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Chair

Mr. Robert Oliphant

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• (1605)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.)): I'm going to call this meeting to order.

This is the 134th meeting of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are continuing our study of migration challenges and opportunities for Canada in the 21st century.

As part of the study, we're looking at the global compacts on both refugees and on migration, which are currently under consideration within the UN network. We are doing a series of meetings on Canada's role in those, as well as the impact that they might have.

We very much thank the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship for joining us, as well as officials from IRCC and Global Affairs Canada.

It is my understanding that the content of the two compacts has largely been driven, from a governmental side, by IRCC, and the process of engagement has been largely driven by Global Affairs. We've invited officials from both departments to join us, and we thank you for coming.

We're going to begin with Mr. DeCoursey with an opening statement, and then the committee will have a chance to ask you and officials questions.

My understanding right now is that Mr. DeCoursey will be with us for the first hour of the meeting, as is our norm, and the officials will be available, should the questions need to be continued by committee members, in the second hour.

Mr. DeCoursey.

[Translation]

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank my colleagues for being here to discuss an issue that is important not just for Canada, but also for the entire world.

[English]

I'm certainly pleased to be here today to discuss the Government of Canada's support for the adoption of the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration and the global compact on refugees.

With me, from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, are Glen Linder, director general for international and intergovernmental relations; and Susan Greene, senior director for resettlement and protection policy. From Global Affairs Canada are Deirdre Kent, director general for international assistance policy; and Stephen Salewicz, director general for international humanitarian assistance.

I will deliver a few opening remarks, and then I will be more than happy to take your questions.

Mr. Chair, as the committee has heard during its study on 21st-century migration challenges, global migration is generally on the rise. In 2017, the number of migrants worldwide was estimated at 258 million, a 49% increase compared to the year 2000. Also in 2017, 68.5 million people around the world were forcibly displaced from their homes.

Not only is Canada aware of these developments, but we are considered a global leader when it comes to managing migration and refugee issues. We have a mature, well-managed migration system, which includes our recently announced levels plan and substantial investments in settlement and integration. As a way to share this experience with the global community and strengthen its reaction to migration and refugee issues, Canada has also played an active role in the development of the two compacts that we are here to discuss today.

As the committee members may know, in September of 2016, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. It launched separate processes to create two non-binding international instruments: the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration and the global compact on refugees. I will start with the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration, and then I will speak about the global compact on refugees.

Canada has greatly benefited from treating migration, not as a problem, but as a complex reality that brings opportunities along with its challenges.

The global compact for migration provides a long-term vision for how countries can improve their responses to migration so that, together, the international community can better reap the benefits and respond to the challenges of migration.

At the centre of the compact for safe, orderly and regular migration are 23 balanced objectives that states can work towards over the coming years. They draw attention to the serious challenges that irregular migration poses while emphasizing the positive contributions of migrants, the benefits of regular pathways and the need for well-managed migration systems.

This is based on the understanding that, as the primary actor in migration and decision-making, it is individual countries themselves that retain the sovereign right to determine who enters and stays on their territories and under what conditions, provided this is done in accordance with their international legal obligations. Accordingly, the text of the compact includes national sovereignty as one of the 10 guiding principles, something that Canada recommended during the process to develop the text.

I want to be clear at the outset about an important aspect of the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration. It is a non-binding instrument; it is not a treaty. Each objective in it includes commitments that, over time, would contribute to meeting the compact's objectives. The actions listed under each commitment are considered a compendium of best practices. This list is intended to provide guidance to countries as they consider how they might work toward achieving the objectives.

Because the compact is non-binding, fulfilling the commitments is voluntary. Each country has the flexibility to implement the compact in a way that works best for them. However, it is Canada's hope that countries will implement the compact in a meaningful way. We would encourage them to use the guidance and the best practices to strengthen their national migration systems.

It is only by better managing migration in each national context that we can, together, work to counter the risks and address the challenges of irregular migration globally. When it comes to implementing the compact in Canada, I should note that a review by federal departments has confirmed that Canadian practices generally align with the compact's objectives and commitments.

Adopting the migration compact would not require changes to our current system, nor would it limit our ability to continue protecting the health, safety and security of Canadians. Canada's responsibility would simply be to consider implementing those best practices that we feel would help to further improve our approach to managing migration. Put simply, in Canada the migration compact would provide an additional policy lens when planning, developing and evaluating our migration policies and programs.

Internationally, Canada could use the adoption of the compact as an opportunity to showcase our mature migration system, to encourage other countries to deter irregular migration and to put in place pathways for regular migration, so that they can take advantage of the benefits that migration can bring.

I want to note that consultation on Canada's approach to the migration compact has been quite extensive. To inform our negotiation position, my department put together a Canadian migration expert group made up of representatives from civil society organizations and academia from across the country. This group's detailed and helpful insights were considered carefully as we developed Canadian positions and interventions. We also consulted

the provinces and territories. In fact, Canada's delegation to the adoption conference will include representatives from municipal and provincial governments as well as civil society.

After two years of consultations and negotiations, the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration will be presented for adoption at a high-level global conference on December 10 and 11 in Morocco, followed by formal adoption by the UN General Assembly. Given the diversity of views about migration that exist around the world, it's inspiring to consider that the vast majority of countries will attend and adopt the compact.

Allow me to turn to the global compact on refugees, which is expected to be validated by the UN General Assembly by the end of 2018. Remembrance Day has just passed, which provides us an opportunity to reflect both on a shameful time when Canada turned its back on the *MS St. Louis* and also to remember the sacrifice of Canadian soldiers who died fighting Nazism and fascism in Europe. Let us also remember that in the days following the world war Canada stood with other states, creating the 1951 refugee convention to protect innocent people fleeing persecution.

We see, once again today, many people on the move for myriad reasons. We see the necessity of working in a comprehensive, coordinated and co-operative effort to address this pressing global challenge. Every time we settle a woman at risk or offer asylum on our land, we demonstrate the values and ideas that define Canada today, just as they did after the Second World War. The compact is about a stronger, fairer response to global refugee movements. Its key aims are to ease pressure on major hosting countries, help refugees become self-reliant, expand opportunities for resettlement and create conditions for sustainable voluntary returns.

• (1610)

The global compact on refugees outlines non-binding best practices that encourage the international community to stand with refugees and host communities. This new way of working between governments, development agencies, humanitarian agencies, civil society and the private sector brings us together in solidarity with refugees.

As a world leader, Canada's resettlement program responds to the needs of the most vulnerable refugees who have been forced to flee their homes. Our recent commitment to resettle an additional 1,000 women and girls reinforces just that.

We are already doing our part. The global compact on refugees encourages other states to follow our lead in this work, and we are helping them build capacity with our global refugee sponsorship initiative.

I should note that the Government of Canada, in consultation with Canadian civil society, has been actively engaged in shaping the global compact on refugees. In particular, together with Canadian non-governmental organizations, we have consistently advocated for a gender-sensitive compact throughout its development.

Canada strongly supports the ways in which the final version of the global compact on refugees focuses on specific measures to advance gender equality and ensure the active participation of refugee women in shaping and implementing refugee responses. This will advance the empowerment of refugee women and girls.

● (1615)

The Chair: I'll just ask you to draw to a conclusion.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: In conclusion, at a time when populism and anti-immigrant sentiment are on the rise, it is important to build international momentum to better anticipate and respond to global migration and refugee flows.

The global compact for migration and global compact for refugees both provide Canada with an opportunity to showcase our best practices and explain how they can help to balance domestic and international considerations and interests related to migration and refugee protection.

As I've noted, adopting them would not affect Canada's sovereignty or infringe upon the rights of Canadians.

I hope this helps to outline our government's support for these initiatives, and I'd be happy to discuss it further through questions and answers.

[Translation]

Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll turn to the government side, Mr. Tabbara, for seven minutes.

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

Thank you to our parliamentary secretary for joining us, along with officials as well.

Mr. DeCoursey, you mentioned that the figures of global migrants are at 258 million. That's a 49% increase, as we've seen.

We know that Canada needs to act and that states need to act in a collaborative measure.

However, there are some states that have not signed on to the compact. There are certain parties that don't believe this compact will be sufficient. There are talks that this compact aims to erase national borders, that Canada is encouraging irregular migration or that it threatens national security. Some political parties have used this as fearmongering.

Do you believe that this compact would do any of these things?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Well, in fact, this global compact speaks explicitly about countries of the world retaining their sovereign right to manage their borders and their migration systems. What it does is provide a compendium of best practices so that countries around the world can work co-operatively, collaboratively and across a range of initiatives to better manage—as I mentioned in my opening comments and you reiterated—the largest trends of global migration that we've seen since the Second World War.

The global compact is about addressing a pressing global challenge, and seeking out ways to work together to foster safe, orderly and regular migration, while retaining national sovereignty and ensuring the safety and security of a country's own citizens. That's certainly the view of Canada, and that's a view that we brought to the table in the drafting of these compacts. It's a view that is explicitly referenced within the compacts.

Political parties and political operatives who would suggest that this is about opening our borders up to more irregular migration are peddling fear and spewing false narratives that are completely contradictory to what this compact seeks to do.

I can quote what this compact is about. It's about our shared responsibility to address global migration challenges, and it speaks to that very fact in section 11, where it talks about shared responsibilities. It says:

No country can address the challenges and opportunities of this global phenomenon on its own. With this comprehensive approach, we aim to facilitate safe, orderly and regular migration, while reducing the incidence and negative impact of irregular migration....

Those who would suggest otherwise are simply peddling false narratives and trying to raise fear and incite anger around the world.

● (1620)

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: I want to touch on that, “false narratives”. I'm going to read off a few of the objectives in the compact, just to have them on the record here, and I want you to add to this.

There are 23 objectives, and it says, “we will draw from these actions to achieve safe, orderly and regular migration along the migration cycle.”

Number one is “Collect and utilize accurate and disaggregated data as a basis for evidence-based policies”.

Number two is “Minimize the adverse drivers and structural factors that compel people to leave their country of origin”.

Number four is “Ensure that all migrants have proof of legal identity and adequate documentation”.

Number five is “Enhance availability and flexibility of pathways for regular migration”.

The last one, number 23, is “Strengthen international cooperation and global partnerships for safe, orderly and regular migration”.

These are part of the 23 objectives.

Why would other operatives, other parties, other states, not buy into this?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: I won't speak for other political parties. I won't speak for anyone but the Government of Canada.

The Government of Canada firmly believes that this compact, through its principles, through the objectives and action items outlined within it, seeks to strengthen the rule of law and foster safe, orderly and regular migration as a means to deterring irregular migration and instances of irregular migration that we see around the world. In doing so, it effectively builds trust and confidence with everyone involved in helping to address these challenges. That includes countries that will be signing the compact, as well as migrants, refugees and those who seek asylum in safe countries.

This is about ensuring that we work together, that the global community co-operates, not just in ways to provide more support to host countries, but also to find ways to support resettlement in safe third countries, through diplomatic efforts, and through enhanced humanitarian and development assistance.

These are all part and parcel of what is baked into these compacts.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: We heard from a lot of witnesses that Canada was extensively involved in the drafting of the compacts. Can you lay down the specific contributions?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Well, one of Canada's contributions was to ensure that national sovereignty was maintained as a principle within the compacts, but additionally, we worked hard to make sure that specific reference to the vulnerabilities of women and girls in refugee situations was mentioned within the compacts. It is well within there.

We have a good story to tell here in Canada about the ways in which we can provide a safe haven to vulnerable women and girls and those who experience other vulnerabilities as refugees throughout the migration process.

The Chair: Ms. Rempel.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the department officials for being part of our study on migration challenges and opportunities for Canada in the 21st century.

I had the opportunity, I believe it was in April 2017, to be in Mexico City with Speaker Regan. It was very interesting to visit some of the resettlement centres in Mexico City and to hear from the Mexican government that Mexico itself was having a lot more pressures on it from migration coming up through the U.S. It was trying to respond to increased refugee and asylum claimants. Now we have this situation at the U.S.-Mexico border, which I think a lot of people are paying attention to. I think a lot of Canadians are paying attention to this as well.

I was reading an article this morning that said that one of the Catholic archbishops in Canada, Leonardo Marin Saavedra raised the possibility of some of the migrant caravan being accepted in Canada. I think this situation is probably going to be more frequent in Canada as we see greater pressures on Mexico and the U.S. coming up in terms of migration challenges in the 21st century.

I'm just wondering, because the archbishop had said that there was going to be a project proposal put forward to Justin Trudeau. Maybe I'll go to Ms. Greene, as you're the director of resettlement and protection policy. Has the government advised you or asked you at

all to start preparing a proposal or any policy to respond to the particular caravan situation that we're seeing in Tijuana right now?

• (1625)

Ms. Susan Greene (Senior Director, Resettlement and Protection Policy, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): I'm actually going to refer you to Mr. Linder because he is our lead for migration-related issues.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Sure.

Mr. Glen Linder (Director General, International and Intergovernmental Relations, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): At this time, we are monitoring the situation very carefully, and we are aware of rumours that are circulating about Canada having plans with respect to people who are in the various movements coming through Mexico. However, at this time, Canada is not considering any exceptional resettlement measures with regard to that particular movement.

We currently have a number of other more serious situations around the world that we are focusing on, particularly in the Middle East. That's where we're focusing our attention for the time being.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you for that clarity.

The other thing that has been a topic of migration challenges, obviously, is the situation at Roxham Road. Part of the conversation on what's happening in Mexico and whether or not Canada should be accepting refugees who are in the situation at Tijuana, or going forward, is the criteria around the safe third country agreement. We've had a few very high-profile groups say that the safe third country agreement should be suspended and that the U.S. does not provide a system with fair hearing.

Does IRCC still consider the United States a country that provides fair hearing for refugee claimants?

Ms. Susan Greene: What I can say for IRCC is that, obviously, the Government of Canada is aware of the developments in the United States. At this time, following the most recent full review of the safe third country agreement, the assessment is that, yes, the United States remains a safe third country.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Could you tell us, just very briefly, some of the criteria that you consider when you make that determination?

Ms. Susan Greene: There's a full range of criteria that are taken into account. Several of them would include whether or not there is due process available through the judicial system, whether the majority of human rights are respected, safe passage and freedom to leave, registration, etc.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: My last question would be probably for Mr. Linder and Ms. Greene.

One of the announcements that we heard from the government around the levels report was an initiative to promote certain terminology being used in the media or perceptions around immigration. I know that there is similar language in the global compact for migration.

Do you have a sense of or has the government instructed you on a plan, a framework or what that would look like yet? Do you have a framework for implementing that particular initiative?

Ms. Susan Greene: I'm not sure that we understand the initiative to which you're referring.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: On the day that the levels report was tabled, the minister made an announcement in his press conference that the government would be undertaking a media campaign, or an awareness campaign, around appropriate terminology. We notice that this is something that's included in the global compact.

Has the government provided you with a framework for what that would look like?

Ms. Susan Greene: Glen, I'll let you speak to that.

Mr. Glen Linder: Up until now, we've rigorously been doing campaigns in the United States, for example, and in other countries as well, to deter irregular migration to Canada—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I'm sorry, but that's not what I'm asking. It is a program specifically within Canada to look at public perception or to change public perception. There was a whole CBC article on it. I'm just wondering if the government has given you direction to prepare a framework on that particular initiative.

• (1630)

Mr. Glen Linder: One initiative—and I think this is perhaps the one to which you're referring—is that we have been looking at making sure that we make data available to demonstrate the impacts of immigration on Canada, the economic and social benefits in terms of why immigration matters to Canada. There might be some specific—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: But—just with the time I have left—has the government given you a framework on how to translate that data into, perhaps, advertising, or with regard to the media?

Mr. Glen Linder: I don't personally have that information on me today, so I'm sorry, but I can't answer that question.

The Chair: I'm afraid that I need to end that there.

Welcome, Mr. Stetski. If I have unanimous consent from the committee, I can give you a little bit of time to settle in if you would like it. If I have unanimous consent, we would switch to a Liberal questioner and then to you.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Mr. Whalen, you're next.

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

Mr. DeCoursey, with respect to the various agreements, compacts, treaties and whatnot that Canada may or may not be able to enter into, is there anything in the global compacts on migration and refugees that would either prevent Canada from negotiating agreements like the safe third country agreement, or encourage Canada in its ability to negotiate bilateral arrangements with countries for the safe return of migrants from those countries who were denied asylum, for instance?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Actually, the compact speaks explicitly—in a proposed action item—about the idea that countries should enter into multilateral, regional or bilateral agreements to manage migration issues.

In objective 23, which speaks to strengthening international co-operation and global partnerships for safe, orderly and regular

migration, there is reference to this in paragraph (e) under the action items. It says, “Conclude bilateral, regional or multilateral mutually beneficial, tailored and transparent partnerships, in line with international law, that develop targeted solutions to migration...”

It doesn't say it explicitly, but that's exactly what we're talking about when we're talking about a negotiated safe third country agreement between Canada and the United States.

If you are in favour of a safe third country agreement between our two countries, then you are likely in favour of a compact that endorses not just Canada and the U.S. negotiating that sort of agreement and ensuring that it meets the needs of both countries, but other countries around the world negotiating perhaps similar agreements, or agreements that would be in the best interests of two countries, or a grouping of countries in different regions dealing with their own unique migration challenges.

Mr. Nick Whalen: On that line, if the compacts represent a compendium, or they provide some type of framework where countries can agree that these are the challenges, the common definitions and the best practices.... If the United States isn't part of the compact, is there any concern, when negotiating these issues with them, that they are going to take a vastly different view on what the challenges are and how they are meant to be dealt with? Or, is it the experience of the department that it really is consistent with the United States that the U.S. not being part of it doesn't have to do with their common understanding of the problem?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: I will speak for the Government of Canada. Our view is that the compact is consistent with the values we want to share with the world. It's consistent with an agreement like the safe third country agreement we have with the United States.

I know that within his mandate, the Minister of Border Security has undertaken to initiate conversations with his counterparts in the U.S. to modernize that agreement. We would see that as well within the scope of what is promoted within the compact for safe, orderly and regular migration.

• (1635)

Mr. Nick Whalen: On that note—that it does represent Canadian values when it comes to migration—those values should be informed in some part by Canadians.

Some concern has been expressed at this committee that Canadians weren't involved in the development of the response. We've heard some testimony that, in fact, Canada was one of the lead players at the table to ensure....

Could you inform the committee to what extent Canadians were consulted on the positions that were taken in the negotiation of the global compact? If it predated your time, then I'm happy to hear from the other witnesses as well.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Sure, absolutely.

It was tremendously important for our government that Canadian values, values based on equality, human dignity, human rights and understanding of the vulnerabilities that different populations, including women and girls, face when they are in migration or refugee situations, were all included in the final draft of the compact. That was to ensure that we had the best understanding of what Canada wanted to offer to these compacts from the moment that the declaration in New York was signed in 2016. We undertook extensive consultations. We consulted with a range of migration experts across the country, with academics, with NGOs.

We also consulted extensively with the provinces and territories. Each provincial government was asked to provide feedback on their thoughts of what was contained within the compact. A number of those provinces provided feedback. Some of them didn't. Those that did provide feedback expressed no concerns with our signing of the compact and we took silence by the others to mean that they were comfortable with Canada signing on to the compact.

We're comfortable that through those consultations we were able to reflect Canadian values broadly and comprehensively, and ensure that the compact doesn't set a global standard for itself that Canada needs to find for itself, but that it demonstrates the standard that Canada has set for the world and will allow us to work with other countries to bring them up to the standard we've set.

Mr. Nick Whalen: On that note, this intensive set of meetings was a request by the official opposition in a motion to the committee to focus on the global compact. To this extent, I'm quite satisfied that our interest is protected and that we're part of them.

Were Canada to withdraw from the global compact, what would be the consequence of Canada maintaining a leadership position in this field but also in keeping other countries that are part of the compact adhering to its values?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: I think everybody at this table would or should agree that Canada cannot on its own, nor can any country on its own, address the significant challenges out there as they relate to global migration trends.

It's important that Canada have a seat at the table, that we work not only to share our best practices and learn from the best practices of others as they relate to the ways that we resettle and provide integration and settlement supports to refugees, but also that we better understand the situation that host countries face in some of the least developed countries of the world, that we understand how better to provide humanitarian supports and development assistance, that we continue to work with other countries on diplomatic efforts and other efforts of international co-operation, to make sure that basic needs are met and that human rights are always upheld.

The Chair: Thank you. We need to end there.

Mr. Stetski.

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Thank you.

My apology if you've already been asked this question.

I want to start with a larger question because there's been a lot of controversy lately.

Does the United States still meet the formal definition of a safe country for refugees?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Our officials have been satisfied that it still meets the safe third country definition that was part of the original signing.

I can assure you that it's part of the responsibility of government to constantly be reviewing our international agreements to make sure that countries we're in agreements with are still maintaining the responsibilities they have in signing them. We continue to do that.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: What would it take for Canada to decide that they didn't meet the definition?

• (1640)

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: I'd be happy to allow one of my colleagues here to speak to the technical aspects of the safe third country agreement if they were able to do so, but again, from the Government of Canada's perspective we continue to monitor the situation in the United States. As you well know, we have a number of ongoing conversations with our U.S. colleagues across a whole range of issues, and certainly managing migration is one of them.

Ms. Susan Greene: Further to the question on the safe third country agreement as we explained earlier, there are criteria that we look to as part of the review process. The department and the government are doing this on a regular basis, so we're very aware of the situation in the United States and monitoring it carefully.

Specifically at this point, I couldn't speak to what exactly it would take to change the assessment.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: Okay.

A number of communities in my riding are privately sponsoring refugees, and they're happy to do so, and potentially quite frustrated, I guess, by limitations on private refugees. I'm interested in whether annual immigration levels plans will change with the global compact on refugees. Also, why does there continue to be a cap on privately sponsored refugee streams when we have people who really would encourage more private refugees, in Kootenay—Columbia, my part of the world, anyway?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Thanks for raising our privately sponsored refugee program. It's unique around the world. It's a global best practice. Wayne, in your riding, in Kootenay—Columbia, it's similar to where I come from in Fredericton, where groups are always eager to support vulnerable people around the world through that program. Through the tabling of our levels plan, we continue to raise the number of privately sponsored refugees who will be admitted to Canada. I believe we've tripled the number of privately sponsored refugees from what it was before 2015. We know that's because of the charity and desire of Canadians to play a role in this effort.

Through our signing on to this compact, we've had a positive leadership role in seeing now five other countries around the world adopt, with certain specifics tailored to their country's unique needs, their own sponsorship programs whereby private citizens are now starting to support the resettlement and integration of refugees.

We know that this program is important. We are trying to meet the demands of Canadians. Certainly, the fact that we have a well-managed and quite robust migration system that allows us to forecast who we will admit to this country on a one-, two- or three-year basis is itself a global best practice and something that we'll continue to share with the global community through our work on these compacts and in other discussion forums that we entertain around the world.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: Will the cap be increased, then?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Our levels plan has been set now for the next three years, which already has seen a significant increase in the number of privately sponsored refugees who will land in Canada, year over year.

I would suggest that we are a global leader when it comes to refugee resettlement. In fact, we in Canada are on track to resettle more refugees than any other country in the world in 2018. We have to do that in a well-managed and orderly way, taking a number of things into consideration, including government resources available and the capacity of refugees to safely and securely settle in communities and start contributing themselves to those local communities. Those are analyses and assessments that our department is constantly making in concert with labour market needs that are driven out of other departments. All of those are considerations that we take into account before tabling our levels plan. As you will know, we've tabled a levels plan that speaks clearly to how many refugees will resettle in Canada over the next number of years. We are a global leader in resettlement.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: I have what is potentially a quick question. Both the compact for migration and the compact for refugees failed to provide any clarification on the role of the international community regarding internally displaced persons. Is the government looking for ways to better engage with these vulnerable groups, especially given what we saw with internally displaced Yazidis?

•(1645)

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: The compact on refugees specifically maintains the definition of a refugee that is in the 1951 convention, but it does provide, as does the other compact, the compact on migration, the frameworks and templates and opportunities to develop global best practices on which we can continue to work with our global partners to address the situation of internally displaced persons. I think Canada has good lessons to share with the rest of the world. In 2017 we resettled 1,400 survivors of Daesh, many of whom were Yazidi women and girls. A majority of those were internally displaced persons, so we do have the ability to respond quickly when we know a situation of vulnerable IDPs exists. I think by being at the table on these two compacts, we are better able to understand situations as they develop, both with people crossing borders and with people being displaced within their own countries.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we have Mr. Tilson, for five minutes.

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Greene, will the global compact on refugees affect how private sponsors select those they wish to select?

Ms. Susan Greene: No, there will be no impact on the selection of refugees by the privately sponsored refugee stream. On the compact, as has already been stated today, it's very clear that Canada is a world leader in the space of resettling refugees. What we call upon other countries to do is to follow our lead and to open up additional spaces for resettlement. At this point, there will be no changes anticipated for our privately sponsored refugee stream.

Mr. David Tilson: The United Nations says there should be changes.

Ms. Susan Greene: That's a very interesting question. The fact of the matter is that the international community has come together to reaffirm the importance of the 1951 convention, which defined "refugee". At this point I would say that hasn't happened in the negotiations. It has not been raised, and I would—

Mr. David Tilson: However, it could happen. Because of this agreement that the Prime Minister is going to sign, it could happen.

Ms. Susan Greene: The important thing we'd like to point out, and it's fundamental for both compacts, is that this is a non-binding agreement. There's nothing that the United Nations would do that would force them to do anything.

Mr. David Tilson: It doesn't matter. It could happen. That's my question.

I realize it has been said over and over by all of you that this is non-binding, but it is an agreement. The Government of Canada is signing an agreement, so the question I have is that even though it's non-binding, there are political pressures. The United Nations officials could say this is what it...

I just pick private sponsors as an example. The policy with respect to private sponsors could change, and should change, and if Canada doesn't change it, well, I would think there will be problems.

Ms. Susan Greene: I'd like to refer you to the parliamentary secretary.

Mr. David Tilson: No, I don't want to refer to him. I'm asking you, Ms. Greene, because you're—

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: I would ask, would the Conservatives propose that we step away from the table and not have any—

Mr. David Tilson: Mr. DeCoursey—

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: When these conversations are taking place

Mr. David Tilson: Mr. DeCoursey, I'm not asking you.

The Chair: May I call you to order?

Mr. David Tilson: I'm not asking Mr. DeCoursey a question. I'm asking Ms. Greene.

The Chair: The witnesses can choose who will answer the question. That is the standard rule.

Mr. David Tilson: No, I don't want Mr. DeCoursey—

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: I was quite clear that this is not a treaty. This is a non-binding instrument and we have an important role to play in having a voice at the table—

Mr. David Tilson: Mr. Chairman, Mr. DeCoursey is not a member of the cabinet.

I don't want to hear from him.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: —to ensure that we can help coordinate efforts by the global community to help address what is a pressing global challenge.

Mr. David Tilson: I don't want to hear from you. You're not a member of cabinet, you're a parliamentary secretary.

I'm asking the staff, who have obviously advised the Prime Minister on this, whether the pressure would be made for the Government of Canada to change its policy, and I specifically referred to private sponsors, but it could be something else.

I'll ask another question—this is to you, Ms. Greene—on whether the global compact for refugees affected the blended visa office referral process.

Ms. Susan Greene: Again, in that case, no, the compact has no impact on the blended visa office referral program because in all cases we are fundamentally working with the definition of a “refugee”, which is one that has been reaffirmed through this process and is standing on the shoulders of the important work done in 1951.

From a government official's perspective, the Government of Canada has the sovereign right to develop its own policies. When it comes to the private sponsors—

•(1650)

Mr. David Tilson: However, the United Nations could ask Canada to change its policy because of the global compact on refugees.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: The Government of Canada would have every right to make the decision—

Mr. David Tilson: Mr. DeCoursey, I'm not talking to you.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: —if it so chose to undertake—

Mr. David Tilson: Mr. DeCoursey, please. Don't interrupt.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: —based on the considerations of the government of the day.

Mr. David Tilson: Mr. Chairman, he is using up my time.

The Chair: The witnesses are asked to answer the questions that the member asks, but they may also defer to each other.

Mr. David Tilson: Well, so far she hasn't. My time is being used up by Mr. DeCoursey.

The Chair: The witnesses can decide who will answer the question.

Mr. David Tilson: Well, Ms. Greene, I'll try another one.

With respect to refugees and internally displaced persons, will Canada have to make changes in the way we select those to whom we offer asylum, as a result of the global compact on refugees?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: This gets stated again and again. Mr. Tilson, respectfully—

Mr. David Tilson: Mr. DeCoursey, don't go there. I'm asking Ms. Greene. She is perfectly competent to answer that question.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: —this has been stated in my opening comments. This is a non-binding instrument. It is not a treaty.

Mr. David Tilson: Mr. Chair, why are the staff here if Mr. DeCoursey is going to answer all the questions?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: It allows the Government of Canada to retain the sovereign right—

Mr. David Tilson: I'm not asking a question to Mr. DeCoursey.

The Chair: That's the end of your five minutes.

Mr. David Tilson: Thanks very much, Mr. DeCoursey, for using up my time. It was very courteous of you.

The Chair: Mr. Sarai.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Thank you all.

There have been claims made by the opposition that the global impact is encouraging irregular border crossing.

Is that true?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: I'm sorry. Can you say that again?

Mr. Randeep Sarai: There are claims that the global compact is encouraging irregular border crossings. Does the compact, in any which way, encourage irregular border crossings?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: The compact actually seeks ways to encourage safe, orderly and regular migration, in accordance with the rule of law, ensuring the safety and security of countries that receive migrants, and ensuring that every unique state has the sovereign right to control its borders in the way it chooses. It provides guiding principles and 23 objectives, with a list of action items that are potential best practices that could be applicable based on the unique situation a country finds itself in. It encourages international co-operation, with the understanding that no one country alone can solve the challenges that are faced by global migration. It also mentions quite explicitly that by working collaboratively and co-operatively, the international community can harness some of the potential opportunities that are available to different countries around the world if we better deal with migration as it exists, whether in North America, Europe, Africa, Asia or any part of the world.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: What are some examples of the 23 objectives? What type of objectives would countries ensure for migrants?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: I spoke about strengthening international co-operation and having not just the entire global community but also regional blocks of countries, and countries in a bilateral nature, sign and initiate agreements that support better management of migration. It talks about better data collection and a better understanding of the situations that those who migrate face.

It talks about flexibility for pathways toward regular migration, and again, I think Canada has a lot to share with the global community in that regard. We have a number of different pathways for people to come to our country, to seek economic benefit, to reunite with their families, or through a number of different refugee streams. We have both permanent and temporary pathways. We have a rather mature system. We still have things to learn from other countries around the world, but we have a rather mature system and a lot of good practices that we can share with the rest of the world.

Also, baked in there is the idea of promoting better and more coordinated border management between countries, to help ensure that when migration takes place, as much as possible, it takes place in a safe, orderly and regular fashion.

•(1655)

Mr. Randeep Sarai: So it doesn't in any way prevent other bilateral or multilateral agreements, like the safe third country agreement. It would not prevent sovereign nations from making a grievance to control or manage the flow that they have.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: No. Again, in objective 23, there's specific reference to conducting, signing and going into bilateral agreements that can help manage migration between two countries, and help coordinate the way that we would manage the border, which the safe third country agreement seeks to do.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: How can the global compact on migration help situations such as the vast caravans that are coming in from South America, going through Mexico and coming up?

If this agreement were in place, how would it help situations like that? Do you have any examples? In what way would it encourage those states along the way to manage those flows of migration? How would it affect the kind of situation that we're seeing right now?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: In some cases, the work of the compact builds upon comprehensive refugee response frameworks that are put in place in different regions around the world, and it helps coordinate actions of countries in specific regions that are experiencing trends like we're seeing through Latin and Central America into Mexico now.

It acknowledges that the answer is much broader than just supports to host countries and refugee resettlement. It acknowledges that it is about galvanizing the global community around new, innovative development assistance methods, providing different types of humanitarian support, and diplomacy in all of its elements.

It also recognizes that, within a caravan such as we're seeing right now, there are a number of different vulnerabilities that people face. We need to better understand the situation and why different people are migrating for fear, persecution, economic opportunity, or for all those other reasons.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Maguire, for five minutes.

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

I'd like to ask a couple of quick questions on the resettlement side, if I could, Ms. Greene.

I think I caught you correctly when you said that there were changes that may take place in the definition of a refugee. Does the global compact on refugees change Canada's definition of a refugee, or how it will be dealt with?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: It doesn't change the definition of a refugee.

Mr. Larry Maguire: I was asking Ms. Greene.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: It maintains the definition of a refugee that is in the 1951 convention.

Mr. Larry Maguire: So the answer is no, it doesn't?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: It maintains the definition of a refugee as per the 1951 convention.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Then I would want to ask Ms. Greene about this as well, because the document itself mentions the idea of climate refugees a number of times. Are you saying that Canada won't adopt any changes because of climate refugees?

I want Ms. Greene to answer, Mr. DeCoursey, so you don't waste my time on this.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: I'm not wasting your time. I'm giving you an answer.

Mr. Larry Maguire: I didn't ask you to.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: It doesn't change the definition of a refugee. The global compact on safe, orderly and regular migration recognizes that people are on the move for a whole host of reasons, whether it be for economic opportunity, for lack of safe haven due to war and conflict, for fear of persecution based on a whole range of things, or because climate change is real. There are island nations in the South Pacific—

Mr. Larry Maguire: Mr. DeCoursey, I sit on the Arctic climate change committee. I know it's real.

Can I just ask the question?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: —that are undergoing severe storm systems and will soon be under water, and there are countries in Africa that are experiencing extreme drought and are therefore severely food insecure. These are all reasons that people are migrating and we need to understand these root causes, and work in collaboration and seek better pathways to support migration.

Mr. Larry Maguire: All I'm asking about is how you're saying there is no change. You answered that yourself, Mr. DeCoursey, and now you're saying a big change is going to happen because of climate change.

The Chair: Could I have order, please? I'll just remind both the witness and the member that only one person should speak at a time, because the interpreters cannot follow two or three or four conversations.

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

Could I ask the question to the person I asked it to, and see if I get an answer?

The Chair: Ask your question.

Mr. Larry Maguire: I just did.

I sit on the Arctic climate change committee. I'm very well aware that climate change is taking place in the world. The answer that the member gave was, no, there's no change. But all I'm asking is what changes will occur because of the changes that are happening in climate change.

Ms. Greene, thank you.

•(1700)

Ms. Susan Greene: I think we are talking about two different things. First of all, the 1951 convention definition of a refugee has not changed. It has been reaffirmed by the global compact on refugees. What's pointed to in the document, however, is a reference to mixed migration. This is something that we as governments and other nations have been aware of for quite some time.

Mixed migration means that people are moving from state to state. There could be refugees. There could be economic migrants within those flows as well. What the Government of Canada's resettlement program takes into account is that complexity within the situation. That is why we have, among our resettled individuals, those who are defined as refugees, and it's also why we have exceptional public policies, which the minister can utilize at his discretion to bring in those who are, for example, IDPs, such as we saw with the survivors of Daesh.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: But, if I can add, Mr. Maguire, and this is a really important point for us all to remember.... Any decisions the Government of Canada makes as a result of signing these two compacts will be based on the political considerations taken by the government of the day, because these compacts reinforce the sovereign right of individual countries to make decisions based on migration and refugee support.

Mr. Larry Maguire: I would like an explanation from the department as well on this, because their own results report states:

the Department centralized the intake of UNHCR referrals in Ottawa in an effort to support timely processing of government-supported refugees. Taking into consideration Canada's referral needs, the UNHCR now has greater flexibility to submit referrals based on global resettlement pressures.

Ms. Greene, can you explain that to us? You've partly done so, I believe. What sort of flexibility does the UNHCR now have in our refugee system?

Ms. Susan Greene: Unfortunately, I'm a policy director, not in charge of our operations. I'd be happy to connect with our operations colleagues to be very precise as to what those flexibilities might be.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Why would that statement be in the report then? I would think there is an understanding that there are going to be some changes adopted.

The Chair: I'm afraid I need to end you there. That is five minutes.

That brings the first hour of our meeting to an end at five o'clock, as we've agreed.

We invite the parliamentary secretary to go to another commitment. The officials are invited to stay, as long as the committee members still have questions.

We'll just suspend for one minute.

• (1700)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1705)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

Thank you, officials, for staying and bringing your expertise.

We're going to continue the speaking order and finish this round.

If members decide that they have answers to their questions, we don't need to fill out the time. If you feel you want to keep going, we'll keep going until six o'clock, but it will be very much up to you.

Go ahead, Ms. Zahid, for five minutes.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair, and thanks to the officials for coming today.

Is there any cost associated with the development of this compact and will there be any costs going forward on that?

• (1710)

Mr. Glen Linder: I can answer with respect to the global compact on migration.

There are no out-of-pocket costs to the Government of Canada in terms of implementation. It's very much a decision of the government of the day as to what they would like to do.

There are opportunities for the government to make contributions to capacity-building and to funding the International Organization for Migration to deliver some of the coordination work the compact asks it to do, but there's no requirement for the Government of Canada to make those contributions. At this time, no decision has been made as to whether the government will do so, so there is no cost with respect to the global compact on migration.

With respect to the global compact on refugees, I will turn it to Mr. Salewicz.

Mr. Stephen Salewicz (Director General, International Humanitarian Assistance, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Indeed, the global compact on refugees looks at a more comprehensive approach to responding to refugee needs. It brings different tools together to explore opportunities for improving the outcomes for refugees, but there are no costs associated with that. It looks at existing resources being better used to respond to those needs.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: This question is for the IRCC officials. Would ratification of the two global compacts by Canada require any changes in Canada's current policies or practices with regard to migration and refugees?

Mr. Glen Linder: With respect to the global compact on migration, it would not require us to do anything. What it does do is provide us a useful list of best practices that we can review. As part of the government's regular decision-making process, if we choose to adopt new practices or to amend current practices, that is, again, a decision that the government of the day can make as it considers any new policy decisions.

With respect to the global compact on refugees, I will turn to Ms. Greene.

Ms. Susan Greene: With regard to the global compact on refugees, the situation is very much the same. This is not a binding agreement in any way. The government of the day will always have the right to amend policies as it sees fit and based on evidence, but not because of any compulsion by the compact.

Mr. Glen Linder: Ms. Kent.

Ms. Deirdre Kent (Director General, International Assistance Policy, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): I will supplement and make a point of clarification further to Ms. Greene's point about it being a non-binding compact among states. It won't be ratified; it will be adopted by states. It is not a treaty and, therefore, it won't be ratified.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: This is for the IRCC officials. Why is it important to take a multilateral approach to issues such as migration and refugees?

Ms. Susan Greene: I think what we all see is that refugee crises are really regional problems. We wouldn't want them to be crises that only one country bears the burden of. The multilateral system and multilateral approaches have been proven to be effective and efficient in helping to manage large-scale, complex issues such as what we see taking place with the refugee crises around the world today.

Mr. Glen Linder: With respect to the global compact on migration, and to migration issues generally, I think you're putting your finger on a really important point. Migration and the determination of who a country allows to enter onto its territory is one of the most fundamental attributes of the sovereignty of a country, so your question is well taken.

The point, though, is that the global compact on migration recognizes that practically every country in the world can be a country of origin, a country of transit and a country of destination, and, in most cases, is all three. Because of the journey that migrants take, the multilateral approach is helpful so that we can leverage each other's different approaches, so that we can have consistency in border management to a greater extent and so that we can have that level of global co-operation to manage these very large migration movements that we're experiencing right now.

• (1715)

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you.

Mr. David Tilson: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I notice the meeting tomorrow is not televised, and yet the minister is appearing. Can you tell us why the meeting is not televised?

The Chair: Yes, and I can also refer to the clerk. There are two rooms that have television available. We are the one committee that has a standing claim on television; however, if more than two committees request it, then the committees have to negotiate with each other, and because we are regularly televised and because the other committees are.... They have two ministers coming to public safety and national security, and the other is public accounts. Public accounts gets precedence over all other committees. Public safety and national security has two ministers coming in, and we have only one, so we lost it.

Mr. David Tilson: Keep up the good work, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Stetski, welcome to CIMM. Go ahead for three minutes.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: Thank you.

I have two questions to try to get in.

LGBTQ groups are criminalized in over 60 countries around the world. Often, they can't cross the border to declare refugee status because the country next door has also criminalized LGBTQ. So the government introduced the rainbow RAP pilot project. Will you make it a permanent and a separate refugee stream?

Ms. Susan Greene: Yes, that pilot is still in place. I can't speak to its permanency, but it has been extended to March 2020, which is signalling the strong performance of that pilot project, and in particular the excellent work of the Rainbow Refugee Society.

We recognize entirely, in full agreement with you, that it is not always possible for members of the LGBTQ community to cross borders and to do so safely. Because of that, over this past year the Government of Canada through IRCC has been working very closely with representatives from the LGBTQ community across Canada and has developed a very strong dialogue on what exactly the risks are that individuals face and the settlement needs they require.

At this time, there are no plans to make a separate stream, but we always have at the minister's discretion the use of public policies that can allow him to support them and that have been used by the minister in the past to bring vulnerable members of the LGBT community to Canada.

The Chair: I'm just going to thank Ms. Greene for that answer, but just caution the member to try to keep on the topic of the global compacts. That was outside our scope today. You happened to get an official who happened to know the answer, but they may not be prepared for questions that are outside today's meeting. Just be cautious on that.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: Then just quickly, she also made reference to climate change refugees earlier on. I sit on the environment committee. I have a great deal of interest in that topic and the very dire warnings that have been coming forward internationally, most recently out of the United States.

Is there, then, an interest in potentially, under either of these agreements, including climate change refugees and what might that look like going forward?

Ms. Susan Greene: I think I can start with a response, and then I'll invite our colleague Mr. Salewicz to speak in part on how the global compact for refugees recognizes all individuals globally who have been forcibly displaced, which could also include those who have been displaced due to climate concerns.

As we said earlier today, our definitional change is not really affected—we're still working with the definition based on the 1951 convention and it has been reaffirmed as being appropriate. Of course, when we look at the reality of what's happening around the world, there are many complex situations at play, and, unfortunately, people are vulnerable in many ways. Whether they are members of an LGBT community, whether they are displaced due to conflict and fragility in their region, or whether it's for climate reasons really becomes less important than the fact that they are displaced and that they are vulnerable.

• (1720)

[Translation]

The Chair: I have to stop you there, Ms. Greene. Thank you.

Mr. Ayoub, you may go ahead for seven minutes.

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

I'd like to take some of my valuable time to recognize Ms. Rempel as the person who asked that the committee hear from witnesses on the global compact. Since she's not here, she can't ask questions about the compact. It is somewhat troubling, but not too serious. We, for our part, are here, and we will learn what we can. She can read the blues to see what was talked about. We aren't in the House, so we can have a discussion.

[*English*]

Mr. David Tilson: The rules of the House don't require—

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. David Tilson: On a point of order, I assume the rules of the House of Commons apply to this committee, and it's most improper for a member to say that someone is not present. That rant by my colleague is most inappropriate. I'd ask him to withdraw those comments.

The Chair: I agree with Mr. Tilson. We have to be very cautious about commenting on the presence or absence of a member.

I would ask you to continue.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: I'll be careful going forward. I appreciate the warning.

I shall carry on then. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Volker Türk, whom you are no doubt familiar with, released a document, on behalf of the UN Refugee Agency, detailing why the global compact on migration is so important. He talks about the multilateral approach, which is an important element, as well as international co-operation in the area of migration. I'm going to make the document available to the committee members.

Migration issues impact countries that are poor or have limited resources. According to Pareto's Law, 80% of migration and immigration problems occur in poor countries, with the remaining 20% occurring in countries that could help the poorer ones by providing infrastructure and strategic support to meet the challenges.

My question is for all the witnesses.

What do you think of the target set by what I call the global compact forum? I call it that because the global compact is an international forum where countries come together to manage migrant crises. Countries should not take from the compact whatever suits them best. It's a non-binding compact. Countries gain, not on an individual level, but on a global one.

[*English*]

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: I think you've put your finger on a very important element of the compact and a very important objective of the compact, which is enhancing international collaboration around the issue of refugees, if I speak to the refugee compact. Indeed, at the heart of the compact is an understanding that the front-line nations, the nations that are on the front lines of the refugee crises around the world, are disproportionately affected and responsible for shouldering the responsibility of supporting the refugees.

The global compacts are essentially an effort to try to expand the responsibility sharing around the globe. A small number of countries are hosting refugees, and a relatively small number of countries are

pursuing ways of supporting those host countries, whether it's with humanitarian assistance, development assistance or resettlement.

The real objective here is to expand the tent, to grow the number of countries that are engaged in the response to refugees, recognizing that global co-operation around this issue is essential. The idea of holding a forum is an element of the compact. The idea behind the forum is that every four years, ministers would gather together from around the world, make pledges about how they're going to respond to refugee needs around the world and share best practices. There would be an accountability mechanism as such, a reporting mechanism, that allows them to share how they've responded to those pledges over time. It's a very important element of the compact as it gives a forum, a platform, for demonstrating this responsibility sharing that I spoke of.

● (1725)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Thank you for your answer.

I'd like the document I just mentioned to be provided to the committee members. It talks about countries and the refugee issue, of course. It addresses the well-being of refugees, be they boys or girls, young or old. From the outset, the UN's focus was on protecting the world's most disadvantaged by bringing together the countries of the world under the auspices of the UN. This document is the UN's response to the recent migrant issues.

If Canada wasn't part of the compact, what impact would it have politically? By adhering to the compact, countries demonstrate a political commitment and political leadership. There are no signatories to the compact—simply those who adhere to it.

Ms. Kent, would you like to answer first?

[*English*]

Ms. Deirdre Kent: In terms of both compacts, I can say for the global compact on migration that it is the first time the international community has come together for this type of framework on migration. While aspirational—not binding—it is allowing for lessons learned, knowledge sharing, best practices, collaboration and giving the UN a mandate to serve as a coordinator and allow for those best practices to be implemented for the benefit of the countries where there are the poorest and most vulnerable who are at the front lines—

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Is there more to gain to be within the compact or to be outside the compact?

Ms. Deirdre Kent: Certainly for Canada it is important to be in the compact in terms of creating a global framework and global co-operation for an issue where no one country can address migration on its own, and also in reinforcing the role of the multilateral system to support those efforts.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Thank you.

The Chair: Now we'll go to you, Mr. Tilson, but I'd like to squeeze in one question. You'll still get your time.

The question is for the Global Affairs officials. Our committee travelled to Uganda in June. Uganda is one of the countries that is a pilot project for the comprehensive refugee response framework, which is part of the initial covenant that was engaged in and then followed by the compacts now.

I'm wondering what kinds of discussions are being held on the way that Canada can support countries that engage in the framework, because we saw Canada's very limited ability to do refugee resettlement and a huge opportunity to help the host country, which is very poor.

Maybe officials from either department can talk, because I think it may change the way we do some international assistance and it may change the way we do a refugee response. Who would like to start it off?

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: I think it is a very interesting opportunity. Uganda has demonstrated a very progressive approach to refugees and, actually, through the comprehensive refugee response framework, there are a lot of opportunities.

For Canada, in Uganda we've focused on our humanitarian assistance, but in other countries we have good examples where we've taken that comprehensive approach. I'd point to Jordan as a good example of how we've used humanitarian assistance to respond to refugee needs, but we're also supporting development activities in Jordan—for instance, through the education ministry there, to expand opportunities and quality of education for Jordanians and to also within this approach support refugees at the same time.

We're looking at approaches that actually benefit host countries through their own development requirements but that also stretch out to meet the requirements of the refugees. I think that's really at the heart of what's behind the global compact for refugees. It's this opportunity that exists to move beyond the short-term humanitarian responses, which I'm responsible for and have a certain purpose, and actually grow the response to be much more sustainable and effective.

• (1730)

The Chair: Ms. Greene, did you want to add something?

Ms. Susan Greene: If I could, yes. I want to reflect on the baton that gets passed from international assistance to immigration. As Mr. Salewicz mentioned, from a development and humanitarian perspective, you'll recall that education in crisis situations is very important. It's through mechanisms such as the comprehensive response framework that we can ensure education is provided to the youth and adolescents who find themselves in refugee camps and are no longer able to follow a school program in their native country.

Also, I want to reflect on durable solutions as well. For the refugee population, one possibility, as we say, may be to resettle to Canada or to another country, but the more likely possibility is for local integration. That's exactly what the comprehensive response framework is signalling.

Further on the education idea, though, I just wanted to flag that alongside our traditional resettlement programs there is also work being done to consider complementary pathways. If you educate a refugee, and then a refugee is available and able to go to university, there are pathways for those refugees to come to Canada, not as a

refugee per se but as an international student. This is something that we have been working on with WUSC over a number of years. There are also pilots that are being worked on with the department to bring in economic refugees: people who can come, are skilled labourers and are able to work right away.

The Chair: Thanks.

I'm at a very grassroots level on this. We were in the Kyangwali settlement of 100,000 people. Mr. Maguire and several of us were there. We saw power lines overhead. Transmission cables go overhead, and yet there is no transformer in the settlement for 100,000 people, so they have no electricity.

It's driving me crazy that Canada can't give them transformers. It's at that level of how we can broaden our understanding of international assistance to work with Uganda as they try to give opportunities to local host communities, as well as to these settlements—not encampments—through mobility, land, food, all of those things. The power is right there, but they can't get it.

That's my rant for the moment. If someone at Global Affairs—because it's not our work—could start to think about that, I think life would be better.

Mr. Tilson.

Mr. David Tilson: Mr. Chairman, to Mr. Salewicz or Ms. Kent, how can you assure me, and Canadians, that Canada will remain in complete control of our borders and our sovereignty after the adoption of these compacts?

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: I think it's been said many times already about the non-binding nature of this agreement.

I'm focused in my work on how to expand opportunities for finding solutions in regions where the refugees initially flee to. We're looking at those approaches to try to find solutions in Uganda and in other countries where they've initially sought asylum.

The UNHCR can advocate for changes all the time. I imagine that they have been advocating for changes over the last few decades around the world.

Mr. David Tilson: I anticipated your answer, that you'd be saying it's non-binding, because that seems to be the tone of this meeting.

However, will there not be pressure by other member states to change our procedures and policies?

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: Maybe I could just speak from one perspective, and if my colleagues have more....

Canada is a world leader on dealing with refugees overseas. The GCR, the global compact on refugees, is fully aligned and looks to Canada for some of the best practices in terms of responding to refugee issues.

It is about codifying best practices for other countries to seek advice for improving the lot of refugees around the world and for improving the host country's efforts.

•(1735)

Mr. David Tilson: I understand that, but I read somewhere recently in the media that 1.5 million asylum seekers have come to Germany in the last five years. The question from member states—I'm not saying Germany would do that—would be that Canada is not pulling its weight, we have to change our ways, as a result of these compacts.

That's the concern I'd like you to address, on whether that's possible.

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: There is the 1951 convention on refugees. There is an international legal system in place that provides for the treatment of refugees.

To suggest that a non-binding agreement somehow overcomes those... I don't see it, but—

Mr. David Tilson: Well then, what's the point of adopting a non-binding agreement?

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: That's a good question. I think it is for other countries out there to rally, support and look for solidarity around what is a really important global issue.

I think a non-binding agreement, by its nature, which is seeking to expand the tent, so to speak, in terms of other countries' engagement on this issue, is really important. The more countries that we can get to be engaged on refugee issues around the world, the better it is for refugee outcomes.

Mr. David Tilson: Well, they're not having too much luck because there are quite a few member states that aren't agreeing to this—the United States, Australia, Israel, Austria, to name some. There may be others.

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: Yes. That's the global compact on migration, not on refugees. With refugees, that's not the case.

Mr. David Tilson: To Ms. Greene, will this initiative cause Canada to adjust the mix of economic, family and humanitarian migrants that we accept?

Ms. Susan Greene: Do you want to try that one?

Mr. Glen Linder: I can assure you it won't have an impact on that. That will be a decision for the Government of Canada to take.

With respect to the general point you're raising, I guess it's one that was of fundamental concern to all of us as officials as the global compact on migration was being negotiated. We were particularly concerned when the United States withdrew and, as part of their withdrawal, they said they were concerned about the impacts on their sovereignty.

It's for that reason that we were so careful in paragraph 15 of the compact to put in there that this is a question that "reaffirms the sovereign right of States". It's the reason that we put in there, in paragraph 7, that it's non-legally binding. Can countries—or the United Nations, or civil society or anyone else—campaign with Canada to pressure us to do x or y or z? Yes, they can, but ultimately it's a decision for Canada as a sovereign state and for the government of the day to decide whether they want to yield to that pressure.

Mr. David Tilson: I understand that, although, you know, look at the Paris climate accord. I don't want to get into environment, Mr. Chairman, but that's non-binding and yet if someone who signed that

agreement, agreed to that agreement, didn't follow through, they'd be criticized. They'd be taken to task by others who are following through.

I guess I'm returning to a question I just asked about the pressure that could be put on Canada to do certain things that we might not necessarily want to do.

The Chair: Let me give permission to the officials to answer as officials and to decline if you think that question is really for your political masters. It's up to you to decide that.

Ms. Susan Greene: Thank you very much.

I think the question is, in many ways, hypothetical. As officials of the Government of Canada, we are looking at evidence, we are looking at data and we are providing our best advice to the government of the day.

•(1740)

Mr. David Tilson: Okay.

Is there anything else?

Mr. Glen Linder: I guess the one thing I would add is that it gives Canada an opportunity as well. It gives Canada an opportunity to engage with other countries that perhaps are not taking advantage of the opportunities that migration can bring. Just as migration has given us economic and social benefits in Canada, it's an opportunity for us to campaign with other countries to ask why they don't think about putting in regular pathways for permanent residents or temporary residents. We have derived a lot of benefit from this in Canada, in terms of filling skills shortages, in terms of addressing our aging population. There's a huge demand globally for migration, obviously evidenced by the fact that there are 258 million people on the move. It's an opportunity for us to ask why they don't take advantage of this and put regular pathways in place.

If there were more regular pathways in place across the world, hopefully that would have an effect in terms of mitigating irregular migration, because people would have more opportunities for regular migration across the world.

The Chair: I'm afraid I need to stop you there.

Mr. Stetski.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: Last Easter, a number of colleagues from all parties and I visited Palestine and visited one of the United Nations refugee camps in Palestine. I'm curious: Under the GCR, is Canada going to be increasing funding for the UNHCR and its important work? Maybe you can't answer that, but is there potential to increase funding for UNHCR under the GCR?

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: There is no link between funding for UNHCR and the GCR. We are, though, a strong supporter of UNHCR in terms of financial support over the years, recognizing the important work it does on refugee situations.

We also support a host of other organizations to respond, though, to refugee issues. In Uganda, for instance, I'm sure you saw some of the international NGOs that are working in that space. There's a variety of channels or partners that we use, but there is no increased funding attached to the GCR.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: They certainly do important and excellent work and I think we should be funding them as much as we possibly can, quite frankly.

Mexico looks like it's about to become a host country for refugees. Would Mexico qualify as a host country for refugees, given what the United States is doing, by keeping people from crossing over into the country? What would that look like? Does Canada have any interest in trying to support Mexico, in any way, to deal with their becoming a host country for refugees?

Mr. Glen Linder: Regarding Mexico, they are also a party to the refugee convention, so they have obligations there as well. If someone claims asylum within Mexico, Mexico is obligated to determine whether the person is genuinely fleeing persecution and needs protection and then to offer them that protection, as a party to that convention.

In terms of Canada's engagement with Mexico, we have provided capacity-building to Mexico, in the past, to assist them to improve their own asylum system, so they are better able to receive claims from people who are coming into their country—whether they are from Central America or elsewhere—to determine whether they are genuine refugees and to be able to keep them in Mexico for as long as they are suffering persecution.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: It's quite disturbing. I understand the United States is using tear gas to keep people from crossing the border. When you think of a third safe country agreement, I wonder if that will impact how we look at the United States going forward.

That's it. Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Zahid.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you, Chair.

My question is for the GAC officials.

One of the most encouraging things that I see about the global compact on migration is the focus on sustainable development. We cannot possibly hope to solve the global migration crisis by treating the symptoms alone. We need to address the root causes of why people leave in the first place. They are often forced to flee because of war and persecution, but many times, they flee in search of economic opportunities.

Can you please address the importance of sustainable development in managing migration and why it is important?

• (1745)

Ms. Deirdre Kent: Indeed, the millions of migrants on the move often live in poverty, where the situations of the poorest and most vulnerable are acute, including women and girls. As you stated, this is a key part of the global compact, which recognizes those particular vulnerabilities that are faced by particularly vulnerable migrants in the least developed countries. The 23 objectives address some of those issues, including trafficking and the situation of women and girls.

For Canada, our international assistance is focused on the poorest and most vulnerable and that includes support to countries that are sources of migrants and hosts for migrants. As Mr. Salewicz pointed out, at times, we can take a comprehensive approach, where we're dealing with mixed migrant and refugee populations, so we look at

not just humanitarian assistance, but development assistance as well. Those opportunities exist through education and through employment opportunities, in order to set up what are often protracted situations, and allow that next generation to have a fighting chance.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Yes, that is one issue, but the situation in the camps in many host countries.... For example, over 700,000 people came from Myanmar and they are in Bangladesh. We heard from our committee members who went to the camps and saw them that there are situations that need to be addressed. Through the compact, do you think that we will be better able to manage those people who are in the camps and how will that be helpful to the host countries?

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: Indeed, I think the global compact on refugees is really about bringing development actors into the situation, into the response. As I said earlier, up until recently, the focus of refugee responses has been purely humanitarian with a focus on basic needs. We were looking at how we could ensure water, shelter and so on, but these longer-term development objectives and requirements of the population have tended to be put aside because of a lack of focus and lack of emphasis.

This compact for refugees expands the focus of the development side to really look at what are the opportunities. I think you mentioned Bangladesh, which is a good example, where the Rohingya refugees are coming in. We have a very important opportunity with that, with the work going on in Bangladesh. We've supported the World Bank to expand health and education opportunities to host communities but also to the refugees. There are a lot of opportunities through the World Bank, bringing in new actors like the World Bank to finance development initiatives focused particularly on health and education to provide longer-term development opportunities there.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Canada recently conducted a review of international assistance. Was migration as a driver part of that review?

• (1750)

Ms. Deirdre Kent: As part of the international assistance review, we did look at the changing dynamic for global development, so that included the sustainable development goals, the Paris accord, but also the context of migration, refugees and IDPs, recognizing that Canada's international assistance should be focused on the poorest and most vulnerable, and particularly gender equality and the empowerment of women.

As a cross-cutting element of the review, yes, and the new policy, the feminist international assistance policy, is fully consistent with what is set out in the two global compacts in terms of a human rights-based approach, gender sensitivity and child sensitivity.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: I'll share my time with Mr. Whalen.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Often what we as elected officials are trying to do is to figure out who has responsibility so we can get information we're looking for. This global compact, at least on the migration side, has very much a whole-of-government approach to trying to solve problems. I think that might even be one of the stated principles.

Is your department or the other government department implicated in the global compact forming reporting structures so that you can work together on each aspect? Has it reached that phase? It's been four months now since the global compact was signed, so I'm wondering where the government is now in terms of what departments are leading on different aspects and whether those reporting structures are in place.

Ms. Deirdre Kent: Certainly Global Affairs Canada and IRCC worked hand in glove throughout the consultations and the negotiations of both compacts. Mr. Linder and I spent a lot of time together, and the implementation is multi-faceted in terms of the global aspect, through Global Affairs Canada, and the domestic aspects and some of the international aspects falling under IRCC.

Mr. Nick Whalen: If I get a chance to ask for somebody else's time later, I'll get into some of the other 23 objectives that are in other departments.

The Chair: Right.

Mr. Maguire.

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

I have just a couple of questions. I want to ask first for a little bit of a follow-up to my colleague's question.

A number of countries were involved in developing these global compacts, and you've indicated that a number were not, on the migration side. Is everyone else still on the refugee side? How many countries were involved in putting this together?

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: That's if, indeed, all the countries remain engaged. There is no signing right now. It's going to the general assembly for approval. There will be a vote in December for that, but essentially the compact has been agreed to by all the countries that participated. The wording in the compacts has been negotiated over the last year and there's been agreement across the board.

Mr. Larry Maguire: As indicated earlier, someone on the panel—and thank you for your testimonies today—indicated that there were a number of countries that were not part of the global compact on migration.

Can you name those?

Ms. Deirdre Kent: The United States, from the outset, did not join in the negotiations. Since July, the end of negotiations, a number of countries have publicly said that they will not join in the GCM: Australia, Czech Republic, Poland, Austria, Estonia, Israel and Bulgaria.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thank you.

Objective number six states, “Facilitate fair and ethical recruitment and safeguard conditions that ensure decent work”. I see a lot of ambiguity in that statement.

Paragraph 22 has a number of principles that would develop and strengthen the labour migration and fair, ethical recruitment processes. It would “allow migrants to change employers and modify the conditions or length of their stay with minimal administrative burden, while promoting greater opportunities for decent work and respect for international human rights and labour law”, which I'm in favour of.

We have a temporary foreign worker program in place right now. Do you think there are any parts of Canada's temporary foreign worker program that you feel would be incompatible with objective number six?

• (1755)

Mr. Glen Linder: This comes back to the fact that these are practices that states can take or leave as they wish.

In Canada, to a large extent, our temporary foreign workers are brought in to fill specific labour market shortages, and with specific employers. To the extent that the system works for us, we don't have any plans to change that.

This paragraph, I think, was developed with those countries in mind that really rely almost exclusively on temporary foreign workers as a source of migration. It's encouraging those countries to make sure that migrants can change jobs as they need to. In Canada, we have a requirement for labour market impact assessment.

That said, we also know that there are many temporary foreign workers who come in and are then able to apply for permanent residence and stay in Canada after that. That's a helpful pathway that we have in place.

Certainly it will not affect our ability and our commitment to ensuring that temporary foreign workers who require labour market impact assessment continue to go through that requirement.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Today in the news, the World Refugee Council has indicated that it thinks it would be a good idea to redirect some of its funds to the Magnitsky style of collecting funds around the world, and being able to put those into settlement and refugee systems.

I'm wondering how you see that fitting with the global compact.

Mr. Stephen Salewicz: My understanding is that's one of their proposals, to seize frozen assets and use them for responding to humanitarian crises. That's an issue that we'll have to explore closely. I'm not sure of all the details. It's a proposal that's on the table, and we'll have to look at it. There is the question of how that might improve accountability, address impunity, but it's something we're going to have to look at closely.

If I could maybe pick up on the last point, you asked about GCR and whether all the countries are still in. At the end of negotiations, all countries had signed on essentially. Subsequent to the negotiations closing, there was a vote at third committee at the UN, looking at the UNHCR omnibus...to which the GCR is annexed. The U.S. voted against it.

Now, what that means going forward is unclear. They did say in an explanation of their position that they supported the elements of the document, but they had some concerns about some of the language.

This is going to a vote at the General Assembly, and we'll see where that takes us. I wanted to clarify that.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thank you.

The Chair: We have a couple of minutes for Mr. Whalen.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

To go back to my earlier line of questioning, I sort of understand the reporting structure between GAC and IRCC, but looking at the objectives, I see the first one is related to disaggregated data, the GBA+ type of stuff. Presumably that might be Stats Canada. Then there's one for sustainable development and climate change. I would think that would be Environment and Climate Change Canada, but maybe I'm wrong. There are some related to pension portability, which I'm assuming is a finance or CRA function. Border security is implicated.

I'm wondering more specifically what types of reporting structures are developing to make sure that the government knows what it's doing across government to live up to its commitments. From my perspective, they may be soft commitments to other countries, but they're things that the Government of Canada has committed to doing. Canadians are interested in whether they're actually living up to their end of the bargain, whatever that bargain happens to be.

Could you just describe what the reporting would be to ensure that all aspects of government are engaged on the migration crisis?

• (1800)

Ms. Deirdre Kent: Absolutely. I'll start off, and then perhaps IRCC might want to chime in.

Certainly, through the negotiations of the global compacts, we took a whole-of-government approach, so any of the text that related

to statistics and data would have been checked with Statistics Canada, and the same with ECCC, Public Safety Canada and Canada Border Services. There is absolutely a comfort level across Government of Canada officials with the text here and the reflection of Canada's position.

The follow-up review mechanisms and approach are still to be determined at the global level, and that will inform Canada's approach.

The Chair: Maybe to take note of our concern, the committee might put in a report how we let it live.

Is it normal for the United States not to engage in international compacts or agreements or treaties such as indigenous persons rights or those things? Do they normally sign?

Ms. Deirdre Kent: Certainly, we respect the sovereign right of all countries to join or not join any international—

The Chair: But the U.S. typically doesn't sign, do they?

Ms. Deirdre Kent: There's a mix. They are party to many human rights treaties, for example, that are binding. I think there's absolutely a mix, yes.

The Chair: Fine, thank you.

As it is 6:02, the meeting is now adjourned, with thanks to the officials for joining us.

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