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CANADA'S RESPONSE TO THE ISLAMIC STATE OF IRAQ AND THE LEVANT (ISIL)

Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

**Dean Allison
Chair**

MARCH 2015

41st PARLIAMENT, SECOND SESSION

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EIGHTH REPORT

Pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(2) the Committee has studied Canada's response to the violence, religious persecution and dislocation caused by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and has agreed to report the following:

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CANADA'S RESPONSE TO THE ISLAMIC STATE OF IRAQ AND THE LEVANT (ISIL)

THE COMMITTEE'S STUDY

A. Introduction

The House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development (“the Committee”) has studied the violence, persecution and dislocation perpetrated by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Iraq, Syria and the region,¹ and the Government of Canada’s response.² The Committee heard from a range of witnesses, including Canada’s Ministers of Foreign Affairs and National Defence, departmental officials, academics, representatives of think tanks and humanitarian relief organizations, and faith and community leaders. The Committee’s last meeting with witnesses was held on 17 February 2015.

B. Overview

The Committee’s meetings highlighted the misery that has been inflicted by ISIL, a terrorist organization whose actions and methods violate human rights, human dignity and international law. The ideology espoused by ISIL is an affront to basic tenets of individual liberty and tolerance. The group is an existential threat to all who are present where it operates.

Then-Minister of Foreign Affairs John Baird³ provided a succinct description of ISIL during his appearance before the Committee in January 2015. He warned the Committee that ISIL exhibits “all the attributes of a cult, even a death cult.” What that means, in his words, is that, “Anyone who doesn’t subscribe to their view of Islam, to their view of the world, is an enemy.”⁴ People have been killed by ISIL for simply belonging to a certain group or holding a certain faith. Others have been forced to flee with nothing. If left unchecked, ISIL could destroy the ethnic and religious diversity of Syria and Iraq. Moreover, ISIL threatens the region’s stability – acting as a magnet for extremist fighters, and seeking to establish adherents in countries beyond Syria and Iraq, while ignoring the borders and sovereignty of both. In short, the Committee’s study confirmed that ISIL is a malevolent organization that must be defeated.

1 In testimony to the Committee, witnesses also referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) by its other names: the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria / Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), Daesh and the Islamic State (IS). For the purposes of consistency, unless part of a direct quotation, this report uses the acronym ISIL throughout.

2 House of Commons, Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development (FAAE), [Minutes of Proceedings](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 4 November 2014.

3 The Honourable John Baird resigned from his position as Canada’s Minister of Foreign Affairs in early February 2015 and from his seat in the House of Commons in March 2015. In this report, Mr. Baird will subsequently be referred to as “Minister Baird.”

4 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 29 January 2015.

Witnesses noted the steps being taken by the international coalition against ISIL – which includes Canada – to help alleviate the suffering ISIL has caused, halt its advance, degrade its capabilities, and prepare local security forces to retake the territory it has captured. Attention has also focused on the need to disrupt ISIL’s sources of recruits and financing and to expose ISIL’s true nature.

Defeating ISIL on the ground in Syria and Iraq is a complex endeavour. Decisively pushing ISIL out of population centres and eliminating any local support it may enjoy in those areas will be tied to progress made in addressing broader societal challenges. Ultimately, defeating ISIL in a definitive sense will require the implementation of governance and security sector reforms in Iraq, and the formation and deployment of effective and accountable Iraqi security forces capable of recapturing and holding territory in all regions of Iraq: Sunni, Shia and Kurdish. In addition to defeating ISIL on the ground in Syria, it will also require the realization of a political solution to the conflict in Syria, now entering its fifth year. To be durable, such a solution must be legitimate in the eyes of all Syrians, and address factors that contributed to the initial outbreak of violence and its continuation since 2011. In both countries, inclusive governance is needed to ensure national stability and cohesion and to prevent the recurrence of conflict and strife, something that could see ISIL’s resurgence in the future or the formation of other extremist groups to take its place.

In all, testimony provided to the Committee reflected different perspectives on the challenge that ISIL represents, and the steps needed to defeat it. Witness presentations also addressed the specific political and security situations in Iraq and Syria, and violent extremism as a broader issue. This report focuses on the key findings of the Committee’s study of ISIL, with the view to providing recommendations for Canada’s foreign policy.

The report begins with a summary of the circumstances that led to ISIL’s rise in Syria and Iraq, and the ensuing consequences for people living in those countries. It then discusses the response to ISIL from an international and a Canadian perspective. Moving to a consideration of the way forward, the report addresses the strategic context in which the threat posed by ISIL should be viewed, outlining the rationale for, and necessity of, actions that can bring about ISIL’s defeat. The remaining sections of the report focus on the measures needed to do so, first from a counter-terrorism perspective, and second from the standpoint of the political and social context in both Iraq and Syria, the two countries in which ISIL is currently based. After some final comments on the need to support the advancement of good governance and religious freedom in the broader Middle East, the concluding section of the report contains the Committee’s recommendations.

THE RISE OF ISIL

A. Origins

ISIL is also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), the Islamic State (IS) and Daesh. It is a Sunni jihadist group with expansionist ambitions, recognized internationally⁵ and in Canada⁶ as a terrorist organization. ISIL aims to establish and then expand – from its current base in Syria and Iraq – a “Caliphate” founded on an extremist ideology and strict interpretation of *sharia* law, which would replace existing national governments.

ISIL did not materialize suddenly in 2014, the year in which it would dominate news headlines. Previous incarnations of the group – comprising core members and founders – were active first in Jordan and Afghanistan, and then Iraq, beginning in 1999. From approximately 2004–2006, the group was known as Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. In the most deadly years of the Iraqi insurgency that followed the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, AQI committed a number of attacks against government and international personnel and Iraqi civilians, including through the use of devastating suicide bombings that in many cases targeted the country’s Shia community. In June 2006, al-Zarqawi was killed by U.S. forces.⁷

The group continued, and was renamed later in 2006 as the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI). However, it suffered significant losses during the *Sahwa* (Sunni “Awakening”) that coincided with the surge of U.S. forces in Iraq in 2007. The Awakening refers to a period when a number of Sunni Arab tribal councils were formed at the local level, often working cooperatively with U.S. forces, which pushed back against ISI’s violent tactics and took up arms against it.⁸ These militias were able to limit ISI’s influence and room for manoeuvre in what had been its stronghold of western Iraq.

ISI was able to regroup during the subsequent drawdown of U.S. forces, the full withdrawal of which was completed by December 2011. Also in 2011, the group, now led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, began to expand into Syria, declaring itself the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham in April 2013. In February 2014, it was reported that ISIL had split – following months of disagreements – with what is known as “Al-Qaeda central” and its affiliated group in Syria, Jabhat Al-Nusra (also known as the Al-Nusra Front).⁹

5 United Nations Security Council (UNSC), [S/RES/2170 \(2014\)](#), adopted by the Security Council on 15 August 2014.

6 Public Safety Canada, [Currently listed entities](#).

7 Charles Lister, [Profiling the Islamic State](#), Brookings Doha Center, November 2014, pp. 7–8.

8 Ibid., p. 9.

9 Ibid., pp. 12–13. As the UN Sanctions Monitoring Team – formed to monitor the implementation of sanctions against Al-Qaeda and associated individuals and entities – indicates, the tensions between Al-Qaeda/Jabhat Al-Nusra and ISIL “were largely over questions of leadership and which strategic targets should have priority (local, regional, international) rather than divisions on fundamental ideology.” See, Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team established pursuant to United Nations resolution 1526 (2004) on the threat posed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and the Al-Nusra Front for the People of the Levant, in accordance with paragraph 22 of resolution 2170 (2014). UNSC, [S/2014/815](#), 14 November 2014, para 11.

B. ISIL's Expansion in Syria and Iraq

By the end of 2014, ISIL controlled and threatened a significant amount of territory in Syria and Iraq. Its evolution from an insurgent terrorist group that conducted targeted attacks to one that had conquered large swaths of territory in which it could impose its ideology and rule must be understood in the context of what was unfolding in both countries at the same time. In Syria, ISIL was able to regroup and then expand in the midst of that country's protracted armed conflict. In the case of Iraq, ISIL took advantage of the deteriorating political situation and rising sectarian violence that had beset many parts of the country.

ISIL's rise in Syria is connected to the ungoverned spaces and power vacuums that were created by that country's civil war, and the growing radicalization of the opposition – increasingly dominated by Islamist and extremist groups – fighting against the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. What had started as a civil uprising against the Assad regime in 2011 had become, by 2013–2014, an increasingly destructive, sectarian and “winner-take-all” conflict. Minister Baird told the Committee that, “ISIS is a direct creation of President Assad's war against his own people. He created the fertile conditions for the establishment of this group, and he bears significant responsibility.”¹⁰

By March 2014, ISIL had suffered some setbacks in Syria, having been pushed out of parts of northern Syria by various groups of opposition forces. However, ISIL was able to consolidate its base of operations in the Raqqa governorate of eastern Syria. In April 2014, it also expanded into the nearby Deir ez-Zour governorate, an area of the country that borders Iraq.¹¹

At the same time, ISIL had also renewed its presence in Iraq, particularly in the western governorate of Anbar. The terrorist group took advantage of a situation in which tensions were escalating between Sunni communities and the Shia-dominated central government in Baghdad led by then-Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. Sectarian violence increased in Iraq throughout 2013, and the government engaged in heavy-handed security measures to deal with protests and growing unrest in Sunni areas of the country. Moreover, in 2012–2014, ISIL waged two specific campaigns in Iraq. One featured attacks on Iraqi prisons aimed at freeing ISIL members, thus bolstering its ranks, while the other focused on intimidating and undermining local security forces, including through targeted assassinations.¹²

ISIL's threat to the stability and territorial integrity of Iraq was symbolized by the raising of its black flag over the city of Fallujah in western Iraq in early January 2014. However, these events in Iraq were arguably overshadowed at the international level by the focus on the intensifying conflict in Syria. There, the collapse of the long-awaited “Geneva II” peace talks in February 2014, combined with the fragmentation of opposition

10 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 9 September 2014.

11 Lister (2014), [Profiling the Islamic State](#), pp. 13–14.

12 *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12.

forces and the continuation of the Assad government's indiscriminate attacks against opposition-held areas, created the sense of an intractable conflict.

The situation in Iraq came into focus internationally when, expanding from its base in eastern Syria and foothold in western Iraq, ISIL made a dramatic sweep through northern Iraq in June 2014, gaining control of territory that included the country's second most populous city, Mosul. ISIL also captured the city of Tikrit.¹³ It was able to acquire military hardware and financial assets along the way. Now holding a swath of territory in Syria and Iraq, ISIL proclaimed itself a "Caliphate" on 29 June 2014, with al-Baghdadi named as their "Caliph." The group declared that, from that point forward, it would be known as the "Islamic State."¹⁴

ISIL then waged an offensive in northern Iraq and threatened territory administered by Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Northern Iraq is home to many of the country's religious and ethnic minorities. As ISIL swept through the area in early August 2014, many – including Yazidis, Christians and Shabak – were killed or forced to flee by the thousands. A report on political and security developments in Iraq that was provided to the United Nations (UN) Security Council by the UN Secretary-General states that these minority populations "fled for fear of genocide."¹⁵

In response to ISIL's growing threat to the KRG capital city of Erbil and to Iraq's minority populations, the U.S. launched targeted airstrikes against ISIL beginning on 8 August 2014. Vital humanitarian supplies were also dropped by air for the Yazidis who were trapped on Mount Sinjar,¹⁶ surrounded by ISIL forces intent on eliminating members of this minority group, considered by ISIL as infidels or blasphemers.

In the wake of ISIL's rapid advance, which brought it to the outskirts of Iraq's capital city of Baghdad, international attention increasingly focused on Iraq's political dynamics.¹⁷ Throughout the summer of 2014, questions and concerns were raised about the country's national unity and the ability of the state to organize the country's defences against ISIL's incursion. By that point, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki had become the subject of sustained criticism for having fuelled sectarian tensions and regional divisions in the country, including by marginalizing Iraq's Sunni minority from political and security institutions. Minister Baird told the Committee that, "Sunni tribes and leaders in Iraq grew

13 Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD), "[Canada Condemns Brutal Attacks and Kidnappings in Iraq](#)," *News Release*, 11 June 2014.

14 Lister (2014), [Profiling the Islamic State](#), p. 4.

15 [First report of the Secretary-General submitted pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 2169 \(2014\)](#), UNSC, S/2014/774, 31 October 2014, para 19.

16 Aircraft from the United States, the United Kingdom and Italy airdropped the aid to civilians trapped on Sinjar Mountain. Moreover, the subsequent mission to "break ISIL's siege of the Iraqi town of Amerli and deliver emergency humanitarian assistance to its residents was conducted with military forces from the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and France." See, United States Department of State, [Building International Support to Counter ISIL](#), Media Note, Office of the Spokesperson, Washington, DC, 19 September 2014.

17 DFATD, "[Baird Concerned by Stalled Parliamentary Process in Iraq](#)," *News Release*, 7 July 2014; and, DFATD, "[Canada Welcomes Appointment of Iraqi Prime Minister-Designate](#)," *News Release*, 15 August 2014.

increasingly disenchanted by the overly sectarian government in Baghdad.” As he put it, ISIL “filled that void.”¹⁸

In general, under al-Maliki’s government, Iraq had seen growing authoritarianism and personalized rule.¹⁹ Moreover, corruption and sectarian politics had been allowed to affect the professionalism and operational effectiveness of Iraq’s security forces. This trend was most notably exhibited by the Iraqi army’s seeming collapse in the face of ISIL’s advance on Mosul – an attack spearheaded by a relatively small force. In the end, the army lost more than the city. It left military equipment and arms that ISIL was able to take and later use in its offensives in other parts of the country.

Nouri al-Maliki resigned as Prime Minister on 14 August 2014. A new unity government was sworn in on 8 September 2014, led by Haider al-Abadi, a Shia, with Sunni and Kurdish deputy prime ministers. The final two Cabinet posts – of the Defence and Interior Ministers – were approved on 18 October 2014.²⁰

On 10 September 2014, U.S. President Barack Obama announced his government’s strategy “to degrade and ultimately destroy”²¹ ISIL, an organization that the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency then estimated comprised between 20,000 and 31,500 fighters.²² The U.S. President indicated that airstrikes would be expanded “beyond protecting our own people and humanitarian missions, so that we’re hitting ISIL targets as Iraqi forces go on offense.”²³ At the same time, the U.S. government worked to establish a broad international coalition, which aims to eliminate the threat posed by ISIL.

C. The Regional Context

ISIL’s emergence – and the broader phenomenon of Islamist extremism – must be examined not only in the Iraqi and Syrian contexts, but also through a regional lens. Many countries in the Middle East and North Africa have experienced years of political stagnation and, in a number of cases, economic malaise. Generally speaking, with a few exceptions, in recent decades the people of the region have been offered variations of two extreme models of governance: authoritarianism and political Islamism. At the same time, rivalries and strategic competition between regional powers have fuelled sectarian divisions and encouraged identity formation along sectarian lines.

In her presentation to the Committee, Ellen Laipson, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Stimson Center, mentioned a number of “historical reference points”, which she argued are relevant when seeking to contextualize the rise of ISIL. She cited the

18 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 9 September 2014.

19 Toby Dodge and Becca Wasser, “The Crisis of the Iraqi State,” in *Middle Eastern Security, the US Pivot and the Rise of ISIS*, Adelphi Series, 54:447–448, 2014, pp. 22–31.

20 [First report of the Secretary-General submitted pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 2169 \(2014\)](#), UNSC, S/2014/774, 31 October 2014, para 10.

21 The White House, [Statement by the President on ISIL](#), 10 September 2014.

22 Ken Dilanian, “[CIA: Islamic State group has up to 31,500 fighters](#),” *The Associated Press*, 11 September 2014.

23 The White House, [Statement by the President on ISIL](#), 10 September 2014.

1979 revolution in Iran, which led to the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in 1981. Ms. Laipson noted that the latter event “demonstrated that what were then considered peaceful Islamists, under the guise of the Muslim Brothers, were being challenged and superseded by a much more violent and extremist form of political Islam in Egypt, which was, after all, the heartland of Arab and Islamic thought.”²⁴ Beyond these specific events, she argued that, more cumulatively, there has been both a “failure of the western project to build an Arab world that had western-style institutions and a failure of the Arab world to develop an ideology that was modernist and positive and constructive for their own citizens.”²⁵

Geneive Abdo, Fellow at the Stimson Center, noted that ISIL has drawn some inspiration from a jihadist principle that was put forward in a book written by Al-Qaeda leadership in Iraq, entitled *The Management of Savagery*. The idea is that the withering away of states “gives jihadists more opportunities.” Ms. Abdo told the Committee that ISIL sees this situation – or withering – as “an opportunity because not only has the nation-state collapsed, but there is no longer any sense of citizenship among the majority of people in some Arab countries.”²⁶ In relation to these challenges, Ms. Abdo argued that part of ISIL’s appeal – specifically the establishment of its self-proclaimed caliphate – and its ability to lure people to it, responds to the “sense of defeat” and “of loss” that exists within Arab societies. She said that “many Muslims compare their standing in the world to what it was centuries ago and they feel that they have been defeated, not by the west but by their own leaders.”²⁷

The desire within many Arab countries for political and economic change culminated in what is known as the “Arab Spring”, a phenomenon that was mentioned by several witnesses who appeared before the Committee. The Arab Spring began with an act of civil disobedience – the self-immolation of a fruit vendor in Tunisia in December 2010 – and led to large-scale protests in several countries in the region in 2011. It resulted in the toppling of the long-standing Ben Ali, Gaddafi and Mubarak regimes in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt, respectively, and was the starting point for what has been ongoing unrest in Syria and Yemen.

Ms. Laipson noted the initial optimism that accompanied the early period of the Arab Spring. Contrasting that hope with the current atmosphere in the region, she remarked to the Committee that,

When the Arab Spring began in late 2010 and 2011, there was a flurry of hope and belief that at least some in the Arab world were now ready to try again to modernize and liberalize and open up Arab politics.

What is striking to me from recent travels in the region is how quickly the disappointment has set in. Even for people who supported the change in Tunisia, for example, with a

24 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 5 February 2015.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

moderate Islamist party coming to power for a brief time, or the one-year reign of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the disappointment in that experiment has led to very quick radicalization by some young Arabs. The notion that people who are being recruited successfully into ISIL had a very different political agenda only a few years ago is a very disturbing thought.²⁸

With that said, Ms. Laipson noted the difficulties that exist in understanding “the vulnerable populations that can be recruited by this radical movement.”²⁹

In his presentation to the Committee, Father Elias Mallon, External Affairs Officer, Catholic Near East Welfare Association (United States), argued that the very term used to describe the events that took place in the Middle East and North Africa in this period – the “Arab Spring” – was ominous, and perhaps even prescient. In the Middle East, he said, rather than being an optimistic time as it is in North America, the spring is a “time when the rains stop and it gets incredibly hot and things die.”³⁰ In Father Mallon’s view, what emerged from the Arab Spring can be described as “an inherently unstable situation with artificial countries, artificial divisions, and really, very little sense of national unity.” He told the Committee that, in the midst of this regional political context, years of war and instability in Iraq, and the destabilization of Syria, “all kinds of operatives, who more or less were always there, were able to move in and fill the vacuum.”³¹

Sami Aoun, Full Professor, Université de Sherbrooke, noted the failure of the Arab Spring “to bring about modernity and liberal democracy.”³² He maintained that it must be understood that ISIL, “despite its horrors and barbaric nature, was born of regional and local frustrations, whether in Syria or in Iraq.”³³ Building on this point, he indicated to the Committee that, in addition to the sectarian violence that is currently afflicting Syria and Iraq, at the broader regional level “there is something even more destructive and menacing going on.” According to Professor Aoun:

In Iraq, in Syria, and elsewhere in the Middle East, a proxy war is raging between the two great powers in that region, that is to say Saudi Arabia, representing Arab Sunni rather fundamentalist and antidemocratic positions, which played a counter-revolutionary role during the Arab Spring, and Iran, which supports and works to strengthen the Shiite communities and has the imperial ambition to dominate that space, that Arab Muslim territory.³⁴

Testimony from other witnesses also drew attention to the regional power struggle between Iran and Saudi Arabia, which seems to be affecting many political and security dynamics in the region and exacerbating sectarian tensions.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 20 November 2014.

31 Ibid.

32 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 3 February 2015.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

Speaking about this context of regional rivalry, Payam Akhavan, Professor, Faculty of Law, McGill University and Kellogg College, Oxford University, suggested that, in the case of Iraq, “the post-Saddam vacuum was filled by sectarian violence with both sides supporting proxy extremist militia based on the Shia-Sunni divide reflecting their respective ideologies.”³⁵ With respect to Syria, Professor Akhavan noted that the Assad regime, which has been backed “by the notorious Alawite shabiha militia,” carried out “a policy of deliberate incitement of sectarian violence as a survival strategy.”³⁶ Furthermore, he pointed out that the Assad regime has been backed by Iran and Lebanon’s Hezbollah, while Turkey and Saudi Arabia have “supported Islamic rebels.” According to Professor Akhavan, “There are even accounts of Damascus helping the rapid rise of ISIL through prisoner releases and other measures.”³⁷ Describing the situation as of the end of November 2014, he argued that the bombing of ISIL targets in Syria had added a further complication by resulting “in more sympathy and more recruits for the extremists, even from the ranks of the Free Syrian Army, once the main rebel movement and competition to ISIL.”³⁸

With such a regional backdrop of interweaving relationships and interests, Professor Akhavan summarized the situation by remarking that, “to say that politics makes strange bedfellows would be an understatement.” In his words: “There is a dialectic of extremism at play.”³⁹ He warned that, “The cynical, short-sighted instrumentalization of religious identity by regimes espousing hateful and discriminatory ideologies will continue to rip the region apart and provide a fertile ground for sectarian violence...”⁴⁰

Another witness, Andrew Tabler, Senior Fellow, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, also noted Iran’s expanding role and influence in the region, a trend that has “oftentimes angered” Sunni Arab elites and Sunni majority countries. He said that,

in the context of the uprisings, Iran has involved itself in these environments militarily through proxy forces and the Quds force to back up regimes that oftentimes have little legitimacy but have legal legitimacy in the international community.

I think overall that's what is causing these and generating the uprisings and the extreme reaction on the part of ISIL which represents, at least partially, the Sunni society's response to that encroachment on Arab territories.⁴¹

In Professor Akhavan’s view, “there has to be a wider rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia if there is any meaningful solution to the regional problem.”⁴²

35 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 27 November 2014.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 4 December 2014.

42 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 27 November 2014.

During her presentation, Ms. Laipson argued that, in addition to the struggle underway between Sunni and Shia Islam, there is also a struggle happening within Sunni Islam. She expressed to the Committee that,

What we are seeing in ISIL now is a willingness to kill other Muslims. This is not Islam versus the west in the first order; in the first order, it is a struggle within the world of Islam, of Sunni Muslims profoundly disagreeing about what kind of governance they want.⁴³

Ms. Laipson noted her belief that, while “ISIL represents a very small minority of Arab populations,” the group is, as a result of its aggressiveness, “able to coerce much larger segments of Sunni communities.”⁴⁴ In the face of such broader and longer-term “struggles within societies and communities,” Ms. Laipson suggested that outside actors can play a role to help reduce the violence and “to give people who are more moderate in their world view some solace.” However, she does not think that “we alone will be able to turn the tide in what could be a generational struggle within the world of Arab Islam.”⁴⁵

For his part, Professor Aoun described the phenomenon as “a multi-level war among Muslim factions.”⁴⁶ While again noting the Shia/Sunni, Iran/Saudi Arabia divide, he also highlighted rivalries between states of certain Sunni majority countries. As he sees it, on one side is Turkey and Qatar – which support the Muslim Brotherhood and political Islamism – and on the other side is Saudi Arabia and Egypt – which Professor Aoun said “support another political Salafism.”⁴⁷ Given the nature of this struggle, which seems to be occurring among countries and societies across the Middle East, he argued that Canadian diplomacy is inherently “limited” in its ability to respond.⁴⁸ Salim Mansur, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Western Ontario, made a similar overarching point in his appearance before the Committee. He argued that, “we cannot change the direction of this war that is going on inside the Arab Muslim world. They have to work it out.”⁴⁹

ISIL’S IDEOLOGY

The horrific acts that have been perpetrated and actively promoted by ISIL – detailed in the sections of this report that follow – are driven by the group’s violent and uncompromising ideology. A number of witnesses who appeared before the

43 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 5 February 2015.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 3 February 2015.

47 Ibid. A report published by the United Kingdom-based Quilliam Foundation includes the following definition of Salafism: “A revivalist Sunni Muslim puritanical movement that believes Muslims should shed traditional theological edicts and instead derive new religious guidance directly from the sources.” See Dr. Erin Marie Saltman and Charlie Winter, *Islamic State: The Changing Face of Modern Jihadism*, Quilliam, November 2014, p. 6.

48 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 3 February 2015.

49 Ibid.

Committee provided their views on that ideology and related worldview, which manifest in ISIL's actions.

Mark Gwozdecky, Director General, Middle East and Maghreb, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD), informed the Committee that, "ISIL has organized, mobilized, and advanced on the basis of adherence to a distorted ideology that aims at eliminating so-called non-believers, who are identified as all those refusing to convert to ISIL's perverted version of Islam."⁵⁰ In a previous meeting on the issue, Andrew Bennett, Ambassador, Office of Religious Freedom, DFATD, had told the Committee that, "What we see in ISIL is a gross warping, distortion, twisting of a perceived understanding of Islam that is not Islam."⁵¹

Testimony from a number of witnesses suggested that a real understanding of ISIL, and the threat it represents, comes from a recognition of ISIL's ultimate objectives. Mr. Gwozdecky told the Committee that ISIL's goal,

is the establishment of a single transnational Islamic state based on sharia law. They want to replicate the caliphate of more than a thousand years ago, which spanned every country in the Middle East, from Spain right through to the subcontinent. That is their stated goal.⁵²

Commenting on the various Islamist terrorist movements that have emerged in several regions of the world in recent decades, Thomas Farr, Director, Religious Freedom Project, Georgetown University, argued that they "are motivated by a belief that God is calling them to brutality and violence against the enemies of Islam." He told the Committee that, in the specific case of ISIL, "the objective is to conquer and control territory in order to carry out this divinely ordained mission."⁵³

With respect to ISIL's long-term plans, it was argued that – however bizarre ISIL's manner of expressing those plans may at times seem – the statements of its leaders regarding the group's fanatic and disturbing objectives should not be minimized or overlooked. They are the actual convictions held by ISIL's members. Jonathan Dahoah Halevi, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, argued that ISIL,

leaves no doubt about its extremist Islamic Sunni ideology and its determination to relentlessly conduct jihad to spread the rule of Islam and the word of Allah, first in the Middle East and later in Europe and North America.⁵⁴

Mr. Halevi stressed that ISIL's ideology "is not a far-fetched harmless fantasy. It is an actual plan of action." He said that ISIL "sees itself as fully committed to bringing about the

50 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 27 January 2015.

51 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 9 September 2014.

52 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 27 January 2015.

53 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 9 December 2014.

54 Ibid.

fulfilment of this prophecy of Muhammad in order to pave the way for the emergence of the Mahdi, the Muslim messiah.”⁵⁵

In addressing the role of religion in ISIL’s activities, Ms. Abdo suggested that,

there is some reluctance, particularly among western governments, academics, and the media, to take religion seriously as being part of ISIS’s appeal, part of its recruitment strategies. I think that’s a mistake.

There’s also, I think, a tendency among Muslim leaders in the Middle East to say that this isn’t about Islam, that this isn’t the real Islam. Unfortunately, here we are, 30 years after we saw the emergence of key Islamic groups, namely al Qaeda, which actually began in Egypt, and we have to tell ourselves that it is about Islam, because this is what they believe. It does have something to do with Islam.⁵⁶

In reference to the split between ISIL and Al-Qaeda, two jihadist terrorist organizations, Ms. Abdo explained that the competition “isn’t just about power.” She told the Committee that it also stems from competition “about Islamic interpretation.” According to Ms. Abdo, “When al-Baghdadi founded ISIS there was a huge quarrel between the leadership of ISIS and the leadership of al Qaeda, because there are profound differences.”⁵⁷ Ms. Abdo stated that the core beliefs held by ISIL are reflected in their treatment of people on the ground. She said that members of ISIL “don’t even believe that Shias are real Muslims.” Therefore, in her view, “it’s a debate about Islamic interpretation, and it’s a way to marginalize other Muslims who are not with ISIS, not only to marginalize them, but to kill them.”⁵⁸

In response to a question on the issue, Dr. Farr argued that it is indeed important “to focus on the religious aspects” of ISIL’s ideology in order to understand the challenge that ISIL poses and the motivations driving its members. As he put it to the Committee,

Listen to what they say. Read what they say they’re doing. They’re not saying that they just hate everyone and are striking out blindly against the rest of the world, trying to carve

55 Ibid. In a recent article in *The Atlantic*, Graeme Wood describes ISIL as an organization with a truly millenarian worldview and beliefs. He argues that ISIL’s nature has been misunderstood by external observers “in at least two ways.” The first is the tendency “to see jihadism as monolithic, and to apply the logic of al-Qaeda to an organization that has decisively eclipsed it.” Rather than a flexible organization comprising a diffuse network of autonomous cells operating in sites around the world, as is the case with Al-Qaeda, ISIL “requires territory to remain legitimate, and a top-down structure to rule it.” The second misunderstanding identified by Wood is, in his words, “a well-intentioned but dishonest campaign to deny the Islamic State’s medieval religious nature.” He argues that much of what ISIL does “looks nonsensical except in light of a sincere, carefully considered commitment to returning civilization to a seventh-century legal environment, and ultimately to bringing about the apocalypse.” See Graeme Wood, “[What ISIS Really Wants](#),” *The Atlantic*, March 2015.

56 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 5 February 2015.

57 Ibid. In the same meeting, referring to the time when ISIL’s predecessor organization in Iraq, AQI, was led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, Senior Fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, told the Committee that there was also a debate between the leadership of AQI and Al-Qaeda “about strategy.” He said that AQI’s “extraordinarily brutal approach caused people not only to chafe at their rule but also to extract revenge that was every bit as grisly as what al Qaeda did.”

58 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 5 February 2015.

out a little place. They're trying to carve out a caliphate and to use that as the way to expand this radical extremist version of Islam.

If we don't understand that, and if we aren't willing to put it on the table—with due respect to the vast majority of Muslims who do not think this way—if we don't do that, we're not going to be able to defeat this enemy.⁵⁹

Other witnesses also emphasized that a failure to recognize and come to grips with ISIL's true nature compromises the ability to determine the policies necessary to defeat it. As Ayad Aldin, Former Deputy of the Iraqi Parliament, told the Committee, "Unless we confront the terrorist ideology, we will not be able to stop the strong wave of terrorism that is attacking our world."⁶⁰

Speaking about that ideology, Professor Mansur argued that,

ISIL is fuelled by the ideology of Islamism. We need to fully grasp the meaning and objective of this ideology, as we in the west once did when confronted with Soviet Communism. This is essential if we are to put forward a coherent policy instead of band-aids to contain and defeat what ISIL represents. Islamism is the ideology of armed jihad, of waging war by any means available to enforce sharia rule in Muslim majority countries and seek sharia compliance by democracies in the west for Muslim immigrants.⁶¹

He also suggested that ISIL's Islamist ideology "can hardly be differentiated from the Wahhabi and Salafi ideology of the ruling elite in Saudi Arabia."⁶² Tarek Fatah, Founder, Muslim Canadian Congress, argued that this "foundational doctrine" of Saudi Arabia, Wahhabism,

is based on a very simple idea, which is that life on earth is a fleeting phenomenon and real life actually begins after death. They say that this world is best treated as an airport transit lounge where we wait to catch the flight to our final destination that's paradise—but only after an end-of-time scenario that will not happen until the entire world is ruled by a single Islamic caliphate and after even the stones and trees will join Muslims in an effort to wipe out non-Muslims, especially Jews.⁶³

From Mr. Fatah's perspective, "War without understanding the enemy can only inflict casualties and damage on the enemy, leaving it on a higher moral ground amongst its own base."⁶⁴

59 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 9 December 2014.

60 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 3 February 2015.

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF ISIL'S RISE

A. ISIL's Record of Barbarism

ISIL pursues its violent extremist ideology wherever it operates. The human rights abuses committed by ISIL have been brutal, deliberate and systematic. ISIL has killed civilians and executed captive soldiers, journalists, aid workers and others, including through beheadings, a barbaric practice that the group has filmed for public distribution. As Minister Baird told the Committee, ISIL documents these crimes “to fan the flames of terror in the hearts of those they seek to rule. They don't hide their brutality; they in fact promote it. They film it; they tweet it, and they bask in the reaction that it causes.”⁶⁵ In early February 2015, a video reportedly released by ISIL showed their gruesome execution of a captured Jordanian pilot, who was burned alive in a cage.

As part of his testimony to the Committee, His Eminence Sotirios Athanassoulas, Metropolitan Archbishop, Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Toronto, cited a November 2014 report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic entitled, *Rule of Terror: Living under ISIS in Syria*.⁶⁶ In particular, he noted the report's findings that ISIL “has executed women as well as men for unapproved contact with the opposite sex,” and “prioritizes children as a vehicle for ensuring long-term loyalty, adherence to their ideology, and a cadre of devoted fighters who would see violence as a way of life.”⁶⁷

In addition to the above-mentioned report on the human rights situation in Syria, the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights have jointly produced three reports on the protection of civilians in armed conflict in Iraq, which cover the period from early June 2014 to early December 2014.⁶⁸ Taken together, these documents paint a disturbing picture of ISIL's reported actions in Syria and Iraq,⁶⁹ while also illustrating the general climate of violence and impunity that has pervaded both countries.⁷⁰ At the hands of ISIL, religious and ethnic minorities have

65 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 9 September 2014.

66 [Rule of Terror: Living under ISIS in Syria](#), Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, United Nations, 14 November 2014. The Independent Commission was established on 22 August 2011 by the United Nations Human Rights Council. It has a [mandate](#) “to investigate all alleged violations of international human rights law since March 2011 in the Syrian Arab Republic.”

67 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 27 November 2014.

68 Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) Human Rights Office, [Report on the Protection of Civilians in the Non International Armed Conflict in Iraq: 5 June–5 July 2014](#), 18 August 2014; [Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Iraq: 6 July–10 September 2014](#), 26 September 2014; and, [Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Iraq: 11 September–10 December 2014](#), 23 February 2015.

69 In the summary section of the third UN report on Iraq, the two UN organizations that produced it note “that many of the violations and abuses perpetrated by ISIL may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and possibly genocide.” See, Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and UNAMI Human Rights Office, [Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Iraq: 11 September–10 December 2014](#), pp. ii.

70 The three UN reports on the protection of civilians in armed conflict in Iraq also document reported violations committed by Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) personnel and affiliated forces.

faced forced assimilation and forced conversions, discriminatory taxes and expulsions. Women and girls have endured sexual violence, been sold in markets as “war booty” and held in conditions of sexual slavery. Children have been tortured and killed and forced to witness and perpetrate executions. Professionals, journalists, community leaders and human rights activists have been specifically targeted by ISIL, including for abductions and assassination. Places of worship and historic monuments have been attacked and destroyed. In areas under ISIL’s control, basic rights and freedoms – such as freedom of expression, assembly and association – have been severely curtailed and violated.

Testimony provided to the Committee described many of these issues, establishing a record of the barbarism and cruelty that ISIL has left in its wake. As Minister Baird said, in respect of the crimes that have been undertaken in ISIL-controlled areas – including “as many as hundreds at a time being summarily executed” – that, “It must be, for some, a living hell.”⁷¹

Bessma Momani, Associate Professor at the Balsillie School of International Affairs, University of Waterloo, told the Committee that ISIL is “targeting everyone and anyone in its wake who opposes its rule, and that includes Sunni Muslims.”⁷² She argued that, in building the narrative for countering ISIL, it needs to be emphasized that ISIL “targets everyone who does not succumb to its very draconian and perverse interpretation of Islam.”⁷³

Within this general climate, and focusing on the situation in Iraq, several witnesses indicated that minorities have been particularly threatened by ISIL. The Reverend Majed El Shafie, Founder and President of One Free World International, visited Iraq in September 2014. Speaking to the Committee in November 2014, he indicated that “we witnessed what we believe is the beginning of a genocide.” He noted that members of Iraq’s Christian and Yazidi minorities “are being killed, massacred, and crucified. Their families are being hunted down and they are given very few options; basically, convert or die.”⁷⁴

The Committee received specific information on the plight of Iraq’s Yazidis, a small minority group that practices an ancient religion. Vian Saeed, a Member of the Iraqi Parliament, who is Yazidi, spoke to the Committee in very emotional terms about the tragic situation that befell her people after ISIL invaded the Sinjar region of northern Iraq – the home of the Yazidi people – in early August 2014. She told the Committee that, “Thousands of Yazidis have been killed: by ISIS directly or indirectly, by the forced march, their escape, the terrible conditions of the Sinjar Mountains.”⁷⁵ Ms. Saeed described how in the village of Kocho alone, “700 people have been kidnapped, mostly women and children

71 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 29 January 2015.

72 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 20 November 2014.

73 Ibid.

74 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 27 November 2014.

75 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 2 December 2014.

aged 12 years and younger, while the rest of the men, about 1,200, were murdered in cold blood, destroying the entire town.”⁷⁶

Ms. Saeed spoke of the deeply troubling situation involving the “more than 5,000 Yazidi women, children, and men” kidnapped by ISIL. Speaking as of early December 2014, she informed the Committee that “No one has yet been able to help them, find them, and bring them back home.” Ms. Saeed said that the Yazidi women and girls who were kidnapped and sold into slavery by ISIL “have been treated with unthinkable cruelty.”⁷⁷ Omar Haider, Yazidi Human Rights Organization-International, provided a personal account of these crimes. He revealed that when ISIL captured his 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.”⁷⁸

During another meeting, the Committee heard from Mr. Gwozdecky (DFATD) that “Reports of sexual violence by ISIL are widespread, and it is increasingly clear that this is part of a deliberate campaign of persecution against religious minority groups.”⁷⁹ As part of his testimony, and after noting the reported prices for women and girls who have been sold into slavery by ISIL, Professor Akhavan stated that “ISIL has been rightfully called the ‘caliphate of barbarism’, or simply a death cult.”⁸⁰

Ms. Saeed also emphasized the dislocation of the Yazidi people, who were forced to flee en masse from their communities in northern Iraq – their only home in the world. In her words,

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.⁸¹

Ms. Saeed stressed that all of the people who had to leave did so “suddenly, in a matter of hours.” She said that, “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.”⁸²

76 Ibid. Reverend Niaz Toma told the Committee that ISIL fighters apparently did receive “instructions” on how to treat different minority groups. Their reasoning was that Christians are described in the Koran as “The people of the Book.” However, Yazidis are viewed by ISIL as “blasphemers; they don’t believe in God.” Thus, for ISIL, while Christians could be forced out of their towns – and have all of their possessions confiscated – in the case of the Yazidis, the instructions “were, no, torture them; kill them savagely.” See, FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 27 November 2014.

77 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 2 December 2014.

78 Ibid.

79 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 27 January 2015.

80 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 27 November 2014

81 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 2 December 2014.

82 Ibid.

The Committee also received information concerning the hardships that have been inflicted on Iraq's Christians. Rabea Allos described the situation after ISIL had taken over Mosul and villages in the nearby Nineveh Plain, where the majority of Iraq's Christian population resides. He said, "Within days, Christianity that had existed from the first century in that region disappeared. All Christians, except for a handful, escaped for their lives and faith."⁸³ Emmanuel Joseph Mar-Emmanuel, Diocesan Bishop, Diocese of Canada, Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East, also testified that "thousands" of Christians faced forcible displacement at the hands of ISIL. They were "given options: either convert to Islam, or pay the jizya—the Koranic tax against non-Muslims—or leave, or suffer beheading." As he told the Committee, "During this exodus about 150,000 Christians and other religious minorities left the city soon after it was captured by ISIS and fled to the autonomous region of Kurdistan relocating mainly in the provinces of Erbil and Dohuk."⁸⁴

Reverend Niaz Toma, Chaldean Catholic Church in Canada, argued that while all groups have been victimized by ISIL in Iraq, the situation has been especially acute in the case of "the peaceful minorities, such as Christians, Mandaean, and Yezidis, who have neither the reliance on the tribal system, nor the existence of the militia, nor the presence of powerful, effective political parties."⁸⁵ Carl Héту, National Director, Catholic Near East Welfare Association (Canada), also noted that the Christian community in Iraq is "not equipped like other folks with guns and tribes, etc."⁸⁶

B. A Humanitarian Crisis

In the wake of ISIL's 2014 rampage, an urgent humanitarian crisis unfolded in Iraq. This situation compounded the already large-scale humanitarian crisis afflicting Syria and the surrounding region, an issue that will be discussed in a subsequent section of this report that deals specifically with the conflict in Syria.

With respect to Iraq, Leslie Norton, Director General, International Humanitarian Assistance, DFATD, told the Committee that an estimated 5.2 million people in the country require assistance, 1.5 million of whom are in areas that are considered out of reach.⁸⁷ The Committee also heard that Iraq's humanitarian crisis has been characterized by dislocation. Emmanuel Gignac, Coordinator, Northern Iraq, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, said that this displacement was generated in three major waves in 2014:

The first one was from January to June, which concerned mainly central Iraq. About half a million [internally displaced persons – IDPs] were displaced.... The second wave followed the fall of Mosul and threw another 550,000 people into displacement. The third

83 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 4 December 2014.

84 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 9 December 2014.

85 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 27 November 2014.

86 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 20 November 2014.

87 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 27 January 2015.

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.⁸⁸

In all, Mr. Gignac reported to the Committee that some 2.2 million people have been displaced in Iraq. He also indicated that “Almost half of that population is located in the Kurdistan region, a region whose population amounts to about five million.”⁸⁹

The Committee heard that access to people in need is an overarching concern with respect to the humanitarian response in Iraq. Access is severely restricted in areas controlled by ISIL. For example, Jane Pearce, Country Director, Iraq, United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), explained that her organization has “easy access” in the Kurdish area and “quite good access” from Baghdad in the south. However, she noted that, “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.”⁹⁰ Earlier in the same meeting, Ms. Pearce had told the Committee that,

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 [2014], fighting had made it too dangerous to distribute in Anbar governorate. With the cooperation of our local partner, we finally regained access in October, 2014.⁹¹

Martin Fischer, Director of Policy, World Vision Canada, also indicated that his organization is not able to access populations “that are behind the front lines, if you will, just outside of Kurdistan.”⁹²

The humanitarian crisis in Iraq is, as noted, further complicated by the conflict in neighbouring Syria and the waves of displacement it has generated. According to Mr. Gignac, there are approximately 220,000 to 230,000 Syrian refugees in Iraq, the majority of whom are also living in the Kurdistan region.⁹³ There are nine refugee camps in Iraq, eight of which are located in Kurdistan, while the other is in Anbar governorate in an area controlled by ISIL. Speaking about that camp in Anbar, Mr. Gignac said, “We are still able to provide assistance there, but in a very ad hoc way and not very reliably.”⁹⁴

The Committee heard that the majority of refugees and IDPs in Iraq reside outside of formal camps, and many are living in informal settlements. What this means is that they are finding shelter in the open, in unfinished and public buildings or schools, or with host communities, which makes it more difficult to reach them and provide services. Mr. Gignac noted that the refugees and IDPs who are staying outside camps “are using public

88 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 17 February 2015.

89 Ibid.

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid.

92 Ibid.

93 Ibid.

94 Ibid.

services, the health services, education, sanitation, electricity, etc.” As such, he said that the pressure on public services in Kurdistan is “huge.”⁹⁵

In describing the general challenges that confront people in situations of displacement who are living outside of formal camps, Bart Witteveen, Director, Humanitarian and Emergency Affairs, World Vision Canada, said:

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.⁹⁶

Mr. Fischer, also of World Vision, commented that, even within cities, locating, registering and providing services to displaced populations presents challenges for humanitarian organizations.⁹⁷

In general, the Committee heard that humanitarian needs in Iraq remain significant. For example, Ms. Pearce observed that the crisis in Iraq has made an estimated 2.8 million people food-insecure, including IDPs, host communities and other vulnerable groups. She noted that, “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.”⁹⁸ Furthermore, Ms. Pearce said that the conflict has resulted in a disruption of the government’s public distribution system of food rations in parts of the country, which has impacted more than four million people who are not displaced but who rely on the distribution system for more than 50% of their energy intake.

Among the many humanitarian needs in Iraq, the availability of shelter was also highlighted. As of the time of his presentation to the Committee on 17 February 2015, Mr. Gignac reported that the UN had constructed 25 IDP camps throughout Iraq, with another 10 under way. However, he cautioned, “we remain below the needs when it comes to shelter.” Mr. Gignac elaborated that, “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.”⁹⁹

Another humanitarian issue is access to education for displaced children and youth. Speaking about the situation in Iraq as of November 2014, Mr. Hétu emphasized that “all the kids who have left as refugees from Mosul, Nineveh plain, and Qaraqosh do not go to

95 Ibid.

96 Ibid.

97 Ibid.

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.

school. There is no school at all for them.”¹⁰⁰ Reverend Toma also commented that the “interrupted and stopped education of the children and youth represent another serious concern, especially with the incapability of the schools of the Kurdistan region to accommodate the number of displaced students.”¹⁰¹

Funding continues to be sought to meet all of these needs. With respect to the response to the refugee situation in Iraq, Mr. Gignac told the Committee that international humanitarian agencies had identified US\$474 million as being needed for 2014. Funding for 43% of that requirement was mobilized. With respect to the IDP situation in Iraq, some 53% of the needed US\$340 million was mobilized in 2014. In Mr. Gignac’s assessment, “The gaps still remain important.”¹⁰² Speaking from the perspective of her organization, the WFP, Ms. Pearce noted that their operation in Iraq will require over US\$420 million for 2015. She told the Committee that they “have received about \$200 million of that.” She subsequently elaborated that the WFP operation in Iraq has “sufficient finances to keep [their] cash and voucher programs going only until May of this year.”¹⁰³

C. The Destruction of Diversity

The information provided to the Committee raised the troubling spectre of a region that is at risk of being emptied of its diversity. The Middle East, and Iraq and Syria in particular, has been – for centuries – a tapestry of multiple faiths, ethnicities, cultures and traditions. Bishop Mar-Emmanuel reminded the Committee that the “ancient Christians of Iraq and Syria both trace their Christianity back to apostolic times.”¹⁰⁴ Reverend Toma also emphasized that “Christianity entered Iraq in the first century.”¹⁰⁵ Indeed, he noted that the first church was built in Iraq in 80 AD. In his presentation, Mr. Héту also stressed this regional characteristic. He told the Committee that, “There is no other place on this planet where there’s such great diversity, where you have Shiite Muslims, Sunni Muslims, and different groups like the Yazidis, a group with a religion that predates Jesus Christ in the region. You have many tribes, clans, Christians of different cultures and areas.” In his opinion, we are currently witnessing “the destruction of that diversity.”¹⁰⁶

In Iraq, diversity is under threat not only as a result of ISIL’s immediate crimes, but because of sectarian tensions and pressures against minority groups that have been building for several years. Ms. Abdo told the Committee that,

In Iraq the pre-2003 Christian population was as high as 1.5 million or 5% of the Iraqi population, and now it’s fallen to 400,000 Christians. Of course this is due not only to ISIS

100 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 20 November 2014.

101 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 27 November 2014.

102 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 17 February 2015.

103 Ibid.

104 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 9 December 2014.

105 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 27 November 2014.

106 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 20 November 2014.

but also to everything that's happened in Iraq since the invasion. But ISIS definitely and the Shia-Sunni conflict definitely do target Christians, and this is one of the many reasons that there is now persecution against Christians in the Arab world.¹⁰⁷

Mr. Héту also noted that, while the situation has recently become acute, the Christian population in Iraq has suffered over the last 10 to 15 years. According to research conducted by his organization and local churches, the total size of the Christian population in Iraq has fallen from approximately one million in 2003 to “about 200,000, maybe 150,000.” Framing the overall situation for the Committee, Mr. Héту remarked: “That means the entire Christian population is being evacuated from Iraq.”¹⁰⁸

For his part, Dr. Farr argued that, today, the “very existence” of Christians and other minorities in the Middle East is at risk. He said that,

We're witnessing the disappearance of Christians and Christianity from Iraq and Syria, a religious and cultural genocide with terrible humanitarian, moral, and strategic consequences for Christians, for the region and for all of us.¹⁰⁹

One worry is that, given the recent violence and brutality that has in particular befallen northern Iraq, some members of these communities will choose not to return to their homes when the fighting subsides, fearful of what may be left behind and desirous of finding a safer and more tolerant harbour.

THE RESPONSE TO ISIL'S RISE

A. The International Response

The threat posed by ISIL to the stability of the Middle East, and the atrocities committed by the group, have generated a significant international response. In August 2014, the United States started direct military action against ISIL in Iraq and began to assemble a coalition of countries with the aim of eliminating the terrorist threat posed by ISIL.¹¹⁰

That coalition is guided by multiple “lines of effort” that were first set forth by the United States in a meeting held on the sidelines of the September 2014 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Summit, involving counterparts from the United Kingdom, France, Australia, Germany, Canada, Turkey, Italy, Poland and Denmark.¹¹¹ They were later endorsed at a meeting of coalition partners convened in Brussels in December 2014.¹¹² The five lines of effort to combat ISIL are:

107 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 5 February 2015.

108 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 20 November 2014.

109 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 9 December 2014.

110 The White House, [Statement by the President on ISIL](#), 10 September 2014.

111 U.S. Department of State, [Building International Support to Counter ISIL](#), Media Note, Office of the Spokesperson, Washington, DC, 19 September 2014.

112 U.S. Department of State, [Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL](#).

1. Supporting military operations, capacity building and training;
2. Stopping the flow of foreign fighters;
3. Cutting off ISIL's access to financing and funding;
4. Addressing humanitarian crises; and
5. De-legitimizing ISIL's ideology.¹¹³

The United States Department of State now lists more than 60 countries that are contributing, through different means, to the international coalition to combat ISIL.¹¹⁴ On the military side, a number of countries are participating in airstrikes, and have contributed aircraft, military aid and bases for operations. Some international partners are also assisting and training Iraqi security forces and the Kurdish *peshmerga*,¹¹⁵ while the United States is developing a program to arm and train moderate Syrian rebels.¹¹⁶

Mr. Gwozdecky (DFATD) told the Committee that, within the coalition, “Canada belongs to a core group that is participating in a combat role through air strikes against ISIL in Iraq.”¹¹⁷ Other coalition countries that have conducted airstrikes in Iraq include the U.S., Australia, Belgium, Denmark, France, Jordan, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. A smaller number of countries, including the U.S., Bahrain, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have conducted airstrikes against ISIL positions in Syria.¹¹⁸ As of 18 March 2015, coalition countries had launched more than 1,600 air

113 U.S. Department of State, [Joint Statement Issued by Partners at the Counter-ISIL Coalition Ministerial Meeting](#), Media Note, Office of the Spokesperson, Washington, DC, 3 December 2014. See also, DFATD, [“Baird Discusses Iraq on Margins of Brussels Summit,” Photo Release](#), Brussels, Belgium, 3 December 2014.

114 U.S. Department of State, [Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL](#).

115 *Peshmerga* is an umbrella term that refers to all of the groups of Kurdish fighters – or security forces – in Kurdistan. The term itself means “those who confront death.” Detailed information on the composition of the *peshmerga*, and all other security forces operating in Iraq, is available in Michael Knights, [The Long Haul: Rebooting U.S. Security Cooperation in Iraq](#), Policy Focus 137, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, January 2015, pp. 26–38.

116 The U.S. is the largest contributor with respect to assistance for training, including in Iraq. 3,100 U.S. military personnel are currently authorized for deployment to Iraq, of which about two-thirds are advisors and trainers for the Iraqi Security Forces and the Kurdish *peshmerga*, while the rest support these forces and provide protection for U.S. civilian and military personnel in the country. With respect to the moderate Syrian opposition, the U.S. is planning to send more than 400 troops to train some 15,000 vetted Syrian fighters over three years (approximately 5,000 per year). Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar have agreed to host training programs. On 19 February 2015, the U.S. and Turkey formalized an agreement on that country’s support for the train and equip activities for the moderate Syrian opposition. See, Christopher M. Blanchard, [The ‘Islamic State’ Crisis and U.S. Policy](#), United States Congressional Research Service, 11 February 2015; United States Senate Foreign Relations Committee, [General Allen Opening Statement](#), 25 February 2015; and, BBC News, [“Syria conflict: US and Turkey agree Syrian rebels deal,”](#) 19 February 2015.

117 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 27 January 2015.

118 United States Department of Defense, [Coalition Airstrikes Hit ISIL in Syria, Iraq](#), News Article, 18 March 2015.

strikes against ISIL in Iraq since 8 August 2014, and more than 1,200 air strikes against ISIL targets in neighbouring Syria since 23 September 2014.¹¹⁹

Many coalition countries have made non-military contributions to the coalition's efforts. These include intelligence gathering and sharing. They also include efforts to restrict the flow of foreign fighters – individuals who travel from countries around the world to be trained by, and fight with, ISIL in Syria and Iraq – and measures to disrupt ISIL's sources of financing. Humanitarian assistance has also been an important part of the international response. For one example, Ms. Pearce (WFP) told the Committee that Saudi Arabia made a US\$500 million contribution to support Iraqi IDPs, and has provided financial assistance to the WFP for Syrian refugees.¹²⁰ Minister Baird highlighted the assistance provided by Saudi Arabia, telling the Committee, "Saudi Arabia has been incredibly generous on the humanitarian side."¹²¹

On 15 August 2014, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2170 (2014), which strengthened international measures designed to combat ISIL, the Syria-based Al-Nusrah Front (ANF) and Al-Qaeda-affiliated entities. The resolution deplored and condemned "in the strongest terms" ISIL's terrorist acts and violent extremist ideology, demanding that ISIL, ANF and all other individuals and entities associated with Al-Qaeda "cease all violence and terrorist acts, and disarm and disband with immediate effect". The resolution also calls upon all UN member states to take national measures to suppress the flow of "foreign terrorist fighters" to ISIL, ANF and other Al-Qaeda-affiliated groups "in accordance with applicable international law".¹²²

The following month, President Obama led a session of the UN Security Council that focused on strengthening the international response to the threat posed by foreign fighters travelling to conflict zones, especially in Syria and Iraq. The session concluded with the adoption of Resolution 2178 (2014). In accordance with its provisions, all states are to ensure that their domestic laws and regulations establish for the prosecution – as serious criminal offences – of travel for terrorism or related training, as well as the financing or facilitation of such activities.¹²³

Most recently, on 12 February 2015, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2199 (2015), which approved measures targeting the sources of funding for ISIL, ANF and any other entities designated as being associated with Al-Qaeda. The resolution condemns any direct or indirect trade with those groups, including with respect to oil, oil products, cultural property and any other antiquities, which the Council noted have been looted and stolen from Iraq and Syria. The resolution also expresses the Council's determination to secure the safe release of hostages "without ransom payments or political

119 United States Department of Defense, [Central Command Updates Iraq-Syria Target Counts](#), News Article, 19 March 2015.

120 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 17 February 2015.

121 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 9 September 2014.

122 UNSC, [S/RES/2170 \(2014\)](#), adopted on 15 August 2014.

123 UNSC, [S/RES/2178 \(2014\)](#), adopted on 24 September 2014.

concessions, in accordance with applicable international law”. Furthermore, the resolution recalls the importance of all UN member states complying with their obligation to ensure that nationals and persons within their territory do not make donations to designated individuals and entities.¹²⁴

B. Canada’s Role

Canada’s contribution to coalition efforts against ISIL began in August 2014 when Prime Minister Harper announced that a Royal Canadian Air Force CC-130J Hercules and a CC-177 Globemaster III would assist in the delivery of military supplies from contributing allies to forces fighting ISIL in Iraq. Between 28 August and 26 September 2014, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) conducted 25 strategic airlift support flights and delivered more than 1.6 million pounds of military supplies to the Iraqi security forces.¹²⁵

In September 2014, the Canadian government announced the 30-day deployment of members of Canada’s Special Operations Forces to advise “the Government of Iraq on how to enable security forces in the northern part of the country to be more effective against the threat posed by ISIL.”¹²⁶ This advise and assist mission was subsequently extended. With respect to the mission’s objectives, then-Minister of National Defence Rob Nicholson¹²⁷ told the Committee that the 69 CAF members have been “providing vital training and assistance to Iraqi security forces.” He added that,

The peshmerga need training in things such as equipment use, maintenance and repair; ground navigation; battlefield skills; communications; command and control; and combat medical care. They also need direct advice and assistance with strategic and tactical planning, particularly when it comes to integrating the air support provided by the international coalition.¹²⁸

On 7 October 2014, the Parliament of Canada adopted a motion supporting the contribution of Canadian military assets to the fight against ISIL, including air strike capability.¹²⁹ The motion covers a period of up to six months.¹³⁰ As was detailed by Minister Nicholson, by the end of October 2014, Canada had deployed approximately 600 CAF members who are “supporting and conducting air operations and providing

124 UNSC, [S/RES/2199 \(2015\)](#), adopted on 12 February 2015.

125 National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces (DND/CAF), [Operation IMPACT](#).

126 Prime Minister of Canada, [The Government of Canada's response to the situation in Iraq](#), Wales, United Kingdom, 5 September 2014.

127 The Honourable Rob Nicholson was [sworn in](#) as Canada’s Minister of Foreign Affairs on 9 February 2015. All references to “Minister Nicholson” in this report reflect testimony provided when Mr. Nicholson was Minister of National Defence.

128 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 29 January 2015.

129 The motion also indicated that Canada would not be deploying “troops in ground combat operations.” See Parliament of Canada, [Journals](#), No. 124, 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 7 October 2014.

130 Ibid.

tactical and strategic advice”, along with six CF-18 Hornet fighters, two Aurora surveillance aircraft and a Polaris refueller.¹³¹

During his appearance at the end of January 2015, Minister Nicholson informed the Committee that Canada’s CF-18 jet crews had carried out more than 200 sorties and more than 25 airstrikes against ISIL targets, including against heavy weapons and equipment, improvised explosive device production facilities, bunkers, vehicles and fighting positions. The Minister said:

By damaging or destroying assets like these, the Canadian Armed Forces are not only degrading ISIL's combat capabilities and preventing ISIL fighters from establishing safe havens, they are also enabling Iraqi security forces to operate more freely and safely. Furthermore, our Hornets were used to ensure the safe delivery of humanitarian aid by providing top cover for coalition transport planes as they carried out air drops to Iraqi civilians.¹³²

Minister Nicholson also told the Committee that Canada’s Aurora surveillance aircraft had flown more than 60 missions, collecting intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance data used to identify and strike targets and assess battle damage.¹³³

Regarding non-lethal security assistance, Mr. Gwozdecky said that DFATD has provided \$10 million to Kurdish security and defence forces. This support includes protective equipment such as helmets, body armour, and remotely operated explosive detection vehicles, as well as logistics support, including transport vehicles, binoculars, computers, and GPS units.¹³⁴

In terms of humanitarian needs, Minister Baird told the Committee that, in the last year, “Canada has contributed over \$80 million in response to the Iraq crisis.”¹³⁵ The humanitarian assistance includes, for example, \$10 million to the World Food Programme to help provide food assistance to about 1.5 million people; \$9 million to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to support about 1.3 million displaced people; \$5 million to the International Committee of the Red Cross for safe water, sanitation, food assistance, financial assistance, and support for three hospitals and nine health centres; and \$5 million to provide emergency shelter and emergency relief supplies to the people of northern Iraq.¹³⁶ The humanitarian assistance also includes \$8 million to the United Nations Children’s Fund to support the “No Lost Generation” initiative, a

131 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 29 January 2015. See also, DND/CAF, [Operation IMPACT](#).

132 Ibid.

133 Ibid.

134 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 27 January 2015.

135 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 29 January 2015.

136 Ibid.; and DFATD, “[Canada Increases Humanitarian Assistance and Protection in Response to the Crises in Syria and Iraq](#),” *Backgrounder*. For further information, see DFATD, [Canada's Response to the Situation in Iraq](#).

program that addresses the education and protection needs of conflict-affected children in Iraq.¹³⁷

With respect to the ongoing conflict in Syria, Mr. Gwozdecky noted that Canada has provided \$400 million to support the humanitarian response. This total includes \$9.5 million specifically for Syrian refugees in Iraq.¹³⁸

The Committee heard that Canada is taking action to assist the survivors of sexual violence and other human rights abuses perpetrated by ISIL. Mr. Gwozdecky told the Committee that Canada is supporting a number of UN agencies and other humanitarian partner organizations to prevent and respond to sexual violence in Iraq. He further noted that Canada is supporting efforts by the UN Population Fund to meet the needs of women and girls, including survivors of sexual abuse, in Syria.¹³⁹ In addition, Mr. Gwozdecky confirmed that the Government of Canada has recently announced an initiative with Minority Rights Group International – an international non-governmental organization – to document human rights violations against vulnerable groups in Iraq.

With respect to the refugee crisis in the region, the Government of Canada announced on 7 January 2015 that it would accept an additional 10,000 Syrian refugees and 3,000 Iraqi refugees.¹⁴⁰ The Syrian refugees are expected to be resettled in Canada over the next three years, while the Iraqi refugees are expected to be resettled by the end of 2015.¹⁴¹

Apart from the military and humanitarian components, Minister Baird described other ways in which Canada is providing support toward the coalition's five lines of effort. He noted that Canada is working with its international partners to impede the flow of foreign fighters, including by funding regional efforts to limit the movement of foreign fighters into both Iraq and Syria.¹⁴² Toward this same goal, Mr. Gwozdecky told the Committee that DFATD is implementing a \$5 million multi-year regional initiative aimed at increasing local capabilities to identify and intercept foreign fighters in source, transit and destination countries.¹⁴³

137 The "No Lost Generation" initiative was launched in 2013 by the UN, national governments and non-governmental organizations to "alleviate the impact of the Syrian crisis on a generation of children and young people in Syria and neighbouring countries, including Iraq." DFATD, "[Canadian Leadership Helping Protect Children's Futures in Iraq](#)," *News Release*, 17 October 2014.

138 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 27 January 2015.

139 Ibid.

140 DFATD, "[Helping to Protect the World's Most Vulnerable](#)," *News Release*, 7 January 2015. According to DFATD, over 2,480 Syrians have been granted protection in Canada through the asylum and resettlement programs since the start of the uprising in Syria in 2011. Canada has also accepted over 20,000 Iraqi refugees since 2009.

141 Ibid.

142 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 29 January 2015.

143 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 27 January 2015.

In addition, Minister Baird said that Canada has strengthened its laws on the domestic front “to limit the ability of radicalized Canadians to become part of the problem.”¹⁴⁴ ISIL has been listed as a terrorist organization under Canada's Criminal Code.¹⁴⁵

Another component of Canada's overall response to ISIL includes efforts to promote religious freedom. Ambassador Bennett told the Committee that Canada's programming in this area is part of Canada's broader strategy to address the situation in Iraq and assist the victims of ISIL. He noted that religious freedom programming aims to “contribute to the development of a stable Iraq where religious freedom is fully endorsed, as only a unified, pluralistic, and representative government can overcome the current crisis.”¹⁴⁶ The DFATD Office of Religious Freedom is assessing a number of projects aimed at increasing interfaith dialogue in Iraq and helping to lay the foundation for a safe and respectful environment for religious minorities.

C. Halting ISIL's Advance

There is a sense that momentum is against ISIL. Since August 2014, coalition airstrikes in Iraq and Syria, and ground operations by the Iraqi security forces and Kurdish fighters, have killed thousands of ISIL fighters, as well as members of the group's senior leadership, destroyed ISIL equipment and infrastructure, and cut off some of the group's supply lines between Syria and Iraq.¹⁴⁷

In mid-December 2014, the *peshmerga* broke ISIL's siege of Mount Sinjar. There have also been indications from the U.S. Department of Defense that Iraqi forces, supported by the coalition, may be preparing an offensive to retake Mosul in the coming months.¹⁴⁸ In late January 2015 – following months of U.S.-led coalition airstrikes in support of the defensive campaign waged on-the-ground by Kurdish forces – ISIL was pushed out of Kobani, a Syrian city near the Turkish border that had been besieged by ISIL fighters for months.

On 29 January 2015, Minister Nicholson told the Committee that “ISIL's advance has been halted and contained.” He added that,

Despite a recent failed attempt to go on the offensive, [ISIL] is now operating in a largely defensive mode. Its freedom of movement and ability to communicate have been

144 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 29 January 2015.

145 Ibid.

146 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 9 September 2014.

147 Blanchard (2015), [The 'Islamic State' Crisis and U.S. Policy](#); and, United States Senate Foreign Relations Committee, [General Allen Opening Statement](#), 25 February 2015.

148 U.S. Department of Defense, [Department of Defense Background Briefing via teleconference by an Official from U.S. Central Command](#), News Transcript, 19 February 2015. See also, Loveday Morris and Karen DeYoung, [“Strains plague Iraqi, U.S. assessments of long-term fight against Islamic State,”](#) *The Washington Post*, 6 March 2015.

reduced. Iraqi security forces, with coalition air support, have retaken important ground in western, northern, and central Iraq, as well as near Baghdad.¹⁴⁹

The Minister further explained that,

ISIL has been pushed back and is showing signs that it is overextended. Iraqi security forces are growing in strength and capacity. Coalition efforts to assist them are helping to provide the space, skills, and confidence that they will ultimately need to defeat the enemy on the ground.¹⁵⁰

The testimony provided by Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, Senior Fellow, Foundation for Defense of Democracies, also underscored that ISIL has lost momentum. In particular, he highlighted that ISIL has not gained any “new major territory” since October 2014. Dr. Gartenstein-Ross further commented that ISIL has seen its heavy weaponry degraded by the aerial campaign, which, lacking industrial capacity, they are unable to replenish on their own other than through attacks on Iraqi and Syrian military bases.¹⁵¹

In addition to the military momentum against ISIL, witnesses cited political developments in Iraq as another source of optimism. As was noted earlier, a new unity government was approved in September 2014, led by Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi. Matteo Legrenzi, Professor, Ca’ Foscari University of Venice, called the resignation of the former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, which enabled the formation of the new government, “a step in the right direction.” He noted that “the essential political problem in Iraq has been the character of the rule by the previous government [...]”¹⁵²

The Committee heard that the al-Abadi government has made efforts to reach out to Iraq’s religious and ethnic communities. Moreover, December 2014 saw a significant development related to an ongoing dispute that has affected the central government’s relations with the Kurdistan Regional Government, which is a key source of effective security forces in the country. Baghdad was able to reach agreement with the KRG on an oil/revenue-sharing deal, ending years of political deadlock, thus improving the prospects for political compromise and improved relations between the two governments.¹⁵³

However, notwithstanding recent progress, a number of challenges remain in combatting ISIL in Iraq. While ISIL has been pushed back in certain areas, it maintains control over Mosul – Iraq’s second largest city – Fallujah, Ramadi and parts of Tikrit, and continues to threaten other cities, including Kirkuk and Baiji. ISIL has also shown its

149 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 29 January 2015.

150 Ibid.

151 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 5 February 2015.

152 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 4 December 2014.

153 According to a UN report, under the agreement, the KRG “will export 250,000 barrels of oil per day and help the federal Government export 300,000 barrels per day from Kirkuk through the State Oil Marketing Organization using the pipeline controlled by the Kurdistan Regional Government. In return, Baghdad will resume the disbursement to the Kurdistan Regional Government of a 17 per cent allocation of the federal budget. Baghdad also agreed to allocate \$1.2 billion per annum to the Peshmerga.” See [Second report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 2169 \(2014\)](#), UNSC, S/2015/82, 2 February 2015, para 12.

continuing capability to launch sporadic offensives, as it did when it recently attacked Al Baghdadi, a town in central Anbar, and Haditha, the main city in western Anbar.

Moreover, the Committee heard evidence from a number of witnesses pointing to unresolved sectarian divisions in Iraq, an issue that will be dealt with in detail later in this report. In the larger picture, testimony suggested that the degree to which reforms aimed at promoting reconciliation and achieving more inclusive governance are meaningfully implemented by Iraq's new government will influence the sustainability of security gains made on the ground.

In the case of Syria, ISIL continues to control territory and threaten populations in the north and east of the country, including in the Raqqa governorate, the group's stronghold. Meanwhile, the broader civil war between the Assad regime and the array of opposition forces fighting against it grinds on.

THE STRATEGIC CONTEXT AND WAY FORWARD

Testimony provided to the Committee emphasized that, going forward, there is a strategic imperative for continued Canadian engagement in response to the violence and instability caused by ISIL.

The threat of further destabilization in the region is a particular concern. Indeed, around the time of the Committee's final meeting on these issues, it was reported that an ISIL affiliated or inspired group in Libya had beheaded 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians who had been abducted by ISIL. The Egyptian government then launched airstrikes against targets in eastern Libya.¹⁵⁴ The situation in Libya was fragile even before this incident occurred. The country has, since the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime, splintered into competing bases of power – through a conflict that involves an array of militias and Islamist groups – to the point where the internationally-recognized government is not able to sit in the capital city of Tripoli.¹⁵⁵

Speaking to the regional context, in her presentation to the Committee Ellen Laipson (Stimson Center) noted that,

We used to think this was a problem just for Syria and Iraq, and now clearly we understand that Jordan is threatened. It could spread to Saudi Arabia. It has certainly already affected Lebanon, and there are other countries as well that will be struggling with this for some time.¹⁵⁶

That said, when considering the optimal policy response to deal with the current situation in the Middle East, Ms. Laipson cautioned that “we all have to be somewhat humble about,

154 Ahmed Tolba and Yara Bayoumy, [“Egypt bombs Islamic State targets in Libya after 21 Egyptians beheaded,”](#) *Reuters*, 16 February 2015.

155 Detailed information on the situation in Libya can be found in the following report: International Crisis Group, [Libya: Getting Geneva Right](#), Middle East and North Africa Report No. 157, 26 February 2015.

156 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 5 February 2015.

first of all, whether it is a problem that we can solve, and we have to accept the limits and the challenges of the role of outsiders.”¹⁵⁷

In another Committee meeting, several witnesses were asked about the complex situations in Syria and Iraq and, specifically, whether the best option would be for western governments to avoid direct intervention and allow a general sorting out among the factions on the ground. In response, Professor Legrenzi said that a “strategy of malign neglect” had been tried for a period in response to the ongoing conflict in Syria, when it appeared that one side included Hezbollah militants backed by Iran, and the other Al-Qaeda groups, all fighting each other. He argued that this strategy of neglect “did not work and ISIL then spread quite quickly to Iraq.” Professor Legrenzi told the Committee, pointedly, that “we have no choice but to remain engaged.” Moreover, he argued that the reasons compelling such engagement are not only humanitarian, but strategic.¹⁵⁸

Andrew Tabler agreed that in the case of the Syria crisis, “We tried to put a fence around it. We tried to contain [it].” That approach, he argued, “failed following the ISIL outbreak into Mosul because the war inside Syria was never just about an uprising. It was about a regionalized sectarian proxy war.” Mr. Tabler also reiterated that, as things stand, “half of Syria’s population is displaced with about two-thirds in neighbouring countries.” In his view, “containment failed a long time ago.” As he put it to the Committee, “We can wish it were different, but it’s not.” As such, he argued for “a policy of assertiveness, not aggression, but assertiveness.” For Mr. Tabler, assertiveness “means not only being engaged diplomatically but the smart use of military force at the right time to push things in a direction that leads to a final settlement.”¹⁵⁹

Rabea Allos agreed that the situation is not one that can be contained from the outside. Speaking in early December 2014, he argued the “need to be aggressive”, emphasizing that there had been “two terrorist attacks in Canada over the last six weeks.” He also noted reports of Canadians travelling to Iraq and Syria to fight with ISIL.¹⁶⁰

Other witnesses also underscored why the particular threat posed by ISIL matters so greatly to Canada and its allies. Speaking in late January 2015, Minister Nicholson argued that ISIL threatens Canada’s strategic interests, both international and domestic. He told the Committee that,

ISIL is not only a threat to the region, it also poses a serious danger to Canada and the world. ISIL has called on its sympathizers around the globe to target those who do not agree with its ideology, using any means, no matter how barbaric. We’ve seen in recent weeks just how much damage appeals like these can cause, as terrorist attacks have rocked Paris and dozens have been arrested in France, Belgium, and Germany in connection with suspected terrorist plots.

157 Ibid.

158 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 4 December 2014.

159 Ibid.

160 Ibid.

Furthermore, ISIL has specifically threatened Canada and Canadians, urging its supporters to harm disbelieving Canadians in any manner.¹⁶¹

In another Committee meeting, Jonathan Dahoah Halevi argued that,

The Islamic State threatens Canadian strategic interests because of its unwavering religiously motivated determination to redraw the map of the Middle East, erase existing borders, unite the Muslim world under its flag, and pursue a foreign policy of jihad in which western civilization is the prime enemy.¹⁶²

From Mr. Halevi's perspective, given the nature of the threat, western governments have "no option of sitting on the sidelines."¹⁶³

In his concluding remarks to the Committee in September 2014, Minister Baird submitted the following:

...I ask that as we consider whether or how to act we also consider what happens if we don't act. What happens if Canada does not do everything in its power to stop this barbarism? Will we be willing to look ourselves in the mirror in 10 years and ask if we have done enough? In a situation like this, there are no easy options, quick fixes, and win-wins. It might seem easy to ignore as we go about our comfortable lives here in Canada. It might seem convenient to brush off options as leading to mission creep in the future, but the hard reality is that inaction is not an option.¹⁶⁴

In making the case for action, Minister Baird's testimony also suggested that the very ideas or ideology that ISIL represents, which it in turn seeks to advance, must be defeated. The Minister framed the problem posed by ISIL in stating that,

What we are facing here is one of the most barbaric terrorist groups the world has ever seen. This is not someone else's problem. We are talking about a group of people who want to impose their barbarism everywhere from southern Spain through to India.

Their world view is a direct challenge to the values of western civilization, and it is a threat to international security and stability.¹⁶⁵

The Minister expressed his view that the "battle against terrorism is one of the great struggles of our generation."¹⁶⁶

As will be discussed in the remaining sections of this report, defeating ISIL requires a multi-faceted and long-term approach. Its capabilities must be degraded on the ground, its presence removed from cities and towns, and its sources of financing, arms and recruits cut off. But, as suggested above, accomplishing the latter also means combatting

161 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 29 January 2015.

162 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 9 December 2014.

163 Ibid.

164 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 9 September 2014.

165 Ibid.

166 Ibid.

ISIL in the realm of ideas, with the intention of diminishing its influence and eroding any appeal it may hold. In other words, ISIL's fighters and its ideology must both be defeated.

COMBATting TERRORISM

To sustain itself as a terrorist organization and military force, ISIL requires more than arms and munitions. It needs financing to support its actions, a steady stream of recruits to fight its battles, and an ideological message to fuel its support.

A. ISIL's Sources of Financing

The Committee did not receive detailed information on ISIL's sources of funding or the financial aspects of its activities, both of which are evolving issues affected by events on the ground in Syria and Iraq. However, at a general level, witnesses underscored that disrupting ISIL's revenue streams is vitally important to the overall effort to combat the group. Reverend El Shafie affirmed that to defeat ISIL, "we have to stop their funds."¹⁶⁷ Mr. Halevi argued that, "it should be a priority for the coalition to work hard on the specific issue of funding."¹⁶⁸

On the issue of external sources of funding, Mr. Allos stated that, "international pressure is needed on some of the regional players to stop the financial and the logistic support to ISIL, whether it is coming directly from governments or from individuals."¹⁶⁹ For her part, Professor Momani said that "sympathizers" – not the states, but individuals – in the Gulf have provided ISIL with funds.¹⁷⁰ Mr. Tabler told the Committee that private money transfers to ISIL "were very important in terms of start-up money." However, "That isn't necessarily the case going forward."¹⁷¹ Rod Sanjabi, External Director, Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, also maintained that "as international attention ramped up, ISIS started receiving less and less funding from private individuals."¹⁷²

One of ISIL's notable organizational characteristics, setting it apart from most terrorist organizations, is its ability to generate its own funds, something that makes it a particular threat. Mr. Tabler suggested that ISIL "is probably one of the most self-sustaining groups that we have seen arise, particularly from not only the Sunni community in the Middle East overall, but perhaps of any country or any proto-state in the region."¹⁷³ Professor Akhavan also noted ISIL's ability to generate funds, saying that, unlike Al-Qaeda, ISIL "is a state that has resources that it can use to raise revenues on the black

167 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 27 November 2014.

168 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 9 December 2014.

169 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 4 December 2014.

170 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 20 November 2014.

171 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 4 December 2014.

172 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 20 November 2014.

173 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 4 December 2014.

market.”¹⁷⁴ Witnesses mentioned extortion, kidnapping, ransom payments, taxes, bank robberies and black market oil sales as self-generated sources of revenue for ISIL.

Countering ISIL’s sources of funding and financing is, as noted, one of the international coalition’s five lines of effort. Donica Pottie, Director, Conflict Policy and Security Coherence Secretariat, DFATD, confirmed that Canada is working through the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and the *Manama Meeting on Combating the Financing of Terrorism* to stem the flow of financial resources to ISIL.¹⁷⁵

At the end of February 2015, the FATF released a report summarizing ISIL’s most important revenue sources and financial activities, while also highlighting measures that can be taken to disrupt that financing. The report’s executive summary describes the study as a “snapshot,” noting that,

gaps remain and more work is needed to develop the full picture of ISIL’s financial activities and to identify the most effective countermeasures to prevent ISIL from using accumulated funds and disrupting sources of funding. ISIL financing is a constantly changing picture and a very difficult and complicated area to address given the operational situation on the ground.¹⁷⁶

At the same time, the FATF report states that funding “is central and critical” to ISIL’s activities. As such, it suggests that,

The need for vast funds to meet organisational and governance requirements represents a vulnerability to ISIL’s infrastructure. In order to maintain its financial management and expenditures in areas where it operates, ISIL must be able to seize additional territory in order to exploit resources. It is unclear if ISIL’s revenue collection through the illicit proceeds it earns from occupation of territory, including extortion and theft, will be sustainable over time. Cutting off these vast revenue streams is both a challenge and opportunity for the global community to defeat this terrorist organisation.¹⁷⁷

In all, it appears that more needs to be done both to understand ISIL fully from a financial perspective and to weaken it financially. The body of UN Security Council resolutions cited earlier – 2170 (2014), 2178 (2014) and 2199 (2015), along with previous Council resolutions on combatting terrorist financing – are critical tools in this regard, and provide anchor points for international efforts.

174 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 27 November 2014.

175 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 27 January 2015. The [FATF](#) is an independent inter-governmental body that was established by the 1989 G-7 Summit. It promotes “effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.” The Manama Meeting was hosted by the Kingdom of Bahrain in November 2014 and attended by many coalition partners including Canada.

176 Financial Action Task Force (FATF), [Financing of the terrorist organization Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant \(ISIL\)](#), FATF Report, 2015.

177 Ibid.

B. Recruitment

The Committee learned that ISIL draws individuals from around the globe to its ranks, including some Canadian citizens. According to DFATD, approximately 130 Canadians are known to have travelled to conflict zones, including Syria and Iraq. These Canadians are thought to be participating in terrorism-related activities, including frontline combat, fundraising, operational planning and disseminating online propaganda.¹⁷⁸

The Committee heard that individuals attracted to ISIL have come from many countries. A study by the United Kingdom-based International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR) supports these observations. Based on the 50 countries for which sufficient data or reliable government estimates were available, as of January 2015, the ICSR estimated that the number of foreigners who have joined Sunni militant organizations in the Syria and Iraq conflicts exceeds 20,000.¹⁷⁹ According to this study, the greatest number have come from Tunisia (1,500–3,000), Saudi Arabia (1,500–2,500), Jordan (1,500), Morocco (1,500), Russia (800–1,500), France (1,200) and Lebanon (900).¹⁸⁰ Minister Baird told the Committee that foreign fighters “pose a risk to the countries they travel to as well as to their countries of origin.”¹⁸¹

Information provided to the Committee pointed to the importance of online tools in ISIL’s propaganda and recruitment methods. It is harnessing social media to reach out to young people, disseminate its worldview and share information about its activities among adherents and sympathizers. Speaking about terrorism generally, and social media’s relevance to terrorism, Dr. Gartenstein-Ross commented that,

Terrorism tends to be a group phenomenon and the reason is that in general, to get someone to undertake an extreme act, like an act of terrorism that will ruin their lives, it takes someone reinforcing their proclivities towards extremism. In the case of social media, social media is increasingly serving as the stand-in for what in the past was a group activity. In other words, social media can be the terrorist group. It’s changing radicalization patterns; it’s speeding them up. People are radicalized, I would say, (a) more quickly and (b) there are more of them doing so.¹⁸²

That said, given the nature of ISIL’s messaging, which will be discussed in the next section of this report, his view is that, “in ISIL’s case, this is unlikely to be sustainable.”¹⁸³

178 DFATD, “Iraq Crisis,” briefing note submitted to FAAE on 9 September 2014.

179 According to the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR), the conflict in Iraq and Syria represents the “largest mobilization of foreigner fighters in Muslim majority countries since 1945.” The ICSR also notes that its figures represent “conflict totals.” It estimates “that between 5-10 per cent of the foreigners have died, and that a further 10-30 per cent have left the conflict zone, returning home or being stuck in transit countries.” Peter R. Neumann, “[Foreign fighter total in Syria/Iraq now exceeds 20,000; surpasses Afghanistan conflict in the 1980s](#),” ICSR, 26 January 2015.

180 Ibid.

181 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 29 January 2015.

182 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 5 February 2015.

183 Ibid.

As noted previously, disrupting the flow of foreign fighters is an international concern – as reflected by UN Security Council Resolution 2178 (2014) – and one of the coalition’s five lines of effort. The risk that the conflicts in Iraq and Syria could provide individuals with combat experience and access to terrorist networks and training, which they could then use against targets in other countries, including their home country, reinforces the importance of addressing the issue of foreign fighters from a preventative perspective.

C. A Counter-Narrative

Another coalition line of effort is delegitimizing ISIL’s ideology. As Mr. Gwozdecky (DFATD) told the Committee,

If we want to overcome extremism, we must wage an ideological battle, a battle that denounces extremist propaganda for what it is: perverse calls for religious and historical legitimacy devoid of substance and rooted in intolerance and cowardice.¹⁸⁴

The Committee heard that an important element of building a counter-narrative is the development of a counter-messaging campaign that can expose ISIL for what it is – a terrorist organization that commits atrocities.

Dr. Gartenstein-Ross emphasized that ISIL is very good at messaging. He said that,

If you look at their videos, the production quality is extraordinary. They have something close to professional quality editing for their videos. They really understand the social media game. They’re able to game Twitter and they’re able to connect with young people in a way that al Qaeda was never really able to do. They take full advantage of the range of social media and this is an extraordinary advantage.¹⁸⁵

Despite these advantages – or organizational strengths – the Committee heard that there are opportunities for Canada and other coalition partners to disrupt the narrative that ISIL seeks to project, thus exposing the organization’s weaknesses.

From a military perspective, the Committee heard that ISIL attempts to exhibit a sense of invincibility and inevitability, exaggerating its reach to generate momentum. However, as was discussed earlier, ISIL has, in fact, lost momentum. Indeed, Dr. Gartenstein-Ross called ISIL “incredibly vulnerable, much more so than public discourse tends to suggest.” He pointed to a number of recent developments and losses, which he said “can vividly show the disruption of [ISIL’s] momentum,” including their loss of Mount Sinjar, the degradation of their logistical capacity, and the increasing encirclement of Mosul. In Dr. Gartenstein-Ross’s view, messages revealing that reality are not currently getting out.¹⁸⁶

184 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 27 January 2015.

185 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 5 February 2015.

186 Ibid.

With regard to strategies that could help to counter ISIL's presence online, Professor Momani mentioned the technique of having advertisements that feature prominent imams, dispelling extremist messaging, appear before YouTube videos of gruesome images.¹⁸⁷ Dr. Gartenstein-Ross mentioned a U.S. State Department initiative called *Think Again Turn Away*,¹⁸⁸ which uses mediums such as Twitter, YouTube and Facebook "to expose the facts about terrorists and their propaganda."¹⁸⁹

Countering ISIL's narrative also requires addressing the religious elements of that narrative. ISIL members portray themselves as holy warriors acting in the defence of Islam. However, ISIL's actions represent a gross perversion of that religion. As Minister Baird said, "This terrorist organization systematically distorts Islamic values, yet it presents itself as the defender of true Islam. We must find ways of countering ISIL's message and exposing its true nature."¹⁹⁰

An effective messaging campaign must also publicize ISIL's brutality. Dr. Gartenstein-Ross has observed that many of ISIL's supporters do not seem to believe that the group is committing atrocities. Exposing those atrocities – including the indiscriminate killing of Muslim civilians – is therefore critical to undermining its support. As Dr. Gartenstein-Ross said, ISIL "has committed severe transgressions of Islamic law even by a Salafi jihadist perspective." In general, he argued that ISIL has "a messaging that is going to explode on them. The faster we can make that happen, the better."¹⁹¹

There is also a need to engage with religious and community leaders to counter ISIL's hateful ideology and to help those who are opposed to it develop bigger platforms to get their message out. Canada's Office of Religious Freedom can be part of this strategy. Ambassador Bennett commented on the Office's work to encourage countries in the region to "speak out more directly on these questions about how ISIL takes Islam and distorts it to advance their extremist goals and extremist ideology."¹⁹² In this respect, he highlighted the *Amman Message* – a statement issued in 2004 that calls for tolerance and unity in the Muslim world – as an initiative on which Canada will engage with Jordan and others in the region.

In relation to narratives, but also the issue of recruitment, some witnesses focused in particular on the need to address and prevent radicalization in Canada. Mr. Halevi asserted that extremist ideas "exist and flourish in Canada," citing examples of statements that he says are being made by associations and individuals – including certain imams – in Canada.¹⁹³ For his part, Mr. Allos contended that, "We have clerics in Canada who are Wahabis, Muslim Brotherhoods, and other similar groups, who are teaching young kids

187 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 20 November 2014.

188 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 5 February 2015.

189 Facebook, [Think Again Turn Away](#).

190 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 29 January 2015.

191 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 5 February 2015.

192 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 27 January 2015.

193 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 9 December 2014.

hatred of anything that is different from who they are.”¹⁹⁴ In another Committee meeting, when asked specifically whether radicalization is taking place in any mosques or teaching facilities in Canada, Professor Mansur responded, “The short answer is yes.” He further argued that, “A great many mosques right across Canada, North America, and Europe are basically the incubators of political Islam. They support, in a sense, the values that ISIL represents.”¹⁹⁵ Asked if he agreed with this statement, Tarek Fatah replied, “Absolutely.”¹⁹⁶

During his testimony, Mr. Halevi put forward a number of recommendations with respect to Canada’s intelligence and national security policies and capabilities. Among these, he argued for the exercise of “less tolerance toward incitement to violence and hate speech.”¹⁹⁷ When he was asked how democratic societies like Canada can address extremism, while bearing in mind freedom of expression and freedom of religion, Thomas Farr replied that, in his view, the answer is “better speech.” He said, “I think religious freedom is the answer to these imams, to encourage others to counter them publicly and bring them out, and to provide other alternatives to Canadian Muslims who are listening to these people.”¹⁹⁸

STRENGTHENING IRAQ

The complexity of the problem that ISIL poses for the international coalition is evident when the issues addressed in the previous section on countering terrorism are combined with the sections that follow, which deal with issues specific to two countries – Iraq and Syria – and a region, the Middle East. As was explained above, ISIL must be met with a counter-terrorism response – domestically and internationally – so that it is not able to garner further support or attract new recruits. But it also must be countered in Syria and Iraq, the geographic space in which it has established itself and where Iraqi, Kurdish and coalition forces are actively working to degrade it. From the perspective of Canada and other coalition members, defeating ISIL requires not only an understanding of the national contexts of two very complex societies, but a policy response that is tailored to both, and designed to support the actions and initiatives being taken by local actors.

Regarding the situation in Iraq, the Committee’s study indicated that there are acute humanitarian needs in the country. Sectors that were highlighted as requiring additional assistance include food security and shelter. Other witnesses noted the need for services targeting the many displaced and conflict-affected children, specifically by ensuring that they have access to education, but also, more generally, safe and child-friendly spaces to live, learn and play. Moreover, testimony indicated that support will be needed to help those who have suffered from violence and abuse at the hands of ISIL, including sexual and gender-based violence. In the longer term, many of those same people – particularly those who have been abducted and held by ISIL – will require

194 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 4 December 2014.

195 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 3 February 2015.

196 Ibid.

197 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 9 December 2014.

198 Ibid.

assistance with rehabilitation to ensure that they are able to return to normal lives. In all, it was clear that the humanitarian needs in Iraq are both numerous and great. And, as Ms. Pearce of the World Food Programme put it to the Committee: “The stakes are high.” She said, “To stop the cycle of sectarianism and violence, the basic needs and rights of Iraq’s population must be met.”¹⁹⁹

However, the Committee’s study also emphasized that the situation that has confronted Iraq reflects not only an immediate humanitarian and security crisis, but a political crisis that had been building for years. Testimony suggested that ISIL cannot be fully defeated in Iraq unless the political and social problems that contributed to its rise in the country are addressed. In other words, the ultimate solution for Iraq must be a political one, based on the full implementation of meaningful governance and security sector reforms, and societal reconciliation.

A. The Legacy of Mistrust and Exclusion

A number of witnesses highlighted the degree to which the Iraqi government became exclusionary in nature during the al-Maliki years, the end of which saw ISIL sweep through western and northern Iraq in 2014. As Mr. Gwozdecky (DFATD) told the Committee, “The marginalization of Iraq’s Sunnis was at the basis of ISIL’s resurgence in Iraq, so the importance of inclusiveness cannot be overstated.”²⁰⁰

Years of sectarian politics and corruption likely contributed to ISIL’s ability to seize territory, as revealed by the apparent lack of resistance it encountered in some Sunni majority areas of Iraq. Professor Legrenzi summarized the divisions that had come to characterize Iraqi politics and society by emphasizing that,

the sectarian and exclusionary nature of rule by the central government in Baghdad makes a large part of the population in the areas controlled by the Islamic State receptive to a message of liberation, however misguided and brutal. They need to be convinced they would be safe if there were a return to central government control.²⁰¹

A similar point was made by Professor Momani. She noted that ISIL received support initially in parts of Syria and Iraq “primarily because ISIS was the devil you didn’t know versus the ones in Damascus and Baghdad, which had so much blood on their hands, according to those groups.”²⁰²

According to an assessment done by the Reverend El Shafie’s organization, ISIL was able to enter Iraq “with 1,500 to 1,800 fighters.” He argued that with such small force, it is not possible that they could “take 40% of the country, including the second-largest city, which is Mosul.” In his view, the reality is that after the years of the Maliki regime, “the

199 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 17 February 2015.

200 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 27 January 2015.

201 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 4 December 2014.

202 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 20 November 2014.

Shias persecuted the Sunnis and other minorities so badly that they had to cooperate with ISIS in order to survive.”²⁰³

Testimony indicated that definitively rooting ISIL out from areas of Iraq will require – or at least be greatly facilitated by – the detachment of the Sunni population from ISIL and the limitation of any support that ISIL might enjoy among those communities. This point was made by Professor Momani. She emphasized that, going forward, there needs to be a consideration of how the tide can be turned, “politically and socially, in these Sunni-dominated areas to ensure that ISIS does not have allies on the ground.”²⁰⁴

B. Security Sector Reform

Exclusionary politics, rising sectarianism and corruption also affected Iraq’s security forces. Professor Legrenzi told the Committee that ISIL includes former Baathist officers (i.e., members of the army from the Saddam Hussein years) among its military personnel who, he said, “have proven to be very effective on the ground, certainly more effective than the bulk of the Iraqi army stationed in Mosul in the north of the country.”²⁰⁵ In addition to issues related to operational effectiveness – evident in reports that some members of the armed forces around Mosul did not even sabotage their equipment before fleeing the area – Professor Legrenzi suggested that there were other underlying problems with Iraq’s security forces related to corruption. He stated:

Let’s ask ourselves why three divisions of the Iraqi army simply melted away. In large part it’s because they were not there. There are in excess of 50,000 ghost soldiers in the army, and this estimate is by the Iraqi government.²⁰⁶

Even when considering the army that exists, it seems that there are other issues, particularly with respect to the representation of Iraq’s different religious and ethnic groups.

Mokhtar Lamani, Former Ambassador for the United Nations-League of Arab States, Office of the Joint Special Representative for Syria, said that when ISIL came to Mosul, “No one was looking to the Iraqi army as a national army.” He said that, while difficult to verify, he had been told by some “very high-ranking people in the army” that the current army “has fewer than 5% Sunni and fewer than 2% Kurds.” Moreover, Mr. Lamani noted that the army is “backed by some Shia militia that are at least as dangerous as ISIL.”²⁰⁷

203 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 27 November 2014.

204 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 20 November 2014.

205 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 4 December 2014.

206 Ibid. A recent Iraqi government investigation revealed that there were an estimated 50,000 false names on the Iraqi military’s payroll. Commonly referred to as “ghost soldiers,” these are personnel who are dead, missing, absent or who did not exist in the first place and whose pay is siphoned off by senior officers. Prime Minister al-Abadi has reportedly taken steps to purge the military payroll of these names. Security Council Report, “[Iraq](#),” *Monthly Forecast*, February 2015.

207 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 27 November 2014.

When asked what an effective domestic coalition to counter ISIL would look like in Iraq, Professor Momani pointed out that such a coalition had been formed once before, in the recent past – the *Sahwa*, or Sunni Awakening – that was able to counteract ISIL’s predecessor organization in Iraq, AQI/ISI. She explained that the approach basically involved taking the local tribal councils that were providing security in Sunni areas, putting an Iraqi uniform on them, and paying them a salary. However, as Professor Momani told the Committee, “when the Maliki government came into power and the Americans left, he basically stripped them of all their stars, stopped their salaries, and told them, ‘You’re a Sunni; go home’.” In her view, “We need to reverse that tide; that’s the simple way.”²⁰⁸

Mr. Lamani also emphasized the mistakes that were made in the context of the Awakening, specifically the al-Maliki government’s treatment of those local forces once AQI/ISI had been diminished. His comments suggested that, this time, the exclusion of Sunni forces from the state security apparatus needs to be addressed. He said that, from their point of view, these Sunni tribes do not want a repeat of joining the fight and “risking their lives for nothing.”²⁰⁹

As the discussion above makes clear, Iraq needs an army that is both effective and nationally oriented. Defeating ISIL in the long term can, according to Reverend Toma, be achieved “by helping and pressuring the Iraqi government to establish a strong army whose loyalty is to Iraq, not to any religious affiliation or neighbouring countries.”²¹⁰ Nevertheless, building such an army is no easy task, a reality underlined by the years of training that had been provided to the Iraqi security forces by the United States military prior to 2011.

As was discussed earlier in this report, several members of the international coalition are providing training to different components of Iraq’s security forces, including the Iraqi army, and, as is the case with Canada, the Kurdish *peshmerga* forces. When asked specifically whether Canada should consider making an additional commitment in the form of a non-combat mission to help train the Iraqi army, Professor Momani responded, “Yes, absolutely.” She said that the Canadian military has a lot to offer, not only in the form of training on logistical and tactical techniques, but in helping to further the understanding of “how you have an army that is inclusive and very much comes from a multicultural society.” She noted that, “Those are really important factors in a country [Iraq] that has been rocked by sectarianism.” While challenging, Professor Momani argued that the Canadian military is “absolutely the best international force to do that because of our comparative advantage as a multicultural society.”²¹¹

Asked a similar question, Professor Legrenzi argued that Canada should demand security sector reform in exchange for its support. He told the Committee that before resources are invested, “you have to make sure there is a will to fight on the part of these

208 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 20 November 2014.

209 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 27 November 2014.

210 Ibid.

211 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 20 November 2014.

men. Even more importantly, that they do not then start to terrorize their own population as they often did in the areas that are now controlled by the Islamic State.”²¹²

Throughout his testimony, Professor Legrenzi emphasized the need for greater accountability in Iraq’s security sector with respect to the behaviour and competence of the army and overall security establishment. As he put it, “the linchpin is security sector reform in Iraq. Without security sector reform in Iraq, we are going to be at it again in a couple of years even if ISIL is expelled from Iraq.”²¹³ In other words, the success of these reforms will influence the sustainability of security gains that are made against ISIL on the ground. From Professor Legrenzi’s point of view, once territory is retaken from ISIL, if members of the Iraqi security forces revert to past behaviour that saw local populations terrorized and marginalized politically, with money being extracted from the populace at checkpoints, then “you can be sure that within two or three years we will have another insurgent group that will spring up.”²¹⁴

The approach taken to advance security sector reform in Iraq will also need to consider issues raised by the role of the many local militias in Iraq, a number of which reportedly operate outside of the central government’s control.²¹⁵ It appears that these militias have, in certain areas, filled the void left by the absence of an effective national army.

Some witnesses noted the connection between Shia militias – also known as “Popular Mobilization Units” – and Iran’s security sector.²¹⁶ As it stands in Iraq, speaking about the situation as of late November 2014, Professor Akhavan suggested that “most of the advances on the ground have been by the peshmerga working in conjunction with the Iranian revolutionary guards.”²¹⁷ In noting the overall need to detach Iraq’s Sunni minority from ISIL and any of its affiliates, Minister Baird said that the “role of the Shia militias is incredibly counterproductive and has done the opposite of winning friends.”²¹⁸ For his part, Professor Legrenzi argued that “a profound rethinking of the nature of rule by the Iraqi

212 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 4 December 2014.

213 Ibid.

214 Ibid.

215 Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and UNAMI Human Rights Office, [Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict in Iraq: 11 September – 10 December 2014](#), 23 February 2015, p. 19. For further information on this issue, see, Liz Sly, [“Pro-Iran militias’ success in Iraq could undermine U.S.”](#), *The Washington Post*, 15 February 2015.

216 At the beginning of March 2015, Iraq launched an offensive to retake Tikrit, a Sunni-majority city north of Baghdad. Media reports have noted that a sizeable proportion of the forces engaged in the operation are Iraqi Shia militias. See, for example, Anne Barnard, [“Iran Gains Influence in Iraq as Shiite Forces Fight ISIS,”](#) *The New York Times*, 5 March 2015. With respect to the involvement of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard’s Quds force, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry recently acknowledged in remarks to the media that, “yes, some of those militias are receiving direction from General Soleimani [head of the Quds force] and from Iran. That’s a fact.” Secretary Kerry also emphasized that the “advance on Tikrit is an Iraqi-designed and an Iraqi-controlled advance.” U.S. Department of State, [“Remarks with French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius,”](#) Remarks, John Kerry, Secretary of State, Quai d’Orsay, Paris, France, 7 March 2015.

217 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 27 November 2014.

218 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 29 January 2015.

central government” must involve the “marginalization of sectarian gangs aligned with the government.” That said, he acknowledged that, last year, those same militias had been “brought up from the south to actually prevent Baghdad from being overrun.” Professor Legrenzi framed the paradox at hand by noting that the militias “were the ones who could be counted on to fight, and yet they exacerbate the problem.”²¹⁹

C. Governance Reform

As noted previously, the security situation in Iraq is connected to the country’s recent governance challenges and its sectarian tensions and divisions. In general, witnesses highlighted the country’s need for inclusive governance and, more specifically, for an approach to governance that is focused on, and reflective of, all areas of the country and all members of Iraq’s society.

The announcement of Iraq’s new Cabinet in September 2014 was welcomed by Iraq’s international partners. Speaking to the Committee the very next day, Minister Baird expressed his view that the situation in Iraq “cannot be won militarily.” He said, “It is essential that the government in Baghdad address the real problems that frankly have existed for more than a decade.”²²⁰ Earlier in the same meeting, the Minister had stressed that, going forward, Iraq’s new government “must put aside ethnic and religious divides and work together to meet the needs of all Iraqis, whatever their creed or colour.” On this same point, the Minister emphasized that it is not enough for Iraq to have an inclusive Cabinet. It is also, as he said, “tremendously important” that the government have “an inclusive program that reaches out to Kurds, to Sunnis, and to other minorities.”²²¹

Testimony provided by the Minister and departmental officials in late January 2015 suggested that the political situation has improved in Iraq in recent months, but remains a work in progress. Mr. Gwozdecky noted that the new government “has articulated a platform that is inclusive, which is entirely what the international community has been calling on them to do.” That said, he emphasized that “there’s still a long way to go in terms of rolling out that platform in a meaningful way that has an impact [...]”²²² Minister Baird also told the Committee that the new Iraqi government “has taken steps to address the country’s security challenges and to curtail sectarianism and corruption.” However, he insisted that “the Iraqi government must accelerate the implementation of these reforms.”²²³

219 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 4 December 2014.

220 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 9 September 2014.

221 Ibid.

222 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 27 January 2015.

223 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 29 January 2015.

D. Reconstruction and Reconciliation

In the larger picture, ensuring that Iraq is on a path to a secure, stable and peaceful future – inclusive of all Iraqis – will require a sustained approach on the part of Iraq’s leaders and a multi-year commitment of support on the part of Iraq’s international partners. Both are needed to prevent further cycles of violence in the country.

Indeed, a few witnesses emphasized that Iraq has experienced many years of strife and displacement, a situation that was enflamed by ISIL’s offensives in 2014. Ms. Pearce (WFP) reminded the Committee that, in Iraq, “development has been held back by conflict after conflict.”²²⁴ As such, when the fighting is over, reconstruction will need to begin.

The remarks of one witness suggested that such a process could begin with a focus on the provision of basic services, nationally and at the governorate and local levels. Ms. Laipson noted that, sometimes, sectarianism can be “muted” or “mitigated” so “long as the services are being provided.” These basic services include such things as utilities, public schools and roads. Ms. Laipson argued that government service provision “would do a lot to mitigate some of this resorting to subnational identity, because people are looking for basic essential services and if they’re not getting them, they become disaffected from their government.”²²⁵

In general, there is a need for a system of governance in Iraq that clearly offers a better option than reliance on extremist groups, whether for services or protection. Professor Momani emphasized that turning the tide domestically in Iraq – as well as in Syria – will require ensuring that there is an effective political alternative to ISIL. In other words, it requires having an answer ready for the question, “If we get rid of ISIS tomorrow, what will come in its wake?” When thinking about what she calls the “day after” ISIL is degraded, Professor Momani told the Committee that, “If you don’t provide sustainable institutions that can fill that vacuum, it will just be another acronym that will fill that space.”²²⁶

Testimony provided to the Committee suggested that the “day after” in Iraq will also need to address intercommunal reconciliation. The situation of people who have been displaced from their communities in the multi-ethnic and multi-faith areas of northern Iraq illustrates this point. The Committee was told that people need help so that they can return to their homes and resume, as much as is possible, normal life. In calling for such assistance from Canada, Mr. Héту noted a specific example where some people had tried to return to their homes in northern Iraq only to find that they “had been totally destroyed.” What remained had been mined by ISIL.²²⁷

224 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 17 February 2015.

225 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 5 February 2015.

226 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 20 November 2014.

227 Ibid.

The importance of ensuring that those who have been displaced are able to return home was also emphasized by Ms. Saeed, an Iraqi parliamentarian and Yazidi. She told the Committee that,

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.²²⁸

In this case, the land in question – the Sinjar Mountain in northern Iraq – is the site of 20 to 30 holy shrines, and is central to the history and traditions of the Yazidi people.²²⁹

That said, when Iraq moves into a post-conflict phase, and many more people are in a position to return to their homes, rebuilding trust between communities will have to be a priority. Speaking about the situation facing the displaced Christian population in northern Iraq, Reverend Toma said that “there is a lack of trust in the Iraqi government, lack of trust in the Muslim neighbour who welcomed ISIL and supported their acts.”²³⁰ This sentiment was echoed by Bishop Mar-Emmanuel, who told the Committee that, “A great deal of mistrust has developed between ordinary Christians and Muslims. For Christians, those who have openly welcomed ISIS have broken a fundamental trust.”²³¹ He suggested that it will probably take “a generation or more before things will be more refined or reconciliation will be done.”²³²

The need for reconciliation was evident in the presentation made to the Committee by representatives of the Yazidi Human Rights Organization-International. Their testimony suggested that they feel that the Yazidi people were abandoned by the Kurdish government and armed forces, who they claim withdrew from the Sinjar area as ISIL advanced, leaving people “helpless.” In fact, Khalid Haider argued that the events of 2014 were not the first time that the Yazidis have been “betrayed” by the Kurds, citing an alleged Kurdish withdrawal prior to an AQI/ISI bombing in a Yazidi area in 2007.²³³ Mr. Haider, speaking about the situation as of early December 2014, also asserted that a lot of the humanitarian assistance being provided to the Kurdish government was not reaching displaced Yazidis. When considering the context of these statements and those above, it appears that while absolutely necessary, reconciliation is not likely to come easily or quickly.

228 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 2 December 2014.

229 Testimony of Khalid Haider, Assistant to the Chairman, Yazidi Human Rights Organization-International. FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 2 December 2014.

230 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 27 November 2014.

231 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 9 December 2014.

232 Ibid.

233 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 2 December 2014.

ADDRESSING THE CONFLICT IN SYRIA

In the wake of ISIL's dramatic advance in 2014, international attention has focused to a large degree on the situation in Iraq. However, the broader civil war in Syria continues, and has only been further complicated by the ascendance of ISIL and other extremist groups as major players within the fragmented array of armed non-state actors operating in Syria. As things stand, the situation is demonstrably complex. While there is a clear overall strategy for degrading ISIL in Iraq – led by a central government working in partnership with the international coalition – the approach to Syria remains more ambiguous, and a topic of fulsome debate.²³⁴

When considering the optimal course of action in Syria, there are seemingly no certain or easy fixes with respect to the policy options. The difficulty in devising a policy that can simultaneously address the crimes of the Assad regime, check the influence of extremist groups, prevent a splintering of the country, and facilitate a political transition that culminates in a viable governance model accepted by all Syrians, cannot be overstated. The Assad regime has been a key belligerent in a conflict that has resulted in an estimated death toll of at least 200,000 people. At the same time, there are concerns over what/who could take Assad's place, particularly given the challenges facing the remaining moderate elements of Syria's armed opposition,²³⁵ pressured by the regime on one side and extremist groups on the other, the brutal violence that has been inflicted as the conflict has continued – including through the use of regime aerial bombardment and siege tactics – and the growing radicalization that such methods have helped to foster.

That said, ISIL is present in both Syria and Iraq, and ignores the border between the two. It views all of that territory as part of its self-proclaimed caliphate.²³⁶ Moreover, as was noted at the beginning of this report, ISIL only exists in its current form and strength because it was able to regroup and then expand in Syria in the years following the campaign waged against its predecessor organization – AQI/ISI – in neighbouring Iraq. It is therefore difficult to see how ISIL can be fully defeated so long as it maintains a stronghold in Syria, a situation enabled by the conflict that has gripped the country.

234 Andrew Tabler told the Committee that, in Washington policy circles, the U.S. approach to Syria was being called “uncoordinated deconfliction.” The term is meant to capture a situation where, as he described it, “the United States is flying aircraft over Syrian territory; the Bashar al-Assad regime is not shooting at those aircraft.” FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 4 December 2014.

235 Regarding the status of moderate opposition forces in Syria, Professor Bessma Momani argued that the Free Syrian Army (FSA) “has become completely decimated [.]” FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 20 November 2014. Mokhtar Lamani told the Committee that “there's nothing in Syria called the Free Syrian Army. If you want to be accurate, you have to add an “s”, Free Syrian Armies. I myself tried to have data about the armed groups. You cannot imagine; they're called brigades, but of course “brigade” has no military definition. They can be five people as well as 30,000 people. I counted more than 2,000 different brigades.” FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 27 November 2014.

236 Jonathan Dahoah Halevi told the Committee that ISIL views the Alawite (Shia) dominated Assad regime as “an infidel government.” Moreover, Syria, known as “al-Sham” to ISIL is, in ISIL's worldview, “the first area from which the jihad would start to expand, and that's why they are focusing on Syria.” FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 9 December 2014.

While efforts to realize a political solution have been unsuccessful to date, testimony provided to the Committee suggested that the resolution of the conflict in Syria through political means remains as necessary now as it did when the Committee studied the situation in early 2014.²³⁷ At the same time, while the search for a sustainable solution to Syria's conflict continues, there is a clear and immediate need for continuing humanitarian and development assistance to help those who have been affected and displaced by the conflict, within Syria and the region.

A. A Protracted Humanitarian Crisis

Now entering its fifth year, the turmoil in Syria has become the world's largest humanitarian crisis. As Mr. Fischer told the Committee, the scale of the crisis has reached a level "not seen since World War II."²³⁸ The situation has only worsened since the Committee released its report on Syria in May 2014. The extent of the regional refugee crisis is an illustrative example. When the Committee's report was finalized, there were already more than 2.6 million registered Syrian refugees in the region, primarily in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. As of 15 March 2015, that number had climbed to approximately 3.9 million refugees.²³⁹ In all, about half of Syria's pre-war population has been displaced.

In addition to the overall need for humanitarian relief, many of the specific issues that were raised during the Committee's meetings early last year remain concerns, including the flagrant disregard for international law and standards that has come to characterize the conflict. Moreover, the delivery of humanitarian assistance to people in need is still an issue. Within Syria, some 4.8 million people are in hard-to-reach areas, an estimated 212,000 of whom are besieged.²⁴⁰

Mr. Fischer also reminded the Committee of the conflict's ongoing toll on children. He said that "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."²⁴¹ Reflecting the humanitarian community's concern about the potential for a "lost generation" of Syrian children and youth, Mr. Fischer also argued that "there cannot be a sustainable future for Syria unless we are able to work with ... 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."²⁴²

As part of her testimony to the Committee, Ms. Abdo addressed some of the regional effects of the conflict by commenting on the specific situation in Lebanon.

237 FAAE, [Responding to the Conflict in Syria](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, May 2014.

238 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 17 February 2015.

239 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, [Syria Regional Refugee Response: Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal](#).

240 [Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 \(2014\), 2165 \(2014\) and 2191 \(2014\): Report of the Secretary-General](#), UNSC, S/2015/124, 19 February 2015, para 34.

241 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 17 February 2015.

242 Ibid.

She noted that, according to official statistics, “a fourth of the population in Lebanon is Syrian refugees,” an estimate which she said is considered “modest.” She warned that Lebanon is “on the brink now, and it has been on the brink for a long time, since the Syrian war began.” As such, Ms. Abdo argued that it is “absolutely incumbent upon western governments to deal with the refugee crisis in Lebanon,” because of the need to ensure that Lebanon does not become another failing state.²⁴³ Mr. Héту also referred to the situation in Lebanon, noting that there has been “a lot of incursion.” Even so, he said that “there is resistance to not fall into another civil war.” As he put it, “They know about that and they don't want to go back there.”²⁴⁴

B. A Political Solution

Testimony indicated that resolving the conflict in Syria – while an elusive proposition to date – must remain a priority. However, the path to arrive at such a political settlement is less clear, and there are many factors that have made it difficult to attain.

One example is the very characteristic of the Assad regime, which Andrew Tabler (Washington Institute for Near East Policy) argued “is a completely minority-based, inflexible system at its core.”²⁴⁵ As such, he said that it is unlikely that the regime, which is dominated by the country’s Alawite minority, will reform itself in the near future. Yet, Syria has a majority Sunni population. Mr. Tabler argued that the only way “to politically undermine ISIL is to bring people who support that organization or are forced to support that organization, Sunnis, away from those organizations and jihadists into some other kind of political arrangements [...]” Doing so “requires a political settlement” to the conflict which, in Mr. Tabler’s view, “remains very far off.”²⁴⁶ In fact, when asked for his assessment of the U.S. airstrikes against ISIL targets in Syria as of early December 2014, he argued that they had “overwhelmingly benefited” President Assad. While degrading ISIL in Syria, Mr. Tabler argued that the airstrikes are making “a real settlement that solves this problem” that much more elusive.²⁴⁷

The future role of President Assad in the governance of Syria remains a contentious and unresolved issue. Professor Akhavan noted that the question remains with respect to “dealing with the massive crimes” of the Assad regime, which he argued has, in the face of ISIL’s emergence, successfully managed to position itself “as the lesser of the two evils.” In his view, “There can be no meaningful long-term solution and stability unless those underlying issues are dealt with.”²⁴⁸

243 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 5 February 2015.

244 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 20 November 2014.

245 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 4 December 2014.

246 Ibid.

247 Ibid.

248 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 27 November 2014.

Mr. Tabler identified two reasons why it would be “unpalatable” to allow the Assad regime to “reconquer” Syria. He said that,

One is the nature of that fight and the lack of legitimacy of the Assad regime due to its actions over the last few years. But also, the Assad regime is in alliance with the Islamic Republic of Iran and its forces, which are in unprecedented numbers and level of influence inside of Syria as a result of supporting the Assad regime during the uprising. That threatens to destabilize the balance between Iranian-backed governments and forces and generally Sunni-backed governments or Sunni-based governments throughout the Middle East, and it makes this potentially much more explosive.²⁴⁹

Mr. Tabler argued the need for “a plan to have President Assad step aside.” Given that Sunnis are generally “adamant” that President Assad needs to go as part of a transition in Syria, such a plan, in his view, “would see regional parties coming to the table and being willing to do much, much more to defeat ISIL and to work with us in the future in terms of stabilizing the Middle East.”²⁵⁰

In all, Mr. Tabler concluded his remarks to the Committee by arguing that the threat posed by ISIL cannot be addressed “without dealing with a settlement in Syria, and a viable settlement in Syria has to have at its end the exit of the Assad and Makhlof families from Syria and the leadership of Syria.”²⁵¹ The process by which such an outcome can be realized, he conceded, is “the subject of the debate.” However, Mr. Tabler emphasized that,

The longer that those individuals stay, I think the longer that Syria will be partitioned. The longer it's partitioned, the more these ungoverned spaces will generate extremism and extremists who make the world a less safe place, not only for Syrians, Iraqis, people in the region, but also those of us in Europe, Canada, and the United States as well.²⁵²

Diplomatic discussions at the United Nations have recently focused on a proposed “freeze” to the fighting between regime and opposition forces in the city of Aleppo.

249 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 4 December 2014.

250 Ibid. The advancement of a political transition in Syria was a key aspect of the 2012 Geneva Communiqué, which was endorsed by the UN Security Council in September 2013 through Resolution 2118. The Geneva Communiqué envisioned “the launch of a Syrian-led political process leading to a transition that meets the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people and enables them independently and democratically to determine their own future.” The Communiqué also indicated that any settlement to the conflict must “provide for clear and irreversible steps in the transition,” including the “establishment of a transitional governing body that can establish a neutral environment in which the transition can take place, with the transitional governing body exercising full executive powers.” See, “Annex II: Action Group for Syria Final Communiqué, 30 June 2012,” in UNSC, [S/RES/2118 \(2013\)](#), adopted by the Security Council on 27 September 2013.

251 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 4 December 2014. The Makhlof family are prominent members of Syria’s business, political and military elite and are close allies to the government of Bashar al-Assad. Anisa Makhlof Assad is the widow of former president Hafez Assad and is Bashar al-Assad’s mother. Other notable members of the Makhlof family include Rami Makhlof, the president’s cousin and a prominent businessman, who has been the subject of U.S. sanctions since 2008. See, BBC News, [Bashar al-Assad's Inner Circle](#), 30 June 2012.

252 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 4 December 2014.

The idea is being advanced by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria and is envisaged as a building block that could help to restart a political process.²⁵³

COUNTERING EXTREMISM IN THE MIDDLE EAST

As this report has made clear, ISIL, as a terrorist organization, must be dealt with. However, as was noted in a previous section that described the regional context in which ISIL has emerged, there are broader issues that need to be considered as part of a long-term strategy to curb violent extremism in the Middle East.

The first issue is governance. While many factors have contributed to the rise of ISIL and other extremist groups in Syria, Iraq and the region, governance failures, and the political vacuums they create, appear to have been an enabling condition. Another issue that was brought to the Committee's attention is religious freedom. It was argued that the promotion of religious freedom, as a precursor for greater tolerance and respect for diversity, can help to curb extremism. Overall, Mr. Gwozdecky (DFATD) told the Committee that the "only possible long-term solution" with respect to countering extremism, including in Iraq and Syria, "is political inclusion, better governance and respect for religious freedom and human rights." Furthermore, he said that "This political solution must come from the Iraqis and Syrians, but Canada is committed to long-term political and diplomatic efforts in support of that goal."²⁵⁴

A. Governance

Ms. Abdo argued that, however challenging to implement, "we need to help Arab societies develop a different form of governance that is somewhere between Islamic extremism and dictatorship," which she argued are "the two sort of polar opposites that have been competing for power for 30 years now."²⁵⁵ With respect to Canada's role in that process, Professor Akhavan argued that, "Canada should consider a meaningful long-term engagement in the region." More particularly, he said that, "Canada, together with like-minded nations, should use its diplomatic influence and other resources to discourage and dis-incentivize regional powers from using extremism as an instrument of power." Professor Akhavan also said that Canada can "make efforts in concert with other nations to balance commercial interests with measures against the rampant corruption, which is yet another breeding ground for extremism."²⁵⁶

As was noted earlier, a number of witnesses offered fairly negative assessments of the events that have transpired in the wake of the Arab Spring. Ms. Laipson was asked what, if anything, could have been done differently by the west that could have sustained the Arab Spring's momentum. She responded,

253 [Implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 \(2014\), 2165 \(2014\) and 2191 \(2014\): Report of the Secretary-General](#), UNSC, S/2015/124, 19 February 2015, para 14.

254 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 27 January 2015.

255 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 5 February 2015.

256 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 27 November 2014.

I think the west tried very hard to be helpful in the first year of the Arab Spring. There was a big infusion, the Deauville partnership, and all these ideas of what we could do. Reality is that the flow of aid, job creation, support for the private sector, etc., couldn't come fast enough or on a large enough scale.²⁵⁷

Ms. Laipson noted what she called the “sad truth” of the issue, which is that in “this media information age we live in, people very quickly decided that it wasn't working.” Citing the case of Egypt in particular, she noted that “They didn't have the patience to let some of these transformative activities play out.”²⁵⁸

Taken as a whole, Ms. Laipson argued that,

We should not give up on the Arab Spring. I still think that the Arab Spring will, historically, be a turning point in the willingness of Arab societies to stand up and say that they want a greater voice. It doesn't mean we're on an easy path to democracy, but I do think state-society relations in the Arab world are changing. We're just at the beginning of that process.²⁵⁹

The experience of the Arab Spring may also indicate that western governments need to develop a better and timelier toolkit that can enable them to address these complex governance challenges and assist – when requested – with political transitions.

With respect to a specific contribution that countries like Canada can make, Ms. Laipson argued for scholarships for young people from the region. In her words,

Let them come out to be educated and exposed to more tolerant multicultural societies. Even though the numbers in scholarship programs are usually so small that you might ask how this can possibly affect the whole country ..., the impact on individual lives is sometimes huge in regard to what happens when those people go home and learn to be better citizens than they would be had they been educated at home.²⁶⁰

Ms. Laipson acknowledged that scholarships on their own are not a “sufficient” solution to the region’s problems. However, she said that “there is a fair amount of evidence, looking over the decades, of how an intervention with an 18-year-old who comes to get an undergraduate degree or comes for graduate school sometimes is so inspiring that those people go on to become leaders in their own countries.”²⁶¹

Comments from other witnesses suggested that, in building an approach to the region, consideration should also be given to ways in which the concepts of pluralism and citizenship can be advanced. Father Elias Mallon told the Committee that something that is “very lacking throughout the Middle East is the concept of citizen, and that's the basis of pluralistic society.” He added that “democracy without a notion of citizenship can end up being the tyranny of the majority, which we have seen in places.” Once there is a “safe

257 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 5 February 2015.

258 Ibid.

259 Ibid.

260 Ibid.

261 Ibid.

place for society to develop,” Father Mallon argued that “we need a civil society in which every citizen is equal and every citizen has an equal stake, and that is not the case in the Middle East now.”²⁶²

The concept of citizenship in relation to the experiences of Syria and Iraq was also raised by Mr. Lamani. He said that, “the constitution in this part of the world should be based mainly on two principles: equal citizenship and respecting pluralism.” However, he argued that, right now, these principles are “strongly missing.”²⁶³

Professor Akhavan underscored the need to invest in programs that can “strengthen civil society” and “independent media,” and in “educational resources that help promote pluralism and tolerance[.]” He argued that it “cannot be accepted” that the Middle East is the one region “that is somehow immune to the historic forces of integration that have shaped the world elsewhere.”²⁶⁴ In general, Professor Akhavan suggested that, “we need to invest much more in aid and reconstruction in creating the institutions and political spaces that will move those societies away from sectarian violence.”²⁶⁵

B. Religious Freedom

Other witnesses emphasized the connection between tolerance and religious freedom. In particular, Thomas Farr told the Committee that in the Middle East,

Despite the efforts of western and western-inspired modernizers, religion remains the primary identity of people in the region. This means that any successful new political order must ultimately be based on religious freedom, that is, full equality under the law for all religious communities. Both history and contemporary research make it clear that religious freedom will be necessary if highly religious societies are to be stable and to rid themselves of religious violence and terrorism.²⁶⁶

In contextualizing events that have unfolded in the region, he noted that “there are legitimate economic concerns throughout the countries of the Middle East where violent Islamist radicalism is incubated and from which it is exported.” Dr. Farr added that there are also “legitimate concerns about the past.” However, in his view, these issues “pale in the explanatory power of this radical version of Islam as an explanation of this terrorism.”²⁶⁷

Dr. Farr also underscored that religious freedom should be seen as “a counterterrorism tool.” It is so because it “frees Muslims to speak about their own religion” and brings “religious people into the public square.” Indeed, he argued that the objective is

262 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 20 November 2014.

263 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 27 November 2014.

264 Ibid.

265 Ibid.

266 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 9 December 2014.

267 Ibid.

not “getting Islam out of the way.” Rather, he said that “It’s a matter of accommodating Islam to the basic norms of self-governance [...]”.²⁶⁸

Speaking from the perspective of the Canadian foreign policy approach to religious freedom, Ambassador Bennett (DFATD) told the Committee that,

We advance religious freedom overseas not simply through international covenants that speak to it as a fundamental right, but we advance it based on the Canadian experience of pluralism. Because we enjoy religious freedom here in Canada and we cherish it, it’s incumbent upon us to speak to those countries where there is such a crying need for reinforcement and defence of that principle.²⁶⁹

Regarding Canada’s approach in this area, Dr. Farr argued that Canada must ensure that “the diplomatic status and authority and the resources allocated” to Ambassador Bennett’s Office of Religious Freedom “are sufficient to communicate to other nations and to Canada’s own diplomatic establishment that this issue is a high priority for the Canadian government and that it will remain so into the future.”²⁷⁰

Both witnesses spoke about developing training for diplomats that focuses on religious freedom. For his part, Dr. Farr urged “Canada to train all its diplomats to understand what religious freedom is, why it’s important for both individuals and societies, why advancing it is important for Canadian national interests, and how to advance it.”²⁷¹ When he addressed the issue, Ambassador Bennett noted that the importance of such training has been recognized. He said that,

This comes back to something that not only our offices but also many of my colleagues have observed when they’ve been engaged in postings overseas or even through their work here in Ottawa. When they look out into these countries, the vast majority of countries in the world have a very strong religious sense. Religion and religious faith dominate or have a place not only within a perceived cultural dialogue but also within a socio-economic political dialogue, whereby religion and religious faith have a very prominent role within society.²⁷²

From his perspective, not understanding “this reality” risks “developing a very serious diplomatic blind spot.”²⁷³

Ambassador Bennett also told the Committee that DFATD held a full-day training session last year for diplomats, which they hope to expand to a two-day program this year. In a written response to a question regarding how such training should be approached in the context of Canada’s diplomatic service, Dr. Farr indicated that it should be delivered “at several stages” of a person’s career, including upon entry into the diplomatic service, prior

268 Ibid.

269 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 9 September 2014.

270 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 9 December 2014.

271 Ibid.

272 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 41st Parliament, 27 January 2015.

273 Ibid.

to departure for a post – with training “keyed” to the country in question – and when that person “is sent out as either deputy chief of mission or ambassador.”²⁷⁴

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The diversity of witness presentations, and the range of issues that were raised throughout the Committee’s study, confirm that international terrorism and violent extremism are complex and multi-dimensional issues that must be met with a comprehensive approach and sustained response. Even so, for the Committee, the essence of the specific issue at hand is clear: ISIL must be defeated, and the violent ideology it espouses stamped out.

The Committee is of the view that Canada must remain engaged with its allies and cannot ignore the crisis that has resulted from ISIL’s rise. If allowed to expand its territorial reach, or even to remain in the towns and cities it currently controls, ISIL would only continue to inflict all of the horrors that were described earlier in this report. It could also engulf the region. Moreover, ISIL has a destabilizing effect on international security through its quest for new adherents and its recruitment of foreign fighters from countries around the world, including Canada.

To date, the international coalition has focused primarily on Iraq. The Committee agrees with this approach. However, no matter how seemingly intractable the general situation in neighbouring Syria may be, it cannot be overlooked that ISIL is active in both Syria and Iraq, and does not respect borders. Ultimately, defeating ISIL will require defeating them on the ground in Syria and achieving a political solution to the long-standing conflict in Syria.

It is clear that many of the issues identified in this report can only be addressed by local actors. From the Committee’s perspective, one of the main take-away messages from its study is that security gains made on the ground will only be sustainable if they continue to be accompanied by real political progress and reforms, a process that must be led and implemented locally.

That said, it is also clear that there are real needs that Canada can help to address, particularly in Iraq. These include the provision of humanitarian relief and military support, as well as assistance to help to strengthen Iraq’s institutions, with the aim of fostering political inclusion and societal reconciliation. Addressing these issues in Iraq, and in the wider region, will require long-term engagement.

The Committee puts forward the following recommendations to the Government of Canada:

274 Written response from Thomas Farr to a question from a FAAE meeting of 9 December 2014.

RECOMMENDATION 1

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada continue to participate in the United States-led international coalition towards the implementation of the coalition's five lines of effort and the realization of the objective of defeating the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

RECOMMENDATION 2

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada continue to support the full implementation of United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 2199 (2015), which aims to disrupt sources of financing for ISIL and other listed extremist groups, and Resolution 2178 (2014) which, *inter alia*,

- calls upon all UN member states, in accordance with their obligations under international law, to cooperate in efforts to address the threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters, including by preventing the radicalization to terrorism and recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters.

RECOMMENDATION 3

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada work with international partners, community and religious leaders, and civil society to counter ISIL's extremist ideology online and to expose ISIL's violent and intolerant nature, objectives and actions.

RECOMMENDATION 4

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada offer support to the Government of Iraq that can help to advance security sector reforms in Iraq, including through the training of security forces.

RECOMMENDATION 5

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada provide support to help strengthen Iraq's political institutions and civil society, and to advance inclusive governance and citizenship.

RECOMMENDATION 6

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada continue to provide substantial assistance to meet the needs associated with the humanitarian crisis in Iraq, including with respect to enhancing food security, ensuring access to adequate shelter and housing, and providing specialized medical care, psychosocial support and rehabilitation services for victims of violence and human rights abuses, including sexual and gender-based violence.

RECOMMENDATION 7

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada provide targeted assistance to help members of religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq who have been displaced to return to their homes in safety and dignity, and to promote intercommunal reconciliation in Iraq more broadly.

RECOMMENDATION 8

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada continue to support the documentation of violations and abuses of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in Syria and Iraq.

RECOMMENDATION 9

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada work with its international partners to ensure that women and girls who have been abducted and enslaved by ISIL are not forgotten, while doing all that is possible to ensure their safe release and return to normal life.

RECOMMENDATION 10

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada continue to provide substantial funding towards the international humanitarian appeals for assistance to meet the needs of people who have been affected and displaced by the conflict in Syria.

RECOMMENDATION 11

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada continue to support the “No Lost Generation” initiative, and provide targeted support for children and youth who have been affected by the conflicts in Syria and Iraq, including by working to improve access to education and child-friendly spaces.

RECOMMENDATION 12

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada continue to encourage a Syrian-led political process – in keeping with the UN-led Geneva process – that would lead to the establishment of a stable, democratic, peaceful and inclusive society, consistent with the 2012 Geneva Communiqué.

RECOMMENDATION 13

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada develop a long-term strategy to guide its engagement in the Middle East and North Africa, anchored by the objectives of supporting good governance, advancing pluralism and expanding economic opportunities, particularly with respect to the youth population.

RECOMMENDATION 14

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada work with Canadian academic partners towards the consideration of scholarships to help young people from the Middle East and North Africa study in Canada.

RECOMMENDATION 15

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada continue to use the Office of Religious Freedom in the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development to work with faith and community leaders in Canada and the Middle East and North Africa to promote interfaith dialogue, tolerance and pluralism in the Middle East and North Africa.

RECOMMENDATION 16

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada develop a training program on religious freedom for Canadian diplomats.

APPENDIX A LIST OF WITNESSES

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
<p>Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Andrew P.W. Bennett, Ambassador Office of Religious Freedom Peter Boehm, Associate Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs</p>	2014/09/09	32
<p>Department of National Defence Thomas J. Lawson, Chief of the Defence Staff</p>		
<p>House of Commons John Baird, Minister of Foreign Affairs Rob Nicholson, Minister of National Defence</p>		
<p>As an individual Bessma Momani, Associate Professor Balsillie School of International Affairs, University of Waterloo</p>	2014/11/20	35
<p>Catholic Near East Welfare Association Carl Héту, National Director Canada Elias Mallon, External Affairs Officer United States</p>		
<p>Iran Human Rights Documentation Center Rod Sanjabi, Executive Director</p>		
<p>As individuals Payam Akhavan, Professor Faculty of Law, McGill University and Kellogg College, Oxford University Mokhtar Lamani, Former Ambassador United Nations-League of Arab States, Office of the Joint Special Representative for Syria, Damascus</p>	2014/11/27	37
<p>Chaldean Catholic Church in Canada Niaz Toma</p>		
<p>Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Toronto (Canada) Sotirios Athanassoulas, Metropolitan Archbishop</p>		
<p>One Free World International Majed El Shafie, Founder and President</p>		
<p>As an individual Reuven Bulka</p>	2014/12/02	38

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
<p>As an individual Vian Saeed, Member of Iraqi Parliament</p> <p>Yezidi Human Rights Organization-International Khalid Haider, Assistant to the Chairman Omar Haider</p>	2014/12/02	38
<p>As individuals Rabea Allos Matteo Legrenzi, Professor, Ca' Foscari University of Venice</p> <p>Washington Institute for Near East Policy Andrew Tabler, Senior Fellow</p>	2014/12/04	39
<p>As individuals Jonathan Dahoah Halevi, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs Thomas Farr, Director, Religious Freedom Project, Georgetown University</p> <p>Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East Emmanuel Joseph Mar-Emmanuel, Diocesan Bishop Diocese of Canada</p>	2014/12/09	40
<p>Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Andrew P.W. Bennett, Ambassador Office of Religious Freedom Mark Gwozdecky, Director General Middle East and Maghreb Leslie Norton, Director General International Humanitarian Assistance Donica Pottie, Director Conflict Policy and Security Coherence Secretariat</p>	2015/01/27	41
<p>Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Daniel Jean, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs</p> <p>Department of National Defence Thomas J. Lawson, Chief of the Defence Staff</p> <p>House of Commons John Baird, Minister of Foreign Affairs Rob Nicholson, Minister of National Defence</p>	2015/01/29	42
<p>As individuals Ayad Jamal Aldin Former Deputy of the Iraqi Parliament Sami Aoun, Full Professor Université de Sherbrooke</p>	2015/02/03	43

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
<p>As an individual Salim Mansur, Associate Professor Department of Political Science, University of Western Ontario</p>	2015/02/03	43
<p>Muslim Canadian Congress Tarek Fatah, Founder</p>		
<p>As individuals Geneive Abdo, Fellow Stimson Center Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, Senior Fellow Foundation for Defense of Democracies Ellen Laipson, President and Chief Executive Officer Stimson Center</p>	2015/02/05	44
<p>Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Emmanuel Gignac, Coordinator Northern Iraq</p>	2015/02/17	45
<p>United Nations World Food Programme Jane Pearce, Country Director</p>		
<p>World Vision Canada Martin Fischer, Director of Policy Bart Witteveen, Director, Humanitarian and Emergency Affairs</p>		

APPENDIX B LIST OF BRIEFS

Organizations and Individuals

One Free World International

REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the Committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this Report.

A copy of the relevant *Minutes of Proceedings* ([Meetings Nos. 32, 35, 37-45, 47, 51](#)) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Dean Allison

Chair

Supplementary Report of the New Democratic Party of Canada

The New Democratic Party agrees with a majority of the recommendations in the present report, but we reiterate our opposition to a combat and training role for Canadian Forces in Iraq and Syria.

It is clear that Canada needs to play a constructive role in the region over the long term, and that is why we called for this study.

We also feel the need to add the following recommendations:

1. The Government of Canada should substantially increase its contribution to humanitarian efforts to assist victims of ISIS, and ensure that all commitments are paid in full as soon as possible. Humanitarian and governance assistance in the region should form the core of the Canadian response to ISIS.
2. The Government of Canada should restrict its military contribution to the transportation of weapons and equipment to the Iraqi and Kurdish authorities, in support of their efforts to combat ISIS on the ground. In particular, Canada should not participate in airstrikes or other military activities in Syria.
3. The Government of Canada should avoid any conflation of humanitarian and military activities. Humanitarian actors depend upon perceptions of impartiality, and independence. Humanitarian assistance must not be tied to military activity.
4. The Government of Canada should take immediate and specific steps to meet its international obligations concerning the travel, financing, and arming of terrorist and extremist organizations, in accordance with UN Security Council resolutions 2170, 2178, and 2199. As part of this effort, the Government should immediately sign and ratify the UN Arms Trade Treaty to demonstrate commitment to ending the flow of weapons to illegal armed groups and human rights abusers.
5. The Government of Canada should partner with domestic communities in order to develop a strategy to counter radicalization.

