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Chair

Mr. Dean Allison

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•(0850)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)): Good morning, everyone. Pursuant to Standing Order 108 (2), our study on Canada's response to the violence, religious persecution, and dislocation caused by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant will begin.

I want to welcome everyone here today. We have a couple of individuals joining us via teleconference. We have a member of the Iraqi Parliament, Vian Saeed, and we want to welcome you. Can you hear us on the line?

Ms. Vian Saeed (Member of Iraqi Parliament, As an Individual): Yes.

The Chair: Thank you.

Joining us here from the Yazidi Human Rights Organization-International, we have Khalid Haider, who is the assistant to the president, and we have Omar Haider as well. Welcome, gentlemen. I understand you drove last night from Virginia, so thank you for making an effort to be here. We do appreciate it.

And we have Rabbi Reuven Bulka, who will be joining us on the call at nine o'clock. We'll try to do it with minimum disruption.

We're going to start with our member of the Iraqi Parliament. Ms. Saeed, if we could have your opening statement that would be great. Once all the opening statements have been made then we'll go around the room and ask questions back and forth over the next hour or two.

Ms. Vian Saeed: Good morning to you. In the beginning and on behalf of all, I want to thank you for giving me the chance to bring you the facts of what has happened to the Yazidis. I want to say that I'm sorry if my English is not so good.

On August 3, 2014, the so-called Islamic State invaded the Sinjar region, which is inhabited mostly by my fellow Yazidis. Perhaps you have heard and learned about the massacres, the displacement, and the kidnapping of women and children, but I think you have not learned about the details of what really happened. Unfortunately, I think I won't be able to take enough time to summarize the heinous cases even partially. Thousands of Yazidis have been killed: by ISIS directly or indirectly, by the forced march, their escape, the terrible conditions of the Sinjar Mountains.

The biggest tragedy took place in the village of Kocho. In Kocho, 700 people have been kidnapped, mostly women and children aged

12 years and younger, while the rest of the men, about 1,200, were murdered in cold blood, destroying the entire town.

The second tragedy is that the Yazidi girls who were kidnapped by ISIS in the area around Mosul have been sold at \$150 per girl, many of them in Syria, and have been treated with unthinkable cruelty.

In addition to forced conversions and rape, over just a few short months while the attention of the war is turned away, more than 5,000 Yazidi women, children, and men have been kidnapped by ISIS. No one has yet been able to help them, find them, and bring them back home.

A small but ancient and proud culture and historic religious community of the Yazidi people may come to a complete and total end. Almost 90% of the Yazidi people of Iraq—400,000 people—are now refugees across the Kurdistan region. They fled their homes in August with absolutely nothing—no documents, no warm clothes, no bedding—in this cold weather. Without shelter, children and entire families are sleeping on the street or under makeshift tents that are not suitable for living in.

Without heat or electricity, fires flare up in the camp. Two weeks ago three children burned to death in a tent that was ignited by a candle, and there was no easy access to water to put the fire out. Even in the three camps provided by the UN—Shariya, Khanke, and Bajit Kandala—in the best of circumstances there is one toilet per 18 families, and for each 50 families one shower room.

I am deeply sad and upset that I must report that the refugee situation is getting worse day by day and hour by hour.

Of course, we are thankful for what we have received, but it is much too late and too little, and our people live in constant fear and in danger from both nature and ISIS.

•(0855)

I am grateful to you for giving me this opportunity to address the Canadian people and ask your government to help my people, the Yazidi people.

Those who have not been killed by ISIS will die trying to survive as refugees in the cold without basic needs, without food, without support. This is a tragedy. It must be stopped before the genocide of an entire nation is on the world's conscience.

We need the Canadian people to hear our plea and help us, shelter us, feed us, and care for our refugees, so they may go home again. We need this now before it is too late.

We need the Canadian people to hear our plea, and help us find and free our enslaved people. All captured prisoners need to be released. We need this now before it is too late.

We need the Canadian people to hear our plea and help us to receive international protection for our people. We need this now before it is too late.

I would like to thank each one of you in advance for giving me this chance to be here on behalf of an entire people.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to continue with our witnesses and then we'll come back to questions.

Mr. Khalid Haider.

Mr. Khalid Haider (Assistant to the Chairman, Yazidi Human Rights Organization-International): First and foremost, I appreciate the great opportunity to speak the truth, especially about what we have witnessed, my colleagues and I, as well as everybody you've had here.

I would like to start by going back to what happened a little earlier, back in August of 2007, when a semi-genocide took place against my people in two of the Yazidi complexes, a Jazeera complex and a Kahtaniya complex. This was due to the withdrawal of the Kurdish security forces five minutes before these two villages were going to get attacked by four huge trucks filled with C-4 and other explosive items, which led to the deaths of more than 700 people.

This in fact is not the first time in history Kurds have betrayed Yazidis. Just because we are not Muslim, that doesn't mean we don't have the right to live on the ground that belonged to our ancestors.

In 2014, seven years after the first genocide took place, here it is: the Kurdish government has withdrawn from the Sinjar area, handing the keys of the golden gates to ISIS, one of the most brutal terrorist organizations ever to have appeared or ever to have existed in human history.

It wasn't enough for the terrorists to force Christians and other minorities to leave their hometowns. In some places, they stripped them to nothing but the clothes they were wearing. They kicked them and dragged them outside their houses. But that wasn't enough. In order for the Kurdish government to make their points with the central government, they had to sacrifice Yazidis. Because of a dispute, the central government would not give a budget to the Kurdish regional governments, so they had to come up with an idea to make turmoil—namely, by bringing the psychological war that is ISIS into Iraq, driving it into the Sinjar area, and disturbing peaceful minorities such as Yazidis and Christians. This is what happened.

It's just like the allegory of the cave. No matter how much we shout or how much we call, "It's us, this is what's happening, this is what has been done to us", nobody can translate internally what is going on with this peaceful minority. It is one of the most ancient beliefs in human history. Yazidis have faced genocide time after time. This is the 74th genocide that has taken place against us. Throughout the years we have lost 23 million Yazidis, and yet, until today, all you have heard about is the Turkish genocide against the Armenians.

The Kurds are playing this psychological war against Yazidis. Of the money that has been sent from the United States—\$280 million—for refugees in these camps, only \$12 million has been spent. All this money you've sent to the Kurdish government is going to their own benefit, not to benefit the refugees who are living in tents. When it rains, some camps are flooded with water, and tents are all we have. People are living outside the tents rather than inside due to the floods taking place. Kids are dying of pneumonia. People are dying from expired food. Food has been sent from the United Nations and other countries to the Kurdish regional government. They replace it with expired food.

Another prime example is that at Sinjar Mountain today there are 7,000 to 10,000 men, women, and children—not to mention the fighters. The Kurdish government sends supplies and they keep them. Whoever says "We belong to you" are given them. Flour and salt are essential items. They will not give them to anybody unless they say, "Yes, we are PDK".

● (0900)

Enough is enough. Today people are dying and suffering. I just want to ask a question: is a human life that cheap? In some countries they do a lot to save the lives of people and even animals. They put too much time into an animal to risk the life of that animal. Yet today there's an entire society—or a nation per se—and an ancient belief that is facing certain death, and nobody even cares about what's happening.

All you hear is that the Kurdish government is doing its best for these refugees, yet most of the time they're not doing even 10% of what you hear. There's a huge difference between hearing and seeing. You hear they are doing this. You might send an envoy to Kurdistan region, but that envoy will be sent to one of the nice camps they've set up for some people who are close to them.

In fact, in over 95% of these camps people live miserable lives: no food and no sanitation. As Miss Vian Saeed said, some of these tents caught fire and people died. Some of these camps were set up for the refugees who came from Syria and were handed to the Yazidis after what happened on Sinjar. It's going to be one of the most horrific tragedies that history will ever mention, because human rights don't... This is turning a blind eye to the Yazidis. Next to me here today is my colleague, who lost his entire family. They were close, in an area where they could have been rescued, but nobody wanted to make any effort to rescue them. Out of an entire family of 40-some people, he's the only one who survived, and that was because he was in the United States, or he would not be here now.

The Kurdish government receives a lot of supplies. The tragedy happened to us, not the Kurds. We want you, as a nation, to be in direct touch with the Yazidis, who have been hurt and have been driven out of their houses and hometowns. We want you to go witness and see how much tragedy they are going through day after day, because most of this aid—over 85%—will not go to these refugees.

Another example is the aid they sent to the mountain from Qatar and from the Emirates, who went to their markets and switched with old and rotten clothes.... There are a lot of pictures that I can forward to you. You couldn't even use these clothes to wipe your car. No human can wear them, especially on that mountain. It gets so cold, just like Ottawa, to a point where people cannot resist low temperatures. This is a fact.

All people hear is that the Kurds are helping. To be honest with you, the Kurds started all of this, and that was due to the dispute they've had with the central government in Iraq. That's why former Prime Minister al-Maliki stepped down after they handed the Mosul Dam to ISIS. So what happened is that they gained power at our expense. Yet every other nation in this world wanted to invade Iraq because they were saying Saddam Hussein was creating mass graves out of his people. Today political sides are creating far worse than what he was doing.

In ending, I'd like to thank you all, ladies and gentlemen, for giving me the opportunity to speak and say what I've seen. Thank you very much.

● (0905)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Haider.

We now have joining us via teleconference Rabbi Reuven Bulka.

Rabbi, I'm going to turn it over to you for your opening statement, sir.

Rabbi Reuven Bulka (As an Individual): Thank you very much.

I was quite moved by the statements of the previous speaker. In a way, he is pointing to the challenges we all face when there is a looming disaster somewhere in the world. The question we have to continue to ask ourselves is whether, more than just in words, we have learned the lessons of the past: Rwanda, the Holocaust, so many situations in which vulnerable people are almost decimated. As much as we would do whatever we can, we'd like to do something to help prevent it. Are we equipped? In other words, is the world in general equipped when something like this happens, to step in and prevent mass disasters, catastrophes, and tragedies like this?

Unfortunately, from what we have seen, the answer is certainly not yes, and more likely is leaning toward a no. That leads to the question: have we put in enough energy to develop an international strategy, even let's say, an international army that steps in to prevent things like this from happening? This is a major challenge.

I know that the government and the Canadian people in general are horrified by what is happening to the Yazidis, but sympathy cards don't save lives. We have to ask ourselves the very serious question, is there more we can do? This is an emergency. As we speak people are dying, and the question is whether there is something we can do to be more responsive. It is a critical question.

I don't question the desire of the government to save lives. I don't question the commitment to human rights. That is beyond question, but the real issue is can we mobilize the world community that cares to make sure that the despots and the killers of the world are not given a free rein. That's the issue we need to address. I leave it to the rest.

This is more or less my opening comment. I know that the issues before us are not only in addressing the danger on the other side of the ocean, but also the question of that danger being exported to Canada. Another challenge we have here in Canada is do we have the wherewithal? We do have the wherewithal, but are we doing as much as we can to make sure that the Canada of the next generation will be one in which terrorism will not dare to raise its ugly head because it just won't be given the chance.

We're horrified when horrible things happen like what happened about a month ago, but the prevention of it down the road involves a heavy investment in community building and in community alert and prevention strategies, which go all the way from being alert to dangers when you see them to building communities that are solid, in which everyone feels included rather than excluded. These are very large agendas, I don't doubt, and I'm not suggesting they are easy. Thank God we have a country like Canada that takes this seriously, and hopefully with that seriousness and the energy, people like you will be able to address it and come up with strategies that will save lives because this is what it's all about.

Thank you.

● (0910)

The Chair: Thank you, Rabbi Bulka.

Witnesses, we're going to have multiple rounds of questions. We're going to start with the opposition, then go to the government, and move around. The first round will be seven minutes, then other rounds will be five minutes, and that will give all the members a chance to ask questions.

I want to start with the NDP, Mr. Dewar, for seven minutes, please.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Thank you, Chair, and thank you to our guests here in Ottawa for coming all the way from the United States overnight. Obviously, that shows your commitment and determination to have a voice for people who have not had a voice in the last number of years. And of course to our friend in Erbil, I want to put my first question to you. But also to Rabbi Bulka, it's good to hear you.

I'm a little shocked at some of the testimony we've heard today. I'm also a little frustrated, because some of the testimony we've heard today is certainly what we heard when we went to Erbil just this past September. There was a call to have immediate action to help save lives and have robust humanitarian support. I also have to say that I'm a little depressed at the fact that I was in Erbil in 2007...and we actually had a conference both here in Ottawa and in Washington about the need to protect minorities. But that was back in 2008, 2009, 2010, where what was happening to Yazidis and to Christians was documented. Now ISIS has been unleashed and it's become worse. But let's be clear here, and I'm going to say it again, this was something we were warned about. No one predicted ISIS, but in terms of the persecution of Yazidis, of Christians, of Mandians, it was happening and Iraq was emptying out.

I want to talk to our friend in Erbil.

Ms. Dakhil, you recently gave a speech to the Iraq Parliament about the situation on Mount Sinjar, and you said, “Away from all political disputes, we want humanitarian solidarity”. My straightforward question to you is, how can Canada both provide the urgently needed humanitarian assistance and support the democratic and social development to help build, to use your words, “solidarity amongst all communities” within Iraq? If I may ask, could you focus particularly on the humanitarian support because of what the witnesses have underlined here today about the delivery of that support? We heard in testimony in our last meeting that while there were pledges made, items weren't being delivered, and now we're hearing more evidence about how things may be diverted. Could you help us with that, please?

Ms. Vian Saeed: Thank you very much for the question, but I think I need a translator. My friend near me, maybe she can translate for me. Okay, no problem?

Mr. Paul Dewar: Take your time.

●(0915)

Ms. Vian Saeed: First of all, we need humanitarian help as soon as possible, like getting shelter for all those people who are sleeping on the streets in this cold weather. We need food, clothing, and first aid. Children are dying from the bad health situation there, but we do not want to receive the help through the UN, because they are not spreading it fairly. All that comes, as I noted in my speech, was provided by the UN. Actually the UN are not concerned with the crisis that we are going through. The Kurdish region helps us as much as it can help, but it is not enough. We need international help from the humanitarians. On the other hand, on the defending aspect, we need the Canadian government to help us in this subject to help our fighters on the mountains and our kidnapped people, whose fate we don't know even now as we do not know where they are exactly.

Thank you.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Thank you.

I want to ask about you being a member of Parliament. As a Yazidi member of Parliament, are you being heard within the Iraqi Parliament? In other words, on what you're saying to us and when you're making your comments within the Parliament, are you being listened to by your fellow members within the Iraqi Parliament?

Ms. Vian Saeed: No. In the Parliament when I introduced my speech the first time, all the Iraqi members supported me. Until now all the Iraqi Parliament really supported me and helped me regarding the bad situation of the Yazidi people.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Just to be clear, they are now supporting you? They're listening to you now, after your speech?

Ms. Vian Saeed: Yes. Until now members of the Iraqi Parliament supported me, but you know the difference between the Parliament and the government. Now we need the government to do something for those refugees and for the kidnapped and for those people on the mountain. We need the fighters, the army, supported by the Iraqi government for this situation.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're now going to move over to Mr. Anderson for seven minutes.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank our witnesses for being with us today.

Following up on Mr. Dewar's question, I would like to ask our friend who is a member of Parliament, what needs to happen politically and militarily for your people to be able to go home?

Ms. Vian Saeed: We need the Canadian government with the international governments to help our government here to fight ISIS. They can help us to go back home to our land that was taken from us.

●(0920)

Mr. David Anderson: Does the Iraqi army have the potential to lead in that fight?

Ms. Vian Saeed: The Iraqi army, the Kurd [*Inaudible—Editor*] army, and also our fighters, the Yazidi people who are fighting, are all ready to fight ISIS, but they need more help from you and the international community.

Mr. David Anderson: Are there things you need training and help with in that area?

Ms. Vian Saeed: Yes.

Mr. David Anderson: I just want to go to our friends who are here with us today.

I was surprised to hear the strength of your presentation about the Kurds. Were you implying that the Kurds could have stopped ISIS? They left the area. Is your position that they were strong enough militarily that they would have been able to stop that?

Mr. Khalid Haider: Indeed. Kurds were well known as fighters. They had the opportunity to stop ISIS and to stop this mess from happening. The Kurds could have gone in the dark of the night, around two or three o'clock in the morning, and left these people helpless without telling them. They could have pulled everybody out and taken them to the mountain and still held their ground, but they did not. There was a lot of proof, a lot of documents, such as videos. There was a news reporter, who asked them, “Why are you pulling out of Sinjar? Why are you doing this? You should protect the innocent.” And they said, “Oh no, we don't know; we'll just leave them”. Sometimes they don't even answer the question. Yet they left armoured vehicles in these camps, these compounds, which belonged to the Iraqi army. There were arms rooms full of weapons they left behind and they fled.

Mr. David Anderson: Tell us about the Iraqi army's role, then, as well, in the past, and how you see it playing in the future. We've heard testimony here that there needs to be development and training around the professionalization of the Iraqi army in order for this battle to turn the other way.

Mr. Khalid Haider: Sir, they don't need training. They do need a better plan. In the war that's going on here, it's a lack of coordination. There is no coordination between the sides.

The Kurdish forces and the Iraqi forces are both led within the same framework. They should protect people no matter who they are, despite their identity, their belief, or their tongue, or whatever they are.

They created this mess themselves. There is no need for training. What really needs to be done is better coordination.

Mr. David Anderson: Rabbi Bulka, I'd like to ask if you can give us a Jewish perspective or an Israeli perspective on ISIS. We hear about their trying to develop now in Libya and Egypt. I'm wondering if you have any thoughts on the development of that organization in that area and how that might impact that. It's a bit of a different area, but an area away from Iraq and Syria.

Rabbi Reuven Bulka: Well, I'm not an intelligence expert, and I don't want to even pretend that, but I'm sure there is a sincere interest in somehow or other checking them, and there's no country that has greater experience on it than Israel.

ISIS is a major problem, but with the looting I would also think that they are not the only problem. There's a whole bunch of terrorist organizations, and this is a massive struggle. I don't know that anybody has "the" answer to it. There's probably a combination of things, but certainly for a group like that that has no reverence for life and, in fact, a disdain for life, it's a very difficult battle, but the only way that you can fight them is with strength and firepower to basically remove them. It's as simple as that.

On strategies to do that, the people who have been in this crucible now for quite a long time are the ones who are probably best able to answer that question.

• (0925)

Mr. David Anderson: You talked about the need to do some educating and influence. I'm wondering how far would you suggest the government or our government should go here in order to influence, or maybe call it control, the religious teaching and messaging that's going on out there, and particularly with relation to the Internet.

Rabbi Reuven Bulka: That's a critical question. We're looking at the issue in the context of our veneration of the idea of free speech. I don't even think that today we have a clear line that separates freedom of speech from responsibility to respect life. We probably haven't climbed that mountain that remains a continual battle, but I don't think that presently you can necessarily stifle what's happening on the Internet because that's going to be very difficult. What you can do is have messaging of the opposite nature, like the "Canadian values" type of messaging that should flood the Internet.

If we spend our time trying to control the bad, we'll probably end up not being as successful as putting our energies into spreading good messages that somehow, with our technological know-how, will get all over the place.

In the end there probably is nothing that's going to be a 100% solution, but if we're betting on the future, the best is to invest it in positive messaging that will embrace all Canadians and reach all Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Rabbi.

We're now going to turn over to Mr. Garneau. Sir, seven minutes.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Like many Canadians, I first became aware of the Yazidis this summer when the events occurred on Mount Sinjar, and I had to admit I was learning something new.

I have some questions for everybody. I'll start with Ms. Saeed. Are you the only Yazidi member of Parliament in Iraq or are there others?

Ms. Vian Saeed: No. We are two members of the Iraqi Parliament who are Yazidi. I am one.

Mr. Marc Garneau: What is your estimate of how many Yazidis have fled to the Kurdish region of Iraq?

Ms. Vian Saeed: We don't know the exact number, but I think it is around 400,000 people.

Mr. Marc Garneau: Have any Yazidis managed to remain in the villages where they come from or has everybody fled to the Kurdish region of Iraq?

Ms. Vian Saeed: Since the beginning, all of the Yazidis have been fleeing to the mountains, to the Kurdistan region, and to the Dohuk. Now we have about 700 Yazidi families in the mountains. Those families are with their men who are fighting ISIS.

Mr. Marc Garneau: Because you are in the Iraqi Parliament, perhaps you could answer this question.

Is the Iraqi government in Baghdad contributing to the humanitarian aid for the refugees who have ended up in northern Iraq? Are they providing funds and humanitarian aid?

Ms. Vian Saeed: Of the humanitarian aid that is provided to refugees in the Kurdistan region, about 80% of it is all from the Kurdistan regional government. The other 20% is from the Iraqi government.

Mr. Marc Garneau: Thank you. I'd like to turn to Mr. Haider.

I was surprised when you said the the Kurds had betrayed the Yazidis. I did not know that, so that is something new for me. You have said that most aid to the Kurdish region is not reaching Yazidi refugees.

I was there in September with Mr. Dewar. We did not meet Yazidis at that time, but mostly Chaldean Christians who had also fled the region.

When you say that most aid is not reaching Yazidi refugees, it implies that the control of the humanitarian aid is done by the Kurdish government as opposed to non-government organizations, United Nations, and others.

Is there a tight control of humanitarian aid by the Kurdish regional government?

• (0930)

Mr. Khalid Haider: Yes, sir, there is. Also, there are not only camps in the Kurdistan region, there are a lot of camps in Turkey. There are different spots.

There is an American lady who sent me documents, which I gave to the clerk, about the Turkish government that is trying to control the budget and will not allow the PKK—which is another political party, a Kurdish party in Turkey—to control this budget, and give it fairly and squarely to the Yazidis who have been stranded and who have been moved away from their hometowns.

About the Kurdish region in Iraq, there are a lot of eyewitnesses, not only us. In fact, my colleague has a better explanation than I do. I will let him explain what's going on regarding the lack of humanitarian aid.

Mr. Omar Haider (Yezidi Human Rights Organization-International): I would like to thank everybody for having us here.

Going back to the mountain, like Kahlid said, I lost all of my family. I'm the only one left. Miss Saeed knows them. She's been in our house before.

With the situation on the mountain, I have all my relatives, all my tribe. They're still there. No one has left the mountain. It's not actually 700 families there; there are 1200 families documented, and I'm in contact with them on a daily basis. Even Khalid was there yesterday.

I talked to somebody on the mountain. Some people risk their lives. They went to the abandoned village to get some flour to make some bread, but unfortunately their vehicle got hit with an IED, and they both died. This is not the first time. They are risking their lives to go and get some flour because they're not getting any aid. The stuff that was dropped was worthless; they didn't even use it.

They have newborns who are dying there. They don't have enough shelter there. Basically, they're running out of food. A lot of people are risking their lives to go to the abandoned villages.

On the hostage situation, a lot of them were in Tal Afar, and they moved into Syria, including my family. They were there. I haven't heard from them for a month. I got a call from somebody yesterday that they had moved half of the hostages there, which was 1,500 people, including some of my family. I don't know where the men are, but we know that they took all of the women to Syria.

Thank you.

Mr. Marc Garneau: You also mentioned that the persecution of Yazidis by Kurds goes back a long time.

Could you elaborate a little on that? The numbers are quite horrendous.

Mr. Khalid Haider: Sir, if you go back to the history of genocide that happened to the Yazidis, I want to mention the “blind prince”—that's what he was called—of Rawanduz. He was a Kurd who led this campaign against Yazidis.

On August 14, 2007, the same thing happened. History repeated itself. The Kurds took their forces out of these two villages five minutes before they were getting attacked, by al-Qaeda at that time, which is ISIS today, another version of al-Qaeda under another name. Today, in 2014, Kurdish people are pulled out under the dark of the night, and all of these innocents are handed to the criminals, including people who were living among us.

In fact, we have people we are in touch with. They killed over 700 Kurdish people who come from Halabja, and different places, from Sulaymaniyah. Who are they? Don't you think that the Kurdish government is aware of those people leaving and they're calling for jihad or holy war? Don't you think that they are aware of their movement within the Kurdish region? Don't you think that they see their forces in Kurdistan region, arresting 16- to 17-year-old boys and tossing them into jail for no reason? They're persecuting us. It's as obvious as the sunrise. It's pretty obvious. It's pretty clear.

● (0935)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Garneau, just to make mention of that document, we will have it translated and it will be sent out to the members. It was just in English

Thank you very much.

That ends the first round. We're going to start the second round, which will be five minutes.

We're going to lead off with Ms. Brown.

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all our witnesses, both by teleconference and here. It's indeed very concerning to the Canadian government to hear of these situations. As you know, we've been very involved from a humanitarian perspective. We started early. We've been one of the largest contributors. The World Food Programme is saying that the people who have committed money are not paying their contributions. I am pleased to tell you that Canada has fully paid the contributions we've made but we continue to look for ways that we can help. Concerning the uneven distribution of the humanitarian assistance that's going in and because we work through our international partners like the World Food Programme, do you have suggestions for us on how aid could get in and be more evenly distributed? We need to see this assistance getting to all the people in need.

You've talked about the number of Yazidi people in the refugee camps. Are they experiencing discrimination within the refugee camps or is the food not getting to the specific camps where the Yazidis happen to be refugees?

Could you give us some insight?

Mr. Khalid Haider: There has always been discrimination there. I'm not going to lie and say all Kurds are alike. There are great people among them. If I said the Kurds in general are the same then it would be a statement that is 100% wrong, but some Kurdish officials are not clearly conveying this message to both sides. The campgrounds that have been set up for the refugees have been set up on low ground. Any time it rains they will be flooded waist high, and people will be forced out of their tents. There has to be an agency or an office or whatever you name it for the food program. That has to be set up by the United Nations or whoever is going to be there to be aware of all the comings and goings. There are many camps, and many people live in each one of them. To have people drive around this Kurdish region—it's not as if you're driving in downtown Baghdad—it's pretty much aligned with the United Nations. They want to be good friends, to look good. To drive around and see people suffering who need help and question them without the Kurdish authorities behind you and then warn them not to talk.... When you go there they will make sure to send somebody with you to warn them not to say anything. It's just like the former regime, Saddam Hussein's regime. It's another version in a different language.

Thank you.

Ms. Lois Brown: Ms. Saeed, do you have any comments on how we get the humanitarian assistance to the Yazidis specifically?

Ms. Vian Saeed: First of all, I want to thank you.

Second, there are some organizations in Canada. One of them is the Iraqi society for human rights Canada. We are in contact with them. You can contact them as well. We can both work to distribute all the aid fairly, even here in Kurdistan. As for me I will have data contracts with [*Inaudible—Editor*] ready to help. Also, with the Kurdish government we are all ready to receive any help from you. To be fair, we want the Canadian society to be contributed in your name. We can't contact your organization there. As I say, there is an organization, the Iraqi society for human rights.

• (0940)

Ms. Lois Brown: I think I'm being told I'm out of time.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thanks, Ms. Brown.

Madam Laverdière, five minutes please.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll ask my questions in English to avoid any further complications in translation.

Thank you very much to all the witnesses for being here today. Thank you for the very interesting comments you've made and for what we have been able to learn through your testimony.

I would like to follow up a bit on Ms. Brown's question because I also wanted to ask how Canada can best target our assistance to help those who are the most at risk. You mentioned, Ms. Saeed, the Iraqi society for human rights. What is their role? What kinds of activities do they undertake? Do they give humanitarian assistance, such as delivering food or shelter or things like that?

Ms. Vian Saeed: I have been working with this organization before. They are ready to provide shelter, food, clothing, and any aid

here to the refugees in Kurdistan. The members are from Kurdistan and from Canada.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: As the official opposition in Canada, we have really called for Canada to provide increased and targeted help for minorities, refugees, and victims of sexual violence in Iraq and Syria. Based on your knowledge of the situation, what are the primary needs in terms of housing, food, health, and educational services?

Ms. Vian Saeed: The thing we are most in need of now is a place to live, like camps or houses, but not tents because it is not suitable for the cold weather here in Iraq. You are free to help by any means you can. I cannot force you or tell you exactly what things you have to help with, but the greatest need is housing because they are sleeping on the streets.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: What is the education situation for the young people? Do they have access to some form of school while they are in camps?

Ms. Vian Saeed: This year all of the refugees were delayed in their education because there was not any access to schools. But next year we are all trying as much as we can to make contracts with the government to make all the refugees have access to schools in the Kurdistan region in the places where they are camping.

• (0945)

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Who is coordinating this effort to give access to school?

Ms. Vian Saeed: The Kurdistan government.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: I'm thinking here of young people, children who are caught in this terrible and awful situation. Do you see a lot of psychological scars, psycho-social problems with these young people? Is there anything that can be done to prevent them from being traumatized for the rest of their lives?

Ms. Vian Saeed: My opinion is that after this tragedy that took place in Sinjar, all the people from there will have post-traumatic syndrome, psychologically they are not stable, especially the girls who had been raped. They are in a terrible psychological situation. I think all of these girls need some psychotherapy at least, so they can get to live with their new lives.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We're now going to turn over to Mr. Hawn for five minutes.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Thanks, Mr. Chair. Five minutes goes quickly. I've got a number of questions and I'd appreciate fairly concise answers.

From what we're hearing today it's hard to tell who's the bigger enemy of the Yazidis: the Kurds or ISIS. If ISIS were eliminated would their oppression be simply replaced by Kurdish oppression, Mr. Haider?

Mr. Khalid Haider: Let me go back to my first statement and ask: who let ISIS in, but the Kurds? It's the same thing. Would the trust have been lost since the second round happened? That's my personal belief. As well, Yazidis believe in general that we can't trust them ever again. There was a route that was going to be opened by the YPG, which is the Kurdish fighters who are fighting alongside the Yazidis. They wanted to open this route back up for the supplies to get to the mountain, food and such, and they refused to do so.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: The Kurds are as big an enemy as ISIS from the sounds of it.

How big an area are we talking about to supply to the Yazidis?

Mr. Khalid Haider: Sinjar Mountains has a stretch from east to west that's going to be nearly 14 to 20 miles. The worst of it is for three miles.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Would it make sense to you for us or somebody to go over their heads and airdrop supplies to the Yazidis?

Mr. Khalid Haider: Indeed. Yes, sir, because if this is not the case nobody will do it. As long as there are people who wanted to claim the goods for themselves, like the political sides, there's no point to let them do it unless somebody else does it.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Some of that has been done, but how secretive would we have to be about that to avoid the Kurds going in and catching the supplies?

Mr. Khalid Haider: It will not be very secret. There has to be some pinpoints on top of the mountain to drop.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: It's hard to hide a C-17...

Mr. Khalid Haider: Yes, it is indeed.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: ...but in terms of getting that operation going...

Mr. Khalid Haider: The Iraqi government has got some of those kinds of airplanes. It would be pretty much hidden.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Okay.

To switch to the training piece, Madam Saeed said the Iraqis need training and I believe that to be true. It might not be the individual military skills that need training, but the ability to operate in a coordinated fashion as a division. There's a division size group of the Iraqi army, about 20,000, who could be put into the battle space relatively quickly, but they need training in my view. I'll ask your opinion. From what I know they need training in terms of coordinating, in terms of operating as an army. That's training on a higher level. That's more leadership training and so on.

Would you agree with that or do you think that's overstated?

Mr. Khalid Haider: I don't want to say I disagree, yet I don't want to say I agree totally because, as I said earlier, they have to be there as a Kurd nation. There are two divisions. You have to coordinate them together and have them agree on the same statement to get this mission done.

● (0950)

Hon. Laurie Hawn: That involves coordinating with other forces in the area. That is where the training is required; it's operating as an army or operating as an army in coordination with other armies.

Mr. Khalid Haider: It is indeed, without discrimination.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Rabbi Bulka, you mentioned at one point that we needed an international army to deal with situations like this. Who were you thinking would comprise that army, and who would lead it?

Rabbi Reuven Bulka: If I had all the answers to that, I would have...it's not clear in my head. It's an idea that needs development. The natural place for this would be the United Nations. I don't see their movement in that. I think that anyone who steps up to the plate, who has international stature—and I certainly think Canada is qualified to do that—should...Somebody needs to take an aggressive lead in this to say we need this international force that on a moment's notice will be able to come in and stop tragedies.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: I don't disagree with you. The UN has never been very good at any kinetic kind of operation.

Madam Saeed, you did mention, unless I misheard you, that you don't want help from the UN. Did I hear you correctly?

Ms. Vian Saeed: I'm not sure I'm blaming the UN, but I think their system is like that. It's somehow too late now. They are too late to provide their help. What I mentioned, or what I meant for you...we want your help to come directly to the refugees. We do not want it to be through the UN.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Hawn.

We're now going to start our third round, and Mr. Anderson is going to lead off.

You have five minutes, please.

Mr. David Anderson: Madam Saeed, I would like to ask you a question about your relationship with the Kurdish government.

Your people are spread out from your traditional area into Kurdish camps. What is your relationship with the Kurdish government? What work do you do with them and how does that work? How does that function?

Ms. Vian Saeed: Excuse me, I didn't hear you clearly.

Mr. David Anderson: Okay, I will repeat it.

I would like to know what your relationship is with the Kurdish government. Your people are spread out from your traditional area into the Kurdish territory. As a member of Parliament, you work to represent them. What is your relationship with the Kurds and their government? How do you work together?

Ms. Vian Saeed: My relationship...? I'm a member of Parliament from the Kurdish region in Baghdad. My relationship with my government, the Kurdish government, is so good, and my relationship with my fellow Yazidi people is so good. I'm trying to help as much as I can, both from the Iraqi government and from the Kurdish government standpoint, to help my people, the Yazidi people, who are all refugees now in the Kurdistan region.

Mr. David Anderson: One of the things we have heard in the last few days as we have been having these hearings is that the past Iraqi government failed; that it discriminated against many different people.

How do you feel about the new government? Is it going to be open to all people and be able to work with all groups, including the Yazidis?

Ms. Vian Saeed: We hope that the new government will help more and that there will be a new beginning and a new future for Iraq, and of course for us as a minority, the Yazidi people.

Mr. David Anderson: I have a very short time, but can you tell me this: what does it mean to be a Yazidi? What is the importance of the mountain and your territory? Can you tell us a little bit about what it means to be Yazidi?

Perhaps, if I have time, I'll allow our other guests to answer that question as well.

Ms. Vian Saeed: Okay.

As you know, we did not choose to be Yazidi. We are born as Yazidi. I'm proud of that. Ours is the ancient religion. It's a peaceful religion; we have not harmed any person or anyone, until now. We live in peace with the Muslims, Christians, Yazidis, Kurds, and Arabs. We do not make any racism. We have been killed 74 times until now, as was mentioned. We are trying up to now to be peaceful and not to hurt anybody. All we want is to live peacefully in our land. We do not want to leave our land here where I was born, where my father was born, and where my grandfather was born. We want to stay here to live in our land peacefully again.

I'm so proud to be Kurd and I'm so proud to be Yazidi, and I want to stay in my country.

●(0955)

Mr. Khalid Haider: That mountain means a lot to us, just as Ms. Saeed said, because of the history that our ancestors built in it, not to mention the religious sites. There are 20 to 30 holy shrines in the mountain. The term Yazidi means "who gave me this life, who created me". We are attached to that mountain because it's ours; we are the natives of that land that was known once as Mesopotamia, as much as the Assyrian and Sabi minorities were and are today. We are the natives of Iraq, and there is no way we will give up our homeland or hometowns to anybody. That is the last thing we will ever think of.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thanks, David.

We're going to go over to Mr. Dewar for five minutes.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Thank you.

I'm glad to hear that. It was a good question by my colleague because I think people need to understand that this isn't about relocation. This isn't about being able to leave. This is where you are, your roots. As with my colleague Mr. Saganash, it's peoples of the land, and it's not about moving anywhere else. You are part of the land, and I think that's important for people to note.

I want to start with you, Mr. Haider. What I've heard today is extremely shocking, if what you're saying is true and based on fact. And I have no reason to challenge you on that, except we've heard other evidence at committee, or certainly when Mr. Garneau and I and the Minister of Foreign Affairs were on the ground. There were suggestions that there was aid getting to people, although we didn't get to Dohuk and other places, which we were encouraged by the UN, actually, to go to.

But what you're saying can lead to charges of war crimes, frankly. And what I want to be very clear about is if what you're saying is true, then what we need to be hearing from levels of government is that this needs to be investigated.

To that end, I suffered a bit of ridicule on our side of the House when I said that we needed to have people who are going to be on the ground to investigate war crimes. I was accused of wanting to send lawyers in to deal with ISIS. I have to say, the reason I was saying that was that, along with other supports, we needed to find out what was going on because war crimes absolutely are being perpetrated. But we need to understand who the actors are.

What you're saying, this evidence that you have, is important not only to share with us, but this has to go to the highest levels. What you're suggesting here is that with great caution, people were being told—and I'm going back to 2009 actually—that their minorities were being targeted. But what you're saying is very different. This is about saying there was evidence that ISIS was coming, and the people to protect were the forces on the ground, the Kurdish, and they left civilians, knowing that they were going to be killed, kidnapped, etc.

Is that what you're suggesting here?

Mr. Khalid Haider: When there is a coincidence, it might be once or twice, but not three or four times in a row. People went to the Kurdish authorities in the Sinjar area and asked if they needed any help or support. People were going to get recruited. They said, "No, no, go home. We have plenty. We have 12,000 peshmerga forces in and around the Sinjar area." Twelve thousand? That's over a division, I do believe, or three divisions. Not to mention, three days before that, they took all these heavy machine guns out of the hands of Yazidi who were involved with the peshmerga.

●(1000)

Mr. Paul Dewar: Why?

Mr. Khalid Haider: I don't know why. I asked that question to the very same person who took them away.

Number three is leaving those people and not telling them. At least tell them the danger is coming. When you have three coincidences in a row, then there is something obvious that it's telling us. When you go back to May 2014, ask about the three major generals who fled Mosul City and handed it to ISIS. Where did they go? Where are they? They went to Erbil. Nobody questioned that. Where are they?

If you want to collect evidence, you do an investigation. You start from the smallest item and ask, "How did that happen?" And then you go back to the bigger picture and put this puzzle together piece by piece. You can't complete a picture with a teeny, tiny piece missing. You go back to the three major generals when they drove to Erbil instead of going back to their headquarters in Baghdad.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Paul Dewar: I have one quick question to our friend in Erbil. Our government has put some focus on the air strikes. We believe we should be doing more in humanitarian support. Can you tell us, what is the most important thing for your people right now? Is it the humanitarian assistance that Canada can provide, or is it the combat mission? Is it the air strikes?

Ms. Vian Saeed: Could you please repeat the question?

Mr. Paul Dewar: Do you think that Canada's role should be to provide more humanitarian assistance or should we be involved in the air strike campaign?

Are the air strikes helping your people right now or what do you need most, humanitarian support or the air strikes from our CF-18 fighter jets?

Ms. Vian Saeed: Mostly, we need humanitarian help or aid for our people, including housing in the camps. We need military help for our fighters in the mountains in order to provide them with weapons, so that they can fight ISIS.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Brown, for five minutes.

Ms. Lois Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Hopefully I'll get through these questions.

Are the Yazidi people looking for their own territory within Iraq or are they happy just staying as Iraqis, and being recognized as a minority group within the Iraqi country?

Were they looking for, or were they fighting for, or are they fighting for, a territory to call their own?

Perhaps Mr. Haider can answer.

Mr. Khalid Haider: In fact, as Yazidis, we've never looked for or sought our own territory. We want to be looked at as Iraqis only because we coexist in peace with every religion or nation around us.

When there is any catastrophe happening to any tribe—not even a religious minority or anybody—we go ahead and support them with whatever we can. We are well-known for being generous and peaceful.

We've never wanted to claim that this territory should belong to us, no. We want to be within the frame called Iraq, but we want to have our rights as well.

Ms. Lois Brown: Have you been recognized within Iraq as a minority population that deserves representation in government or Ms. Saeed, did you have to fight for your seat in Parliament along with others to get recognition?

• (1005)

Ms. Vian Saeed: For me, no, I have never been treated as a minority in Parliament. It was not hard for me to fight for my seat there.

As I've said before, we are living peacefully with all people and we respect other religions as do other nations. I haven't had any problems with my colleagues in Parliament.

Ms. Lois Brown: We're glad to see you there. As female parliamentarians in Canada, I'm sure Madame Laverdière and I applaud your initiative and your desire to serve your people.

I would like to go back for a moment to the discussion about humanitarian assistance. As I said before, Canada is the third largest contributor already in humanitarian assistance. We are very concerned about what is happening in this part of the world and getting humanitarian assistance there.

Since the World Food Programme has identified the real problem as other countries not paying what they've pledged, is there a message or a way of taking this message to other countries and asking them to ensure that what they have said they would contribute actually gets put through to the World Food Programme?

Have you taken this message to other countries and asked them to pay what they have pledged?

Ms. Vian Saeed: I have no opportunity to talk this widely to other countries, asking them for or giving them their message. Maybe now, through you, I can say my message to all the countries.

What we went through, I don't want any person on this earth to go through. Seeing your children dying, seeing your mother or father killed in front of your eyes, seeing your sister and your daughter being killed on the mountains, [*Inaudible—Editor*] this is a terrible situation for any person to go through. I don't want anyone to go through this, and I'm saying this with my whole heart.

But I'm asking all these countries, if you were in our place, if you had been facing all these terrible conditions that we went through, what would you feel, or how would you want the world to help you? To every person that is hearing me now, or any country that promised to help or to contribute, give aid, I hope you will be able to provide what you have promised us.

Thank you so much for giving me this opportunity.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to round four now.

We're going to start with Mr. Saganash, for five minutes, please.

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank our guests for their testimonies this morning.

I want to start with Ms. Saeed. I'm picking up on Ms. Brown's questions here. I guess in these sorts of conflicts, the most vulnerable people are always girls and women, without exception.

What are the particular needs of the women who are impacted by this conflict in this case, and what role can Canada play in that area specifically?

• (1010)

Ms. Vian Saeed: First of all, we need a higher power to release all these girls who have been kidnapped. Maybe your power or the higher power, or the power that we have here, can help us to get our girls back to their families.

After that, we look forward to making rehabilitation centres to help those girls rehabilitate and get back to their normal lives. Or maybe we can move them abroad to better centres to be treated if they have any psychological or physical problems or injuries.

Mr. Romeo Saganash: Thank you.

My next question is for Rabbi Bulka.

You spoke about the need for an international army, and you responded partially to that question from Mr. Hawn.

I want to follow up on the other aspect that you mentioned. You spoke about the need for an international strategy. You spoke about human rights in that context, which I believe are very important. All member states to the UN clearly have an obligation to uphold all human rights at all times. That's at the core of the purposes and principles of the United Nations, and I think we need to be reminded all the time about that.

Can you elaborate further on this need for an international strategy? I get the impression that we'll be getting more and more of these sorts of conflicts in the future, and that need for an international strategy is quite important in that context.

Can you elaborate a bit?

Rabbi Reuven Bulka: Right, it's precisely that. I'm happy you brought that up. It's precisely because it seems like an endless thing, and the tragedies we've had have been on a massive scale. We talk about every life being precious, but you're talking about hundreds of thousands, millions of people.

My main problem is that it shouldn't get lost in the bureaucratic mess. There are countries around, including mainly democracies, that are committed to this and that perhaps have to take the bull by the horns and say they're going to do something now to prevent this type of thing down the line, in the future, to have a rapid response force, and to look at this.

At least put the world on notice that there's a serious effort going on out there to counter the types of atrocities that we seem to be hearing about week in and week out.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Hawn, five minutes, sir.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Saeed, you responded about what is more important—military aid or humanitarian aid—and really, you answered “both”,

which I think is true. The humanitarian aid is obvious. You also talked about needing firepower to rescue the girls. In your opening statement you said that the genocide must be stopped. Of course genocides aren't stopped by humanitarian aid.

I think there are about 700 Yazidi fighters, if I heard correctly. Can you tell me who is supporting the Yazidi fighters militarily, or with training or supplies, or whatever?

Ms. Vian Saeed: Now the supplies for the Yazidi fighters on the mountain are all from the Kurdish government.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Okay, but what we heard from Mr. Haider is that the Kurds are abandoning the Yazidis. Mr. Haider, I'll turn to you. Is there a contradiction here?

Mr. Khalid Haider: Sir, first of all we are not Kurds, as Ms. Saeed claimed that we are.

After the genocide it is hard to trust the Kurds and live with them, especially after what we've seen. As my colleague mentioned, we've seen the Kurds in Sinjar have guarded ISIS and led them to the houses that belonged to the Yazidis.

In fact, there are over 5,000 to 7,000 Yazidi fighters fighting inside Sinjar Mountain, and they are not Kurds, and they aren't supplied by the Kurds.

In fact, all the aid was dropped through the central government of Iraq. After that, a heavy raid by ISIS took place in the Sinjar Mountains. There was wave upon wave of ISIS that our fighters in the mountain have decimated. They have taken over their machine guns and weapons, and some of them are heavy Russian-made Dushkas.

Thank you.

• (1015)

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Just a clarification on a matter of terminology, in the west, a division is about 20,000 people, so it's just a difference in terminology.

Mr. Haider, I think in your opening statement you referred to this being the 74th genocide, comprising 23 million Yazidis. Can you give us some context on that timeframe?

Mr. Khalid Haider: It started almost 1,100 years ago after the existence of Islam and spreading the word of Islam.

It started with the Mongols, then the Persians, then the Turks, and today it is happening by both Kurds and Arabs.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: So it seems to me, from everything I'm hearing—and I asked that question earlier—if ISIS is gone the Kurds are still going to be your enemy. Is that a fair statement?

Mr. Khalid Haider: If you go back to the years before Saddam Hussein, to Salam Arif and his brother, Abdul Rahman Arif, one of the requests of Mustafa Barzani was religious unification in Iraq, that there should be all Muslims and nobody else.

I think you heard of that right back to the fifties or perhaps the sixties. I'm not saying that he's following in his father's steps but it is not that far from that statement at all.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: That goes back to Ms. Saeed's desire for it not to be a separate nation, per se, but to be part of the Iraqi nation, but to have freedom of religion and so on. With that history, how realistic is that?

Mr. Khalid Haider: With the situation and what's going on it's difficult. It cannot be real. It's just pretty much a myth unless they acknowledge us and our existence.

If Kurds are going to claim us as part of their society, then why are they sending their peshmerga and their fighters to Kobani if the Sinjar Mountains is closer?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Why would they want to claim you as part of their society if they persecute you so much, other than having somebody to persecute?

Mr. Khalid Haider: It's pretty much land and politics.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Yes.

Mr. Khalid Haider: That's what it is.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: It's sad, is what it is.

Rabbi Bulka, you talked about messaging and that we can deal with, or try to deal with current organizations like ISIS and so on, and really there is only one way to deal with them and it's by force, from that point of view.

But in the longer term, about messaging and attitudes and education, using the Internet and schools, can you comment a little bit about how we would get into the minds of people through the Internet, through schools, and through religious teachings or countering religious teachings that may be destructive?

Rabbi Reuven Bulka: There are a number of ways, but the messaging has to come from the people on the ground, for example, getting leaders of the various communities to come together, extolling Canada, being welcoming, and basically messaging how important it is to have inclusivity, to work together for all segments of the community, to build the communities that they're living in, to think in terms of what they can contribute to make Canada better. The types of things that are positive in their outlook, that would give people a sense of belonging, are the types of things that we should be thinking about as powerful messages. We should enlist the leadership of the various ethnic and religious communities in this campaign. It has to be a massive one. It has to be something in which the political leaders of our country are heavily invested so they know that this is not just some fringe group but that it speaks to the totality of the country.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Hawn.

That completes our fourth round, but I know there are some additional questions.

Blaine, welcome, and glad to have you here.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Well, thank you, Chair.

First of all, let me just say I'm a temporary on this committee today. I find the conversation absolutely amazing.

The concern that I have, in the little bit of research that I've been able to do while I was sitting here, and, of course, listening to the testimony, is that while we may disagree on what the immediate short-term needs and goals of the Yazidi people might be, whether we need more military presence or security presence, or whether we need more humanitarian aid—those are all questions that are legitimate issues of debate—I'm thinking more long term.

Mr. Haider, you've brought up the history of the Yazidi people, and you've said quite clearly that you don't think you can ever trust the Kurds again. There seems to be this inability to do what normally would be a reconciliation approach where, when somebody has wronged you, there is an ability to reconcile, whether it's cultural or whatever it is. It seems to me that this ability to remember all of the wrongs of the past and never seem to move beyond them seems to be a sticking point in the Middle East. That's based on my perception.

My question to you is: if that's going to be the case moving forward, and President Obama has indicated that his goal would be the new government in Iraq being a more unified, more benevolent government to bring people together, without this apparent ability to reconcile across the cultures and across ethnic and religious lines, is that a bona fide, legitimate, long-term goal? Or will that only provide short-term security for as long as that benevolent government is there, which can be replaced, of course, through a democratic process, with any other government that might not be so in the future? How do we reconcile this? I see it simply becoming an ongoing problem that will flare up from time to time.

Is there anybody here, Ms. Saeed, or even Mr. Bulka, and you, Khalid, who sees any other options available out there to provide more security in this region in the longer term?

•(1020)

Mr. Khalid Haider: Yes, for long-term goals there is an alternative. In fact, the only option we have, which is going to be the best option, is bringing these sides together under the United Nations' supervision and having them work together. They may not agree. This is only an opinion, my opinion: secure the borders along these countries around Iraq and have the army do the defence, as usual, and not have the army do the policing job.

Religion, just like freedom, can be used, but cannot be abused. Once you overdose on any kind of medication, it might harm your life, and it's the same thing with religion. People who are overusing it need to be educated and taught how to properly use it. In fact, in Iraq in particular, that's one of the biggest issues since 2003. Religion has dominated the area and become pretty much the main dominance, replacing politics. Religion cannot be used in this room to discuss as politics, but can be used in a church or a mosque to talk about peace, and not used as a tool or weapon to encourage people who don't know anything about the outside world and use it to harm and hurt people, especially innocent minorities.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Does anybody else want to take that on?

Rabbi Reuven Bulka: In the end, our experience has been that the only real guarantee of religious freedom is when countries are democratic. I know it's a long shot, but our ultimate goal has to be to create governments there that are answerable, that are accountable, that are democratic, and that are founded on mutual respect. I know it is a long way off, but that has to be our end goal otherwise, if governments are in the hands of despots, you only have a guarantee of chaos and future atrocities.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to move over to Mr. Dewar for five minutes.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Thank you, Chair.

I want to touch on two issues. The first is to build on the questioning we've just heard from my colleague.

One of the issues we talked about in the last hearings was from witnesses about the need for a truth and reconciliation process along the lines of South Africa and other countries that have done that. I think it makes sense, but the other issue that of course has to be confronted.... Actually, when I was first in Iraq in 2007 there was a discussion around the Constitution, and at the time you couldn't mention the word "federalism". It was seen as too controversial. Now we're hearing more and more people talk about that.

As Canadians, we don't want to ever impose our form of government on anyone, but certainly will share our experience. The catastrophe of the Bremer model after 2003 is starting to be addressed in terms of changing the actors.

But I'd just like to hear from you, Mr. Haider. In Canada we have obviously a national government, but we have devolved powers to provinces, and one of the key aspects, which we heard again from our witnesses at the last committee hearing, was the need to emphasize citizenship and pluralism. It's a bit of a rhetorical question, but it's important to put it on the record. Is that something you could see as being helpful to deal with the crimes of the past, if you will, and the need to look to the future?

•(1025)

Mr. Khalid Haider: It is indeed. In fact, when you have a government like Iraq dealing with a lot of problems and issues, you have to take baby steps, go step-by-step to have that kind of federal system applied. Also, on war crimes, the U.S. can go back to its records and investigate that, go back to the history. There are a lot of people who witnessed that. Gather all this information and bring these people to justice.

Iraq is divided now into three divisions: south, centre, and north. As long as there are these three divisions, then it's hard to deal with or fix any issues unless we have that part taken out of the equation and have the true result, which is going to be why they are fighting and over what, which is obvious. Everybody is fighting for a bigger piece of pie, which are all these oil resources, yet people are not getting any use or benefit from that.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Thank you.

In the time I have remaining I just want to touch on your comments, Rabbi Bulka. The idea you have has been well documented. There have been proposals put forward, in fact, by Canadians and others for a rapid response at the UN. I'm not sure

that's going to happen overnight, but it's certainly something we should continue to talk about.

There is something very concrete that other countries have gotten behind, and we pushed the present government to get behind, and that is a focal point for R2P, which is basically to have our government appoint someone to look at coordination and at areas where there are potential humanitarian crises or conflicts. Certainly we saw this in slow motion this past summer. It's called an R2P focal point. It's basically appointing someone from our Department of Foreign Affairs to work and coordinate with others to look at the whole doctrine of R2P and coordinate information so that we can actually respond.

It's not "the" solution, but it's one of the tools we can have in our tool kit. I'm just wondering if you know about this, based on your comments, and if you would advocate for that kind of approach.

Rabbi Reuven Bulka: What I see though, is that what you're spelling out doesn't seem to fit into the whole idea of rapid. I'm a big fan of having alert systems out there just because it's better than having nothing.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Great.

Rabbi Reuven Bulka: But on the other hand, I really think that if we're serious—I know we are serious—and if we're focused on really preventing this in the future, we have to have something that is robust, something that has teeth in it, that is more than just an alert system.

I don't know if this is something along the lines of the ambassador we have for religious persecution—

Mr. Paul Dewar: No. If I may say so, it's very different. It's coordination with other countries to do what you just said. But you're right—

Rabbi Reuven Bulka: Okay. I would be in favour of that for sure.

•(1030)

The Chair: Thanks.

Thanks, Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Anderson, go ahead for five minutes.

Mr. David Anderson: Thank you Mr. Chair.

Madam Saeed, I would like to get clarity from you on an issue. We've heard a little bit this morning regarding the role of the Kurds and the Kurdish government. We have a difference of opinion or flavour from our two witnesses here.

You work with the Kurdish government. If we went back one year, in your area, who was responsible for security? A year ago, what role did the Kurds in your area play in terms of security and responsibility, and what role do they play now?

Ms. Vian Saeed: One year ago, Sinjar was one of the places that had not agreed to be under the security of the Iraqi government or the Kurd government. There was some conflict about this, about who was responsible for the security there. But the Kurd government and the peshmerga were responsible for the security of most of the areas there.

I don't know whether this is the main thing you wanted to know from your question.

Mr. David Anderson: Yes it is, actually.

I'm just wondering who is responsible for security in the area. You talked about 1,200 fighters on the mountain. Generally in the area, what role do the Kurds play, or does ISIS control the area?

Ms. Vian Saeed: Now Sinjar is not under the control of the Kurds. It is under the control of ISIS. Only the fighters on the mountain of Sinjar are fighting ISIS. But Sinjar as an area is under the control of ISIS.

Mr. David Anderson: Okay. Thank you very much. That brings us some clarity.

We've talked a little bit about civilians. I'm wondering if you can tell us what is currently known about the Yazidi civilians who have been taken captive. You've talked a little bit about people being trafficked and that kind of thing. What do you know about your people who have been taken captive?

Ms. Vian Saeed: Excuse me?

Mr. David Anderson: I'm just wondering if you can tell us what you know about the Yazidi civilians who have been taken captive by ISIS, who are prisoners. What can you tell us about that? You've talked a little bit about human trafficking, but what else can you tell us about that? And perhaps our other guests can speak to that as well.

Ms. Vian Saeed: We don't have any information about the people who have been kidnapped by ISIS. But according to some girls who have been released by ISIS...by some of their fight.

Mr. Omar Haider: To go back to the hostage situation, I think I have more information than Ms. Saeed. The hostages were in four different places. They were in Kocho, in two villages in Tal Afar, in one of the former U.S. air bases south of Mosul, and other areas. They moved families who did not have their men with them. When they captured my family, they took all the men—my three uncles, my brother, and all the relatives—and they separated the girls and sold the girls to Syria. They took three of my sisters, and they sold them to Syria as slaves.

The rest of the family were in Tal Afar until a month ago, and they moved all of them—I've been tracking that.... They moved all the families who did not have their men with them to Syria. I talked to him; I hadn't heard from him in a month, and I talked to him yesterday. Some of my family, my grandmother and my aunt.... One family in Syria bought them. I talked to the guy. They gave him my phone number, and he talked to me yesterday on my way here. He wanted to make a deal with me. I have my family, my mom and my siblings. Of course, we don't know anything about the men; they are probably already dead, but the rest—my mom...my grandmother, my aunt, and my three uncles' wives with their kids—are about 40 people.

They told me they were going to go look for the rest of my family and bring them all together. For each of the family, we have to pay \$10,000 for them to go and collect all of the family. All of them were together, but when they took them to Syria, they sold them separately. As of right now, this is the situation with the hostages, the latest situation and the latest news of the hostages.

●(1035)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Haider.

We'll go over to Mr. Garneau for five minutes, please.

Mr. Marc Garneau: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We hear in the media that when ISIS captures people, depending on who they are, sometimes it gives them a choice to convert to its perverse set of values and beliefs or to be killed. In the case of the Yazidis, as I understand it, there is no choice: they either kill you or enslave you, one of the two, so that's a particularly harsh treatment at the hands of ISIS.

I want to get back to what Ms. Saeed described as about 400,000, I guess you could call them refugees, who had fled from the Sinjar area and who are looking for assistance in refugee camps. Given the fact that, depending on the numbers you believe, there are probably over a million refugees from other minorities, religious or ethnic, in the area, I am trying to get a sense of whether Yazidi refugees are being discriminated against versus other refugees. Conditions are miserable for everyone, but is there discrimination among refugees in the Kurdish area based on who they are?

I would like to direct that question to Ms. Saeed first. Because you are an Iraqi member of Parliament, you may have that information.

I'd also like to hear from Mr. Haider.

Ms. Vian Saeed: All the refugee situations here are bad but according to the Yazidi refugees it's worse because we don't have any help or any access to help. The Christians are getting some help from the Kurds or from organizations here that can help them, but we don't have any such institutes specially for Yazidis to help us in person. This is the first point.

The Yazidis left their home and their place suddenly, in a matter of hours. They were told they had to leave or be killed, so they were not able to take clothing, any money, or anything to protect themselves from bad weather. They could not even take their cars. They left their houses with only the clothes they were wearing. They were not able to take anything with them.

They were not like the other refugees who had been told they had a few days to leave their houses. They were able to take some aids, some money, some clothing with them when they left their houses.

We also have some people taken as slaves and some who were kidnapped. We don't know anything about them. Also, many of our people have been killed in cold blood there in Sinjar who did not have time to leave as ISIS attacked them.

I think all these points make our situation worse than the others.

●(1040)

Mr. Marc Garneau: Thank you.

Mr. Haider.

Mr. Khalid Haider: In the Kurdistan region, as Ms. Saeed and I mentioned, there are some minorities like the Christians. The Catholic Church will provide them with a lot of aid. They have a backup, but in the Yazidis case, nobody is going to back us up unless some countries like Canada or the United States or the United Nations in general send us some aid, if that aid gets through.

There is another important point, as my colleagues mentioned. Some of our people, our families, have lost all their documents. They don't have a single ID card to be identified as Yazidi or Iraqi or whoever they are. The Kurdish government doesn't want to issue new ID cards to them.

This is the fact about the KRG, the Kurdish regional government. The Kurdistan region in Iraq is in better shape than the Kurdish region in Syria, and the refugees in Syria are in better shape than they are in the Kurdish region, and I feel ashamed to say I'm a refugee in Iraq, because Iraq is my home. There are not enough words to express my feeling for such a hideous situation. Nothing can be worse than being a refugee in your own country. People don't get enough food. People don't get their ID card issued to them. Three days ago there was a protest in Shariya camp to better their living conditions. The Kurdish security forces shot four of them. They didn't kill them; they were wounded, and there were witnesses. If you believe in democracy and freedom of speech, then why are you shooting people? You can use better methods than that. We've had enough of using violence against innocent people who are asking for their rights, not to participate in your government, not to participate to overthrow either the central government or the regional government.

All they want is to live. Over one million Yazidis are scattered between Turkey, Syria, and Iraq, homeless, yet they are the natives in their land. They are the owners. Now they become the lodgers or far worse than that, homeless.

Also, as my colleagues here mentioned and brought to my attention, the Shabak are a minority. They are Shia from Iran and the Iraqi government supports them. Everybody has a backup except the Yazidis. The Kurds are claiming the Yazidis are part of them. Then where's the aid? Is that how you deal with and treat your supporters?

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

I want to say thank you very much to our witnesses today.

To Ms. Saeed in Iraq, thank you very much for talking to us today. We realize what an important role you play as a member of the Iraqi Parliament. Thank you so much for that.

To our colleagues here, thank you for taking the time to drive here to talk to us about that.

Rabbi, thank you as well for your testimony.

Ms. Vian Saeed: Excuse me. Can I have a minute just to clarify something?

The Chair: Sure.

Ms. Vian Saeed: About what has been said about the Kurdish government here, I think there was some conflict about the subject. In person now, I want to clarify some facts.

I disagree with being in a place where they are underestimating what the Kurds' institutions and government have done for us. Now all the Yazidis are refugees in the Kurdistan region. They are protecting us. They are saving us. They are fighting ISIS with us.

Now the Kurdish government has started to make IDs and passports for all the Yazidi refugees who are in Kurdistan. They are helping us with humanitarian aid and with security. This I want to be clear for all of you. I think there was some misunderstanding and some conflict about these facts.

Thank you so much for giving me this opportunity.

• (1045)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

With that, I'm going to adjourn the meeting. Thank you.

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