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**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, September 30, 2014**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Scott Reid**



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

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•(1300)

[Translation]

**The Chair (Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC)):** Order, please. I would like to have everyone's attention.

Today is September 30, 2014, and I want to welcome you to the 35th meeting of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

[English]

Pursuant to our standing orders we are looking today at the persecution of religious minorities in Iraq. We have with us Reverend Majed El Shafie who is the founder and president of One Free World International. Reverend El Shafie has come to this committee before on a variety of issues relating to religious liberty in different parts of what we could probably describe as the Islamic world. Today he will be testifying on something that of course is very much top of mind to many people and that is the situation in Iraq, based I believe on some personal experience visiting with some MPs last summer.

Reverend El Shafie, I invite you to begin your remarks. When they're over we'll go to our normal questions. The timing of each question will depend on how much time is available at the end of your introductory remarks.

Thank you very much.

**The Reverend Majed El Shafie (Founder and President, One Free World International):** Mr. Chair, and honourable members of Parliament, I thank you for this opportunity to speak with you about the situation in Iraq, especially in Kurdistan, and how Iraqis has been affected recently by the attacks from ISIS.

My name is Reverend Majed El Shafie. I am the founder and president of One Free World International for human rights. I spent time in an Egyptian prison for fighting for human rights. I was in an Egyptian prison, and I was tortured for my Christian beliefs.

The fact that I'm here, and the fact that I'm still alive, is not less than a miracle. It is extremely important to start this introduction for one simple reason. I'm not here just as a man wearing a suit sitting behind his desk. I used to be one of the minorities who were in prison, who were tortured, and who were almost killed for their beliefs.

One Free World International is a human rights organization based in Toronto. We now have branches in 20 countries. Our main goal is to fight for the persecuted believers whoever they are. If they are Hindu, or Sikh, or Christians, or Muslims, or whatever their religion or whatever their background, we're fighting for the minorities who are facing persecution for their religious beliefs around the world.

When it comes to Iraq, One Free World International led two delegations to Iraq. One was in September 2011, with member of Parliament John Weston and Senator Don Meredith. They came with us in their capacity as observers. We were able to meet with different members of the Iraqi government. We were able to meet with victims. We were able to see some of the churches and worship places that were attacked such as Our Lady of Salvation.

Recently One Free World International led another delegation to Iraq, August 30 to September 1 of this year. Three members of Parliament came with me again in their capacity as observers. One of them was my good friend and a dear friend of mine who I dare to call a friend and a champion of human rights, Mr. Brad Butt—he is here with us—and Mr. Russ Hiebert and Mr. Leon Benoit. We were able to go to Erbil in Kurdistan and see the situation on the ground in Iraq, especially in the northern side in Erbil in Kurdistan and Dohuk, the border city of Mosul. We visited three refugee camps. One of the refugee camps was a Christian refugee camp, the second refugee camp was a Yazidi refugee camp, and the third one was mix of Muslims, Christians, Yazidis, and other minorities.

In terms of the situation on the ground in Kurdistan, you have to understand that as we are talking right now there are more than 1.6 million refugees in the area of Kurdistan, all of them running away from the torture and the attacks that took place when ISIS attacked the region. There were more than 500 children under the age of three in one of the refugee camps we visited.

When we met with the refugees face to face the stories we witnessed.... One little girl, Rahama, was eight years old and had lost her mom and dad when they died in an explosion in Mosul. Another testimony that really touched my heart was from the Yazidi community. One of the victims ran away to the Sinjar mountain. When ISIS attacked, many of the Yazidi community escaped immediately to the Sinjar mountain. It is estimated that over 50,000 from the Yazidi community escaped to Sinjar mountain.

•(1305)

They tell you that on the first night, because of the lack of food and water between 45 to 60 Yazidi children....

One of the mothers almost lost her child. In order to maintain the life of her child, she cut her finger to feed her child her own blood. We were able to meet with this woman, and it broke our hearts. This is the situation on the ground.

We witnessed Christians being crucified by ISIS. We witnessed young kids being attacked, being raped. We witnessed a group of females who were kidnapped and sold to the ISIS fighters for \$20 apiece. They sold them like slaves, for their own fighters, for their own pleasure.

The situation on the ground, the persecution that's facing the Christian minority in Iraq today at the hands of ISIS, is not brand new. Christians have been persecuted in Iraq for the last 10 years and longer—since the American invasion. The problem with the Christians is that they get in the crossfire between the extreme Sunnis and the extreme Shiites. The persecution of Christians is not something new. Even the persecution of the Yazidis is not something new. Now we are speaking more about it because now ISIS has attacked, and you can see this persecution increase in a major way. But for the last 10 years our organization and the Iraqi community have been crying out about the persecution taking place against their people, and the world remained silent about it. That's the truth.

We visited the medical centre as well. We sat down with some of the doctors who deal with the situation. We discovered that one of their main needs is medication; they don't have enough. All said and done, and all that we witnessed....

I went as well to the front lines. I didn't take the honourable member of Parliament with me, simply because it would have been unsecure. We went to the front lines and I met with the Peshmerga, who are the Kurdish troops on the front line. One of the soldiers was 65 years old. When I asked him what he was doing there at 65 years old, he said, "I have to defend my country. We've been persecuted as Kurdish for many, many years, and I have to stay here to protect my country." He's 65 years old, fighting in the front lines.

The situation in Iraq right now has all the signs of the beginning of a genocide. Without our intervention we are risking emptying the region, especially Iraq, of the Christian minorities, the Yazidi minorities, and the other minorities such as the Mandaeans, and so forth. This has happened before in Iraq. This is not the first time. Some of you say, well, it has never happened that you could empty the place of all the minorities, but that's not correct. In 1941 in Iraq there was a massacre, again of the Jewish people, called the Farhud. Between 200 and 700 Jewish people were killed that day, and more than 2,000 were injured in the massacre. From 1948 to 1951, it was the exodus of the Jewish people out of Iraq, and now Iraq, to the best of my knowledge, does not even have one Jewish person.

One of the victims of the Farhud massacre is sitting behind me, Ms. Noga Abarbanel.

I'll go to my recommendations. Our Canadian government—and I am very thankful to our Canadian government—has presented a total of \$28 million in aid to Iraq since the beginning of 2014.

• (1310)

On August 10, \$5 million in humanitarian aid was followed by \$15 million of new military aid: \$10 million for non-lethal military equipment to secure forces combatting ISIS and \$5 million to

support regional efforts to limit the movement of the foreign fighters into Iraq and Syria. There was \$7 million of new humanitarian aid: \$5 million for emergency shelters and relief equipment, and \$2 million for urgent care services in the region.

Our number one recommendation with regard to aid is accountability. We are giving aid to countries where the governments are not accountable. We cannot ensure that the aid is ending up in the hands of the people who need it.

The truth and the reality is this. When I took the rocky first trip, I had with me Mr. John Weston and Senator Don Meredith. They are witnesses to what I am saying. We met with the vice-president of Iraq, the vice-prime minister of Iraq, the foreign affairs minister, and the human rights minister. Canada at this point had given more than \$300 million in aid to the Iraqi central government. When we asked where the \$300 million went, the response from the Iraqi government was "we don't know". They don't know where our money went. They don't know where our tax money went.

As far as giving this aid to Kurdistan or Iraq is concerned, we have to have accountability. We have to know where this money went and we have to ensure that the aid is actually ending up in the hands of the people who really need it.

The second thing with regard to aid is that we have to have a condition. "We will continue to support you. We will continue aiding you if you protect human rights in your country, if you protect women's rights, if you improve your human rights situation." We cannot just give aid without a condition.

All I am saying is if we are giving aid, let's ensure that this aid not only will be used for the people who need aid, but that it will ensure that the Kurdish government or the Iraqi central government will be able to protect women's rights, human rights, and the freedom of religion. Freedom of religion is the foundation of democracy. Without freedom of religion, there would be no democracy, because if you took from the men and women what they believe, you would take from them everything else.

We have to focus aid on medicine and shelter. The winter is coming in four weeks. The people are living in tents. They need shelter and they need it now or a lot of them will die in the cold. This is four weeks away, it's not that far away.

With regard to our recommendation about air strikes and Canadian military involvement, air strikes are very important to protect the minority and to push ISIS back and to stop their advances. However, air strikes will not win you the war. The minute that we start the air strikes, and we really are, a surprise element already disappears. I promise you that ISIS will start to blend in with the civilians, with the locals, so it will be almost impossible to hunt them down with air strikes without hurting the civilian population. As much as air strikes are important, they will not have a resolution with regard to ISIS.

How can we defeat ISIS, especially in Iraq? There are two things.

Number one, we have to cut the lifeline of ISIS financially. ISIS is supported by governments like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, and Turkey. We have to punish the governments for supporting ISIS with supplies or finance. On top of this, they are also buying oil from ISIS. The revenue of black oil is almost \$2 million to \$3 million a day. All of this has to be cut. I know the Americans started to strike the oil fields in Syria and Iraq just to stop this part.

• (1315)

It is very important that we look at the governments that support ISIS. You have to ask yourselves the question: why were two American hostages and one British hostage beheaded while 49 Turkish hostages were released the next day? What is the deal between Turkey and ISIS that makes Turkey secure? They're releasing their hostages, but the Americans and the British couldn't. We have to punish the government that cooperates and coordinates with ISIS. This is number one of how to defeat ISIS.

Number two is the reconciliation within the Iraqi government. I need to tell you something very important. I don't know if you know this from the news or not, but here is the truth. When ISIS entered Iraq, it entered Iraq with forces of 1,500 to 1,800 soldiers. It's impossible, with 1,500 to 1,800 soldiers, to take 40% of the country in a few days, including the second largest city in Iraq, Mosul. It's impossible. ISIS couldn't do this without the support of the Arab Sunni tribes. After years and years of persecution from the Shia Maliki government, the Sunnis said enough is enough, they would cooperate even with the devil. This doesn't mean that the Sunnis are bad. It simply means that they were forced to cooperate with ISIS. They were tired of the abuses and the persecution they were facing from the Shia government, the Maliki government, and not all from the Shias, but the Shia Maliki government.

To start reconciliation is how you defeat ISIS in Iraq. You have to start reconciliation within the Iraqi government where you can include all the minorities—Sunnis, Christians, Yazidis, Shabaks, Kaka'is, whoever they are—and you have to give them the right of self-government, if it comes to that, to protect them.

Once the situation is settled, you have to have international peacekeeping troops to protect the minorities and in order for them to feel secure in returning to their homes.

Mr. Chair, I've finished my testimony. Would you allow me to have the last two minutes after the questions for my closing remarks, please?

• (1320)

**The Chair:** We'll certainly try to do that.

On the suspicion that we may run a little over time, I'm going to ask for the indulgence of the committee at seeing the clock generously towards the end of the meeting. We might perhaps go a little beyond 2 p.m. It will be all dependent on everybody being efficient in their questioning, and the answers as well, so that we have the time for that.

Let's keep our remarks short. We have enough time for six-minute question-and-answer rounds for each of our questioners.

Hopefully that will leave us with enough time for that two minutes at the end, Reverend El Shafie.

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** We begin with Mr. Sweet.

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

I myself want to make a brief statement first. As far as the notion of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, or the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, I consider those titles unacceptable and repugnant, as well as the whole notion that this terrorist group is an Islamic state. I want to have that on record, number one.

Number two, I know Reverend El Shafie did not intend this because he was testifying at large volume, but I want to make sure there's no ambiguity with respect to the government's position or my position. No amount of persecution justifies the kind of terrorism we're seeing. In fact, it's interesting that Reverend El Shafie mentions the years and years of persecution of minorities and Christians in Iraq. Of course, no such action at all has ever been taken. There's no justification whatsoever for taking innocent people and beheading them or crucifying them, or some of the things we've seen that are just humanly barbaric and to a magnitude that we haven't seen.

Reverend, thank you, first off, for the courage to go underground and bring back some information that is not only very relevant from the ground but very current.

I want to ask you about the marking of the doors of Christians particularly.

But first I want to ask you what the situation is for Muslims who are peace-loving and moderate in Iraq. Are they suffering at the hands of the extremist elements in Iraq as well?

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** The last refugee camp that we went to was a mixed refugee camp, which means that we met as well with some of the Muslim families who had been affected. I can tell you that, yes, the moderate Muslims who are peace-loving Muslims are affected as well because I believe that ISIS doesn't know religion. That's truly my belief. The fact that ISIS now is fighting with the Kurdish government, or Kurdistan, of which the majority are Sunni Muslims—they're the same, they're not Shias—shows you that they don't care of what belief you are. However, I will point out strongly that the biggest dilemma facing Islam today, as a faith and as a belief, is not the rising of the extremists but the silence of the moderate Muslims. I will point out that the moderate Muslims today should play a bigger role in fighting these extremists and in showing the world if this is true Islam or not true Islam. Sadly, what I am seeing is the moderate Muslims in Canada, and elsewhere, in Iraq and in the United States, are very silent. I believe this is a very weak point on their side.

• (1325)

**Mr. David Sweet:** Reverend, the marking of the doors of Christians particularly is very troubling. Did you meet any of those people whose doors had been marked and were fleeing from.... I'm not going to finish your answer, but from what would they be fleeing if their doors were marked with a Christian symbol in Arabic by these terrorists?

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** Let me just explain quickly. Doors are marked by the letter *nun* in Arabic. The letter *nun* stands for *Nasrani*, which is “Christian”, so it’s the first letter of “Christian”. Of course, we met some of these people, especially in the first refugee camp in Erbil, when we went to the Catholic church there. It brought back memories to us of the Holocaust when they used to mark Jewish people with a Star of David. It is the same concept basically. They mark your door and they give you three options. Once this mark is on your door, you have three options: get killed, pay extra tax, what is known as *jizya*, or you convert to Islam. This is the meaning of the mark on the door.

**Mr. David Sweet:** You mentioned being in Kurdistan. How many of the refugee camps are actually in Kurdistan, and are the Kurdish forces protecting those? Are they managing and protecting those camps?

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** To the best of my knowledge, I don’t know how exactly many refugee camps there are there. Not all of them are refugee camps. Some of them will be empty buildings that are not built yet. Some will be in a church. Some will be even in some homes or gardens or in the street. There is no way to pinpoint exactly how many refugee camps are there.

**Mr. David Sweet:** These are not sophisticated United Nations refugee camps. These are makeshift groupings of people trying to huddle together to protect themselves.

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** Absolutely, and we went to some of the refugee camps that were made by the UNHCR. We went to both of them, but I can tell you that for the majority, wherever there is an empty space, they will just put people there and they will keep them there. At least they have a place to sleep.

I’m sorry, what was the second part of the question?

**Mr. David Sweet:** It was mostly about Kurdistan—

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Marston, please.

**Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome again, Reverend. You’ve been here a number of times as a witness on many fronts around the world to which you have travelled in the name of humanitarian aid. It has been really interesting for me because you are validating today some of the information that has come to the official opposition about the situation over there. Following the United States, leaving the country, Prime Minister al-Maliki turned on the people who used to support Saddam, in my understanding, and basically as well the army wasn’t being paid properly, and, as you indicated, when 1,800 to 2,000 crossed the border to invade and something like five regiments laid down their arms—

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** That’s correct.

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** Those five regiments could have put an end to it right there—

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** Absolutely, that’s correct.

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** —if it hadn’t been, in my belief, the political distortion that happened in the interim between that time and when the Americans first left.

They’ve replaced that Prime Minister now, and hopefully things will improve on that front.

You talked about aid and the need for immediate aid. Of course this group will be pleased to hear the word “accountability” in there because that’s one of the things we’d be very concerned with, how the dollars would be spent that will go over there. In a time of crisis, in any nation, they could be diverted into military even if we want them to go to humanitarian, so we have to find a way to do that.

Canada will have a limited amount of resources to put into this, whether it be military or whether it be humanitarian aid. From your perspective would you say that humanitarian aid is more important than military aid at this juncture?

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** I would say that both of them will complete each other, just to be honest and to be clear, without taking any position of any political party.

But the truth and the reality are that if there is no security on the ground, the humanitarian aid will not do anything. If the refugees are not secure, if their borders are not secure, if Kurdistan is not secure as a country and as a nation, it will not be able to aid 1.6 million refugees and displaced persons.

What I am really saying is that you cannot take both of them and divide them into two pieces. Both security and humanitarian aid have to work together and complete each other.

• (1330)

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** We have a situation where we now have Britain, the United States, and France involved. From my perspective, that’s a pretty heavy-duty military action under way already. The forces of those countries combined certainly would offset anything that Canada would even begin to put in there.

Would it not be better for us to take the humanitarian front, allowing the other nations to put the money and effort into the military side while we put the majority if not all of ours into humanitarian aid?

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** I believe that if we do it in a balanced way, we can.... The Peshmerga definitely need military aid and support, that is 100%. When we went to the front lines we spoke with the people from the Peshmerga troops and they definitely need the aid.

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** I’m not in disagreement with you on that aid going there. I’m saying the countries best positioned to do that are Britain, the U.S., and France, and I think Australia has just become involved too. I may be mistaken on that. But from a military standpoint, they’re far better equipped for advanced moves in the area, and Canada is less so inclined.

The other aspect of whether or not there are boots on the ground over there is still in debate, even in the U.S.

But for immediate action—as you said, winter is coming on—if we start the preparations and start the humanitarian aid flowing and count on the other nations to support that effort....

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** Mr. Marston, to be honest with you, I am not a military expert as well. I am scared that to answer the question would not be fair to the needs on the ground militarily.

My advice is to do it in a balanced way so both military and humanitarian aid complete each other. That's how I see it.

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** There certainly is sense to that because the humanitarian aid would need to be protected. The moment people go for the aid, they're at risk of being attacked.

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** Absolutely, yes.

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** Again, if we have limited resources to put into our aid, where would you suggest the need is most important at this juncture? Is there a place we would phase in where we would try to target our aid?

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** Of course the people are the most important. As well as giving humanitarian aid, we have to make sure the people are secure.

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** But I'm asking, where specifically in the country? Is there a group more in need than another, for instance?

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** All the groups are equally in need.

**Mr. Wayne Marston:** Okay, thank you.

**The Chair:** We'll go then to Professor Cotler next, and then we'll go back.

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

I too want to commend Reverend El Shafie for being with us and once again providing timely and compelling testimony to us today and really exposing ISIS as a case study of our responsibility to prevent and protect against mass atrocities and the targeting of religious minorities, Christians as a case study, and the genocidal actions against them.

I have two questions.

First, ISIS as you know is not just in Iraq it is also in Syria. There are those of us who said there was a need to protect minorities and provide humanitarian aid three and a half years ago when the civilian protests began in Syria, which then was confronted by the assault from the Assad regime: disappearances, torture, bombs, all the thing that we know about.

We were told at the end of the first year, when there were "only" 8,000 dead and now there are more than 200,000, that if we were to intervene then, and it didn't even have to be military—all forms of intervention—this would lead to civil war, sectarian strife, jihadists, etc. Everything we were told would happen if we intervened in my view happened because of our inaction, because we didn't intervene.

What options do we have in Syria? Because regrettably not acting when we did, are there any reasonable options?

Second, ISIS is a cruel and barbaric face of radical Islam—and I distinguish that from Islam, I want to make that clear—but it's not the only threat. We also have other radical Islamic groups, which you know only too well, whether it be al-Qaeda, al-Nusra, whether it be Hamas and Hezbollah. While one is Sunni and the other Shiite both are supported by Iran, which has boasted of arming both this summer. So the question is, one, are there any good options regarding Syria? Two, what about the other critical mass of threat?

● (1335)

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** Thank you, Mr. Cotler, for your question. As usual your question is very simple but yet very complicated.

Let's backtrack a little about ISIS and who they are. You need to understand that ISIS is a branch of al-Qaeda. The leader of ISIS is Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The leader of al-Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri, wanted ISIS to focus on their territory in Iraq. They wanted Jabhat al-Nusra, which is another branch of al-Qaeda, to focus on Syria. That's when Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi disagreed with Ayman al-Zawahiri and separated. Now ISIS has become separate from al-Qaeda. ISIS is the child of al-Qaeda but they disagreed on which territory belonged to you and which territory belonged to me.

ISIS was born, and we can see the monster right now.

With regard to the situation in Syria the world did too little too late. Now the problem is literally way bigger than us. We have two devils to deal with and we have to choose between them: the Assad regime or the two extremist groups.

The only way we can have a sense of fixing, that we can cooperate with local groups, is that we have the sense from them that maybe they are moderate enough or they have a sense of democracy or they will be able to ensure protection of minorities. However, history teaches us, especially American history, that this is really a tricky game because America supported Osama bin Laden during the mujahedeen war in Afghanistan and turned against him. It supported Saddam Hussein during the Iranian war, the first Arab Gulf war, and turned against him. It supported the rebels in Libya who killed their American ambassador three months later.

The truth and the reality are we have to choose the only solution, that we work with local groups that we trust. I will not name them because I simply don't trust any of them. We have to work with local groups to be able to get out of the problem in Syria.

That's my simple answer. I hope this answer helps you.

**Hon. Irwin Cotler:** Yes. If you have a moment, could you comment on what I said about the critical mass of threat from radical, violent Islam, apart from the ISIS or al-Qaeda threat, the overall threat?

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** On the overall threat, which is the extremists, we have to understand the story from the beginning, when the so-called Arab Spring started. Now we are discovering that the Arab Spring turned out to be a cold, deadly winter.

We're all against the dictatorships—please don't misunderstand me. We're all against Mubarak, Gadhafi, Ali Abdullah Saleh, Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia. We're all against all of these dictatorships.

The problem is that when you take a dictatorship out you create a political vacuum. Who is using this political vacuum? The extremists. That's what we saw happen in Libya. That's what we saw happen in Egypt when the Muslim Brotherhood took over.

The extremists will only be defeated if we have the separation between religion and state. That's the only way to establish democracy in the Middle East, to have the separation between religion and state, and to have freedom of religion for minorities and to protect minorities.

Right now, because the political vacuum was created, the extremists will increase and their influence will increase for one simple reason: there is no education. If we are talking about Egyptian society, 30% to 40% of Egyptians are illiterate. They don't know how to write or read their own name. Even if you reform the constitution, the Egyptians don't know what they're voting about, so they will follow the man who comes with an appeal and says, follow me so you can go to heaven. That's exactly what's happened. Education, education, education to defeat the extremists in our Middle Eastern land.

• (1340)

**Hon. Irwin Cotler:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you. We're out of time for that round.

We go now to Ms. Grewal, please.

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

Thank you, Mr. El Shafie, for your time today. I deeply appreciate your passion and your commitment to fighting for the rights of religious minorities.

Past Prime Minister of Iraq, Nouri al-Maliki, is blamed for creating favourable conditions for the formation of the Islamic State by ostracizing the Sunni Muslim community there through sectarian policies that favoured the Shia minority.

In what way do you see that economic hardship and political apathy for Sunni Muslims in Iraq are linked to the formation of the Islamic state, and how does that get addressed? What changes need to be made politically? Do you think that more favourable treatment of Sunnis would get rid of the support that the Islamic State seems to have?

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** If we are just talking about the situation in Iraq, I believe that mainly because the Maliki government, which is majority Shia, mistreated the Sunnis—and the other minorities, not just the Sunnis—we see that the Sunnis, as I mentioned before, had to cooperate with ISIS in order to get rid of this injustice they faced for the last 10 years.

I believe that if the Shia government started to deal with a reconciliation process, where they can include not just the Sunnis but other minorities such as the Christians, Yazidis, Mandaeans, whoever they are.... One of the requests of the Christian community, some of the Christian community in Iraq, for example, in the Kurdish area, is that they be self-governing to protect themselves.

This will maybe answer part of the question Mr. David Sweet asked me about whether the Kurdish troops protected the Christians there or not. You need to remember that in the beginning when ISIS entered Kurdistan, many of the Kurdish troops left the minorities behind and they left. They withdrew without even warning the minorities. The Yazidis were left behind. The Christians were left

behind. That's how ISIS was able to do a lot of damage to them, because the Peshmerga did not protect them in the beginning.

We have to bring the situation in Iraq to reconciliation, not just with the Sunnis but with all the minorities, together with the majority. After we settle and after we have this peace and reconciliation, which is very similar to what's happened in Lebanon—the Taif Agreement, in 1988, I believe—after the reconciliation takes place, in the areas where there are minorities, if they can have international troops to ensure their safety, like peacekeeping troops, that's the only way they will return home because then they will feel secure and they will reject ISIS.

**Mrs. Nina Grewal:** I understand the new Prime Minister, Haider al-Abadi, is from the same political party as al-Maliki.

• (1345)

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** That's correct.

**Mrs. Nina Grewal:** So how are the two different from one another? Is al-Abadi a positive change for Iraq's religious minorities there?

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** So far I don't see any difference yet, to be honest with you; al-Abadi is talking the talk. Just when he will walk the walk is a different story.

The difference here is that they learn the lesson. They saw ISIS take over 40% of their country. They saw Mosul collapsing. The lesson now has been learned, and let's hope it has been learned forever, not just for a period of time and after that the Shia government will repeat its mistake.

There is one thing I know. In many cases in history, human beings repeat their mistakes. What's the definition of insanity? It's repeating the same action and expecting a different outcome.

Over and over we saw the Iraqi government acting in an insane way, and I hope this is not the case.

**Mrs. Nina Grewal:** Mr. Chair, do I have some more time left?

**The Chair:** You have one more minute.

**Mrs. Nina Grewal:** The Islamic State has caused mass general displacement for people in Iraq. Can you elaborate on various religious minority groups that have moved: Christians, Yazidis, and other minorities that fled to different parts of Iraq and are now safer from persecution?

Are they still living in a territory that is controlled by the Islamic State? What is being done to protect food and provide relief for these people? What can Canada do to help in this area?

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** The ones who were able to escape to Kurdistan obviously are under the protection of the Kurdish government. We can help them on the ground, as I said, with shelters and medication, and secure their return home.

The ones who still remain in ISIS territory will be given three options: convert to Islam, be killed, or pay extra taxes. If they don't they will collect their women, and sell them for \$20 apiece. They will kill their children, and they will crucify them. That's what's happening to them right now.

**Mrs. Nina Grewal:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Let's go now to Mr. Benskin.



**Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you. This is my first time meeting you and hearing from you. Your knowledge and the information you bring to the table is invaluable.

I want to pursue a bit of the line of questioning of my earlier colleagues. I am by no means a military strategist, but as a former martial artist, we look at two options: you have an offensive posture and a defensive posture.

For me in this situation the offensive posture would be, as you were saying, attacking the financial support of those governments or penalizing those governments that are supporting ISIS, attacking the oil fields and cutting off the lifeline.

The defensive posture I look at as being along the lines of what my colleague Mr. Marston was talking about in terms of humanitarian aid. I agree with you wholeheartedly there is a double element to that humanitarian aid. There is the need to provide the assistance, be it medicine or shelter. There also is the need to defend that, to make sure those supplies get to the refugee centres, to make sure the refugee centres are protected against any kind of invasion, any kind of situation where people are held hostage by nefarious means.

Would you elaborate on how Canada could possibly play that defensive position in terms of making sure refugees are protected, that the food, the medical aid they need, does get to them so things do not disintegrate in those centres?

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** First of all, you have a Canadian embassy and you have ambassadors. By the way, we met with the Canadian ambassador there, and he is doing a great job. He is going everywhere. Usually the Canadian ambassador is sitting in their office doing nothing. Sorry, did I say that out loud? I'm sorry. This is on the record.

In this case, the Canadian ambassador in Iraq is doing a great job. He is going everywhere, ensuring that there is communication, and he sees the situation on the ground. He went to Dohuk, which is on the border with Mosul. He is a very brave man, and I'm very proud of him as a Canadian ambassador to our country there.

Your embassies have to be your eyes in this area to ensure that the aid reaches the right people. When you are giving Kurdistan the aid, giving governments the aid, I can assure you it doesn't matter what government it is. Whether it is the central government of Iraq or the Kurdish government, I can assure you that there is corruption on the ground. I can assure you. There is no way around it.

With respect to the part that goes to the government, the Canadian embassy and our Canadian staffers have to know which project, and they have to visit this project. They have to see what's happening, to go there unannounced. You don't have to go to the minister to tell him you're going to see the project today; just grab your car and go there to see what's happening.

Accountability is number one, and it has to come from our embassy and staffers.

Number two, there are many organizations that can be Canadian organizations, but they have ground there. One of them is Mr. Medlum Merogi, and he has an organization on the ground. Mr.

Merogi was my hands and feet on the ground there. He is under Canadian law, so we can hold him accountable. That's just an example; I'm not pointing at anybody. I'm saying as an example that we can have a Canadian organization that goes to do the work there and is accountable to us. It can be local, such as with his Iraqi background, and we can cooperate with it to ensure that the aid reaches the people. When you just give it to the government and you leave it, that's a waste of money.

• (1350)

**Mr. Tyrone Benskin:** Thank you.

It's more of a comment than anything, but you were talking about the separation of church and state. I think we can break that down into its simplest form as something that every country, including Canada, has experienced for better or for worse throughout its history, and that's inclusion.

We see this a lot in African nations, where there are so many different so-called ethnic minorities in a given space that they don't always feel included. It has led to some atrocious acts in various countries. It's the same kind of thing that's happening here, and I'm not talking about ISIS as far as justification. I'm talking about what you were talking about in terms of what needs to happen in Iraq to begin to turn that around, which is inclusion, so that everybody feels they are a part of the decision-making process and they have a say in what happens to them.

Would you think that is a reasonable assumption or characterization?

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** I agree with you.

When we start the reconciliation process in Iraq, the main problem is that there are two ways they will go. The first way is that they will have a meeting like this, where they will serve tea and coffee and take some pictures and put it in the media, and the minute you leave it will be over. This will have been a nice meeting where they take pictures, but nothing will really take place. They will choose from the Sunni leaders or the Christian leaders or the Yazidi leaders, who are also corrupted. Basically, they will bribe them to keep them quiet and that would be the end.

That is one way. That's the fear, that this will take place.

The other way is that you sit down with other countries and other governments under an international umbrella. It could be under the UN umbrella. For example, let's say that's what needs to take place; here is the election of reconciliation, and these are the steps you have to take on the ground. If you are serious about healing the wound of the country of Iraq and the nation of Iraq, it doesn't matter who they are. You see, I believe that religion is between you and God, but your nationality as an Iraqi is between you and your nation. Iraq belongs to all Iraqis, not Christians, not Yazidis, not Shiites, not Sunnis. Iraq belongs to all Iraqis.

If you are serious about that, you have to have an international umbrella, international monitoring, to ensure the process of reconciliation is taking place with a serious recommendation. If Iraq's Shia majority government is serious about this, they will work with the international community and their locals to ensure that this will happen.

Thank you.

• (1355)

**The Chair:** Mr. Schellenberger, you will be our last questioner.

**Mr. Gary Schellenberger (Perth—Wellington, CPC):** Thank you.

Reverend, it's been great to hear your insight today, and I'm very pleased for that.

As you stated, minorities are given three choices, but the end result is Muslim or death. Do we call this war in Iraq and Syria a religious war, or what term should we use for this conflict? I have asked other witnesses and have been told that this is not a religious war, but I am confused when a person is beheaded in the name of Allah.

Is this a religious war, or how should we—

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** Yes, it is a religious war.

The people who tell you it's not a religious war say that because they are politically correct.

One of the main cancers in our Canadian society is political correctness.

**Mr. Gary Schellenberger:** How should one engage a religious extremist to incentivize them to tolerate religious minorities and their freedoms? Is this achievable in Iraq today?

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** By the Iraqi government, by ISIS, by who?

**Mr. Gary Schellenberger:** By the world.

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** By the world, to achieve religious tolerance in Iraq.

**Mr. Gary Schellenberger:** Yes, tolerance.

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** You can see this religious tolerance happening in Kurdistan, and maybe we can support this. Now, I am not saying that the Kurdish government is an angel and is doing everything right. Please don't misunderstand me. At Christmas a few years ago, Christians in Kurdistan were attacked for four hours. The Kurdish police did not stop to help them at all. I just need to be clear, because I am not here to paint it as a perfect country; it is not a perfect country.

But I believe that religious tolerance is achievable in two ways in Iraq, or anywhere else in the world. Number one is by education. I'm not talking just about education of this generation, I'm talking about education for the next generation. You can see this example in Kurdistan to a great degree.

Number two is that we have to connect our aid and our international trade to the improvement of human rights in these

countries. We have to do that. I'm not saying to use it as a weapon. I'm saying to use it as giving a hand. I'm not saying to cut the aid completely and fully. All I'm saying is, "I will increase my aid to you, I will increase my international trade with you, if the human rights conditions are improved in your country. If you have women's rights, I will give you more aid, and I will do more business with you. If the rights of minorities are protected, if the rights of children are protected, if you are really fighting human trafficking, and if you are really protecting your environment..." It's all of this.

If we can connect our aid and international trade to the improvement of human rights and other matters in these countries, you will see a huge difference, because every government needs aid, and they need international trade. Hurt them in their pockets, and they will listen.

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

I'm going to stop with that to give you your final remarks.

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** Thank you, and I thank you once again for the opportunity.

I want to acknowledge Mr. Brad Butt, who came with me to Iraq; I'm very thankful to him. I want to acknowledge Mr. David Sweet, who has always been a great supporter of our cause. I want to acknowledge Mr. Wayne Marston, who I consider very close and a dear friend to my heart. Mr. Irwin Cotler is not here, but I leave the best for the last, Ms. Elizabeth May, I thank you so much for coming here. I really appreciate it.

These are my closing remarks. Regardless of our political differences: Conservative, Liberal, NDP, or Green—and I watched the debate in the Canadian Parliament every day—I can assure you these people don't care if you're a Conservative, a Liberal, NDP, or Green. It's as simple as that, so we have to move fast to help the people on the ground.

I used to be one of them. I used to be in prison and I still carry the scars on my body for my Christian beliefs. I am honoured to carry them as medals of honour. If there is one thing I know about Canada, as a person who came to this country as a refugee, I know that Canada is a temple of human rights. I know that Canada is the conscience of our world, and I know that our world is a dark and unfair place. It's not because of people who have done evil, but because of the people who remain silent about it. In the absence of light, darkness prevails. If there is one thing I learned when I was in prison in Egypt, you can always kill the dreamers but no one can kill the dream.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for having me.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear!

• (1400)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Reverend El Shafie.

That concludes our business for today, unless honourable members have anything administrative to bring up.

We are done, and we are adjourned. Thank you very much.







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