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# **Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, February 17, 2015**

—  
**Chair**

**Mr. Dean Allison**



## Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Tuesday, February 17, 2015

• (1100)

[Translation]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.)):** Good morning, everyone.

We will begin our meeting.

[English]

This is the 45th meeting of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. Today we'll continue our study of Canada's response to the violence, religious persecution, and displacement caused by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL.

Our witnesses today, we have the pleasure of having Ms. Jane Pearce, who is country director for the United Nations World Food Programme. Beside her is Mr. Martin Fischer, director of policy for World Vision Canada, and Mr. Bart Witteveen, director of humanitarian and emergency affairs at World Vision Canada. Lastly, appearing remotely via your screen from Erbil, Iraq, is Mr. Emmanuel Gignac, coordinator for northern Iraq from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Without any further ado we'll begin. Each of the witnesses will have up to 10 minutes to speak and then we'll proceed with questions.

Ms. Pearce, if you will begin the proceedings....

**Ms. Jane Pearce (Country Director, United Nations World Food Programme):** Thank you very much. Good morning, everybody.

I'm honoured to be here today as a representative of the United Nations World Food Programme, a voluntarily funded organization whose work has so often been made possible by the generosity of the people of Canada. Canada is a key partner in combatting hunger, and consistently a top donor to WFP's global operations. WFP remains the largest recipient of Canadian humanitarian funding, which is a tribute to our partnership.

If 2014 was a year of turmoil, 2015 is proving to be just as turbulent for WFP's operations around the world. Nonetheless, WFP continues to respond effectively and efficiently. Despite the daunting challenges of operating in countries like Iraq, WFP continues to be innovative in its delivery of food assistance. This is a testament to the commitment of WFP staff on the front lines. They listen to donors like you. They listen to the cooperating partners, without which our work would not be possible. Most of all, they listen to the people they serve.

On behalf of WFP, let me thank you for the contributions made to our emergency operations thus far. Thanks to the support of steadfast donors like Canada, WFP has been able to reach 1.7 million IDPs in Iraq since the onset of the crisis in 2014. When Canada made its first distribution to WFP's emergency response in March 2014, we were severely underfunded. That initial contribution could not have been more timely. I look forward to briefing you on Canada's contribution of \$13 million to Iraq's conflict-affected people.

Before I move on to the current crisis, let me just give you a snapshot of WFP's presence in Iraq over the years. WFP has been working alongside successive governments since 1991, providing food to people whose lives and livelihoods were jeopardized by conflict and natural disasters. Despite being an oil-rich country with enormous economic potential, Iraq's development has been held back by conflict after conflict. Protecting the poorest, most vulnerable Iraqis from the effects of this violence is a continuing challenge.

Iraq has one major social safety net, the public distribution system, which aims to help break the cycle of poverty by providing each Iraqi with a monthly food ration.

At the beginning of 2003, when it became clear that the PDS was likely to be interrupted by war, leaving 27 million Iraqis—60% of whom were totally dependent on it—without food, the WFP took over this system before handing it back to the government in 2004. Capacity building for government staff in the relevant ministries was key to this operation and is central to the working relationship between WFP and the Government of Iraq today.

As Iraq worked to stabilize politically and economically in the aftermath of war, WFP committed itself to improving opportunities for Iraq's next generation, with special nutritional support for mothers and children.

As sectarian violence overwhelmed Iraq in 2006, WFP launched an emergency operation to support internally displaced persons and Iraqi refugees in Syria. Active until June 2010, the operation assisted over one million people.

From 2010 WFP shifted its focus to government capacity-building and development of social safety nets. In 2012 Iraq opened its borders, welcoming Syrian refugees in both northern and western governorates. Canada came forward with \$3.4 million Canadian of much-needed funding to support WFP's operation. We were engaged in providing food to Syrian refugees in Iraq when this new crisis struck in January 2014.

The last year in Iraq has seen WFP evolve and expand, working to provide food assistance to the victims of ISIL's rampage through the country. The recent crisis in Iraq has made an estimated 2.8 million people food-insecure. This includes IDPs, host communities, and other vulnerable groups impacted by the conflict, requiring immediate food, agricultural, and livelihoods assistance.

Much of Iraq's wheat production comes from the presently volatile northern parts of the country, and nearly all of Iraq's water resources flow through areas under ISIL and affiliated armed group control, putting the food security of many Iraqis at risk.

•(1105)

The June harvest has been severely impacted, reducing food availability at the national level. The conflict has also resulted in a disruption of the government's public distribution system of food rations in parts of the country, impacting more than four million individuals who are not displaced but rely on the PDS for more than 50% of their energy intake.

As the needs of displaced people changed, so did WFP's assistance. In the first quarter of the year, we worked with IOM to ensure that displaced people in Anbar had both food and stoves to cook it on. As families running from Mosul were forced to flee from place to place, carrying nothing, WFP developed a special package of ready-to-eat food rations specifically for Iraq, including dates, a national comfort food. When a tidal wave of people fled northwards escaping the ISIL advance into the Sinjar district of Nineveh, WFP opened field kitchens to receive them. These provided two hot meals per day to a peak of 224,400 individuals, much-needed relief for people who had lost their homes, belongings, and even friends and family members. We continue to work closely with partners such as UNHCR to monitor and respond to the needs of displaced Iraqis and Syrian refugees arriving in camps and other settlements.

Canada's first contribution of \$2 million Canadian to WFP Iraq was used to buy 1,500 metric tons of family food parcels. This fed 520,000 vulnerable people for one month. As a cold winter set in and the flow of displacement stabilized, WFP brought in food vouchers for displaced people in urban locations of the Kurdistan region. Worth \$32 per month per person, these vouchers can be redeemed at local shops.

I'm happy to tell you that the success of this program in the governorate of Erbil is thanks to the strong collaboration between WFP and World Vision, our highly valued cooperating partner. We see vouchers being used to buy eggs and milk, bread and cheese, fruit and vegetables, cooking oil and tomato paste. Dietary diversity is increased, the local economy is boosted, and people are given the power to choose. Approximately 340,000 people have been reached with vouchers, injecting approximately \$18 million into the local economy of Kurdistan, where markets are functioning well.

In 2015, WFP is looking to move forward with electronic vouchers. A gentleman spending his voucher in Erbil city last week told us that vouchers had brought him and his family more choice, dignity, and independence. I'm pleased to say that the contribution WFP received from Canada in late 2015, of \$13.4 million has been allocated for vouchers. Your contribution will provide 260,000 people with a monthly food voucher.

Achieving these results has not been easy. Ongoing clashes, sieges and the unpredictable movement of battlelines has often frustrated WFP's efforts to reach people in need in western, central, and northern Iraq. By May, fighting had made it too dangerous to distribute in Anbar governorate. With the cooperation of our local partner, we finally regained access in October, 2014. WFP continues to look for opportunities to provide assistance in hard-to-reach areas. We managed to get food into Salah al-Din governorate, and were quick to deliver for families returning to shattered communities in liberated areas of Nineveh governorate. Although WFP stands ready to provide assistance to all those in need, this requires increasing the capacities of local NGO partners. Currently, assistance in hard-to-reach areas such as Anbar is ad-hoc and largely relies on a single local partner. Unfortunately, WFP cannot use cash and voucher-based assistance in contested areas where there is no reliable market.

Despite the logistical and security obstacles, I'm glad to tell you that WFP was able to reach 1.77 million conflict-affected people in Iraq with food assistance in 2014. But there is a great deal more to do. We remain deeply concerned about the food security of an estimated 1.3 million people in militant-held areas, where food prices are skyrocketing, and basic services are functioning only intermittently. Even as I speak, ISIL militants are massed outside Kirkuk city and the possibility of a battle for Mosul looms.

•(1110)

As humanitarians, we are preparing for more and further mass displacements. To deepen our understanding of the situation in ISIL-held or besieged areas, WFP is using remote data collection to gather information on the food security of people there. Early survey results from Anbar show a huge inflation of food prices and shortages of staple food items and cooking fuel.

International and local partners continue strengthening collaboration in an effort to widen the areas of operation and reach the largest possible number of vulnerable people, including 1.3 million people in need residing in areas controlled by ISIL and affiliated armed groups. A combination of direct implementation, discreet oversight, and remote management will continue to be adopted whenever feasible. Humanitarian partners will also enhance collaboration with the private and other non-traditional sectors to boost the response.

The stakes are high.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Marc Garneau):** Ms. Pearce, would you just wrap it up? We want to have as many questions as possible.

**Ms. Jane Pearce:** Certainly. I'm just about done.

The stakes are high. To stop the cycle of sectarianism and violence, the basic needs and rights of Iraq's population must be met. Food security is security, and the two should not be separated.

Thank you very much.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Marc Garneau):** Thank you, Ms. Pearce.

Mr. Fischer.

**Mr. Martin Fischer (Director of Policy, World Vision Canada):** Thank you, Chair, and good morning.

My name is Martin Fischer. I am the director of policy for World Vision Canada. I'll be sharing my time with my colleague Bart.

[*Translation*]

We want to thank all the committee members for inviting us to participate in this important study on the situation in Iraq and Syria.

[*English*]

World Vision responds to humanitarian emergencies by providing life-saving assistance such as food, health care, clean water and sanitation, and safe places for children. We are guided by the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence, and deliver assistance to people regardless of their religion, ethnicity, race, and gender.

We are actively responding to the humanitarian situation in Iraq and Syria. In fact, I just came back from the Kurdistan region of Iraq yesterday where, together with our president Dave Toycen, I visited our projects and spoke with children and families, our project staff, as well as officials from DFATD and our humanitarian partners such as WFP.

Today, my colleague Bart Witteveen, our director for humanitarian and emergency affairs, and I would like to discuss with you the humanitarian situation in the region, which is particularly part of your study concerned with the dislocation of people, as well as World Vision's response. As we do so, we ask you to consider three recommendations. First, in the immediate term, use the upcoming pledging conference in Kuwait to champion the children of families of Syria and Iraq. Second, clearly distinguish between Canada's humanitarian response and its military and diplomatic engagements in the region. Third, use every opportunity to emphasize the importance of peace for the children of Syria and Iraq.

Last week in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, I spoke to children who yearn to be children. In the midst of chaos, they want to be able to play and learn, and they tell stories of anguish that no children should ever experience. Their stories of fleeing and living far away from home are heartbreaking.

Imagine Salma, for example, a 15-year-old girl who had to flee with her family after gunmen killed her father. Salma's mother is so distressed by the traumatic events that she's not spoken in more than three months. Today Salma, at 15, is the primary caregiver for her five younger siblings, the youngest of which is only two years old. Her younger brother Edo is 10. Back home he went to school and studied hard with dreams of being a doctor. While he still holds that dream, he's no longer in school and forced to work to provide food and other necessities for his family. Sometimes he makes enough only for sunflower seeds or chips. On a good day they can buy some

vegetables. Medical care is expensive, and when one of Salma's siblings gets sick—as young children so often do—the family has to borrow money to pay for a doctor and medication. Her brother Edo's days are now filled with worries about earning enough money for food, perhaps a new tarp or propane gas—anything to help—while Salma now shoulders the responsibilities for her entire family. These worries about surviving are something no child should have to deal with. Salma and Edo appear far older than their years; war forces children to grow up quickly.

Yet Salma's and Edo's story is all too common. Millions of children in Syria and Iraq face similar challenges. The violent advances of armed groups, including ISIL, in both Syria and Iraq have affected the population of those countries at an unprecedented scale, including not only ethnic and religious minorities but also millions of Muslims. While a lot of the attention has been on Iraq lately, let us not forget the dire situation in Syria, where an estimated 5.6 million children—that is roughly as many as the total population of the greater Toronto area—are in need of life-saving assistance. As you have heard from witnesses in this study before, this truly is a humanitarian crisis at an unprecedented scale, one not seen since World War II.

• (1115)

**Mr. Bart Witteveen (Director, Humanitarian and Emergency Affairs, World Vision Canada):** I'd like to focus now on the needs of and the impact in particular on the most vulnerable. In our work, we see the direct impact this is having on families and children.

Like Salma's, many families have lost family members and have fled with very few possessions, sometimes leaving even their identity papers behind. Though there are formal camps, most displaced families, such as Salma's, live among local communities in villages, towns, and cities. Some—often multiple families together—rent houses and apartments in bad shape at very high rent, while many live in informal settlements of improvised structures in schools or abandoned buildings. Many lack protection from the elements—heat in the summer and cold, snow, and wetness in the winter—with little or no access to clean water and sanitation facilities. As a result, many children get sick from water-borne diseases such as diarrhea, and exposure to the cold has had deadly consequences for babies and small children.

Like Salma and Edo, families struggle to provide such essentials as food, clothing, and fuel to cook and stay warm. Lack of food leads to increased malnutrition, and like Edo, many children in Syria and Iraq have to work to help provide for their families. This need forces them out of education and into situations in which they are more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Children's education is also disrupted, as schools have become unusable, and they have difficulty transferring school documentation. When they do get into school, language differences and their absence from school for months or years often make it difficult for them to follow classes.

Medical services are hard to access. Many cannot afford them. Health facilities have been damaged or destroyed, and medical personnel have been forced to flee, making health care simply unavailable for many. Parents of new babies face difficulties registering their births. These unaccounted children risk not being able to access services such as education and health care for the rest of their lives.

Finally, the cycle of social consequences has a devastating impact on children. There are credible reports of wide-scale grave violations of their rights by all parties to the conflict, including the killing and maiming of children, child recruitment by armed groups, sexual violence against girls and boys, and obstruction of their right to education. This leaves children such as Salma and her siblings in urgent need of normalized routines and safe places to learn and play.

We've been actively working to reduce the burden on the families and children of Syria and Iraq. So far World Vision has raised almost \$185 million, including grants from the Canadian government, to reach 1.7 million beneficiaries, with projects in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the Kurdistan region of Iraq, where Martin just was. Our programming targets the greatest need in each context. We select beneficiaries based on vulnerability criteria and in coordination with UN agencies and other NGOs to ensure greatest reach.

Our projects include food assistance through the provision of food vouchers or cash; essential non-food item support, for items such as soap and fuel and such winterization items as blankets or stoves; water, sanitation, and hygiene interventions; education activities, including remedial and life skill classes; child-friendly spaces, where children can find safe places to play and receive the psychosocial support they so badly need; and health programming, providing primary medical care and referral services to displaced populations.

The Government of Canada has consistently been a generous contributor to the humanitarian response for Syria and Iraq, for which we are grateful, and DFATD has been a responsive donor, allowing the flexibility that the fluid situation in this crisis requires.

● (1120)

**Mr. Martin Fischer:** Allow me to wrap up with a little bit of elaboration on the recommendations.

As the Syrian crisis enters its fifth year now, it continues to have a regional impact, including the conflict we are now seeing in Iraq. The urgency for impartial, neutral, and independent humanitarian action to assist and protect families and children has never been greater. For this reason we would like to offer three recommendations.

First, given Canada's solid track record as a humanitarian donor, we ask that the Government of Canada champion the urgent humanitarian response and the needs of children by encouraging its international partners to contribute as generously as Canada has. The upcoming pledging conference in Kuwait on March 31 is an excellent opportunity for the Minister of International Development to do this.

Second, we ask that parliamentarians clearly distinguish between Canada's humanitarian response and its military and political strategies. As we deliberate the future of Canada's military role in the House of Commons, we ask you to make those decisions

independent of considerations about humanitarian assistance, which need to be based, as we've before, on the humanitarian imperative and principles.

Lastly, the children of Syria and Iraq want peace. No matter which forum each of you find yourselves in, here in Canada and internationally, dealing with the challenges of this region, we urge you to think always of Salma and her siblings. The only way for her and her friends to have a real, sustainable future is to have a peaceful solution to the underlying conflicts.

In conclusion, I want you to imagine the children that I met last week, children who, in spite of all the chaos and violence, continue to have hopes and dreams for the future of living in peace and dignity. Canada can and does play an important role in ensuring that these hopes and dreams do not evaporate.

[Translation]

We thank you for giving World Vision Canada an opportunity to share its views during this important study. We would be pleased to answer your questions.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Marc Garneau):** Thank you, Mr. Fischer.

I now yield the floor to Mr. Gignac.

On a more personal note, I would like to say that it's a pleasure to see you again. We met briefly at the Baharka camp in September.

Go ahead.

**Mr. Emmanuel Gignac (Coordinator, Northern Iraq, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I am very grateful for the opportunity to address the members of the standing committee. This is an honour for me and the organization I represent today.

[English]

I will continue in English, which is my working language. That will make my presentation easier.

My name is Emmanuel Gignac. I'm the head of UNHCR in the Kurdistan region. I've been now in Iraq for a bit more than a year, based in Erbil, covering the Kurdistan region of Iraq.

I will be fairly brief. I will give you an overview of what has now become a unique situation, with the Syrian refugees on the one hand and the newly erupted IDP crisis on the other. I will move on after that to talk briefly about the challenges ahead and then finish with the funding situation.

First, on the refugee situation, the Syrian refugees have been flowing into the Kurdistan region of Iraq already since 2012, with an influx in 2013. Over 50,000 refugees arrived in two days. The figures show that at the beginning of 2014 there were 190,000. They have now reached 220,000 to 230,000, since we started getting a new influx of refugees who came from the town of Kobani into Turkey and from Turkey into the Kurdistan region. This has been happening since October so you can...[Inaudible—Editor]...the IDP crisis, which started a bit earlier in 2014.

A majority of the people are living outside camps. About 60% of the refugee population are sharing services and living inside the host community. The vast majority of the refugees are in the Kurdistan region. There are nine camps. One, however, is in the Anbar province and that is now an area being controlled by ISIS. We are still able to provide assistance there, but in a very ad hoc way and not very reliably.

The other camps are in the Kurdistan region, three in Dohuk, four in Erbil, and one in Sulaymaniyah. The UNHCR, as you know, has the lead on the coordination of the refugee response. This has been organized through the refugee response plan, which this year has seen.... We've added a component of resilience, which led to the development of the 3RP, the refugee response and resilience plan, which was launched initially in Berlin last December.

As to the achievement on the refugee front, certainly since 2013 eight camps were built. They were further improved in 2014 and we now have a living standard that is quite impressive in these camps: infrastructure, sanitation infrastructure, water supply infrastructure, but the shelter as well. This has improved considerably the situation of the refugees.

We registered all refugees in 2014. We also rolled out biometric registration in the context of a verification that is still under way and will be completed by the beginning of this year. Part of the achievement is also the services to children, psychosocial services in child-friendly spaces in partnership with UNICEF. There is also work that has begun with the community regarding sexual or gender-based violence, an important issue that is not very easy to address in the context of Kurdistan. In 2014, up to 54,000 community members were reached through the awareness campaigns that were carried out.

• (1125)

I talked already about the shelter. There are numerous other achievements, but I do not wish to enter into them in order to remain within my limits of time. I pass now to the IDP crisis, which erupted, as you know, in June here in the Kurdistan region. However, the first wave had started in Anbar. Basically, the IDP crisis has been composed of three waves. The first one was from January to June, which concerned mainly central Iraq. About half a million IDPs were displaced, people were displaced. The second wave followed the fall of Mosul and threw another 550,000 people into displacement. The third wave was the most important one. It occurred at the time of the offensive in Sinjar and the Nineveh plains, which added another 830,000 people. We're talking nowadays about, in Iraq, 2.2 million people being displaced. Almost half of that population is located in the Kurdistan region, a region whose population amounts to about five million. So you get a good idea of the pressure that it is putting on the public services in the northern Iraq area.

As far as the UNHCR is concerned, we've taken on the responsibility for three clusters in the complex of the IDP. This is always under the leadership of OCHA, who are in charge of the coordination of the IDP response. Clusters had been established in Baghdad in January 2013. They've been extended to January 2014, and activated here in northern Iraq.

In terms of achievement, it's been a bit of a roller coaster since June. One of the main issues was shelter of the people. We had a

massive number of people who were, let's say, in the open, in unfinished buildings, and also in schools, which needed to be evacuated in order to have the school year started. We had to scramble to build a large number of camps. The UNHCR, with the funds that we have received, was able to complete eight camps. Two are still under construction. These camps will be hosting up to 90,000 people. We've been also supporting 537 collective centres across Iraq, benefiting 26,000 people.

One of the key issues, of course, back in August, was the approaching winter and the need to protect people and give them the necessary equipment to go through winter. Thanks to the funding that was generously given to UNHCR, 70,000 families were provided with winter kits, which was quite a challenge. But we were able to finalize our winterization in mid-January—it had started in October. In addition to core relief items, kits have been distributed to all new arrivals.

We have currently 25 camps that have been constructed throughout Iraq and there are 10 that are under way. Out of these 25, 17 are located in the Kurdistan region, and of the 10 under way or under construction, five will be located in Kurdistan region. This gives you a good idea of the massive proportion of the displacement there is.

• (1130)

Inside this, we remain below the needs when it comes to shelter. The most recent assessment unveiled that we still have 450,000 people who are living in unsuitable shelters that are not adequate and are therefore in need of better shelter.

When we talk about challenges, there is the fact that the last wave of people was in August and we're almost six or seven months after that. We still suffer with this huge number of people displaced. It's still a big challenge how to reach these people and how to provide support to everyone. Among the refugees and the IDPs the majority are staying outside camps, in public buildings or unfinished buildings in the host community. They are using public services, the health services, education, sanitation, electricity, etc. There is a huge pressure on the public services in Kurdistan.

The other big challenge of course is the fact that the military operations are still ongoing and further displacement is likely to occur. We are thinking of course of Mosul in particular. Should there be a military operation that would take Mosul, we are fearful that this would lead to other waves of large numbers of displaced people.

Lack of access to conflict areas is also a challenge that we need to see how we can address...*[Inaudible—Editor]*...also the fiscal crisis that we see in the Kurdistan region, hampering their ability to support the crisis.

I want to highlight one of the potential impacts of the crisis, which has been very much on the news—

• (1135)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Marc Garneau):** Mr. Gignac, if you could wrap it up.

**Mr. Emmanuel Gignac:** —the violation of human rights. We have constant reporting in the community and we...*[Inaudible—Editor]*...of widespread human rights abuses that have taken place at the time of conflicts on populations that were fleeing. These include rape, and also the abduction and killing of civilians. It is a problem that we are uncovering progressively, especially the sexual and gender-based violence on women. It's a problem that we'll require a lot of time to address and provide proper assistance.

I will conclude, Mr. Chair, on funding and just do a quick overview of where we stand regarding the refugee response. The total requirement in 2014 was \$474 million U.S. That's for Iraq, specifically. We were able to mobilize 43% of this requirement, mobilizing more than \$200 million U.S. When it comes to the IDP response, the total requirements were in the range of \$340 million, and we were able to mobilize a bit more than 50%, 53% to be more exact. The gaps still remain important. Even with countries that contribute generously, there are still a lot of gaps that we are not able to address because of this gap.

I want to highlight the Canadian contribution. In 2014 Canada contributed over \$2 million to the Syrian refugee response plan but also to the new IDP situation, as well as the ongoing Iraq situation. In 2015 Canada has already contributed \$27.5 million, which we received already and will be covering both the Syrian refugee response and the Iraq situation, addressing the needs of the IDPs. To be more precise, \$22.5 million will go to the IDP response and \$5 million to the Syrian refugee plan.

That's all, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much. I'm open to any questions.

Thank you.

• (1140)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Marc Garneau):** Thank you, Mr. Gignac.

We will now proceed with the first round of questions, which is seven minutes per person. I would just remind all of the witnesses that we stick to the clock on that one, so please try to be succinct in your answers. I know our fellow MPs have many questions to ask.

We'll begin with Madam Laverdière, followed by Ms. Brown.

*[Translation]*

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank everyone who testified before the committee today.

We know that the situation on the ground is absolutely horrible, but every time figures or personal experiences are shared with us, we are even more struck by the horrors of this crisis.

I would like to use this opportunity to congratulate the United Nations agencies on the extraordinary work they are doing in the field.

However, I would like to highlight the work done by Word Vision in this initial round.

*[English]*

You said you select beneficiaries based on vulnerability criteria.

*[Translation]*

Could you elaborate on those criteria and the way you proceed?

*[English]*

**Mr. Bart Witteveen:** First, we need to recognize that the overall response to the crisis takes place on many fronts. We are working in Lebanon, Jordan, inside Syria, as well as in Iraq, so it is difficult to give you a detailed response that would cover the whole humanitarian response.

But in each context we try to look at some of the key indicators that would clarify which people and which groups are the most vulnerable. Typically, some can be direct indicators, such as health indicators that are quantifiable and objective. In some cases you use proxy indicators to get an understanding of the particular vulnerability of particular groups. For example, in Dohuk you will find that there are people who are living in an encamped situation, in which case it's relatively straightforward in terms of trying to develop your programming in response to everybody. But you also have large numbers—I would say the greatest numbers—who are settling in cities in improvised situations throughout the more secure areas. In those cases we'll look, for example, at those who are unable to rent accommodation but are finding refuge in abandoned buildings, in school buildings, and that sort of thing. That would be a key indicator in terms of vulnerability.

The other issue of course is that we are looking at families where the head of household is a woman or in some cases children. These are all indicators that we would use. There is usually quite an exhaustive list of questions and indicators that we would go through in each context, trying to make sure that the assistance we have and that we are allocating is targeting those most vulnerable.

*[Translation]*

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** Thank you very much.

As for the subject of my next question, we have had enlightening discussions on it in the past. Could you tell us more about the challenges you face on the ground as a humanitarian organization when delivering supplies and gathering the civilian population's feedback?

*[English]*

**Mr. Martin Fischer:** I think speaking from my experience last week and just placing.... I know that Mr. Garneau and Mr. Dewar were in Erbil late last year with then-minister Baird. Speaking about the context and the perceptions that one may have of a humanitarian emergency, on the logistical part, oftentimes we talk about logistics being a challenge or roads being a challenge very concretely. Especially in Kurdistan, that is not the case. The roads and the logistics are very much in place.



I think from our perspective the key challenge really is access. It's finding and determining where displaced populations are and being able to access them in the most effective way. Very concretely, then, a challenge obviously is the ongoing violence that is still occurring within close proximity of our operational area. We're not able at the moment, obviously, to access populations that are behind the front lines, if you will, just outside of Kurdistan. But that is a concern that I think the humanitarian organizations share in Iraq as well as inside Syria, specifically where you have large numbers of people being caught in areas that we're not able to access because either it's too dangerous to access or we can't actually negotiate the kind of access that we need to negotiate.

That points to one of the recommendations we've made. Unless there's a political solution to this process, to the ongoing violence, we will not find ourselves in a situation where we can actually operate in those areas that are affected by violence.

I don't know, Bart, if you have anything to add.

• (1145)

**Mr. Bart Witteveen:** Absolutely. I tried to articulate some of the issues we look at in terms of determining who is the most vulnerable. At the same time, we have to recognize, as Martin has indicated, that there are large areas where we simply don't have access and where we can be quite confident that there are very vulnerable people.

[Translation]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Marc Garneau):** You have 45 seconds left.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** I will be brief. Perhaps we will come back to this.

You also talked about sustainable peace and a political solution. Bridges will have to be rebuilt. You hope to one day be able to rebuild bridges and engage in long-term democratic development in Iraq.

How can Canada contribute to this effort?

Thank you.

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Marc Garneau):** Very quickly, please....

**Mr. Martin Fischer:** As we articulated—and maybe we can elaborate on that in the next round—it's really to look at the various elements that need to be put in place for Iraq and Syria distinctly. What Canada can do very concretely is to look at the political dimension and to look at the military dimension as separate from the humanitarian element. There are things very concretely that we think Canada can do. We can get into that later.

I remember that last year around this same time we talked about the Geneva peace conference. That process is struggling, to put it in the best terms, but there are things that I think Canada can still do politically. But I know that I'm out of time and I want to respect the seven minutes.

[Translation]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Marc Garneau):** Thank you, Ms. Laverdière.

Up next is Ms. Brown.

[English]

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

Thank you very much for being here. It's sad that we need to have this revolving conversation. Fundamentally, I have three questions.

Martin, you've started on some of them. I would like you to carry on about the peace process.

I have a question regarding humanitarian personnel.

Ms. Pearce, you've given us a map that has identified a whole section of Iraq. It says there is limited access. First of all, I wonder if any of you could comment on what access you may have in identifying those vulnerable populations that are there. Are there humanitarian actors who are able to get in? You say you have limited access. Perhaps you could give us a bit of a picture there. Are there any resources getting into those areas?

**Ms. Jane Pearce:** Thank you, very much.

The map that you have in front of you will show three distinct areas. The top area is the Kurdish area that we've just spoken about, where we have easy access. I say that I know roughly 95% of what is going on there. From Baghdad in the south we have quite good access. I have local staff that travel there often. They interact with government and we have good knowledge of who the people are and what their needs are. The big issue for all of us, and in particular for the United Nations World Food Programme, is the area covering the governorate between Baghdad and the Kurdish region, which is controlled by ISIL and other armed opposition groups.

We distribute in all 18 governorates of Iraq. We have IDPs in all of the country. The areas in the middle section are areas that we access whenever we possibly can. We work with national NGOs, cooperating partners, and we have agreements with them that they deliver food when it is safe to do so. Nobody wants a situation where a food distribution is compromised in any way; either the implementing partner comes into a problem or the people who are receiving the assistance. It is ad hoc, but it is going on and we are getting more and more information from these areas. We've now put in place a monitoring system that we do with telephone technology that is safe for the people to respond to, and we are starting to get good information back from them. Thank you.

• (1150)

**Ms. Lois Brown:** World Vision, do you have any access in those difficult areas?

**Mr. Bart Witteveen:** In the case of Iraq we are working exclusively in the Kurdish-controlled areas, so areas of relative stability. We have had operations in northern Syria where we operated from Turkey, cross-border. That's been an engagement that has gone up and down to be frank. We started pretty much at the beginning of the crisis where we were working in several areas in the north. As ISIL took over those areas, we were able to maintain operations there for quite some time, but during the period leading up to the aerial bombing campaign we had to suspend those operations. We've now restarted in some of the other areas in northern Syria, but at a very modest level. I think she described it very accurately in terms of trying to find those ways in which we can do it within the framework of the humanitarian principles and where we can have accountability in terms of reaching the most vulnerable.

**Ms. Lois Brown:** You were delivering blankets, food stuffs, shelters, and medicines into as many areas as you could. How successful has that been, getting those things in?

**Mr. Bart Witteveen:** Go ahead.

**Ms. Jane Pearce:** I'll speak to this one. We run a very coordinated response. There is something called a "rapid response mechanism", which is a conglomeration of UN agencies and NGO partners who, when we know that new places are open for access or we have new areas of displacement, provide a coordinated response package. People will get water, some medicines, food, and services for women—women's dignity kits. When we go in we have no reason to think that the assistance is not getting there. We have very good relationships with the NGO partners, both international and national, and we have no reason to believe that it does not arrive. We get good feedback from it, and we feel fairly confident that it's reaching the people who need it the most.

**Ms. Lois Brown:** Thank you.

Martin, could we go back to a conversation about the peace process? You mentioned the Geneva conference that took place about a year ago now. I express a concern. In Canada I know we graduate people from conflict and peace studies, and yet... I guess my question is: where are the peacemakers? What do we need to do? How can we help, and how do we build that governance structure in Iraq that is going to ultimately bring peace to that country?

**Mr. Martin Fischer:** To make it very concrete, to World Vision as a child-focused organization, one of the things we're able to do in Jordan and in Lebanon is to work directly not so much with children but with adolescents, who we feel have a key stake in the future of Syria when they return, in order to really be able to provide them with the kind of soft skill set that they'll need to rebuild that social fabric when we have a sustainable peace.

On the larger political process, really as a humanitarian organization I'd like to leave that to those who engage with that in a little bit more detail. But there cannot be a sustainable future for Syria unless we are able to work with—the term that has been used a lot is "no lost generation"—Syrian children and youth who have had to flee, in order to equip them with the kinds of skills they need to build that country back. We can gladly elaborate on that in another round, but that to us is a key concern, equipping young people with the kinds of skills they will need in the future.

•(1155)

**Ms. Lois Brown:** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Marc Garneau):** Thank you.

We will now begin the second round of questions.

Ms. Laverdière and Mr. Saganash will share their five minutes.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** Very quickly...

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Marc Garneau):** Sorry, I made a mistake.

[*English*]

I'm obviously very temporary here. I apologize.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Hawn is up first. My apologies.

[*English*]

**Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you all for being here.

I want to direct a couple of questions to Mr. Gignac first.

Recently in some of the areas that have been recaptured by peshmerga, there have been some indications of some atrocities being carried out by them, which seemed to be more about revenge against ISIS. How concerned are you about that and that spilling over into a broadening of violence perpetrated by the very folks who we are supporting?

**Mr. Emmanuel Gignac:** I don't know if you can hear me, but yes, we've heard of reports, in particular in Kirkuk, where allegedly peshmerga fighters were mistreating bodies of killed ISIS fighters. I think this is something that the authorities in the region have condemned very strongly. The impression we have is that it is not something that is supported by the wider population, and I would say that these are what we could call isolated incidents. I don't think this would be a trend that would...[*Inaudible—Editor*].

We've seen other cases elsewhere in Iraq clearly between the Shia community and the Sunni, and their rights...and atrocities are often committed. I think that's part of the major problem Iraq will have to face. It's not only about making peace but after that it will be about reconciliation and establishing the political process that is under way right now but is still very fragile. I will leave it here. I hope this responds to your question.

**Hon. Laurie Hawn:** One of the issues that has concerned people around the world in various scenarios is human trafficking.

Mr. Witteveen, I think you may be the best one to answer this. Is there a problem with human trafficking in the camps in Iraq?

**Mr. Bart Witteveen:** I think when you have a context such as exists in the Kurdish area—encampment, people trying to find a livelihood within the urban centres, high vulnerability—this will always be an issue, and I can't quantify it.

**Hon. Laurie Hawn:** Is World Vision looking at that, trying to address that, or at least highlighting that?

**Mr. Bart Witteveen:** We're certainly monitoring that. We don't have programs addressing that issue at this point, but it's certainly something that within our child protection interventions we would monitor closely. But I think it's fair to say that the vulnerability that supports that kind of activity exists.

**Hon. Laurie Hawn:** Mr. Fischer, you talked about the three priorities and you talked about distinguishing between the humanitarian aspect and the military aspect. How would you suggest we distinguish between those two in ways that we're not doing now?

**Mr. Martin Fischer:** As all three of us as well as Mr. Gignac have mentioned, the importance of humanitarian assistance is that it be delivered based on humanitarian principles as well as the humanitarian imperative. I think the key for parliamentarians, really, is that as we look into the immediate future, when we look at considering what the Canadian Forces mission will look like after the initial first six months, we need to have that conversation separately from considerations on humanitarian assistance. Whatever we're doing as the Government of Canada, when it comes to humanitarian assistance, it needs to reflect the premise of the humanitarian imperative. We need to make the decision on humanitarian need based on the dynamic situation on the ground. We need to make the decision on whatever our Canadian Forces may be engaged in entirely distinct from that.

• (1200)

**Hon. Laurie Hawn:** Do you think that...? I mean, I have the personal sense that we are doing that, based on the gratitude expressed for the amount of aid, etc., that Canada has given. Do you think that we are crossing those lines now where we shouldn't be or are we distinguishing between them?

**Mr. Martin Fischer:** Canada in general is a humanitarian donor. Whenever Minister Paradis as well as past-minister Baird have appeared internationally, they are strong champions of the humanitarian principles. Our key concern is that you as parliamentarians look at the mission going forward and that you don't say there needs to be a military mission in place in order to deliver humanitarian assistance. There are, as Ms. Pearce and others have said, humanitarian actors in place who can deliver and negotiate access and we're able to have those two conversations separately.

**Hon. Laurie Hawn:** Ms. Pearce, you had some figures about how this much money can deliver this many packages of food, and so on. Can you give us some context or just an example of what the period of time is? It's nice to deliver it but how long is that sustained? Also who supplies those markets, where do the products and produce come from, and how reliable is that?

**Ms. Jane Pearce:** Thank you.

I think it's easier for me to talk in 12-month figures. We need over \$420 million U.S. to run our operations in Iraq for the year of 2015. We have received about \$200 million of that. It costs us around \$26 million each month to run the assistance.

We provide three kinds of assistance. We provide family food parcels, which are 72 kilograms of food for a family of five for one month and that food comes in from Turkey. We have immediate response rations, such as the things we send in to newly displaced people and I buy those in the Kurdish market. I also provide

vouchers, which put money back into the community. We do this very slowly. We're concerned about the ability of the market to sustain this. We want to make sure that we scale up quickly so that we don't disrupt the markets too much.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Marc Garneau):** Thank you, and I did take into account the rock music.

[*Translation*]

I yield the floor to Ms. Laverdière and Mr. Saganash.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I was interested in the comments on the need to truly separate potential military or political actions from humanitarian aid. I think this is a key principle.

I apologize for addressing World Vision Canada again. I know that my colleague has questions for the representative of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees about the World Food Programme.

Back to my question. Can the Canadian government do anything to facilitate the access humanitarian organizations need?

[*English*]

**Mr. Bart Witteveen:** Let's keep it simple. I think the starting point is to make that clear distinction and to recognize, as Martin said, the primacy of the humanitarian imperative: the delivery of impartial, neutral, and independent aid.

Now, this is not a silver bullet that's going to allow us to operate without problems—it's obviously much more complicated than that—but it is a key element to allow us to position ourselves as humanitarian agencies, and where possible, to negotiate access, managing the perceptions of the belligerents on the ground. In that sense, this is very much the starting point for us in terms of getting our operations going and allowing us access to the very most vulnerable.

On a broader, more political level, I think the Canadian voice, in advocating for humanitarian access, advocating on behalf of the humanitarian principles, and advocating on behalf of a sustainable peace process wherever those opportunities and avenues may exist, is critical in moving this forward.

We have a humanitarian engagement on the ground; there are military operations taking place. There has to be a political platform as well, at the right moment—I'm not saying it can be achieved tomorrow or in the short term, but we have to bear it in mind—to take us to a sustained solution to this very dramatic crisis.

• (1205)

[*Translation*]

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

How much time do I have left?

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Marc Garneau):** You have two minutes remaining.

**Mr. Romeo Saganash:** In his testimony, Mr. Fischer talked about a humanitarian crisis at an unprecedented scale, one not seen since World War II. I agree with him. As for Ms. Pearce, she said that mass displacements in Iraq would continue in 2015.

My first question is for Mr. Gignac.

What priorities should countries have when faced with a situation like this? In terms of resources other than financial ones, of course, has the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees identified any other needs?

**Mr. Emmanuel Gignac:** Thank you very much for your question, Mr. Saganash.

We are indeed facing an extremely complex situation not only in Iraq, but also in the entire region, and that further complicates matters. The situation in Syria is extremely difficult. We can't see the end of the tunnel or how the situation could be resolved. We see no end to the humanitarian crisis.

That crisis gives the Islamic State an opportunity to interfere in Iraq. It has become a destabilising force that is capitalizing on the weaknesses of Iraq's political process.

The consequences we saw in 2014 are clear. The humanitarian consequences are absolutely tragic in a country that also produces oil. You may think that the country would have the means to meet the needs of its population.

This isn't just an Iraqi problem, as an economic crisis has also been caused by the drop in oil prices and major liquidity issues. Iraq is having huge problems in terms of management and governance. That country has been in transition since the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime. That's the context in which we are operating. There are also community tensions that probably existed during the regime and simply came to light after its collapse.

Iraq is a very complex country, as it is a mosaic of very old religious and ethnic communities, and tensions have always existed there. Iraq is currently lacking political stability and a political framework. The tensions will persist until a political framework has been implemented. The Islamic State is obviously exploiting this situation to further its own growth. That's why the response is complex. A humanitarian response is self-evident. We have to continue to support Iraq through resources, but also through assistance in terms of governance and the political process.

Kurdistan's case is unique in the sense that the region receives 80% of its budget from Baghdad through budget transfers. Owing to disputes, discussions, disagreements or political wrangling over the sale of oil, those transfers have been suspended. An agreement was recently negotiated, but it has not yet been implemented. That's why we have had to take over when Kurdish authorities requested our assistance in areas such as the construction of temples and distribution of essential goods. Kurdish authorities have officially approached United Nations and asked for assistance because they did not have the means to handle the situation. Baghdad has kept out of the Kurdistan crisis, and this remains a contentious issue. That's why I think we can work with a number of vectors for which Canada can receive support by participating in various political, security and humanitarian actions. I think it's very important for Canada to maintain its commitment to humanitarian action.

• (1210)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Marc Garneau):** Thank you, Mr. Gignac. [English]

The completion of the second round will be shared by Mr. Goldring and Mr. Schellenberger.

**Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC):** Thank you. I'll go first.

Are any refugees moving to Saudi Arabia?

**Ms. Jane Pearce:** I have not heard of that happening. That is probably something UNHCR could speak to better than I can for the World Food Programme. I have never heard of that, but I bow to Emmanuel on that one.

**Mr. Emmanuel Gignac:** The information I have is that there are no refugees getting into Saudi Arabia from Iraq. The border as far as I know is completely closed and sealed for security reasons.

There were refugees in the past at the time of Saddam Hussein. There was a camp in Saudi Arabia for quite some time, Rafha camp, if I remember. It was hosting essentially Iraqis from the south, from Basra, mainly Shia, who were at the time fleeing persecution by the regime. These people returned home in 2003. Now since we left, I would say, and specifically with the situation that is unfolding, we don't have any reports of refugees crossing into.... There is less need for refugees to go in that direction because we could have people from Anbar, but it's a long way. But I believe the Saudis are keeping the door closed.

Thank you.

**Mr. Gary Schellenberger:** Does the Saudi government supply humanitarian assistance—food and housing—to the refugee camps that are in Iraq?

**Mr. Emmanuel Gignac:** I can take that question also.

The answer is yes, definitely Saudi Arabia has provided a huge contribution to the UN. Back in July, half a billion U.S. dollars were given to the UN and were allocated to the different agencies. This contribution proved to be extremely timely and regarded.... I think the situation would have been much worse than it has been in terms of the ability of the international organizations to respond to the needs of the people. Regarding refugees, I don't have the details, but I believe that Saudi Arabia has also contributed to the Syrian refugee plan, not only in Iraq but also in Jordan and...[Inaudible—Editor].

Thank you.

**Mr. Gary Schellenberger:** Thank you.

**Ms. Jane Pearce:** The contribution from Saudi Arabia was \$500 million, which was made for only Iraqi IDPs, and only for Iraqis inside Iraq. So we could not use it for the small number of Iraqis who had crossed the border and become refugees. I think that's quite an important distinction to make. It was made predominantly to stabilize the situation with the country, and it did enable us as a humanitarian community—because a lot of the money filtered down to our partners—to stabilize the situation and respond. The very big lesson there was that having enough money at the beginning of an operation saves lives.

In terms of the refugee operations, Saudi Arabia has contributed to the World Food Programme, to our regional emergency operation that covers Syrian refugees, but that's a much smaller contribution. I think it's around \$20 million.

Thank you.

• (1215)

**Mr. Gary Schellenberger:** Ms. Pearce, you recently stated that structures have not yet been put in place to cater to displaced Iraqi nationals fleeing into the three southern provinces of Najaf, Karbala, and Babylon. Would you be able to expand on what has been done in that region and what remains to be done?

**Ms. Jane Pearce:** That was the result of an assessment mission that we sent through these three southern governorates.

When we said that the structures were not in place, I think Emmanuel made it very clear earlier that most of the displaced people are not in camps. They're dispersed amongst family members, within their tribes, or within host communities.

In these southern governorates, we found that not a lot of assistance was being provided to people. People were left. Government does not necessarily have the capacity to help these people, and we've been very clear about that. Part of what we are pushing for is to get more partners to go down into the southern governorates, so we can provide more assistance. The issue there is that the focus has been so much on the Kurdish areas and not on the southern governorates where there is a lot of need. We actually find that people have more need there, where there is nobody to provide them assistance, than there is in the north, where there is so much focus.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Marc Garneau):** Thank you.

That completes the second round.

[*Translation*]

We will begin the third round with Mr. Trottier, who has five minutes.

**Mr. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Thank you, to our witnesses today, for your testimony.

The first question I had was about agriculture and food and their relationship.

Ms. Pearce, you commented on the sensitivity, when you're distributing food parcels and vouchers, and on how you need to work with local producers and different agents of the agriculture industry within Iraq.

How do you work with local Iraqis—the farmers and food distributors—to make sure, if you're putting a lot of food aid into the market, that it doesn't depress prices for their goods in the markets, and then on the other side, when it's a question of vouchers, that you don't create some form of inflation within a market? How do you consult with local stakeholders to make sure you're sensitive to the balance that needs to be struck?

**Ms. Jane Pearce:** Thank you very much.

We work very closely with the Food and Agriculture Organization. We are both within the food security cluster. That is, we rely heavily on FAO, particularly for the agriculture.

Iraq is mainly a cereal-growing area; it's wheat. Most of the wheat goes into the government silos and into the public distribution system. A lot of the wheat that you find on the market will be imported because the local wheat is not of a quality to make the local bread, so there is always a push-pull in the market.

Prices tend to be slightly inflated with the national produce. There's a little bit of an incentive for farmers to stay on the land, for reasons of curbing urbanization, but also of the importance of keeping people on the land to keep the dust down and to keep the salination of the plains at a reasonable level.

We monitor the markets with the ministries of planning in the KRG areas and also in the government. We go slowly. This is something that WFP does in all the countries of the world in which we work. We know how quickly we can manage. We watch whether or not prices are going too high; then we will slow up our implementation if we think it is not conducive to the local market.

• (1220)

**Mr. Bernard Trottier:** Would you comment on longer-term prospects for agriculture in the region? This is one of the cradles of global agriculture, so at some point Iraq will be more self-sufficient in food. What are the prospects, if we're able to make the situation on the ground more secure and safe?

I imagine Iraq would be fully self-sufficient in food—obviously trading for goods and such things, but in terms of basic, staple foods it would be self-sufficient, would it not?

**Ms. Jane Pearce:** I'm not sure it will be entirely self-sufficient. It is a very hot climate, as any of you who have been there in the summer know.

They are large wheat and rice producers. I don't expect the rice production to be impacted, because that takes place in the southern governorates, but there is enormous concern for the wheat harvest going forward. FAO is distributing seeds to people. They're also distributing seeds in Nineveh and Salah al-Din, which are the two governorates with the most agricultural production.

I honestly cannot tell you what the prospects look like for this year, because we don't know what the situation is going to be like. We know that the seeds are there ready for planting, but we also know that there could be a lot of violence in those areas in the coming months that may impact upon agricultural production.

**Mr. Bernard Trottier:** Thank you.

My next question is for Mr. Fischer and Mr. Witteveen, having to do with health.

I know there are some critical challenges with respect to sanitation and potable drinking water. What are the other main health challenges right now within the camps? Are there any diseases running rampant through some of the camps? Are there vaccination requirements? Is there a shortage of front-line practitioners, doctors and nurses?

What are the main priorities and challenges right now within the camps?

**Mr. Martin Fischer:** Thank you very much for the question.

As you've heard before, I think it's important to distinguish between the two general settings of where people have moved to: one is formal camps and the other is informal settlements. Those two situations present distinct health challenges. I can give you the World Vision example.

We operate in the Sulaymaniyah governorate in the Kurdish region of Iraq through a World Health Organization grant that allows us to provide front-line health services both to IDPs who are in informal settlements or who have taken over a hospital—where I was on Sunday—or within camps.

In camps the key concern is overcrowding. A key concern is that you have tents meant to be for one family, and now because of the rapid influx you have two, three, or four families in very confined spaces. That in itself presents an increased risk of transmission of diseases, hygiene. Out of that comes building of latrines as a key concern.

But also a key concern is that with this influx of this large number of people, you have a shortage of qualified staff within the Kurdish region. There are struggles as displaced people out of other regions of Iraq have moved into Kurdistan and are having difficulties practising. For example, World Vision's front-line staff have made a very targeted effort of employing internally displaced people who have medical qualifications. That's a very concrete...we hear this often in Canada around accreditation of credentials.

I can give you the story of a hospital that I went to in a town called Qalat Dizah, which is up over two mountain passes away from the main city, where around 800 individuals have taken over an abandoned hospital. You have rooms that were essentially former hospital rooms where there are only washroom facilities to the floor, and now you have children sleeping on the floor because there hasn't been an initial impact.

It was really heartbreaking to see up to eight, 10, or 12 children in a space that is meant for three or four individual beds. Children often come to those places with pre-existing conditions. Those people are difficult to register so we can provide them with health care. World Vision is able to go there three times a week with a small mobile clinic. You need to be very versatile as a service provider to be able to get to those people on a very quick mechanism, because often they move unannounced, if you will, from one place to another, so tracking down these folks is very difficult.

I think that's all the time I have.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Marc Garneau):** Thank you.

•(1225)

[Translation]

To even things out, Mr. Saganash and Ms. Michaud will have the floor for seven minutes.

**Mr. Romeo Saganash:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

I have a quick question for Madam Pearce before I hand it over to Madam Michaud.

You obviously work in—how would I put it?—a challenging environment, to say the least. I'd like to know more about the challenges your organization faces in achieving its mandate on the ground. I think you spoke about moving lines of combat being a challenge, and Mr. Witteveen talked about a dynamic situation on the ground. I'd like to know more about that and how governments like ours can help in achieving your mandate on the ground.

**Ms. Jane Pearce:** I think we are all in agreement that the biggest challenge we have is getting access to the people who need us the most. I've been very concerned about the situation of the people in the governorates controlled partially or fully by ISIL.

This is a country that has two or three generations who expect to get their food. If you give them cash, they don't buy food; they buy other things. There is a social conditioning that leads them to expect. There has been no public distribution system distributions in these governorates in some places for 12 months.

We talk a lot to the truck drivers who go into these areas. Trade continues, so there is some food going down there, but we don't know how much, and we don't know what the situation is actually like when you get off the main arteries. Where there are markets, the trucks go in. We're looking at doing this remote monitoring, as I mentioned to you.

The other challenge is reaching the people we need to reach and making sure our assistance continues to go to them. Funding is something I'm going to begin to worry about now. We have sufficient finances to keep our cash and voucher programs going only until May of this year. For people who receive a voucher, the imperative is not to have the cash now. But for people who don't have access to markets and who need food, I need three months in order to put these parcels together and bring them in. So money is an issue. Of course, it always is.

These are the things Canada can do. You are one of our biggest partners. You partner with us in a number of ways. Yesterday when I was talking to my counterparts here, we also talked about the possibility of Canada coming in and giving us experts. We need to start targeting and doing some assessments. Then we can bring in Canadian partners to help us with that. It makes our credibility better when we have our donor partners. It gives us different perspectives. I think it is very important for Canada to keep a high level of conversation regarding the humanitarian situation when we are talking about political and potentially military conflict. It is very important—as Ms. Amos, the emergency relief coordinator, has said—that politicians remember that there are people on the ground who are impacted by their actions. If that is something that Canada can do, we are certainly very grateful for that.

Thank you.

[Translation]

**Ms. Éline Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP):** Thank you very much.

My questions are mainly for Mr. Gignac.

During your presentation, you briefly discussed the fact that there were already some services in the camps, such as a form of assistance aimed directly at women and young girls who have been sexually abused or subjected to gender-based violence.

Could you elaborate a bit and tell us more about the programs and forms of assistance that already exist? Can you also tell us what Canada is doing under those programs and how it could better help those types of victims?

Thank you.

• (1230)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Marc Garneau):** We are trying to reconnect.

This won't count against your remaining time.

[English]

I think we will suspend for a minute or two, but please don't go far away as we hope to re-establish communication and we still have a couple more questioners.

• \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

•

• (1235)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Marc Garneau):** I would ask you to please take your seats.

The solution we're going to find here is that Madam Michaud's question will be passed on to Mr. Gignac and he will answer it, but we'll suspend trying to re-establish contact. However, Madam Michaud still has time remaining, so I would ask her to continue with her questioning.

[Translation]

**Ms. Éloise Michaud:** How much time do I have left, Mr. Chair?

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Marc Garneau):** Four minutes.

**Ms. Éloise Michaud:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to put the same question to the World Vision Canada representatives. I think you may have an interesting perspective on this issue.

Are there any aid or service programs provided directly to women or young girls who have been victims of sexual violence or gender-based violence? What is Canada's contribution or involvement in those kinds of programs? What more could Canada do to help those victims?

[English]

**Mr. Bart Witteveen:** I'll speak for World Vision. We contribute to addressing that very sensitive issue. There's a medical component to that. There's a psychological component. Then there is, let's say, the recuperative component. We contribute to each of those essentially indirectly through our support to access to health care, but most specifically in our child protection programming, where the provision of child-friendly spaces allows children to get some sense of normalcy as they recuperate from these dramatic experiences that they've had.

In that sense, we don't have dedicated programs for that, but we feed into the overall care that is provided to these people. The sad thing is that we're dealing with that after the fact, as it were. The key issue is trying to find avenues of protection, but that, of course, is a much more complicated question.

[Translation]

**Ms. Éloise Michaud:** Did you want to add anything, Mr. Fischer?

[English]

**Mr. Martin Fischer:** I'll make a similar comment as I made to Monsieur Trottier, and that is that we're facing a multitude of settings that present distinct challenges in terms of being able to provide services.

As I said earlier around health, it's similar services, similar challenges, when it comes to the psychosocial dimension of SGBV survivors. Oftentimes, even within cities, you would have populations that have taken over abandoned buildings, for example, which have stopped being constructed because of the current crisis. It sounds benign, but locating, registering, and then providing services to those families is difficult. First identifying where they are is a challenge, and then being able to provide services in those kinds of physical environments, where privacy, for example, is a key concern, is even more challenging.

With regard to camps, the Kurdish government is doing a decent job at setting up camps—the physical structure of them. They should be set up to provide the physical space for those kinds of services, but then finding the appropriate partners who have the trained individuals to provide that is not easy.

I think it's also important, especially within Kurdistan, to emphasize that as humanitarian agencies and especially the NGOs are coming in, there's a start-up phase to these processes. Essentially, you sort of sequence the services and put into place the services that you can, based on, in our case, either private funding or government funding. I think the words we've heard over and over again today are being able to be flexible and adaptable to the dynamic situation.

As for parliamentarians, it's important to keep in mind that as we think of a displacement crisis, we so often think that these only take place in camps. We see the images of camps. Certainly one thing I took away last week was that this is one side of a very important study, but there's another side that's equally important. These are these informal settlements, where it's even more difficult to provide services to displaced populations.

• (1240)

[Translation]

**Ms. Éloise Michaud:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Marc Garneau):** Thank you.

To complete the round, we have Mr. Goldring.

**Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC):** Ms. Pearce, on these maps that we were given, could you help me to understand a little better? On the one map, it has areas that are clearly not accessible and are marked in red. On the other map, although I understand it's for the same date and period of time, it indicates there is food distribution throughout all of the areas.

Which is the case? Could you explain this a little better?

**Ms. Jane Pearce:** I don't have the map.

**Mr. Peter Goldring:** One seems to be in conflict with the other, or perhaps I'm reading it wrong.

**Ms. Jane Pearce:** The map that I have here, you'll see that we're looking at the shading of the maps. They're both in an amber colour, a sandy kind of colour. The one here that I have shows how many people we actually reached over the course of January. Then if you go in here, this will show you what kind of assistance has gone into that part of the country.

**Mr. Peter Goldring:** But it indicates that it's not accessible, and the other one indicates that there's been distribution.

**Ms. Jane Pearce:** Though only parts of it. So when you have a look at the red, that's a place called Hit, where we have not been able to get into but in other areas of the governorate we can reach them.

**Mr. Peter Goldring:** Oh, I see.

**Ms. Jane Pearce:** As I said, it depends very much on the situation on any given day. It's not as if every day you can go to Amerli or those places. We give the implementing partner the liberty and the freedom to go when they feel it is safe.

**Mr. Peter Goldring:** With the food distribution and the vouchers as well, how secure is that? Are there any that have been siphoned off or find their way into the enemies' hands? Are you fairly confident that it's secure, that the food is actually going to those who do need it?

**Ms. Jane Pearce:** In the KRG areas and in the areas south of Baghdad, I'm confident. I know and I monitor that on a regular basis. As for the areas in the centre, the governorate is controlled by ISIL. I am confident that the implementing partner carries out the distributions as and when needed. I have no reason to expect that there would be any misappropriation of World Food Programme food at this point.

**Mr. Peter Goldring:** With the vouchers themselves, too, have they been proven to be fairly secure or has there been any counterfeiting or marketing of them?

**Ms. Jane Pearce:** Not thus far. At the moment it's quite a small catchment area. It's quite easy for us to monitor it, and we don't see that. But we are, in the next couple of months, moving on to a credit card that we will be using for the voucher program. We're transitioning over to this, and that will be even more secure.

• (1245)

**Mr. Peter Goldring:** Is there chip technology in it, too?

**Ms. Jane Pearce:** It is chip technology.

**Mr. Peter Goldring:** That would be very secure. I look at the paper vouchers, unlike a bill or something, generally money has a certain level of security to it from counterfeiting attempts, but a simple voucher would be pretty easy to run off a printing press.

**Ms. Jane Pearce:** You know, the issue is that you need to start somewhere. The thing that has dominated my response for the World Food Programme is the most dignified response that I can give, particularly for the women and the sense of normality that the voucher gives them. It gives them the opportunity to choose their own food, to choose what they like. To have a sense of normality—

going to the shop, getting their food, and cooking it—is a very powerful thing for people who have lost every single thing that they have.

**Mr. Peter Goldring:** But in other scenarios and other theatres, I guess you could say, there have been instances where the food has been taken, stolen by the truckload, from what we see in some instances. So how relatively secure has it been in Iraq?

**Ms. Jane Pearce:** Thus far, and I touch wood there, it has been very secure. I have no reason to be concerned at all.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Marc Garneau):** Thank you, Mr. Goldring. That will take us to the fourth round. I understand there's one question that Madam Laverdière would like to ask before we call it a day.

I should mention that apparently Mr. Gignac can hear us although we can't see him.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** Okay. I would have liked also to talk about access to school for children, but I think we'll have to leave that aside for another day or another context.

I have one quick question for Madam Pearce.

You mentioned that Canada could provide experts for your program. What kind of expertise are you looking for?

**Ms. Jane Pearce:** What I discussed with our colleagues yesterday was the kind of expertise that socio-economists and vulnerability and assessment mapping consultants can assist us with in assessments. This is something that we will be doing over the next four to six months. So these were just preliminary discussions but that's the kind of thing that we like. We also can have observers who can come in and assist us in the assessment process.

**Ms. Hélène Laverdière:** Thank you.

Very briefly, on children in school, we're talking of the lost generation. How many children don't have access to school right now in Iraq, including Iraqi kids and eventually Syrian children? Are you engaged and what can we do about that?

**Mr. Martin Fischer:** Again, I hate to sound like a broken record, but around education there are similar concerns in camps and informal settlements. Presumably, the percentage of children who aren't going to school would be extremely high for various reasons. One is that in camps, in terms of the sequencing, we're not there yet in all situations. The funding hasn't been put in place. I know that UNICEF is working hard to convince donors to make education a priority for IDPs in Iraq. When it comes to informal settlements, there are various practical challenges. If you have children who have come—I can talk about Kurdistan—to the Kurdish region of Iraq, the language of instruction would normally be Arabic. In Kurdistan the language of instruction would usually be in Kurdish. Not all children are able to speak Kurdish so even if there were access for them to existing schools, you would face a considerable language barrier.



Out of that are various trickle effects as services are being put up, either formally or... World Vision sometimes tries to provide informal education or remedial classes so that at least children don't lose track entirely. You have a challenge that as services catch up, these children will eventually fall behind.

I think the example of the no lost generation effort—Canada has contributed generously to that in Jordan and in Lebanon—is a good example where you're systematically working with the host government to address those systemic structures. One of the key things I mentioned before is that World Vision, for example, employs displaced medical personnel to provide services. It's a very practical solution you can also apply on the education side—people who have moved from one region of Iraq to another, who are able to speak Arabic with children, and who have the kinds of qualifications you'd be looking for, are able to provide those kinds of services. There are all sorts of things that, as the response and our response continues to ramp up, are in the sequencing to get to that.

In the meantime, if I may, as Bart has mentioned, there are things that World Vision tries to do to provide a sense of normalcy to these children. We've used the term "child-friendly spaces". Again, I'll come back to that hospital I visited on Sunday, which essentially is a physical structure that is in not terrible shape, but there's no place for these children to have a routine every day. So yes, they play outside,

but they've been detached from their routine of going to school, and they need that routine. One of the things that we were struck with is that some of these child-friendly spaces are rather simple in their physical structure. They are just a tent where we then are able to provide a dedicated space for these children to have, depending on their age, either as a safe place to play or a safe place to have some form of education. That is a real challenge in these informal settlements, where you have this mixture of needs and you need to sequence which needs come at which time.

● (1250)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Marc Garneau):** Thank you very much. That brings it to an end.

I'd like to thank all of you very much as witnesses—the World Food Programme, World Vision, and the UNHCR—for the incredibly important work that you do. I'd like to thank you for taking the time to come and answer our questions.

We're now going to suspend for a minute. We have some committee business to discuss in camera. We need to get to two very quick committee matters.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*

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