HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

CIMM • NUMBER 127 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, October 23, 2018

Chair

Mr. Robert Oliphant

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

Tuesday, October 23, 2018

● (1535)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.)): I am going to call this meeting to order, which is 127th meeting of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) we are studying migration challenges and opportunities for Canada in the 21st century.

We thank all the witnesses for joining us. It's very late in Kampala tonight. We're very pleased that you're able to join us. In this first round, we have about 50 minutes. We're going to hear from our witnesses who are each going to present their stories, concerns or thoughts for this committee, as we engage in a study on people who are on the move, either being forced to move from their homes or choosing to move from their homes.

We're going to start with the Angels Refugee Support Group Association for the first presentation. You are given between seven and 10 minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bibe Kalalu (President, Angels Refugee Support Group Association): Good evening, everyone.

My name is Bibe Kalalu and I am the President of the Angels Refugee Support Group Association, an organization created in Uganda in 2009 in response to the discrimination and persecution of LGBT nationals in Uganda, as well as LGBT persons from the African Great Lakes countries and East Africa.

I am a Congolese refugee and a member of the LGBT community in Uganda.

I want to tell you why LGBT refugees in Uganda suffer a great deal because of their gender identity and the kind of problems this leads to.

First of all, Uganda is an extremely homophobic country where LGBT persons are constantly under tension or subject to prosecution.

In the next seven minutes, I will address four points.

First, there is a lot of discrimination against LGBT persons in the health sector. In Uganda, health services for LGBT persons are very poor, and no hospitals will treat LGBT refugees.

Second, for safety reasons, the refugee community in Uganda does not work with LGBT refugees.

Third, LGBT persons cannot find work and do not receive any assistance.

Fourth, Uganda refuses to grant refugee status to LGBT refugees living in the country and denies their refugee claims. This affects us a great deal.

I will now turn it over to my colleague and will resume my presentation thereafter.

[*English*]

Witness 1 (As an Individual): Thank you very much. I don't know if this is my time yet. Maybe I will have to wait.

The Chair: Go ahead. You can share this time as you like, if you want to both take some time and go back to each other, that's fine as well.

Witness 1: Thank you for this opportunity that is given to me and Rainbow Heritage Initiative, which is an organization for LGBTI refugees and asylum seekers here in Uganda.

For security reasons, I prefer to be called Witness 1 in this conference room. I'm going to share some challenges we are facing here in Uganda as LGBTI refugees and asylum seekers.

Point one of my testimony is about claiming asylum based on gender, identity and sexual orientation. The ability to claim asylum based on gender identity or sex orientation is essential; however, it is a challenge for LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees, because if you claim asylum based on your gender or sexual orientation, you risk being arrested immediately.

Currently, our organization has six members from Burundi and Rwanda without asylum documents or refugee status. This issue was shared with UNHCR and OPM, but it is like waiting in vain. As an organization, we are feeling weak and frustrated. We fear there is nothing we can do for our members unless we raise our voices.

It is a huge problem, because for some members if they go to the police, as a starting point, and claim asylum based on gender identity or sexual orientation, they can be arrested immediately. We have tangible examples of some who have been released after being detained. They went back to their home countries, and we don't know if they're still alive or not.

Point two is my personal experience of an LGBTI refugee in Uganda, a transgender man who came from Rwanda. I left my home country in 2010 following a period of detention and torture as a result of being an LGBTI person. I spent four years without a valid document and during that period I had no.... I was not allowed to get refugee I.D. Then I had been sexually and physically assaulted several times by a neighbour. Certainly, I could not report that case, because I had no document that would allow me to report it, and I could have been arrested.

I didn't get any assistance due to that, and I spent more than four years waiting to be resettled. It is not a happy life. There is a time of misery and a painful life.

Point three is about resettlement. In Uganda, we have three durable solutions including voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement. When it comes to voluntary repatriation, it is risky. Members can't go back because they fled violence, persecution and discrimination. They risk being killed.

The second option of a durable solution is local integration, which is totally impossible here in Uganda because of the high level of homophobia that is found everywhere.

The third one, which remains a unique durable solution to rescue LGBTI refugees, is really resettlement.

● (1540)

The government of Uganda and the police are against homosexuality. If humanitarian actors try to help, they are silenced by the government, because if you try to or give any assistance to LGBTI people, it is labelled as promotion of homosexuality.

Let me go quickly to the last point, which is on the recommendations.

The first recommendation is that we are requesting the Canadian Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration to talk to the government authorities of Uganda and put pressure on them to change their current practice, because when foreign aid is cut off, they take their frustration out on us, being very homophobic in the name of defending African values.

The second recommendation is to request that the Canadian standing committee put pressure on countries who have missionaries coming to Africa, like religious leaders, for instance, Scott Lively who came and promoted hate in Africa. Even abroad, these people have to obey the laws of the United States. We are requesting Canada to start discussions with the United States to see how this can stop.

The third one is for the standing committee to talk again to OPM and request that LGBTI refugees be granted refugee status. They need to have freedom of rights under the 2006 act, as do other non-LGBTI need to enjoy freedom and their rights.

The last point is to request the Canadian standing committee to talk to different countries and tell them to open the door for LGBTI refugees who are living here in Uganda, because our lives are in danger. We can inform Canada and the UNHCR that it is not safe, and it is like torture to spend more than two years.... Some of us have spent already 10 years and more, and there is risk. At the end, you leave Uganda when you have been harassed, you have been arrested many times, and sometimes people are dying in this way. They leave when their lives have been already affected.

Thank you so much for listening to us.

● (1545)

The Chair: Thank you both.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for your presentations and for sharing your story.

[*English*]

We're going to begin with Mr. Sarai.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Thank you for being brave enough to come to speak to us. I want to commend you, Witness 1, as well as your colleague, in bringing this to our attention.

As you know, we're trying to study migration and migration patterns. We're very well aware of your plight. Some of our members have travelled to Africa and witnessed first-hand the camps there, as well as some of the challenges you face.

In terms of questions, I'm going to start backwards.

You had a recommendation, and I'm going to ask you for clarification. You said that you wanted Canada to pressure the U.S. and others, or that the U.S. had some law in terms of missionaries and what they say when they're preaching.

Can you clarify that? I need to know what your request is more clearly.

[*Translation*]

Witness 1: I was referring to the specific example surrounding Scott Lively's arrival in Uganda, in 2009. After he left, laws were enacted to condemn homosexuality. That is when LGBT persons started having a lot of problems.

So we asked Canada to appeal to the United States to take steps to stop homophobic remarks that engender hate. That is what I was referring to.

I hope that is clearer.

[*English*]

Mr. Randeep Sarai: I get that now. That's what I was trying to figure out.

My second question is based on your fourth recommendation for Canada and other friendly countries to convince Uganda to be more tolerant and not to be homophobic. Can you tell me of countries within Africa that are more friendly to the LGBTQ community? That would help us with building allies.

Which others have demonstrated more tolerant values on the continent of Africa?

[*Translation*]

Witness 1: My colleague will answer, but I might want to clarify some things after.

Mr. Bibe Kalalu: There are no countries in Africa that encourage homosexuality. It is false, totally false to claim that certain countries are tolerant. In all African countries, people are taught that homosexuality is taboo. When I say “taboo”, that means that something is impure. This attitude is evident all over Africa: a homosexual is never considered a moral and physical person. All LGBT persons who leave their country are subject to discrimination, and that starts in their family. It is also evident in government and in the population.

What we are recommending to major powers such as Canada and the United States is to define what an LGBT person is and to protect our community. LGBT issues have to be continually raised with African governments. They are the ones who encourage the population to reject LGBT persons. Institutions such as governments and churches say that all homosexuals are taboo. That leads to the question: what is taboo?

Like all human beings, homosexuals are created by God. These individual do not choose to be homosexual, but they are taboo. Even if you ask 1,000 doctors, 1,000 pastors and 1,000 heads of state to change a person's gender identity, it cannot be done. It is impossible.

Major powers such as Canada that visit Africa have to use the opportunity to educate African governments appropriately about the LGBT community. They must explain who we are and what we are.

● (1550)

[*English*]

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Do you also want to say something? Please be brief, if you don't mind. I have a couple of questions.

[*Translation*]

Witness 1: Yes.

I wanted to add that we are presenting our grievances to Canada because you have compassion for us.

To get back to your question, Scandinavian countries such as Sweden, Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands show they are compassionate. It is not a question of friendship, but something that comes from the heart.

Right now, Uganda's approach to LGBT issues is exaggerated.

[*English*]

Mr. Randeep Sarai: You said that the refugee community doesn't work with the LGBTQ community. Can you say how they don't? Is it the UNHCR officials who don't work with you? Is it the Ugandan government officials who don't recognize or work with you, or is it both?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bibe Kalalu: That is completely normal: the government leads the country and makes the decisions.

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees, or HCR, wants to help LGBT persons, but it cannot help those whose asylum claim has been denied by the Ugandan government. A person who is transgender, lesbian or gay will have their asylum claim automatically denied because the police know they belong to that community. They have no right to government assistance.

The HCR is subject to the authority of the Ugandan government, which has the final say on matters involving LGBT persons. It influences the churches and the population. It influences everything.

LGBT refugees and Ugandan LGBT persons need access to health services and the labour market in Uganda.

These are great challenges that we are facing; they come from governments and also affect the organizations. That is the problem.

[*English*]

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Thank you.

The Chair: Up next we have Mr. Tilson.

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Thank you. I have one question, and then Ms. Rempel will take over.

I have a constituent who is from Nigeria, and he is gay. He was married, and his former wife and family have threatened to kill him if he returns to Nigeria because he's gay. This is Nigeria, mind you, not Uganda. The Nigerian government has similar laws to Uganda.

My question is mainly to help me because he may be deported back to Nigeria as early as next week, and we're trying to stop that. What happens in Uganda if the authorities or the government determine that someone is gay? What would happen to that person, and what are the penalties?

● (1555)

Witness 1: Currently the penalty is death, in cases when they find you in action. They can raise their allegations, which we are always victims of, because even if you are moving or based on how you're putting on your clothes, there are so many reasons they can put you in trouble. I am very sorry for that person because he might be killed.

Mr. David Tilson: By the government...?

Witness 1: Yes, by the government, by mob justice, or by the police. It can be anyone because this is like sensitization or mobilization of the population, the police, and everyone in the country.

Mr. David Tilson: Ms. Rempel.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): You've raised some concerns about the danger and threat to the lives of LGBTQI members when they file for refugee status. Can you outline some of the potential threats or harms related to the specific steps in the process of applying for refugee status in Uganda with the UNHCR?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bibe Kalalu: To claim refugee status, a person must first go to the police who are responsible for receiving refugees. It is the police in the intelligence service. When a person approaches them, they are investigated and, if their gender identity is discovered, their claim is automatically denied, without warning, assistance or negotiation. The majority of LGBT persons living in Uganda do not have refugee status. We have been wondering how we could obtain it. Some have been lucky and were granted it, but that is not the case for the majority. It is at the interview stage with the police from the intelligence service that refugee status applications are flatly denied.

HCR officials say they are bound by Ugandan law and encourage us to go to the police. Yet the police and the prime minister of Uganda do not want to grant asylum to LGBT persons, even if they are in a very deep abyss. An LGBT person who leaves their country cannot obtain that status. It is very difficult to obtain because of our LGBT orientation.

Witness 1: I would like to add something, if I may.

In terms of the steps in the process, first the person has to go to the police, then to the prime minister's office, or meet with police officers. A person who is finally granted refugee status is no longer considered an asylum seeker. It is at that point that they can typically appeal to the HCR.

I said, however, that certain persons from Rwanda and Burundi were victims of the homeland policy. For example, Rwanda is considered a politically stable country, and the conflict in Burundi is not really recognized by other countries. When those people arrive in Uganda, they continue to be subject to homophobia there. That is why many people do not obtain refugee status or the documents provided to asylum seekers.

Thank you very much.

● (1600)

[*English*]

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Quickly with the time I have remaining, the UNHCR says they have a process for complaints related to discrimination.

Do you have faith in that process, given your lived experience?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bibe Kalalu: I want to mention three things about the asylum claim process. Even if your refugee claim is denied upon review of your file because you are an LGBT person, the HCR can still plead your case and help you find a third country if you were deemed an asylum seeker, even if you were not granted refugee status.

On the other hand, the HCR cannot appeal to the police or the prime minister's office to grant you asylum seeker or refugee status. We have already negotiated with the HCR about that. We have a number of witnesses, like those nine LGBT refugees who left Kenya, Burundi and Rwanda, and who have had a lot of problems recently. Six or seven months ago, some of them were arrested, others were beaten up and harassed and their rights were violated. It was a disaster. We pleaded their case to the HCR, which tried to negotiate with the prime minister, but that has been to no avail as of yet.

Witness 1: I want to add that there have been bilateral meetings between the prime minister's office and the HCR. The organization Interaid also took part in those meetings recently as an implementation partner, but there have been no tangible results. The HCR bravely shows its willingness to help LGBT persons. Owing to current pressure by the government, however, the speaker of Parliament, Ms. Kadaga still refuses any debate about LGBT persons. This hurts us; our hearts are bleeding.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Madam Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to recognize that my colleague Randall Garrison, who has been the NDP critic on this file for many years, a staunch advocate on the issue, is here to observe this meeting as well.

I'd like to thank our witnesses today for your courage and for your ongoing advocacy in what you do in Uganda.

I come today with some understanding of the challenges you face from this perspective. On October 17, at the 139th IPU Assembly meeting, in fact, a motion was put forward to try to recognize the rights of the LGBTQI community members. It was met with hostility. I think that's a very gentle word to describe the response from the Ugandan representative. I will just put on the record a quote. He said, “We shall continue to fight the LGBT issues on the international level until people here appreciate that same-sex is inhuman and anti-culture”. That's a direct quote from representative Francis, at the meeting.

To get a sense of the hostility, the challenges and the risks you face as a community there, I think we get a glimpse of that.

On that note, in terms of what Canada can do to advocate at the international level, I think it is fair enough to say that everybody at this committee will advocate for that and want our country and our government to do that.

In terms of specific actions, do you have any specific piece? You suggested talking to the United States. The United States is a bit of a challenge, and I don't want to go into details about that. Are there specific aspects, for example, a meeting we can go to, a motion perhaps that could be passed in the House of Commons, or anything to that effect, that would assist the situation and lend support and voice to you?

● (1605)

[*Translation*]

Witness 1: Thank you very much, Ms. Kwan.

It is very difficult for us because we are doubly victimized. Uganda is a very conservative country that focuses a great deal on culture. I do not know how to explain it. Perhaps Ms. Kadaga is hurting us to appeal to voters, or so she can do whatever she can or wants to do. That is doubly harmful to us because we had to leave our homeland to come here. The United Nations consistently calls for us to be treated like human beings, but she refuses, which has an impact on Parliament, on the population, and on police services.

This affects us a great deal. Someone asked if this also has an impact on the HCR. It does, and it affects the work of its officials. We would appreciate it if you could please negotiate with whomever to put an end to this.

Mr. Bibe Kalalu: I will also comment on that.

You may recall that we used to work with the Refugee Project. That organization defended LGBT persons in Uganda, but that protection led to the closing of refugee offices for a whole year. That was a shock, and the Refugee Project faced a lot of problems. The Refugee Project tried to do more for LGBT persons living in Uganda. We did a lot of serious work with that organization in the past, but it is difficult now.

The Refugee Project focuses especially on health and protection. In the past, if a person was arrested, the organization could send a lawyer to help them. At this time, the Refugee Project cannot provide legal assistance to a person who is arbitrarily arrested. We have sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV, and other health problems. So if an LGBT person goes to any hospital and admits to being LGBT, they are turned away. We are turned away everywhere. We used to do a lot of work with the Refugee Project, on 80% of cases. Now we are only working with them on 3% of our current cases.

We are starting to suffer in terms of safety and health care.

[*English*]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'm going to ask one more question. I think I'm going to run out of time very quickly.

When we travelled as a committee to Uganda, one of the issues, at least for me, was that, in speaking with one representative from the UNHCR, when I asked them how safe Uganda was for the members of LGBTQI community, the response was, “If people didn't flaunt their gayness, they would be safe.”

From that perspective, I don't know how.... Anyway, I won't go into that comment.

I guess on this question around resettlement, how can you, given those circumstances, go to the UNHCR and make your application? You highlighted some of those challenges.

Would you recommend for Canada to come forward with a special initiative to prioritize LGBTQI members from what we call individuals who have been persecuted in their own country who are internally displaced, such as the LGBTQI community, as a separate strain for resettlement to Canada so that we can have that dealt with by the UNHCR in a different way, hopefully, to provide some support to the members there?

● (1610)

[*Translation*]

Witness 1: Thank you very much.

That is right. That is what we want above all else. On July 12, we had a meeting with officials from the Protection Desk Uganda. For a long time, I have been asking for LGBT persons to be treated as persons with specific needs. Why? Because LGBT people are rejected all over the world and have to lock themselves in their homes to avoid being attacked and dealing with problems outside.

How can a person hide their homosexuality? LGBT persons have to live their lives. They have to talk to their neighbours, go to the market or the hospital. It is completely impossible. I think you can negotiate with the officials to give priority to LGBT persons because they are really not treated like other people. I mentioned the Refugee Act, adopted in 2006. Our needs related to employment, freedom and fundamental rights have to be considered. We have never experienced that as LGBT refugees. Members of the LGBT community want to be treated like everyone else.

Mr. Bibe Kalalu: I would like to add something and go back to the question you asked the HCR official. If a person conceals their gender identity, they can indeed receive assistance. If a person is tall, how can they be short? If a person is fat, how can they be thin? How can a person hide their pregnancy and become thin? If they are born that way, how can they change or hide it? It is difficult. People cannot hide their gender identity. The body has to be what it is, just as you do. Being an LGBT person is not a crime. It does not make you a thief. An LGBT person is not a speck of dust without value. This is why we are seeking protection and financial assistance from you.

It is also a health issue. In Uganda, we really have a lot of health problems. For LGBT persons who become ill, the situation becomes desperate. Many of us die, lose our lives for nothing, here in Uganda. Access to health care and the labour market are among the problems we face because of our gender identity. If we go work somewhere and people find out we are LGBT, we are fired automatically without being paid. It becomes difficult. In fact, it becomes a crime.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Mr. Whalen.

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Thank you very much for coming.

Just to get a little more information from the Angels Refugee Support Group Association, how many people does your group support?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bibe Kalalu: Thank you very much for the question.

The members of the Angels Refugee Support Group Association work in several parts of Uganda: in Kampala, at the Kyaka II and Nakivale refugee camps, and in the Hoima district. There are currently 55 of us in Kampala, 35 at the Nakivale camp, 40 at the Kyaka II camp and 25 in Hoima. I am referring to persons who identify as members of the LGBT community right now. There are other persons who continue to identify as such. There are more than 150 LGBT persons living in Uganda.

● (1615)

[*English*]

Mr. Nick Whalen: Do you have an estimate of how many LGBTI refugees there are in the camps?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bibe Kalalu: There are three refugee camps, some in the capital of Kampala. Several of our members are in the camps in Kampala, Kyaka II, Nakivale and Hoima. Here in Kampala, there are 55 of us, there are 45 in Nakivale, 35 in Hoima, and 32 in Kyangwali.

It is 11:30 p.m. We got three very urgent cases. After this meeting, I am going to the Nakivale camps because there have been some arrests. I will be going today and very early tomorrow morning.

[*English*]

Mr. Nick Whalen: In terms of ethnic Ugandans who are also LGBTI, does your group provide any support to them if they find themselves displaced as well?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bibe Kalalu: Can you repeat the question, please?

[*English*]

Mr. Nick Whalen: Does your organization provide any support to ethnic Ugandans who are also being persecuted because of their sexual orientation or their gender?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bibe Kalalu: Yes, some Ugandans use our organization because there are no Ugandan organizations to help them.

We work with Ugandan organizations. In Uganda, there are a lot of organizations that help LGBT persons and that also have a lot of members. People reach out to our organization and refugee organizations for counselling, guidance and advice.

[*English*]

Mr. Nick Whalen: Canada has a rainbow refugee assistance pilot program that it offers in connection with a group in Vancouver. Since 2011, the federal government has assisted that group in privately sponsoring refugees from the LGBTI community. Has your organization ever participated in their programs to privately sponsor refugees from Uganda?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bibe Kalalu: No, no, no. There are a lot of organizations in Uganda that protect LGBT persons, but when LGBT refugees approach them, they are told they do not work with refugees. This creates confusion. It is the same thing when we ask for services or help: the organization officials tell us they do not work with refugees.

Witness 1: I would like to add something.

One of our members made statements to the media. She works with Rainbow Railroad, and I would like to thank Rainbow Railroad very much. I helped her during that process, but it took us some time to get involved. From time to time, she has problems because everyone knows her now.

In any case, we need mutual assistance on immigration. You have to look at how you can get involved to solve our members' urgent problems.

[*English*]

Mr. Nick Whalen: In terms of your involvement with Canada as compared to other countries that your organizations have worked with to place LGBTI refugees for resettlement in those other countries, what other suggestions might you make for Canada to adopt other best practices?

● (1620)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bibe Kalalu: First of all, thank you very much for the question.

I would ask you to focus on emergency measures and the resettlement of LGBT refugees living in Uganda. I would ask you to provide assistance very quickly, along with funding and resettlement services.

In addition, it takes at least 18 to 20 months to get a visa from a country such as Canada. In the meantime, we are waiting and suffering here in Uganda. If you can speed the visa process up, that could make it easier for us to leave the country. There are a lot of challenges for us in this country. Canada needs to help organizations that look after LGBT persons, especially in terms of health and safety.

Those are our recommendations.

Witness 1: I would like to add a suggestion.

LGBT refugees who have documents are assisted by the HCR and other humanitarian agencies. But who helps the people who have no documents, those without papers? You can think of them. If it does not work with the HCR and the government, perhaps you can think of other ways of preventing asylum seekers from dying before our very eyes.

You are in a better position to think of something than we are; you can expand the possibilities better than we can. We are constantly under pressure because we are at risk of dying.

Canada is a big country. We thank you, but we want you to keep thinking of us. We commend you for your courage to take action and help us quickly, very quickly, compared to other countries. We have been contacted many embassies and delegations, and your concern for our difficulties has been touching.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Maguire.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank you both for your time as witnesses this evening, in your area of the world, or this afternoon, here in Canada.

Witness 1, you indicated that you had moved. You left your home country to come to Uganda.

When was that? How long ago was that?

[*Translation*]

Witness 1: That was over eight years ago. I have lived here since August 2010.

Mr. Bibe Kalalu: I have lived here since March 2007.

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thank you.

I was one of the committee members who were in Tanzania and Uganda. I met with your organizations last summer, in June, and I heard your desperation with your situation, similar to that of many other refugees from other countries around Uganda as well.

When you speak of the opportunity or the right to come to other areas of the world or to seek better safety where you are, what is your priority? Is it to remove yourselves from those areas, or, in the larger scheme of things, how can Canada help raise the issue of making it safer for you, not only in your home country but in Uganda where you are?

[*Translation*]

Witness 1: On behalf of our homeland, thank you very much.

The secretary general of the International Organization of La Francophonie, or OIF, comes from our country. This will be discussed and perhaps people will think of LGBT people. It is not our fault for being what we are; it is how we were created.

I was caught in the U.S. more than four years ago. I was a victim of the current U.S. policy. For over four years, I endured other threats. There was the incident at Club Venom, in 2016. I was affected by that, and that is why I had the courage to keep fighting. I created the Rainbow Heritage Network because of the injustice suffered by refugees in Uganda.

That was more than four years ago. I might go to the U.S. soon, or not. I do not know what will happen there.

[*English*]

I don't know what the future is holding,

[*Translation*]

because LGBT persons are still under threat.

● (1625)

Mr. Bibe Kalalu: I would also like to say something.

We would like to say that the priorities for your country should be as follows.

First, you have to see how you can prioritize the resettlement of LGBT persons, because we are suffering here.

Second, you need to invest in initiatives to protect the health and safety of LGBT refugees.

Third, you have to try to talk to the Ugandan government to reduce the suffering of LGBT persons, to help solve problems. They are also threatened, not only in Uganda, but also in Congo, Nigeria and all African countries. These could be your priorities.

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thank you.

I have another question in regard to that.

I made notes that you indicated that in the process you go through when you're getting your orientation to leave, one of things you have to do to start the refugee process is that you have to go to police and you have to be examined. If your orientation is discovered, then you're blocked. The police are not the most favourable to be the ones to go to in your situation.

Is there a situation that could come about whereby...? The UNHCR right now has to rely on the police documents. How could we change that?

[*Translation*]

Witness 1: We have very limited resources. We have only our voices to discourage this. We are truly limited. Once again, we are the victims of our homeland's policy. Since Rwanda is a politically stable country, we do not dare claim a political reason. We do not dare say we are LGBT because we could be arrested immediately.

If there were other avenues than going to the police, we would certainly use them. We feel very threatened when we go to the police. We are persecuted and we are afraid of being tortured by the police.

[*English*]

Mr. Larry Maguire: Could I just interrupt you for one moment?

Pardon me, it's due to time.

Could another group, other than the UNHCR, get refugees out of Uganda more effectively? What I'm saying is, right now we rely on what the UNHCR provides us. Are there better ways or other avenues that we should be looking at to help you in that regard?

[*Translation*]

Witness 1: Thank you very much for the question.

In the past, there was HIAS, including HIAS Uganda, HIAS U.S. and HIAS Kenya, but that organization has unfortunately closed its doors. That affected LGBT persons because it helped many of those people. Some of them are in Canada right now and some are in the U.S.

There is also the Refugee Law Project, which deals with issues affecting LGBT persons, but this agency does not offer resettlement assistance. Small organizations such as ours work on the cases of people like us, LGBT refugees.

● (1630)

Mr. Bibe Kalalu: I would like to add something. Once the police identify a person as LGBT, that person loses any hope because the police cannot accept such people under Ugandan law.

It would be better to register LGBT persons through other agencies, such as the Refugee Law Project, which can seek asylum on their behalf. That could be a way of registering those persons here in Uganda

Our organization does not dare stand up to the government. It is very difficult. Larger organizations such as the HCR or the Refugee Law Project can perhaps do that, so you could contact them and ask them how to go about it.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm afraid I need you to end there. The opposition owes the government party about 10 minutes, just to let you know. We'll take it out sometime later. I didn't want to cut off the witnesses today because I thought the questions and the answers were very good.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I would like to thank both the witnesses for their courage and for coming out today and providing their important testimony.

Witness 1, you mentioned briefly in your comments the Scandinavian countries. Do these countries have any programs for LGBT refugee resettlement that we can learn from?

[*Translation*]

Witness 1: Thank you very much.

I mentioned Scandinavian countries such as the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark and Norway because, compared to other countries, they accept a large number of LGBT refugees. I am not referring to France, the United Kingdom, Switzerland or other countries. Canada and the United States did accept LGBT refugees from countries where HIAS was active, but its door are closed right now. We don't know what happened to them because access to information is limited and it would take in-depth investigations, but we have seen the generosity of these countries.

The Chair: I'm sorry, we have finished this part of the meeting. Thank you for being with us and for your testimony.

[*English*]

It's been very helpful to us and we will keep you in our thoughts, both as we do our report but also ongoing as we push our government and the people of our world to have a better approach to help you with safety and everything you need. Thank you very much.

We're going to take one minute to suspend while we change the witnesses. Thank you.

● (1630)

(Pause)

● (1635)

The Chair: We're going to get started. We do have one witness coming by video conference, but since we have witnesses here we should begin with them.

Where my mind is, just so you know where the chair is at this moment, is that I'm trying to figure out whether or not we could revoke tax charitable status for faith organizations that preach hate. That's just where my mind is at this very moment. I was just thinking about our last witnesses and thinking, “How do we allow faith communities to preach hate and still give them tax charitable status?” That's just where my mind is.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: We have a lot that could fall into that category.

The Chair: But not the Mennonites. We're going to start with two people from MCC, the Mennonite Central Committee Canada, Rebekah Sears and Anna Vogt.

We're going to begin with you and then we'll go to the video conference next.

Ms. Anna Vogt (Director, Ottawa Office, Mennonite Central Committee Canada): Thank you so much for the invitation.

Mennonite Central Committee, or MCC, is a ministry of Anabaptist churches responding to basic human needs and working for peace and justice. While our work began in 1920 assisting refugees fleeing the former Soviet Union, today MCC works worldwide. Last year alone, we supported over 300,000 people on the move.

MCC welcomes this opportunity to share our experiences and recommendations around global forced migration.

Committee members may be more familiar with our work on refugee resettlement as MCC helped to resettle one-third of Canada's blended visa office-referred refugees in 2017. Resettlement work in Canada and Canada's role as a leader in encouraging resettlement globally is of vital importance.

MCC consistently hears from our partners internationally, however, that addressing the root causes of forced migration must be part of any solution.

While MCC works on the theme of migration worldwide, our most coordinated regional work currently take place in Latin America, where I recently worked. I will share several migration push factors, the response of our partner organizations, and then several recommendations to the Canadian government, especially focusing on our partners in central America, Mexico and Colombia who keep us informed of migration trends as they unfold.

We are hearing reports that migration in the region is forced by hostile environments that are seedbeds for violence. These include severe socio-economic inequality, illicit economies coupled with corruption and weak institutions, and rising levels of militarization.

Latin America is the most unequal region in the world. More than half of the region's productive land is held by the top 1% of the largest farms. This is coupled with a growing economic dependence on extractivism, including agro-industries, mineral resources and hydrocarbons. This has led to a decrease in local food production and access to safe water, which are factors that encourage migration, especially when combined with threats of violence over control of land or development.

While Colombia holds the record for one of the highest numbers of IDPs in the world, at seven million, internal displacement is increasing in central America and in Mexico.

This inequality destabilizes the region by contributing to the growth of the illegal economies. Even when organized crime is not a direct driver of violence, it may indirectly impact violence by corrupting state institutions and reducing access to security and justice mechanisms along with health and education. High unemployment and exclusion drive youth gang membership, leading to increased urban violence. In turn, migration itself fuels instability. In border regions, the illegal economy around migration has become more profitable than drug trafficking.

Increased militarization to combat organized crime combined with state institutions unresponsive to human rights violations exacerbate violence. Increased security policies have led to extrajudicial killings and a crackdown on non-violent protest.

Latin America is currently the most dangerous place in the world to be a human rights or an environmental defender. Militarized borders and routes, especially around Mexico's borders, contribute to increasing migrant deaths and disappearances as migrants and asylum seekers take lesser-known routes to avoid official detection and end up in the hands of cartels or in extreme desert conditions.

Foreign development and economic interventions may inadvertently cause harm in these complex scenarios. Throughout the region, however, MCC works with local partner organizations that seek to address this complexity.

I will share only a small sampling of this diverse and creative work.

For example, in Colombia, our partner Sembrandopaz accompanies over 40 displaced and returned farming communities in a reconciliation and human rights project. They specifically work to bring youth from divided communities together through sport for leadership development and non-violent conflict resolution. In a parallel process, community leaders have formed a reparation and advocacy movement to collectively work to stay on their lands and develop alternative economic projects.

Anti-corruption work in Honduras led by the Association for a More Just Society uses evidence-based trackers to monitor government contracts and spending in education and health. Through their work, they have seen an increase in the number of days children spend in the classroom.

Voces Mesoamericanas in southern Mexico is part of a network of organizations—including in central America—that monitors border violence. This network also documents internal displacement and can provide early warning signs of areas where conflict may be likely to break out, and where migration flows may increase.

In response to these contextual dynamics and migration push factors, MCC offers the following recommendations to the Canadian government, not only for Latin America but for all areas where forced migration is taking place globally. First, increase investments in conflict prevention; second, use a “do no harm” lens; third, have partnerships with diverse actors; and fourth, continue leadership in global agreements.

● (1640)

We encourage increased investment in conflict prevention initiatives, especially local peace-building and mediation initiatives across different sectors and faiths. When mapping drivers of conflict, it is crucial to identify the strengths and capacities that already exist at a local level and can be leveraged to build sustainable peace.

We also encourage the government to integrate a conflict sensitivity lens—i.e., do no harm—across all programming to ensure that actions do not inadvertently exacerbate conflict dynamics or socio-economic inequalities. Canada should focus on resourcing non-military means of addressing insecurity around the globe. MCC also encourages Canada to increase our diplomatic efforts around conflict prevention and strengthen non-violent alternatives to the use of force.

We also encourage Canada to engage in partnerships with diverse actors, with a particular focus on supporting grassroots partners, enhancing local solidarity networks and promoting mechanisms for co-operation between actors on different levels, especially in situations of protracted internal displacement. We encourage more opportunities for funding, recognizing the important role that local organizations play in meeting the needs of IDPs.

MCC also encourages greater co-operation and work between the IRCC and GAC to build both departments' capacities for responding creatively to the full array of complex international issues that face our world today around forced migration. We encourage Canada to continue to show leadership on the implementation of the global compact on migration and the global compact on refugees, bringing in a root causes and prevention lens to these global agreements, along with a continued focus on resettlement globally.

There will be more information about all of these different topics in the written submission that is in translation currently.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to turn to Mr. Clayton from Samaritan's Purse Canada in Calgary.

Welcome.

● (1645)

Mr. John Clayton (Director of Programs and Projects, Samaritan's Purse Canada): Good afternoon. It's great to be connected with you, Mr. Chairman and honourable members. I want to thank the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration for the opportunity to speak concerning issues surrounding forced migration, as we understood that was the topic to be dealt with.

This is my second time presenting to this committee. I want to thank you and the Government of Canada for action taken in assisting the Yazidi people we previously talked about.

I'm a representative of Samaritan's Purse Canada. We are a registered charity in Calgary. We are part of an international Christian organization that is on the front lines of the worst tragedies unfolding around the world. Almost all of these include aspects of forced migration.

I would like to make four points. First, Canadian policy needs to focus on root causes, as we've already heard. This will minimize forced migration and enable the safe return of people.

Second, resettlement must be done with impartiality. That needs to be a guide.

Third, the UNHCR referral process requires Canada's vigilance to ensure accountability.

Fourth, safe, orderly and regular immigration policies may be unpopular, but the alternative is also inhumane.

In reading the news release concerning this committee's current study, I couldn't help but notice the parallels of this meeting's agenda topics and the upcoming December UN meetings when the global compact on migration will no doubt be ratified. The global compact is a non-binding agreement; however, it shapes the political will and ambition of the international community. From it, Canada will be faced with policy decisions aligning with the global compact and then creating Canada-specific policies.

The magnitude of our world's current situation, with untold tens of millions of people forcibly displaced, is staggering. We observe that this is largely man-made, due to poor or corrupt governance, and largely avoidable at the start. The global compact very correctly identifies addressing the root causes of refugee movements as a priority for all nations of the world.

For Canada, as I understand it, dealing with these root causes is the domain of foreign policy. Canada needs policy that focuses Canadian economic aid and development to reduce migration push factors. This will enable the safe and dignified return of displaced people to their countries of origin, which is the most desirable option.

I have witnessed the success of these root-cause interventions and efforts. I spent the first years of my career with Samaritan's Purse in Croatia and Bosnia. I witnessed the success of the Dayton peace agreement in 1995, and while it was not perfect, I saw the return of the refugees and the displaced—at least to their own respective countries, if not to their homes.

Secondly, since the mid-1990s Samaritan's Purse has been very involved in relief efforts in South Sudan. The comprehensive peace agreement in 2005 that was preceded by the Machakos Protocol in 2003 was largely facilitated by a Canadian foreign policy initiative and funding. This enabled millions to return to their homes.

I trust that the global compact and the work of this committee will help clarify and focus Canada's foreign policy priorities towards dealing with root causes. The sad reality is that the global compact and policy can't resolve all of these causes, and forced migration will continue. Some problems are intractable and leave millions in dire situations. I was particularly impressed with comments made by the preceding witness, Anna, because they tie into my story.

In 1920 my Mennonite grandparents fled persecution in the Soviet Union and came to a homestead on the Canadian Prairies. Ukraine recently opened up their KGB archives, revealing the fate of those who did not flee. They were rounded up for show trials and executed or exiled to the gulag.

I have great personal sympathy for the impossible and dire situations of this world. I believe that when you do examine the situations that exist, priorities emerge. Not all forced migrants are in equally dangerous or impossible situations, and the humanitarian principle of impartiality directs that we prioritize those in most need of resettlement without discrimination. This humanitarian principle of impartiality must inform Canada's policies and priorities.

Canada acted properly in dealing with the Yazidi people, and I'm particularly proud of this. I believe the Yazidis continue to be a leading example of forced migration and one of the world's most impossible of situations. They are the victims in a UN-declared genocide. They were a vilified minority group displaced from their homeland with little chance of future security or freedom. Canada demonstrated impartiality when Yazidis were brought here. I believe we ought to open our doors to more of them.

● (1650)

The Rohingya in Myanmar are another group of people who deserve priority consideration.

I also observed this committee examining the UNHCR's determination and referral processes and Canada's engagement in these processes. The UNHCR is committed to very lofty humanitarian principles; however, it is evident that some dominant cultural groups in the UNHCR can demonstrate systemic racism, intolerance or bias against minority groups in their midst.

I believe it was wise for Canada to have sent representatives to northern Iraq to assist with Yazidi immigration to ensure impartiality. Vigilance for UNHCR bias or prejudice and the option of intervening for minority groups that are not being dealt with impartially also ought to be part of Canadian policy. Transparency must be welcomed and prioritized in this regard.

For decades Canada and the international community have used three words, “safe”, “orderly” and “regular”, to help define migration and immigration policy. Deviation from these guiding principles has consequences. It enables human trafficking and criminality. It encourages life-endangering risk-taking. It allows for possible compromises of safety and security inside Canada, and it also inadvertently tells new arrivals that Canadian rule of law is not important when legitimate channels and due process are not followed. Lastly, these deviations reduce the co-ordination efficacy of Canadian refugee resettlement support services. I think these are outcomes that really are inhumane.

The committee is meeting to discuss the future of Canadian policy. The global compact to the UN system is based on principled, intentional humanitarian action; however, our culture is increasingly seduced by populism, virtuous posturing and the need to be seen zealous in helping, regardless of the implications and impact on Canadian citizens and processes. This needs to be resisted. Canada's policies on forced migration need to remain grounded in sound principle.

Thank you very much for this opportunity.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Tabbara.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here.

I've met many people. MCC and Rebekah Sears, I remember quite well the many occasions that we spoke.

Anna, you mentioned the recommendations, and you mentioned the increased investment in conflict prevention—the same with our witness in the video conference—and that the root causes are largely conflict and individuals who are causing this chaos.

The report that I have here from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre shows much of what you've mentioned about the conflicts. It shows that the displacement for 2018, from January to June, came from these top five countries: Ethiopia, Syria, DRC, Nigeria and Somalia. The numbers are, in that same order, 1.4 million, 1.2 million, 946,000, 400,000 and 300,000 roughly. That's the displacement within that period of individuals coming from those countries.

What I also want to mention and get into is that we're seeing a lot of displacement due to climate change. I'm going to read you a little bit of where the disasters have come from during January to June 2018, where many of the displacements have come from. In India there were monsoon floods and 373,000 were displaced. In Somalia there have been floods, and roughly 300,000 people were displaced. In Kenya there are similar numbers, 300,000, and in the Philippines not too long ago we saw 150,000, and there are more that I can read off here.

We can do a lot with diplomacy. We can try to put in more funding to prevent measures so that we don't see these conflicts arise in the first few countries that I mentioned. What are some of the things we need to do to help those climate refugees? What would you suggest for the government to take action on so that we can prevent these numbers from continuously rising?

Ms. Anna Vogt: If I can just jump on this, a lot of times when we think about climate change-caused refugees, there are a number of factors that also lead up to their forced migration. Often, especially as we're seeing in central America, climate change is the last factor that serves to push people into migrating.

There has to be a holistic approach to why people are fleeing, understanding that climate change is also exacerbating conflicts, especially around access to natural resources. As we commit to working against global climate change, I think we still need to look at conflict prevention as well. For example, for Honduran farmers, instead of being able to grow two corn crops a year, this year they were barely able to grow one because of climate change-caused drought within their areas. These are also people who are living in very precarious situations, where they are already fearing displacement or being forced from their land, and then climate change is an additional factor that then leads them to migrate.

Again, how do we integrate that lens of understanding this holistic cause of migration while also understanding the importance of climate change in these situations?

● (1655)

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Mr. Clayton, perhaps you would like to comment on that as well.

Mr. John Clayton: I think the impacts of climate change, because of the nature of how they impact the world, are hard to predict in terms of where events will take place. Investments into the NGO community or into the structures that exist within government in terms of disaster risk reduction, preparedness in terms of being able to respond to these events, and minimizing the impacts when they do happen—those are the kinds of priorities in terms of Government of Canada or Global Affairs Canada initiatives that I think are good investments. Just due to the very wide nature in terms of how they would have to be done, however, they aren't a priority when it comes to the immediate needs of displaced populations when they happen. It's this idea of wondering how you can invest in prevention when the needs around actual responding to events that are taking place in the world right now are so overwhelming.

I don't think there's a way to mitigate climate change. It's about being prepared to be able to respond, and to be able to respond effectively, when it happens. I think those are the capacities that are lacking in a lot of these countries.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: In Canada we have various ways to resettle refugees. In your opinion, is there something we're doing correctly, perhaps, or could add more to? We have the government-assisted refugee program. We have the private sponsorship program and we have the blended visa. Is there anything we need to continue to work on in these three areas, or is there even another recommendation we can add in assisting with resettling refugees?

Maybe I can get your recommendations, starting with Anna and then Mr. Clayton.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Michelle Rempel): Mr. Tabbara, your colleague would like a minute. I'm happy to give him a couple of extra minutes.

To the witnesses, you have about 30 seconds to answer that question.

Ms. Anna Vogt: I would just like to say that this isn't my area of expertise. Our colleague Brian Dyck can also respond to some of these questions. He's spoken to the committee before. He is currently in Ethiopia. He did emphasize the need for Canada to be involved globally in presenting resettlement and working globally to see how other countries can also be involved in resettlement.

I know that doesn't directly answer your question, but....

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Michelle Rempel): Mr. Oliphant.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: I'm going to step in here with a question. I stepped out of the chair to do this.

Mr. Clayton, witnesses on our last panel were from Uganda. We heard it implied that one of the root causes to forced migration was hate that was spread by missionary churches in Africa aimed at LGBTQI communities.

I want to know the relationship between Samaritan's Purse Canada and Franklin Graham, the president of your international organization, and whether you stand by his remarks this summer when he, in addressing former president Jimmy Carter's comments on gay marriage, referred to the abomination of homosexuality, saying that Sodom and Gomorrah were God's punishment and that those deaths were brought about because of homosexuality.

Mr. John Clayton: Franklin Graham is the president of Samaritan's Purse Canada. I'm not familiar with the exact comments you're referring to. I don't believe our organization has anything to do with condoning that violence that's taking place in Uganda.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: This is what Franklin Graham said:

> I have to respectfully disagree with [former President Jimmy Carter] on this one. He is absolutely wrong when he said Jesus would approve of gay marriage. Jesus didn't come to promote sin, He came to save us from sin. The Bible is very clear. God destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because of homosexuality.

This would say that somehow, God killed people because they were gay.

Is that the belief of your organization?

● (1700)

Mr. John Clayton: I didn't come here prepared to comment on Franklin's comments earlier, and I don't believe, personally, that it's in any way reflective of biblical truth.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Okay. Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Michelle Rempel): Mr. Oliphant, are you done?

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Yes.

The Vice-Chair (Hon. Michelle Rempel): Do you mind if I take my chair back?

Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Rempel.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Clayton, I want to expand upon your remarks with regard to the discrimination that might be faced within the UNHCR process. I want to start by acknowledging UNHCR has an important role to play in refugee resettlement, but one of the things we want to do is to also ensure that those processes are improved upon so that the world's most vulnerable are protected.

We know that internally displaced persons are some of the world's most vulnerable. Right now, in global resettlement programs from host countries that rely on the UNHCR for resettlement lists, there are difficulties for internally displaced persons accessing UNHCR resettlement.

I just wanted to give you a bit of time to expand. Perhaps you can provide the committee or point us to some quantitative data or evidence around the discrimination aspect that you mentioned, some of the reforms that Canada could advocate for to strengthen processes so that vulnerable minority groups that are internally displaced have equitable or priority access to resettlement programs. Could you also talk about how domestic practices and domestic policies within Canada could reflect that reality?

Mr. John Clayton: Okay. First, I don't come with quantitative information. I have anecdotal information from our operations in various locations. Specifically, as I was addressing the Yazidi situation, we've been very involved in that response since the ISIS overthrow of Mosul and the events that took place in those days. It became evident that those biases exist in the dominant cultures of the areas where the UNHCR operates. I don't think we judge them. Sometimes these things are just inherent in terms of the world views and the ideas that people have when they approach different people groups. When you're from a dominant people group and you're dealing with minority groups that you've had no relationship with, or that you've been taught bad things about, it's very difficult for you to be objective or to hold onto those lofty humanitarian principles.

I understand Canadian representatives assisted in the referral process that took place in that particular location. I'm not aware of other locations where that happens, but anywhere there is a minority group in the midst of a dominant group like that, there is the possibility of those problems existing, so I think—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Sorry to interrupt. We've had the UNHCR in front of us, and over the course of this Parliament, we've also had witnesses—for example, members of the LGBTI community—talk about difficulties accessing resettlement programs, given the process. We have two stories: We have "discrimination and difficulties happen", and we have the UN saying, "Nothing to see here, folks."

I'm just wondering how, as a service provider—and I'll look at the Mennonite Central Committee too—we break that impasse. If we want the system to function properly, if we want social licence and people to accept that the system is equitable, how do we break that impasse? How do we actually push for reform given the UN is a very bureaucratic organization?

What do you suggest for us, especially as somebody who is tired of having this fight every time we have a displaced persons group and then the UNHCR in front of this committee?

● (1705)

Mr. John Clayton: There is one simple way. If there is accountability, there will be full transparency. If it's ever questioned, there would be a welcome to come and investigate the objectivity and the—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: What does accountability mean? What does that mean in terms of a specific mechanism, in terms of a recommendation for this committee?

Mr. John Clayton: I would say the starting point would be their not saying, "There is no problem." It would open the door to saying, "Please come and examine how we are upholding these humanitarian principles." If anyone says they don't have a problem, and you're a primary supporter or funder of their operations, they ought to welcome the chance to demonstrate their transparency, their adherence and their ability to deliver.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Do you mean something like a Canadian initiative, or a Canadian-initiated request for a review of process conducted by an independent body?

Mr. John Clayton: Yes.

I don't know what it would look like but I know there are good minds that would be able to think through how you would conduct a monitoring visit or an evaluation of the fulfillment of those principles.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: To your knowledge, has there been anything like that done? Would we find any arm's-length groups or countries that have conducted an audit of this process to date, if our committee were to look at something like that for best practice?

Mr. John Clayton: I can't speak to that.

It was something that we talked about in our office and discussed internally. We thought there should be no hiding from that if it was ever asked for. I think the response indicates that maybe we do need to look at something different here.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Okay.

I'll give the remainder of my time to the MCC to comment on anything I've raised.

Ms. Anna Vogt: Sure.

One of the pillars of our organization is partnering with local grassroots organizations that actually do very good documentation and awareness-raising on where there may be gaps within institutions, especially what we heard earlier today from Uganda. Having that kind of information and evidence from local partners is key to some of these processes.

For example, one of the organizations we work with in southern Mexico that I mentioned earlier, Voces Mesoamericanas, actually receives MCC funding to go to Mexican detention centres to investigate and document whether migrants receive adequate care when they end up being detained in Mexico. We can then take that information and use it to put pressure on the Mexican state. Mechanisms like that allow our local partners who have access to provide us with this information.

Rebekah, did you want to add anything?

Ms. Rebekah Sears (Policy Analyst, Mennonite Central Committee Canada): Sure.

Thanks so much for the questions.

In addition, thinking of the other presentation and back to these global mechanisms, UNHCR and the global compact, there's a lack of representation of internally displaced peoples. A lot of groups you're mentioning would fall under that category, the groups from the previous session as well. UNHCR is looking after these groups as kind of a default.

I think I've heard this testimony before the committee earlier from experts on internally displaced peoples, that there's no one body in charge of that group of people, even though internally displaced peoples have been represented. Colombia has one of the highest numbers in the world. There are almost double the IDPs as there are convention refugees.

In addition, IDPs are a good early-warning system if something is going wrong in a country. Before refugees start crossing the borders, you have growing numbers of internally displaced peoples, and often minorities and other groups targeted by their own governments.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses for their presentations.

Anna, one of the issues you mentioned around internal displacements, or one of the challenges with migration issues, centres on domestic violence. We have a situation in the United States whereby we now have a president who outright says that this will not be a consideration for asylum seekers.

I'd like to hear your comments on that, and on the implications for people faced with those kinds of circumstances.

● (1710)

Ms. Anna Vogt: Absolutely. Thank you for raising that.

This is a very pressing concern. With regard to domestic violence, Latin America has one of the highest levels of violence against women in the world. Often, when women are fleeing, even in this migrant caravan coming from Honduras, a number of women are fleeing domestic violence as well.

It's very important to keep that gendered lens as we look at why people are leaving, at the multiple reasons people are leaving. It could be gendered violence combined with climate change, situations of instability, corruption, or lack of access to justice mechanisms or institutions that may be weakened. It may not be possible to access protection within their own country, especially in areas where women may face higher discrimination as well, or where it's not culturally acceptable in the same way to denounce domestic violence.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: From that perspective, individuals coming from the U.S. to Canada through irregular crossings are faced with a dire situation, I would argue.

Given the circumstances we now face regarding the United States, with the current president's perspective on that, would you say that the U.S. is a safe country?

Ms. Anna Vogt: I can't make that statement. My organization doesn't have a stance on that, but I would say that it would be imperative to pay careful attention to those cases and carefully study and examine whether women or other members of the LGBTQI community are able to access adequate protection.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Right.

Where a person is being forced to cross over from the United States to Canada through irregular crossings as opposed to the official border entry so that they can actually make a legitimate claim —because the safe third country agreement will not allow them to do that—they're being forced to cross over in unsafe conditions.

Ms. Anna Vogt: Yes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Do you think that's the optimal situation for people who are in need of asylum or making an asylum claim?

Ms. Anna Vogt: I think the optimal situation for people, especially those who are fleeing violence or domestic violence, is to have as easy access as possible to channels that provide them safety and security as quickly as possible.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Right, so under those circumstances one would argue that being forced to cross over at irregular crossing locations is not the optimal option.

Ms. Anna Vogt: Right...and situations where they have to undergo as little trauma as possible to access safety.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

We were talking about the UNHCR, or if you will, really the LGBTQI communities and other internally displaced individuals in their home countries. They have very little ability to access resettlement streams for a whole host of reasons. If, for example, they identify themselves to be from the LGBTQ community and it is illegal to be gay in that community, they put themselves immediately at risk, so people actually cannot do that.

Do you have any suggestions as to what Canada can do to provide supports for those individuals?

Also, is it an option, or would you recommend, that Canada work with the local community groups there on the ground in collaboration with Canadian groups to provide for a stream, and should Canada provide a special allocation for those kinds of internally displaced individuals?

Ms. Anna Vogt: At MCC, because we already do work with local partners on the ground, we can see the value in partnering with local people who—as mentioned earlier in the testimony—are fully aware of the situation and can speak with personal experience and are very knowledgeably and also have access to other people who are also facing the same types of oppression or situations. I think that would be imperative.

We also listed that as a recommendation, to encourage Canada to engage in partnerships with a diverse group of people and across sectors.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: When we do that, do you think that should be a special measure, so above and beyond our regular refugee stream in terms of resettlement?

I know that part of the problem the UNHCR identified in Uganda was that there are so many people in need of resettlement support, and they have so few spots, it is really difficult for them to make those decisions to determine who is a priority and who is not. It seems that literally millions of people are a priority.

Given that set of circumstances, if we're going to really target a group of individuals who are faced with imminent danger, who are being actively persecuted, and their very existence indicates that they are in violation of the law and subject to punishment, should Canada, then, establish a special measure for resettlement for those kinds of individuals?

● (1715)

Ms. Anna Vogt: I believe this is something the committee probably has more expertise in than I do, but I think it also goes back to my response about domestic violence as well. What are we looking at—and maybe that is special measures—for people who need the most protection in the least traumatic and the least life-threatening manner possible, and how can we provide that?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Rebekah, would you like to say something?

Ms. Rebekah Sears: I know we've said this many times, but I would just emphasize the connection with the local communities that have access to these minority communities. I am just thinking of MCC's work. In the Middle East, we are connected to majority populations but also to minority populations that are at risk, so it's having that connection and finding out what the communities would like to do as well.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: The reason I raised this special measure issue is this. There are only so many—7,600—government-assisted refugees at the moment. If you take, for example, the Yazidis, who we had resettled, those numbers were supposed to be a special measure, but they didn't come out of a special measure in terms of additional numbers from the government-assisted refugees. They came out of the regularized government-assisted refugee pool.

That means that all those other people who are in great need, individuals who the UNHCR and others are desperate to resettle, have lost out on those numbers.

When we have a dire group as such, really, should we not recognize that dire situation—as in the case of the genocide of the Yazidis—and do that as a special measure and therefore not take space out of the government-assisted refugees?

Maybe I can turn to Mr. Clayton on that question, for just a quick answer, because I am getting a stare from the chair.

Mr. John Clayton: I don't know all the different policies in terms of those allotments or the different aspects of how people can be assisted, but if that 1,200 was supposed to have been a special allotment for the Yazidis, I don't think it should have affected that total number.

I don't have anything else to contribute.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Yes, except that it wasn't. It was taken out of the regular government-assisted refugee numbers.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Thank you.

We will continue with Mr. Ayoub.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub (Thérèse-De Blainville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate my colleague's passion. We have a lot of questions, but just seven minutes, which is very little.

Let me begin with you, Mr. Clayton. I'm not sure I understood correctly so please correct me if I am wrong, but you said that the best solution for the integration of refugees is ultimately to send them back home. You said that would be an ultimate objective.

Did I understand you correctly? I don't want to presume that is what you said.

[*English*]

Mr. John Clayton: I could go back to my notes and refer to it, but I believe that is.... Most displaced people I've talked to want to return to their homeland, yes.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Okay. That's their point of view.

[*Translation*]

That's right.

Similarly, for a country such as Canada, which wants to welcome refugees, what is the best way of doing that and how can it judge its success if the starting premise is that these people eventually have to return home?

[*English*]

Mr. John Clayton: I think there's a distinction between the foreign policy efforts and the foreign affairs efforts to create or remove the root causes that can allow people to return, and the resettlement issues of determining, with the criteria that are available, those who will never be able to be resettled. There are two dynamics that play simultaneously here and that speak to migration and immigration.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: From what I understood, we were talking about refugees, and not immigration. Immigration is another story. People who want to immigrate usually take steps themselves, whereas refugees are in a vulnerable position, fleeing violence and intimidation, and they are fighting for their lives.

I am an MP from Quebec, a province that is trying to see how to reduce the number of immigrants and refugees, perhaps in the short term, to give us time to integrate them better so they do not have to go back home or settle elsewhere. In our case, we want a majority of francophone refugees.

How can we balance all that?

● (1720)

[*English*]

Mr. John Clayton: I think it comes down to the resettlement process in terms of the criteria that are being established and how people are being interviewed and their intentions and situations. I know that there are people who want to come here to Canada. So many of my friends who are from other parts of the world and have made this their home are excited about living here.

In terms of the UN referral process, I don't know how you encourage them, or do they establish different criteria to help determine who those people are who really are going to integrate and, for your particular context in Quebec, fit in and satisfy your expectations?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Ms. Vogt and Ms. Sears, do you have anything to add? What are your thoughts on these two kinds of integration? Do you share that view?

[*English*]

Ms. Anna Vogt: I think it also depends on what type of situation we're talking about. For example, many people may be in a protected situation of displacement—or even housed in refugee camps—who never resettle to Canada either, where the most durable solution for them may be to possibly return home to their country. I think it is a bit more complex than people resettling in Canada, going through local integration and then returning back to their country. How are we looking at the different groups of people, not even in terms of who a refugee is and who a migrant is, but even globally in terms of where people are located and, as well, their own desires to possibly return?

I think integration is a great step that Canada does take with newcomers to make sure they are part of Canadian society. Also, I think that encouraging integration measures within other countries that face large asylum-seeker or migrant populations as well is a really good step, especially in places where there may never be the possibility of someone even having the choice to return home.

Rebekah, did you have something to add?

Ms. Rebekah Sears: Maybe I would just emphasize Anna's earlier points in her presentation about the importance of people making the choice of whether or not to migrate.

Sorry, I just lost my train of thought.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: I will share my time with my colleague since he has a question.

We want to save lives by playing a role in prevention internationally. Could moving a person to a neighbouring country be a short-term solution?

When we bring in refugees temporarily, I think there is a conflict between safety issues and the degree of belonging to Canadian society as an indicator of immigration success. In my opinion, there are no half-measures: people come to Canada because they want to become 100% Canadian, or not.

I will turn it over to my colleague.

[*English*]

Mr. Matt DeCourcey (Fredericton, Lib.): Thanks very much, Ramez.

Just to the MCC, based on the government's commitment and intention to resettle 1,000 vulnerable women and girls, many of whom will have been subjected to gender-based violence and other forms of persecution, do you have any advice on partners to work with and processes to ensure this is done effectively and efficiently, and that the results are achieved as per the commitment made?

Ms. Rebekah Sears: Are there particular regions where this commitment is coming from?

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: This is effectively the question I have. Do you have any recommendations or advice on where and who to work with and how this can be effectively achieved so that we can resettle those 1,000 women and girls?

Ms. Anna Vogt: Yes. Actually a few years ago there was a direct connection between Colombian refugees and Canadian Mennonite churches here in Canada. MCC actually helped facilitate the sponsorship of a number of Colombian refugees directly from Colombia.

One of the processes that made it very effective was the fact that there was that direct connection with the sending country, so that we were actually able to provide information even about trauma awareness to the families and the church groups that were resettling these refugees and walking alongside of them as they adapted to life in Canada. That ability to share that cultural information, that contextual information, that information about what even maybe triggers in their situation as they adapt to Canada, actually made that situation much more sustainable in terms of people's ability to integrate into Canada and to feel that people were walking alongside of them in each step of the process from going through the claims to arriving in Canada.

Those issues of how can we be aware and intentional about where there may be local community partners that can also help to share information about the situations where people may come from and then help that integration into Canadian society I think would be key.

● (1725)

The Chair: Thank you.

We go to Mr. Maguire for five minutes to bring us home.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I acknowledge the fact that both of your organizations, Mr. Clayton, Ms. Vogt and Ms. Sears, do great work in regard to resettlement, and thank you for your presentations today.

One of the things that we learned, and in my opportunity this June, was that when you're in refugee camps and you're talking with them, they would like to resettle, but the last option is to go to a third country. They'd like to resettle in their own home areas.

What drove me to this question is, Ms. Vogt, that you mentioned IDPs in Colombia are seven million, and then you backed it up, Ms. Sears, by saying that there are twice as many IDPs as there are refugees in the world, and there are 64 million refugees. This leads me to ask that even with all the successes that each of you have had, and there are government refugee programs that have been successful as well, what's the biggest need you would see to be able to make sure that we were able to do as much, or a percentage, at least, share from Canada's opportunities within this country, to expand that?

Is it needs for languages, different things when they get here, or is it just the fact that we need to make sure that we have a sound process of dealing with who can come to Canada from the refugees camps, and what other financial resources would be best used as well?

Ms. Anna Vogt: Part of it is also what I started talking about at the beginning: addressing these root causes of migration. Again, it's putting more financing into local conflict prevention and trying to actually look at partnerships with diverse actors, and these increased investments, as well, in mediation in situations where, because of migrant flows, there may be more risks of conflict. It's looking at that global lens and seeing resettlement as one tool within Canada's tool box of addressing forced migration, but there are also many ways that Canada can be involved.

Even in looking at Colombia, with all of these different IDPs, it's recognizing that local organizations throughout the countries are the organizations that deal with the burden of actually receiving these IDPs, especially because there isn't as much ability of the UNHCR to be involved because it is an internal displacement. How does the Canadian government recognize and support these local organizations without having all of these people needing to come to Canada?

I think Rebekah would like to answer.

Ms. Rebekah Sears: Just in addition, there's the burden on host countries, especially those surrounding conflict areas. For example, I think that 85% of Syrian refugees are still in the region, in surrounding countries like Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan, so the burden is on those host countries.

As Anna said, resettlement is one option, but it's not necessarily what people want to do. It's not necessarily the best thing to do to resettle all of these refugees, but to support the host countries so they will be able to support refugees and displaced peoples, and again, go through the local organizations, especially when it comes to internally displaced, because often the problem is with the government.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Yes, thank you. It's like we saw in Uganda.

Mr. Clayton, could you elaborate on that from your end as well?

● (1730)

Mr. John Clayton: Yes, Mr. Maguire. I think the question for the Government of Canada and for the people who are assembled here in this committee is whether you want to go wide or whether you want to go narrow. We have to be realistic about the resources that Canada has available. We can take a shotgun approach and spread ourselves very thin, or we can decide on some very specific initiatives that we would like to tackle.

I go back to the example of what was invested in the comprehensive peace agreement in Sudan and South Sudan. Notwithstanding the problems that currently exist in South Sudan today, I believe a large amount of initiative and financial resources went to solving, contributing to the solution of a problem.

What do we want to do? Do we want to go wide, or do we want to go narrow? I can't answer that question. I think we ought to be realistic in terms of what it is that we can accomplish as a country and not try to be all things to all people, but dig into some specifics deeply and intentionally.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thank you.

My last question is in regard to some comments that you made, Ms. Vogt, and you mentioned them again here now on conflict prevention. That seems to be prevalent in situations throughout Africa as well, but you're saying it's very predominant in Latin America. We're seeing that. There are people migrating out of their countries right now as well. As we speak, they're on the highway.

What, in this situation, needs to be done? What, in your view, would be the best way to maximize the funds that we are presently using in those areas? You mentioned food. You mentioned sport. What is the best way to resettle these people and use those funds to reduce the conflict that you talked about?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Ms. Anna Vogt: Great, this is easy.

I think it's also, again, that connection with local partners, people who have a deep understanding of their own area, of their own context, the people who are invested in creating change within their own environment. How can we look across sectors to identify some of these different groups, and then actually work with them as they work on doing conflict prevention? I think that, from all of the examples I've seen across Latin America, has been the most sustainable in the areas where we have seen the most change or the most possibilities for peace building to take place.

The Chair: We need to end there.

Thank you, all, very much.

Thank you, committee. We will resume on Thursday.

The meeting is adjourned.