. Queenie Choo: I don't believe they all understand their rights and also their responsibilities of being in Canada. This is what we're trying to say: make sure through education sessions that we are able to help them understand what their rights are and what their responsibilities in Canada are.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: A previous witness to the committee, Chantal Desloges, mentioned that she believed the minimum age for those being sponsored should be raised from 16 to 18. Would you agree with that?

Ms. Queenie Choo: In terms of the age, as long as we make it reasonable, we make it less of a barrier to people, I think that would help the vulnerable women to get on with being economically independent.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Ms. Douglas, welcome back. Nice to see you again.

Some witnesses who have presented at our committee have discussed conditional permanent residence. We know that if women present evidence that they are in a forced or abusive marriage, the proposed condition would cease to apply in instances where there is evidence of such abuse or neglect.

What evidence can be used, in your opinion?

Ms. Debbie Douglas: That's the difficult thing in proving violence, outside of physical bruises, as well as if there are witnesses to the abuse.

What we have been told by our front-line practitioners who have been working with those women is that even when women somehow get that information and they attempt to get further information about the implications for their immigration status, many citizenship offices do not have that information, they're not aware of the exemption, so women are being given wrong and often contradictory information.

Exacerbating the problems is that the 1-800 number from CIC is often not answered by a person in real time, and so folks are not able to get the information they require so that they can be informed that, yes, if you are being abused you really can leave, that you will be exempted from the deportation order or the conditionality of the two years of not living together with your spouse. Hence, our push for education, not only of the sponsored spouse but also of those working in immigration and other service agencies so that women get accurate information in terms of the implications for their immigration status.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: One would think the first step when somebody is being abused is to call the police. The first thing that would come to mind is not to call CIC's 1-800 number when they're abused. But I understand what you're saying. I don't want to take away from what you're saying.

Have you come across examples where specific evidence they presented was rejected?

Ms. Debbie Douglas: No, we haven't had any specific examples where the evidence has been rejected. But there also isn't any intentional collection of what's happening since October 2012 with the implementation of this new regulation. I know that in Ontario, as a council, we haven't started collecting that kind of information, and I don't believe my counterparts across the country, whether it's AMSSA or La Table in Quebec, have started collecting that information either.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Let me ask a question of you, Ms. Belhassen.

Are women generally afraid to present their evidence in cases where they've been abused, do you think? They're very vulnerable. They're here. They don't know what perhaps a mainstream Canadian would know. In your opinion, do you think there's a tendency for them to be afraid to present their evidence when they are being abused?

[Translation]

Mrs. Amel Belhassen: Yes, absolutely. From our experience and our many meetings with women who have sought our help, we have learned that they are afraid to report their spouse or husband. They are afraid not just of their spouse, but also of their community, because of how it is viewed.

What's more, some women with bruises did not want to report the abuse. Others still don't understand that abuse is more than just physical, that it can be psychological as well. When they describe what is happening to them and professionals tell them they are experiencing psychological violence or abuse, they ask what that means.

During my presentation, I said it was important to keep these situations from happening, and not to wait until it's too late. These women should be advised of the rights they have here, in Canada, our values and the fact that men and women are equal here. They should be informed of all that even before they get to Canada.

Basically, as I was saying earlier, information sessions should be available to these women to explain what sponsorship is, how it works and what it requires of them and their husbands. Keep in mind

that many husbands and spouses take advantage of the sponsorship dynamic.

• (1605)

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Sandhu.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Thank you, witnesses, for being here.

First of all, I want to talk about S.U.C.C.E.S.S and the work you do in our communities. I know you're from Vancouver and you provide a wonderful service to the people in the Lower Mainland. I know a number of organizations that you work with and individuals in my constituency, so thank you very much for being here and for serving our community.

You provide interpreters. You will not only help people in our official languages, English and French, but other languages as well. You have volunteers for that. How many languages do you think you provide your services in?

Ms. Queenie Choo: We provide about 20-plus languages. We also work with the language bank to offer their services depending on the person, where they come from and the language they speak, in an attempt to make sure they understand the intent and the message and the rights and responsibilities.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: You're telling me language is not an issue to provide information to people or to interact with your clients in the Lower Mainland.

Ms. Queenie Choo: That's provided they know how to access the service and what services are available for them.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Once they do come to S.U.C.C.E.S.S., are they able to interact in the language of their choosing?

Ms. Queenie Choo: Yes.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: I'm a little confused. Somebody coming from another country would not necessarily know our laws and our regulations.

Ms. Queenie Choo: That's correct.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: That would be regardless of their language, their ability to speak English or French.

Ms. Queenie Choo: Yes.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: You're saying that language doesn't play a role in understanding our laws and all our regulations. We talked about providing more education, more resources for women who are subject to violence. Once they reach here, are we able to provide them with the information and help that's needed in their native language?

Ms. Queenie Choo: Let me put it this way. It's hard for a layman to interpret law. I want to share with you some examples. I didn't have time for the second example. Even the person who knows the language does not necessarily understand the legislation and the implication of the laws. I think it's important that as a government, as a service providing agency, we have the responsibility and obligation to help those vulnerable people not only to understand the language but also understand the implication, the responsibility, and their rights.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Is language not the primary reason they don't know the laws and what rights they have in this country?

Ms. Queenie Choo: Yes, I think we are splitting hairs. If they don't have basic language skills, they would not be able to understand even day-to-day talk. Some of them come with minimal literacy or are even at the preliterate stage in their country of origin. That means they are illiterate in the country of origin, let alone in the English language. Even though we talk to them in their native language, we have to make sure we speak at the level they can understand, let alone the laws and the regulations in Canada.

• (1610)

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Ms. Belhassen, you talked about arranged marriages. I think you may be confusing arranged marriages and forced marriages. You talked about violence committed against people who are in arranged marriages. Did you mean forced marriages, maybe? Can you clarify your understanding of arranged marriages and forced marriages?

[Translation]

Mrs. Amel Belhassen: Normally, an arranged marriage is decided by the two members of the couple. Sometimes families also intervene in arranging the marriage. In the case of forced marriage, I believe the spouse, the woman, is forced into that type of marriage. She doesn't choose it, but is forced into accepting it.

That said, we have seen situations where abuse is present in both types of marriages. As I said, it is important to prevent any situation that leads to abuse or makes it worse.

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): I will use the rest of my colleague's time.

I'd like to pick up on something Ms. Belhassen said and ask each of you to comment briefly on it.

You mentioned the importance of taking action before sponsored individuals arrive in Canada and ensuring they are provided with the information they need. You aren't the first witness to tell us that. We have previously discussed the matter of advising them of their rights and providing helpful resources should they need them or even helping them to sign their own sponsorship documents themselves in their native language.

Ms. Douglas and Ms. Choo, do you support a similar proposal to prevent abuse?

[English]

Ms. Debbie Douglas: Absolutely, the sector across the country has identified the need. We do have some services paid for through Citizenship and Immigration Canada, pre-arrival services. We think that having a discussion or having modules that include violence against women, that include information on conditional sponsorship and exemptions, that include discussions on Canadian law, especially as it has to do with gender equality and other issues of concern to women in particular, is critically important.

We have the mechanism to do it. As a sector, including Citizenship and Immigration Canada, we are looking at expanding pre-arrival services. The research is bearing out that folks who are well informed before they come here have an easier time in terms of the settlement process. Violence against women issues, as well as

other issues that have to do with women's rights and responsibilities are critical in terms of being included in any pre-arrival services that we are providing.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. McCallum.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

A voice: I would—

The Chair: She can go, but she's using your time, if you wish.

Hon. John McCallum: Then she can go some other time, because I don't have much time.

Thank you very much to all of you for being here and for all the work you do.

I'd like to start on the question of language tests for spouses.

More than 30 years ago, I married a woman from Malaysia, and I would have been shocked if the government of the day had said that in order for this woman to be my wife she had to pass a language test or an education test, or any other kind of test other than age and non-criminality. It would have struck me as Orwellian 1984-ish and definitely not the role of a government.

Ms. Douglas was very clear on this point. I just want to ask the other two witnesses, without going into it at great length, whether you agree or disagree with the language tests for spouses.

Ms. Queenie Choo: We concur with Ms. Douglas' point with regard to the language requirement.

Hon. John McCallum: Thank you.

[Translation]

What about you, Ms. Belhassen?

Mrs. Amel Belhassen: I agree as well. They need to have some knowledge of one of the two languages of the country where they will be living.

• (1615)

Hon. John McCallum: You don't agree with the others, then. You think spouses should have to pass the language test.

Mrs. Amel Belhassen: It shouldn't be a condition of sponsorship. Under the new rules, their being sponsored depends on their ability to speak one of the two languages and their having job skills. Theoretically speaking, knowing the language is important, but it shouldn't be a condition of sponsorship.

Hon. John McCallum: So it shouldn't be a condition, is that correct?

Mrs. Amel Belhassen: Precisely.

[English]

Hon. John McCallum: So you do agree that the language test should not be a condition, right? Okay.

My second question is on the issue of this two-year conditional living together rule. Madam Belhassen was very clear that she was opposed to that because she didn't think it helped with the violence problems, and so on.

I'd just like to ask the other two whether they are for or against this conditional two-year living together rule.

Ms. Debbie Douglas: I appeared before this committee and I found opportunities when appearing before this committee to raise the whole issue of that regulation. We are on the public record as being against having a two-year conditionality imposed on sponsorship.

I didn't get to it in my remarks. We believe that—

Hon. John McCallum: Okay. I'm sorry, but I don't have much time and I have another issue.

Ms. Choo.

Ms. Queenie Choo: My example actually illustrates the fact that it might not be helpful in those abusive situations under those conditions.

Hon. John McCallum: Thank you. We have unanimity on those two points.

I have a third, more positive point. I really like the idea because I think it is practically reasonable to speed up the legal process for abused mothers so they can stay here longer, so they are able to stay here without huge delays. One of you proposed that.

I'd like to ask, in my final question, whether the other two would also agree that it is a good, practical proposal. It struck me very positively.

Ms. Debbie Douglas: Yes, it makes sense to have women stay in Canada with their children as opposed to having the children separated from their mothers because their fathers happen to be Canadian, as was presented here.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Amel Belhassen: I agree and support that proposal. It's important that they stay here with their children.

[*English*]

Hon. John McCallum: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think we have unanimity on the three points.

The Chair: Mr. Leung.

Mr. Chungsen Leung (Willowdale, CPC): Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

Ms. Choo, I am very curious about your first example, the case study you gave. I will allow you perhaps two minutes to share with us your second example. I will leave the remainder of the time for questions.

Ms. Queenie Choo: The second example is an Arabic-speaking client who was sponsored by her husband. When she came, she was psychologically abused by her husband by the fact that her husband lied to her about his living conditions in Canada. He told his wife that he was living in very nice conditions. He was not. He was living in a very small apartment, and also had a seasonal labour job; so it was to the contrary.

There was also the fact that she was under his scrutiny and not able to go outside to work. She was not permitted to communicate with others and make friends. She was very much socially isolated and very much under that psychologically abusive situation. The marriage didn't turn out right. She certainly wanted to go back to her own country of origin.

However, he would threaten her and say that if she went back, the sponsorship would be terminated. She was under a lot of psychological threat and material threat as well. She became ill. She was deprived of medical treatment because her husband refused to pay for the costs.

I'll just summarize. In view of all this, she decided to leave him because she understood.... She was well educated, so she was able to speak the language. However, she still needed help in terms of getting her rights identified and known. She did leave her husband. She did leave the marriage that she came to Canada for.

• (1620)

Mr. Chungsen Leung: I gather from all three of your previous testimonies that you indicated it was important to provide information to prospective spouses before they entered the country to know what our laws are and where they could get help.

At the same time, I also see the point that government should not dictate whether knowing a language should be a requirement for a person to get married. Given that information, how can we deliver the information to these prospective spouses, whether they're illiterate in their own language, or whether they lack English or French, on how to get help and what their rights are? I'd like to hear your opinion on that.

Ms. Queenie Choo: In fact, this example speaks to the importance of pre-arrival information. They need to understand what the Canadian system is in terms of their relationship, what they can do in those abusive situations, how they can get help, and what legal assistance they would be able to access.

That even speaks to the need of those individuals before they come. Not only the women but also equally important, before this arrangement, the husbands also need to get the same information so that they can agree upon those situations and agreements before they get their sponsor spouse approval.

It is very important in terms of the pre-arrival information. Many of them, if they had the basic language skill, would be better off. However, there are many of them who don't even have that. That is so important to identify when you see the two case study scenarios.

Mr. Chungsen Leung: Ms. Douglas, would you care to comment on that, please.

Ms. Debbie Douglas: I think it speaks to the need for information about the existence of services.

Here in Canada we probably have one of the most sophisticated settlement and integration service sectors. Globally we certainly know that because we have lots of visitors from across the world coming in to take a look at our system, and yet, there are many newcomers who don't know about it. One of our own researchers, in "Making Ontario Home", talked about upwards of 30% not using services because they weren't aware of them. So, pre-arrival information before they come, on arrival information in terms of letting folks know what services exist, where they are in their community, and the kinds of supports that they can get when they need it....

Mr. Chungsen Leung: In the pre-arrival situation, that means we have to deliver that message in almost 190 languages. There's a potential we may have to do that for every major language group that exists around the world.

Ms. Debbie Douglas: I'm trying to remember off the top of my head in how many countries right now we do have some pre-arrival services. I know out of the U.K. office they probably take care of about 20 countries. Asia is pretty well covered, as well as China, the Philippines, and India, in particular. The U.K. tends to take care of the continent of Africa and the Middle East. We are building infrastructure in terms of being able to deliver those services overseas. It's really looking at where it is that we're putting investments. I want to say again, it has to be seamless. It has to be pre-arrival and in-Canada information once they arrive here.

Mr. Chungsen Leung: Madam Belhassen, do you wish to comment on the delivery of information and how we manage that with the people who may be illiterate and with people who don't speak English or French as a first language?

[Translation]

Mrs. Amel Belhassen: It's true it is a bit complicated, especially since, as was just mentioned, women or immigrants make up a diverse group. When it comes to immigrant women, for example, some are city dwellers, whereas others live in rural areas and have a tougher time accessing information. Some of them have never gone to school and don't know how to read or write.

How can we deliver information to them? I think the approach should depend on the prospective immigrant. People on site, in the home country, can deliver the information to them, there, in their native language.

•(1625)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm sorry, sir. Your time has expired.

Ms. Blanchette-Lamothe.

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: Ms. Belhassen, I'd like to continue the discussion to make sure I understand you correctly. You are saying that we shouldn't use education or language as the basis for choosing who is sponsored and that we need to tailor how we deliver the information to them. If they aren't able to read, then the information could be provided to them in person, in a language they understand, and adapted to their educational and language abilities,

instead of creating a barrier to the information. Is that what you are saying?

Mrs. Amel Belhassen: They shouldn't be chosen. All of that should be tailored to the groups in question.

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: Thank you. That's what I thought you said.

I'd also like to follow up on what you said about how hard it is to access protection measures and services. I believe all three of you mentioned that. Earlier, one of my colleagues said that a woman's initial reflex would probably be to call the police. That's not true. Given how things work in certain countries or the experiences these women have had, they won't react by calling the police.

I have here the information sheet that CIC provides to sponsored individuals who request it. The document says that, if the person is suffering from abuse and wants to request an exception to the conditional permanent residence measure, they should contact CIC's call centre at the number provided.

But one witness told us that the call centre wasn't suited to that kind of call. The witness said that the person could wait on hold for a long time and that, in some cases, a CIC representative had to call the woman back. Women in abusive situations can't always leave a phone number where they can be reached or wait on hold for long periods of time.

What are your thoughts on those comments? What kinds of services would make things easier for women who want to report abuse or seek help?

The question is for the three of you.

Mrs. Amel Belhassen: First of all, as you just pointed out, the tools exist; they include the police and the services offered by the department. But the immigrant woman's interaction with those services and the police is a sensitive matter. Agencies here would have to explain to immigrant women what the police do. They would need to allay these women's fears and help them understand how things work here, to change their thinking and ideas from back home.

Basically, efforts need to be made at the front end, before these women get here, and once they are here, a lot of outreach and education is needed.

[English]

Ms. Queenie Choo: From the service provider agency point of view, I think it is now even more significant and vital to provide these vulnerable immigrant women with the information they need should those circumstances arise so that they know who to talk to when there's an issue, so that they're not left in those desperate situations when a crisis comes. This is important to better prepare them for the future.

To the service provider agency, we have to make those services available for these people. We have to invest in those services so this is not a vicious circle for those battered women.

Ms. Debbie Douglas: Let me echo Ms. Choo's comments in terms of the need to continue to invest in the settlement services and the kind of education and training that needs to happen there so that front-line practitioners are asking the right questions so that women are able to disclose.

I believe Ms. Belhassen talked about the need to develop trust in the relationship before someone will disclose that there is violence in the relationship, particularly for women who have experienced trauma, coming out of refugee situations where the state has often been the oppressor. It's difficult to expect them to trust state institutions, like the police, for example, and even settlement services, because for them, walking into a service agency, it's basically a government agency. There isn't that sense that this is non-profit and arm's-length from government. I believe there is awareness that needs to be built, both on the side of the immigrant woman who is coming into Canada, but also on the service industry side, whether or not it's a front-line settlement organization, police services, immigration offices, and including folks working in our call centres.

•(1630)

The Chair: On behalf of the committee I'd like to thank the three of you for coming and sharing your knowledge and experience with us. It has been very helpful to us in preparing our report for the House of Commons.

Thank you very much for coming.

We will suspend for a few moments.

•(1630)

(Pause)

•(1635)

The Chair: Ladies and gentlemen, we'll start with two witnesses. The first witness, who is a lawyer from Montreal, apparently has transportation problems. If she arrives, we will let her participate, but in the meantime, we will start with two witnesses.

We have Saman Ahsan from the Girls Action Foundation. Welcome. She is here in Ottawa with us.

We also have Marie-Josée Duplessis, executive assistant, who is from Montreal.

We'll start with you, Madam Duplessis. You have up to eight minutes to make a presentation to the committee.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Josée Duplessis (Executive Assistant, Collectif des femmes immigrantes du Québec): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

First, thank you for the invitation. Our director, Aoura Bizzarri, asked me to represent the Collectif des femmes immigrantes du Québec, or CFIQ, and give evidence for your study.

The CFIQ was established in 1983 by stakeholders from various backgrounds. Its mission is to support immigrant women and their families and women from visible minorities and cultural communities as they integrate into Quebec society and the labour market.

I'd like to give you a sense of the kind of work we do. Last year, the CFIQ offered 12 distinct services at its women's centre. A total of

2,685 women benefited from these services and activities, resulting in 12,375 visits to the centre. In addition, 2,400 people, including 900 women, registered for its 11 socio-occupational integration projects.

The CFIQ has expertise in two areas covered by your study, the integration of immigrants into the labour market and the social isolation of immigrant women. I will start with the integration of women immigrants into the labour market.

Immigrant women face many challenges common to immigrants: a lack of knowledge of the labour market, organizational cultures and the skills required in the workplace, the need to learn English or French, and the need to rebuild their work network. All newcomers, be they men or women, face these challenges.

But women must also reconcile a job or job search and family life. Most immigrant women come from traditional societies where gender roles are much more distinct than they are here in Canada. Women are usually responsible for domestic work and taking care of children. In their native country, however, they were able to rely on a large support network and often had domestic help even if they were not rich. In order to enter the labour market here, they must rebuild their personal support network, as well as their professional one.

For the first time in their lives, women often find themselves shouldering all the responsibility for doing the domestic chores, planning and preparing meals, and caring for children. That's a lot of responsibility all at once. Some men do not want to share these tasks, while others are willing to help but do not know how because they never learned how to do them. Regardless, this problem has an impact on the family dynamic and affects the spouses' relationship.

Now, I'd like to spend some time discussing the obstacles immigrant women face, obstacles that are not related to their integration or adaptation efforts. In fact, removing these obstacles falls more on the shoulders of Canadian society.

The first obstacle is the lack of room in subsidized daycare, which obviously prevents immigrant women from trying to enter the labour market. The longer immigrants take to enter the labour market, the more difficult it is to have their credentials recognized.

Another obstacle is the fact that services are not tailored. Offering tailored services is paramount. The immigration process and the individual's situation must be taken into account, as these affect access to services. Bewildered by the immigration process and finding themselves in a place where the rules of the game are different, new and often implied, where both work and personal networks are non-existent, immigrant women need different supports so that they can regain their independence. And goodness knows how much value we attach to independence in our society.

Program standards for public labour market integration services represent another obstacle. In Quebec's case, that involves Emploi-Québec. These services are often aimed at reducing the number of people receiving employment or social assistance. Sponsored women are not entitled to employment assistance; neither are economic-class immigrant women during their first three months in Canada. Often, then, those not receiving a cheque are not allowed to participate in a job placement or training program because helping them does not reduce the number of employment assistance beneficiaries. That denial of services further delays their entry into the labour market or even access to a retraining program.

• (1640)

And, very often, employers require prospective employees to have work experience in Canada. So we have some work to do in terms of making our society more inclusive and accommodating when it comes to immigrants.

Another obstacle is education and credential recognition, which is a very complex issue. Because of time constraints, I won't go into it in detail. I would like to say, however, that on a small scale, there are some pilot projects under way in that respect; they take into account the education completed and the credentials earned as part of a work experience in the host country or not. Non-standard projects of this nature are serving as trial exercises that will make it possible to better assess the situation and support labour market participation. But, even if these projects do perform well, the fact that they are non-standard often hinders their existence in the long term. So the problem as far as adequate funding is concerned, comes back to the non-tailoring of services, standards and programs.

As far as the employer perspective goes, Deloitte conducted a round table dialogue in 2011 involving a hundred or so employers. Round tables were held across the country and the focus of the discussion was diversity. The round tables revealed that employers were risk-averse and that they associated the hiring of immigrants and the difficulty of having foreign credentials recognized with risk. So rather than take the risk, they don't get involved.

The lack of understanding around cultural nuances was another problematic element. So there's a lot of groundwork to be done as far as small businesses are concerned.

The Chair: Ms. Duplessis, you have only a minute left.

Ms. Marie-Josée Duplessis: In conclusion, what I want to make clear is that employers need help and support when it comes to evaluating credentials. The organizations could play a very significant role in providing that support, facilitating increased awareness and understanding and making it easier for immigrants to enter the labour market.

I still had many points to cover, so I encourage the committee members to ask me any questions they would like afterwards. Thank you.

• (1645)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We now have our third speaker. Welcome Ms. Molina, who is from Montreal. We'll let you catch your breath, and we'll have Ms. Ahsan speak.

[Translation]

Ms. Saman Ahsan (Executive Director, Girls Action Foundation): Good afternoon. Thank you for inviting me to appear before the committee and share our experience working with immigrant girls and women in Canada.

[English]

I think it's clear that immigrant girls and women, including those in the spousal sponsorship program, face various challenges and experience considerable tensions in their efforts to bridge multiple cultures, live in a new context, and respond to the discrimination and barriers to opportunity they face. At the same time they also demonstrate high aspirations, skills in cultural negotiation, and great potential for leadership.

According to statistics from a few years back, girls and young women under 25 made up to 38% of female immigrants to Canada within that particular year.

We can see girls and young women are at the crux of race, class, age, and gender, which are converging factors that make them particularly vulnerable. They find themselves caught between two cultures where their own is often devalued, and they face tremendous struggle in trying to fit into a new culture. Their specific needs and experiences need to be acknowledged and addressed if we want to prevent violence against them and also to prevent an abuse of the immigration system.

Immigrant and refugee processes place many women, including those who come here as a sponsored spouse or those who sponsor spouses to come here to Canada.... In both situations the girls or young women are in particularly vulnerable positions and need our support.

Some immigrant girls and women face violence in their homes, but may have little or no protection due to a range of factors. I think the factors were covered by some of the participants who spoke just before me, so I won't go into detail. For example, there's the lack of information, distrust of the police and services, fear of deportation, language barriers, fear of isolation, just to name a few. There is a range of factors that make them more vulnerable. Perpetrators of violence also think they can escape punishment if the victims feel they cannot afford to report the violence. Usually the victims are girls and women.

I will tell you a little bit about the Girls Action Foundation and our approach. We are a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting girls and young women to reach their full potential as future leaders and change-makers. We operate on a national scale through a network of more than 340 member groups in all provinces and territories across Canada. We provide our members with tools, resources, and training to help them start up programs for girls, including programs for girls from specific backgrounds, such as immigrant and newcomer girls.

We have supported more than 100 initiatives across Canada to build a national movement of active and engaged young women and organizations.

We take an assets-based approach in working with girls and women, because we see immigrant girls and women as having many strengths and skills. They work hard. They carry heavier burdens than their Canadian counterparts, and they act as cultural ambassadors and bridges between two cultures. Often they are the ones who are supporting their family in understanding and accessing services, and in this process they develop skills, such as cultural awareness, communication skills, and resourcefulness, which can be valuable assets for the whole community.

Immigrant girls and young women are more likely to continue and complete their education than their Canadian counterparts, so we really need to see girls and young women who come to Canada, including those who come in as sponsored spouses, as assets, as agents of change, not as victims or beneficiaries just waiting for our intervention.

We have worked a lot with immigrant girls and young women, and we have seen some promising practices that have been proven to work. They include building skills and self-esteem, reducing isolation, and increasing connections to their communities, providing support, especially supports from their peers, and providing girls and women with girl-only spaces where they can express themselves more freely, and last, providing role models, including role models from their own families and communities, to show them they can also reach levels of leadership in Canada.

We have some recommendations that would reduce violence and abuse as well as support communities, girls and women in dealing with violence.

First of all, it's important to see that a holistic approach is needed, one that recognizes the diversity of needs, provides a range of social services, and builds linkages between the different services.

There should be services at all levels. At the individual level, services should help young women develop skills and knowledge to participate actively in society and to deal with issues such as violence when they face them.

•(1650)

There should be family-oriented support to address the stress that families face, especially families who are immigrating together or have other changes in their economic status due to their immigration, to help them support one another and respond together.

There should be services to help the host communities in the process of the adaptation of newcomers, especially women who come in as sponsored spouses and are particularly vulnerable. These services should include: cultural sensitivity and training for service providers, who should also belong to diverse backgrounds that can relate to the young women; increased collaboration between community centres, shelters, police, and justice officials; and ongoing provision of information to immigrant women, especially sponsored spouses, about their legal rights and services.

Health, well-being, and skill-building programs with a feminist and cross-cultural approach need to take place. We should start young because our society needs to equip girls and boys to develop into healthy active men and women who don't commit acts of violence or abuse, but know how to respond if they are ever faced with it.

Policies and programs at the government level must be proactive. Immigrant women should be engaged as a priority right from the start, not as an afterthought. They should be collaborative and flexible and adapt to different needs and realities of women. They need to recognize the role of immigrant women in their families, communities, and society at large. If women are provided with support and resources to develop their leadership skills, they can become a tremendous asset, not only for the young girls of the communities but for society at large, as they can act as role models for younger women and also provide them with support.

Last, I just want to highlight again that we should not overlook the specific realities and challenges that girls or younger women face. As I said, they are at the crux of race, class, age, gender, and they are particularly vulnerable, so they need specific attention to reduce their vulnerability.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ahsan.

Ms. Molina, thank you for being determined to come to Ottawa.

Ms. Claudia Andrea Molina (Lawyer, Cabinet Molina Inc., As an Individual): Yes, thank you for having me.

The Chair: We look forward to your presentation. You have up to eight minutes to make a presentation to us.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Claudia Andrea Molina: My comments today will focus on just two aspects relating to the sponsorship program: the conditional permanent residence period of two years and its impact on women in domestic abuse situations, as well as the proposed requirement that sponsored female spouses be able to speak one of our official languages.

The government's objective of protecting women from barbaric crimes is commendable. But requiring women to speak one of the official languages does not address the source of the problem. Unfortunately, this new requirement will discriminate against women from certain countries and subject them to shameful consequences. It will also separate families, preventing women in their child-bearing years from starting a family and, in some cases, from having one at all.

Learning a language is not an easy, straightforward or fast process. I would submit that this new requirement violates the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. What's more, it's an attack on the family and women's rights.

The fact is that the new rule will have no effect whatsoever on many women who come from countries in northwest Africa where honour crimes and forced marriages exist. The reason is that they already speak French.

In addition, there is no research showing that the ability to speak English or French shields women from domestic abuse situations. Resources to help women are what is needed.

In my legal practice over the years, I have seen a great deal of women suffering from domestic abuse. Many of them were from the United States, Canada and even France, just to name a few. They were often well-educated women with careers. However, they were socially isolated, and seeking out support and helping themselves was a challenge.

Violence is a complex problem that won't be solved by learning one of the official languages.

Furthermore, there is absolutely no doubt that Latin, Asian and European women who don't speak English or French and who come from countries where forced marriages and honour crimes don't exist, will be separated from their families and discriminated against unnecessarily, under the proposed requirement.

It's also quite conceivable that some women could face enormous pressure from their husbands to learn English or French quickly so they can be sponsored. And that could cause conflict in families and make women even more vulnerable.

If the objective is to prevent barbaric acts, why not take a targeted approach? I suggest that the government examine the problem directly at its source. Who are the women most at risk of falling victim to an honour crime? What support and information programs are available to those women upon arriving in Canada or before they are sponsored?

Would it be possible for the government to prevent domestic abuse by educating men and women on what constitutes violence against women under the Declaration of the Elimination of Violence against Women, adopted in 1993? According to that declaration, violence can be verbal and leave no physical trace.

Women who are already in extremely vulnerable situations should not be forced to file a police report and further endanger themselves because of the two-year conditional permanent residence period. The conditional two-year period makes women who are victims of domestic abuse more vulnerable, despite the exception put in place by the government. In fact, these women are often asked to provide evidence that they are experiencing domestic abuse. In some cases, what the government is trying to achieve will actually make the abuse these women endure worse, making them even more vulnerable.

• (1655)

The exception in the act should be interpreted very broadly so as to respect the definition of violence in the 1993 declaration, so as to include psychological and verbal violence. Article 1 of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women states that:

[...] the term "violence against women" means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

A woman should not have to tolerate shouting, insults and psychological and verbal mistreatment, and should not have to prove this mistreatment in order to remain in Canada. The current law puts the sponsored woman between a rock and a hard place.

This problem existed before the advent of the two-year conditional residency. Indeed, women who were being sponsored were often victims of family violence. They could then ask to remain in Canada on humanitarian grounds or be entitled to an exception. I have had some of these women as clients. They had to prove that they had lodged a complaint with the police or that they had marks of physical violence. It was very complicated and traumatizing for them.

Realistically speaking, it has to be said that lodging a complaint with the police can sometimes make violence against certain women worse. In Quebec, I saw cases where following complaints to the police, violent husbands hunted these women down, and tracked them right to the shelters for abused women that are supposed to be anonymous and have secret locations.

That said, my conclusion is that the conditional residency provision prevents these spouses from giving each other a chance to reconcile and undergo therapy, but does not necessarily protect the institution of marriage as well as judges who give couples some time to change their minds. In real life, sometimes couples quarrel. Certain women will forgive acts of violence, that are then not repeated.

In conclusion, I submit that in sponsorship cases, families deserve as much protection from legislators as do other families. Once I saw a young couple with a newborn at my office. The mother had postpartum depression.

• (1700)

[English]

The Chair: Please wind up, Ms. Molina.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Claudia Andrea Molina: Very well.

During the quarrels that followed, acting on an impulse, the young husband called up Citizenship and Immigration Canada to withdraw his sponsorship. The process had to be started all over again from square one, even though they had been close to the end. This story had a happy ending: the couple reconciled and the woman was granted permanent residency. However, how many stories have such happy endings?

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Menegakis.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Thank you, witnesses, for your presentations today.

[Translation]

My first question is for Ms. Duplessis.

Madam, I read your article entitled "Le regard de ROSINI sur l'immigration", in which you wrote the following:

We consider integration to be a complex multidimensional process (linguistic, economic, social, cultural, political and religious) and a bidirectional one, since it engages the immigrant and his or her family as well as the members and the institutions of the host society. Moreover, this process is gradual, continuous, and individual, according to the individual's pace and history, and takes place within the framework of society and the family.

Could you shed some light for us, please, on how integration is experienced by women who are being sponsored?

Ms. Marie-Josée Duplessis: Thank you for your question, Mr. Menegakis.

I do in fact know the text you have in your hands very well, since I wrote it. However, I did say at the outset clearly that my testimony would not necessarily be about sponsored women, but more so about the expertise of the organization I represent, the Collectif des femmes immigrantes du Québec.

Regarding sponsored women, I can point out that we see them much less in organizations, since when they are sponsored, a network helps them out from the time they arrive. This causes a perverse effect. The advice that is given to them regarding integration into the workforce is often not well-founded. For instance, women are told to forget about their past careers and to begin again at the bottom of the ladder, or to take training as support workers in order to be able to find a job easily. If the same woman had gone to an organization that could assess her skills and take into account her schooling and professional experience, she could probably have been directed toward more satisfying and self-actualizing work. The fact that, generally, sponsored people do not have much to do with the integration services of the host society is a problem and often limits their future advancement possibilities.

In the statement you read, they in fact refer to a bidirectional integration process involving the host society and the new immigrants. This bidirectional process is more difficult in the case of sponsored women because often their harbour, their home port is the community, and sometimes remains the community. So often they do not benefit from the bridging role public or community services play.

Have I answered your question?

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Yes, thank you very much.

Can you tell us how in your opinion settlement services should be supporting women?

Ms. Marie-Josée Duplessis: Yes, I spoke about that earlier. Among other things they must take into consideration the immigration process, the experience as a whole, the loss of reference points and the fact that many of these women are for the first time responsible for everything in the family—housework, educating the children, family balance—aside from having to find a job and deal with the family dynamics that have been perturbed.

Often, the services offered by women's networks have a feminist approach that encourages women to be independent and take their destinies into their own hands. I'm not saying that the feminist approach is bad, but in the case of immigrant women, we must absolutely take into account their central, essential role and what the family and the community represent for them. So we cannot do interventions that are based solely on the individual's independence.

It is important to take into consideration the environment, the community and the family. That is what the Collectif des femmes immigrantes du Québec does in its activities. We really want to work with the person where they are. Quietly, things evolve from there. Newcomers adapt much more quickly than people think. A lot of

changes happen, but the host society only sees the distance still left to cover rather than the distance that has already been covered.

So we have to work with the person where they are when they arrive and help them evolve gradually, taking the environment into account as well as the frame of reference the person has. It may be that that frame of reference is different from those that are valued in Canada. So we have to gradually help these two realities to converge, to meet, and help with the necessary mediations so that the transition happens. The point is not to lose one's culture of origin, but rather to see what compromises can be achieved, what changes are acceptable, and which are less so, and to work step by step on integration at all of these levels.

• (1705)

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

I have a quick question for you, Ms. Ahsan.

Proxy marriages are legal right now. It's true that a couple who are married over the phone or even by fax can be eligible for the spousal sponsorship program. I'm under the impression this could or would lead to more forced marriages.

In any event, do you think this practice needs to be stopped? Should proxy marriages be banned from the spousal sponsorship program?

Ms. Saman Ahsan: Are you asking me?

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Yes.

Ms. Saman Ahsan: I'm not equipped with a legal background. I'm not a lawyer. I am working for an NGO that supports girls and young women's empowerment, but I can see there could be problems with proxy marriages. I have seen that there are cases which are totally valid, but again, there is a possibility of abuse of the system. I don't know if it should be banned, but I think there should be some protective measures to make sure that if there's a marriage, it is really a true, valid case and not just made up for immigration purposes.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: That's an excellent answer. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Blanchette-Lamothe.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: Thank you.

My first question is for Ms. Duplessis and Ms. Ahsan.

You have shown us how important the front-line services are, and how much they can contribute to protecting sponsored women. However, as we know, a lot of women do not go these organizations. Indeed, often the most vulnerable women do not know how to turn to these external resources or to find these services.

How do you think the most vulnerable sponsored women should be directed toward these front-line services? More specifically, how could the government ensure that these women draw on the front-line services they need?

[English]

Ms. Saman Ahsan: I am an immigrant, and when I came in I got a lot of support in finding a job. Emploi-Québec helped me even before I came in. I was part of teleconferences looking at my background, my qualifications, how I could use them when I came.

Similarly, when a new immigrant is coming in as a spouse, before and after he or she comes here, there should be those kinds of services, that outreach. The immigrant has to take part in those services and sessions to learn about his or her rights, the legal situation in Canada, in a very simple way.

The government can make some simple worksheets, handbooks, which would help them to understand the laws as they would apply to them. What do they do if they are abused? What are their rights if they are abused? Would they be sent back to their home country if they report abuse? It's questions like that. They should be given to young women when they come into Canada.

There should be a continuation of the process, where social services providers stay in touch with them and build a relationship with them and also help them to get skills that allow them to express themselves, to learn the language, to find local supports. Usually women like to find support in their community, but they need to be really helped so they can find those supports and reach out to them and know where they can go if they need support.

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: Ms. Duplessis, did you have something to add?

Ms. Marie-Josée Duplessis: When we talk about isolation, it is redundant to say that the main objective is to reach those women. The Collectif des femmes immigrantes du Québec is a small organization that works in the street a great deal. We distribute information about our services in the subway and at bus stops. We also go to religious organizations and community groups and explain our services to them. I would add that we also...

• (1710)

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: Forgive me for interrupting you. I simply want to make sure that you understood my question.

I'm trying to find out if you think the government could do something to bring together these vulnerable women and organizations like yours. Could the government do something to help you come into contact with vulnerable women?

Ms. Marie-Josée Duplessis: Thank you for putting me on the right path.

Yes, the government could do something. For instance, when live-in caregivers arrive in the country, they are given a list of available resources concerning works standards and the associations that can support and help them. We could do something like that for sponsored women.

In Quebec, the Department of Immigration and Cultural Communities, which is responsible for the integration of immigrants, offers group sessions, one of which is entitled "First Settlement Steps" and the other "Integration Objective—Understanding the Quebec Labour Market". Various themes are discussed at these seminars.

The problem is that the participants have to register to attend them. Currently, when newcomers go through the immigration wicket at the airport, they are told about the service, and they are invited to go to the website in order to register.

In the past, the immigration officer used to register the newcomers for these information sessions. So the immigrants—this would include sponsored persons today—were told to go to the information session on such and such a day at such and such an organization to attend "First Settlement Steps" and to go another day the following week to the next information session, "Integration Objective—Understanding the Quebec Labour Market"; these sessions lasted 24 hours.

If we did that, the newcomers would be put in contact with the community services and they could even develop a network amongst themselves to help each other out.

So we should not stop at providing information to the newcomers, we should also register them for these resources. When you have just arrived, and you reconnect with a member of your family, there are so many things to say, and people forget to register. They feel that is not important, and they depend on their spouse or other relatives to guide them after their arrival.

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: Thank you very much. That was very interesting.

Ms. Molina, I would like to ask you a few questions.

You talked about language and education. A little earlier, one of the witnesses said that language and education should not be a barrier or a requirement, but that the government should rather adapt so as to communicate the information properly. For instance, the government could use a different language or hold individual meetings, rather than communicating in writing.

Do you agree with those suggestions?

Ms. Claudia Andrea Molina: Completely. I think that is a very good idea.

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: Thank you.

I have a question about the length of time it takes to process the sponsorship files of spouses.

One of the witnesses seemed to suggest that the processing time was possibly a factor that could make them vulnerable. He said that if the wife had to wait three years, for instance, before being able to join her husband in Canada, she could possibly be more vulnerable in her country of origin.

As a lawyer, do you have an opinion on that issue?

Ms. Claudia Andrea Molina: Yes. That can be a problem depending on what is happening in the woman's home country.

A woman's right to have a family is a protected, sacred and fundamental right in international law. Women today have a tendency to have children later in life, for instance in their 30s or after they finish their schooling. However, when my clients get married they are often in a big hurry to have children. The immigration process becomes an obstacle. Some of my clients become very stressed out. They wonder when they will have medical insurance and when they will be able to begin to plan their pregnancy. Having a child is their life project, and when that project becomes conditional, it is quite dramatic. In my opinion, that aspect has been neglected by the government. I think that the government should indeed have a look at that.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. McCallum.

• (1715)

[Translation]

Hon. John McCallum: Thank you.

Thank you for being with us.

I'd like to begin with a question concerning the rules the government intends to impose concerning the language test for spouses. I believe Ms. Molina talked about that.

Are you in favour of that test for spouses, or not? For my part, I am completely opposed to it. In my opinion it is not up to the government to tell Canadians whom they should marry. That said, I would like to put that question to all three of you.

Ms. Ahsan, what do you think?

[English]

Ms. Saman Ahsan: Coming from a human rights and social justice background, I would be against such a test.

Hon. John McCallum: That's a very good answer, thank you.

[Translation]

What do you think about that, Ms. Duplessis?

Ms. Marie-Josée Duplessis: I am against it. I don't agree that it should be a selection factor. However, it is important to offer francization services when the person lands here.

Hon. John McCallum: I agree completely with the importance of learning one of the two official languages, but I consider that it is not a good idea to impose that as an entry condition.

[English]

The second question is about this new system since November 2012, I think, where the couple is forced to live together for two years to become a spouse allowed into the country. We had some discussion in the last session. One person at least argued that this did not do anything to reduce the risk of violence and was not a good idea.

I'd like to ask each of the three of you, is this new system where the couple is forced to live together for two years as a condition of entry a good thing? Is it helpful to the cause against violence against women, or is it not a good thing?

Ms. Claudia Andrea Molina: I think it's a really bad thing. I think it puts spouses on an unequal basis. I think it's very unhealthy

in a relationship. It's very arbitrary that in two years we'll know for sure that this is not a bad-faith marriage or relationship. Often in real life, couples will fight at the beginning of a relationship, especially after having children, and especially for someone who comes into a new country who has to adapt. I think it's not connected to reality.

Hon. John McCallum: Thank you. I don't want to rush you. I just want to make sure the other two get to answer.

Ms. Saman Ahsan: I agree with that, and add that such a condition would not prevent violence.

[Translation]

Hon. John McCallum: Ms. Duplessis, what is your opinion?

Ms. Marie-Josée Duplessis: I think that in cases where there may be violence and mistreatment, the imposition of these two years as an entry condition will keep certain women in intolerable situations, perhaps precisely because they will be afraid of not being accepted into the country. I think that in a precarious situation where there could be violence, this can only limit women's possible recourses.

Hon. John McCallum: So the three of you are opposed to such rules. Am I right?

Ms. Marie-Josée Duplessis: Yes. I am not in favour of such a rule.

Hon. John McCallum: Thank you.

[English]

On the basis of our two sessions, we have unanimity on both of those points, so our report can be considered written.

In my remaining time, I'd like to ask about another more positive suggestion that was made, and I thought it was a really good idea.

A lot of the problem with abused mothers is that if they get out of the relationship, they could be deported unless they appeal to stay. That appeal process could take one year, two years, even more, and in the meantime they're in a very precarious position. Would it not be a practical solution to this kind of issue to speed up this process so the women involved would have a decision much faster as to whether or not they could stay in this country with their children?

Ms. Saman Ahsan: Definitely, I would agree with that.

Hon. John McCallum: Good. I don't want to show a bias in what answers I favour, but that's a good answer.

Ms. Claudia Andrea Molina: I think that article 4(f) of the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women shed some light on the question you just asked. I think it says, and this is what's happening here, the government needs to be careful when they pass laws that they don't increase violence toward women, when the objective is to reduce it. I think this is what we're creating here.

• (1720)

Hon. John McCallum: It's sometimes called the law of unintended consequences.

Ms. Claudia Andrea Molina: Yes, unintended consequences.

The Chair: Your time has expired, Mr. McCallum. Thank you.

Mr. Opitz.

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and through you, thank you to all the witnesses for being here. They were very good presentations

Just to start my bit, it reminds me of something that the Blessed John Paul once said, that it's the duty of every man to uphold the dignity of every woman. That's something I think we can all take away.

I'll start with you, Ms. Ahsan. This was asked in the last panel, but I'd like your opinion on it.

On March 4 Chantal Desloges mentioned that she believed the minimum age of those being sponsored should be raised from 16 to 18. Would you agree with that?

Ms. Saman Ahsan: I would strongly agree to that.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Could you elaborate?

Ms. Saman Ahsan: I think that 16 is too young an age to get married in any case, and it's a young age for sponsorship. I think universally, across the world, 16 should be too young to get married.

Mr. Ted Opitz: I liked your presentation, by the way. I think you showed some good leadership in developing young people and girls and giving them opportunities. That's something that I enjoy doing with kids in my riding, being a former trainer in the military. It's part and parcel of what I have done in the past.

How many immigrant communities do you work with?

Ms. Saman Ahsan: We don't have a number, but I said that we have a network of about 340 member groups that work across Canada. About two-thirds of them are working with immigrant or racialized communities.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Okay.

What cases of forced marriage have you seen?

Ms. Saman Ahsan: We haven't really seen any cases of forced marriage in my work with Girls Action Foundation. We do see girls who mention in the programs that their parents are the ones who would find a spouse for them from their country of origin. We do have such things, but there hasn't been any case that I have seen directly. In such cases when we hear of girls, our job is really to build their critical thinking and their communication skills so they can express themselves and speak to their parents. We link them up with supports that are available in their community, services, community members, role models to whom they can go when they face such situations.

We're not like a social worker who would actually intervene in those cases; we're more on the prevention side.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Would you consider any of those arranged marriages as being forced?

Ms. Saman Ahsan: I think there's a—

Mr. Ted Opitz: I know they're different. That's why I'm asking you. Can you define the difference for me?

Ms. Saman Ahsan: Forced would be against a person's will. Often girls growing up in immigrant families grow up with the idea that their families will choose a spouse for them, and it's something that's quite natural to them that they might not be opposed to. It depends. Usually a family does want the best for their daughter, so

they would try to get someone who will take care of their daughter. But sometimes that's not the case, which is very disappointing, if a family finds someone who is not going to take care of their daughter. But usually families also try that.

Those are arranged marriages, where the family finds someone and the young people agree to get into such a marriage.

A forced marriage would be when they don't agree, or they have met the person or heard about the person and don't want to get into it.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Thank you.

Some witnesses at this committee have discussed conditional permanent residence. We know that if women present evidence that they are in a forced or abusive marriage, the proposed condition would cease to apply in those instances where there's evidence of abuse or neglect. Have you witnessed any cases of abuse or neglect?

Ms. Saman Ahsan: Personally, I have. I had a friend who went through that situation. She came in through an arranged marriage, not a forced marriage. She had never met her husband before, but she had agreed with her family to get into this marriage and come to Canada. When she came here, she went through all kinds of abuse, physical, emotional, economic. She's a good case study, because she finally went to the services, and they took her and her child away from her husband. She was able to get a lot of training and skill development. First she got training as an English-language service provider within the same community centre that supported her, and eventually she did her law degree and now she's a lawyer working on domestic violence cases.

So I've seen one case that ended up pretty well.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Well, that's fortunate for her. What kind of evidence did she present?

• (1725)

Ms. Saman Ahsan: It's an interesting case, because she had internalized the violence, and she was not reporting it. She was talking to her doctor on the phone when her husband started abusing her, and the doctor heard her and sent the social workers. They said that they believed there was abuse going on and that they would like to separate her from the family, so they took her away to a shelter. After a lot of psychological help, she was able to really say that she had been abused. They had the proof, because they were able to go right then when the doctor reported having heard abuse going on. They were able to see the violence, but at the time she had said, "No, no, I fell down the stairs."

Mr. Ted Opitz: Was she afraid to also report it potentially because she was afraid of losing her PR status? Is that one of the reasons?

Ms. Saman Ahsan: She had no idea of the rights that she had or the status. She didn't have her passport. It was with her in-laws. So she had no idea what would happen, and they were always threatening her.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Is that it, Chair?

The Chair: You had seven minutes. You have a couple of minutes left, a minute and a half actually.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Okay, when you said I still had seven minutes, I thought, wow.

The Chair: No, you have a couple of minutes left.

Mr. Ted Opitz: That went really fast.

Ms. Duplessis, your organization tries to reach out to women in isolation. This can obviously present some challenges, since clearly, the man would like to keep her away from any contact or support. Have you heard of any cases where the man found out the woman was seeking support and the situation got worse?

For example, if there's a spouse....

Go ahead, sorry.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Josée Duplessis: Thank you. Mr. Opitz.

I don't want to get into something I do not know well. Our organization does not work with women who have been subjected to violence. So I prefer to leave the floor to the other two witnesses who have more information on that.

But I thank you nevertheless for the question.

[*English*]

Mr. Ted Opitz: I think my time is up, but I just wanted to point out that language requirements were actually introduced by the Liberals in the original act. I think with that, my time is up.

The Chair: Ms. Molina, I have a question for you. It's a question I asked the bureaucrats when they were here.

You have a situation, well it's not a hypothetical situation, but it's a situation where the man says there was fraud involved. The wife left and it was fraudulent. The wife says no, it was physical and mental abuse.

There are three different areas. There could be the criminal aspect if there's physical abuse. That's assault and that's evidence beyond a reasonable doubt. Then we have a matrimonial court. I have no idea what goes on in the civil code but presumably it's similar to Ontario, which would be on the balance of probabilities as to who is telling the truth. Then we have immigration. My understanding is it wouldn't even be, it may not even be, a judicial decision. It might be an administrative decision as to who is telling the truth.

Do you see a problem there? I am looking at strange conflicts of law.

You could even have conceivably different decisions. Someone could say the husband is telling the truth. Someone could say the wife is telling the truth.

Ms. Claudia Andrea Molina: I haven't witnessed a case where you had those three scenarios. I've witnessed women under severe stress, traumatic situations, where women are put under the microscope and people don't believe them. They have to prove that they've been victims of violence. That's pretty traumatic. On top of suffering violence, they have to go through all that other stress.

I think the government should put measures in place to just treat women with more kindness.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Blanchette-Lamothe, you have a question, a very brief one. Thank you for letting me take your time.

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: No problem.

[*Translation*]

My question is for Ms. Ahsan.

I'd like to go back to a suggestion made by Ms. Duplessis that the government automatically register sponsored women arriving in the country for information sessions so as to ensure that every one of them, even the most isolated or the most vulnerable, has a first contact with front-line services.

What do you think about that?

● (1730)

Ms. Saman Ahsan: Yes, I agree entirely. However, I would like to add one thing.

[*English*]

I'll switch to English, if you will excuse me.

The services and service providers should be culturally sensitive and it's better if you have someone who speaks their language or is from the same community. But that would be a great support to women coming in.

The Chair: Thank you. Our time has expired.

I thank the three of you for coming to the committee and giving us your views on many different issues. Thank you very much.

This committee is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante : <http://www.parl.gc.ca>