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Chair

Mr. Robert Oliphant

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.)): I call to order this 145th meeting of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

We are returning to our major study on migration challenges and opportunities for Canada in the 21st century.

This week we have three meetings to tie up requests that the committee had following the summary of evidence that the analysts prepared for us. You had requested more information on Latin America, on labour demand related to newcomers to Canada, as well as some statistics on the SDC work and temporary foreign workers.

This week, the meetings we'll be having today, Wednesday and Thursday will cover those topics and also satisfy the needs of the various motions that were passed with respect to the number of meetings required.

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): I have a point of order, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. David Tilson: It's on the topic you were just discussing. I recall somewhere having a vote that we would have three extra meetings. What I don't recall, other than from your declaration, is that there would be three meetings this week. I know for certain that there was never a vote that there be a meeting on Thursday. That was a declaration by you without consulting the committee.

I'm unavailable on Thursday. It's a very bad time for me. If I had known some time ago, I could have made arrangements, but it's very inconvenient. I would suggest, Mr. Chairman, because you didn't consult with the committee on that particular meeting for the Thursday, that you choose another date, with the approval of the committee.

The Chair: As the previous chair will know, the committee meets at the call of the chair. That is within the Standing Orders. I met with the analysts and the clerk to find a way to accomplish all the things you had requested and also give them time to prepare a report.

In negotiating with the staff of the committee, then, it was my choice to call that meeting. I regret that it causes difficulties for members. You may, however, consult with other MPs. It's certainly your right to be here at the committee or your choice not to be here, but it is always, as is really clear in the Standing Orders, that the meetings are at the call of the chair.

Mr. David Tilson: I understand that the meetings are at the call of the chair, but normally out of courtesy, the chair consults with the committee, particularly with a special meeting. I understand that for this topic to be covered properly we had agreed to three meetings. I'm just saying that I don't know whether any other members feel the same way, but we had no notice of your announcement that it would be this coming Thursday. It makes things very difficult, certainly for me.

However, I have had my say, Mr. Chairman, and I express regret, if you are going continue to call the meeting on the Thursday.

Thank you.

The Chair: I will just remind members that they can check the minutes from the meeting that happened last week. I told the committee last week that we would be meeting on Thursday afternoon. I didn't give you a lot of notice, but it wasn't just today; it was actually at the last meeting we held.

Mr. David Tilson: Mr. Chairman, you gave us no notice and no discussion. However, if you're determined to do it, you're absolutely right that the chairman can call a meeting. I just think that out of courtesy to the committee, if you're trying to build a good relationship with all members of the committee, you consult with the committee before you start setting up those extra meetings.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Maguire.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): I feel the same as Mr. Tilson. I can probably be here. I've changed some plans already. I was a bit taken aback that we were going to do three meetings in one week; that was the only thing. I knew we had to do three: we had agreed to do so. So I appreciate that, Mr. Chair. I was looking at not being here for another event.

I just wonder for the future whether we could have a bit of consultation about when the meetings are going to be. I know you have the right to go ahead and call them as the chair, but I've had to make some pretty major changes to scheduling and that sort of thing to accommodate this.

I know we don't meet for two weeks subsequent to this, I believe. Is that correct?

• (1535)

The Chair: We won't be meeting for two weeks. We come back for one week and then we're away for another week.

You also requested, you will remember, at the last meeting to have another meeting with officials on supplementary estimates (B).

Mr. Larry Maguire: Mr. Chair, I was just going to add that.

The Chair: I'm attempting to schedule all your requests, and also deal with a very wonky House calendar this year. It is not without regret that I try to schedule these meetings, because I would like to be home a little earlier on Thursday as well, but this is the best we could do.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Well, that would have been great if I could have been at home, but I wasn't going to be anyway.

I know you and I didn't have anything to do with that "wonky" calendar, as you say. I know we have only that one week and then we're out another week. This would get into April pretty quickly. I appreciate the dilemma, but I just want to put that on the record.

Thank you.

The Chair: Is there any other discussion on that?

[Translation]

We'll continue with Mr. Beuze.

First, thank you for accepting our invitation to appear today.

[English]

The time is yours, for 10 minutes.

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze (Representative in Canada, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. I'm very happy to be back before this committee as it's an important ally for the UNHCR, the UN refugee agency.

I'm also particularly pleased that the committee has decided to shed light on the situation in Latin America, because it has been traditionally one of the situations in terms of refugees, forceable movement of people and migration, that has been often under-reported in the media, in the public and sometimes in some of your sister Parliaments abroad.

I'll discuss three different situations this afternoon to introduce the topic.

The first one is the north of Central America. That concerns people leaving and fleeing El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. I was there a year ago, and for somebody such as me who has spent most of his career in the field in wartorn countries in the Middle East and in Africa, I came to realize that the level of violence and the type of violence is very similar to what you would see in a conflict.

It is inflicted by criminal gangs, organized crime, which are actually de facto controlling part of the territory, or part of the territories in those three countries, where the presence of state law enforcement and judicial authorities are not possible, where the presence of public services such as health or education is extremely limited for a certain number of the population.

As we speak, we believe that by the end of 2019 we'll have more than 300,000 asylum seekers and refugees from those three countries in the sub-region, on top of which we have to add 60,000 people who are going to be forceably returned, mainly from Mexico and the U.S., who may have protection concerns when they arrive back in

one of those three countries, and more than 3,000 internally displaced people in those three countries. It's quite an important crisis for UNHCR and its partners.

From the survey we have done with people who are on the move, who are trying to move for their safety towards Mexico or the United States, 71% have expressed being directly targeted by violence, in particular, women, children, young girls, by those criminal gangs. I interviewed young girls who at the age of 17 had been several times gang-raped by the gangs, young men who are forceably conscripted into those criminal gangs, but also the LGBTQ community and in particular transwomen, who are particularly at risk of being targeted.

On top of that, we can add also human rights defenders, lawyers, indigenous leaders and a number of unaccompanied children who are joining those caravans, who made the headlines a few months ago when they reached Mexico.

People from those three countries are going to a number of countries, such as Belize, Costa Rica, Guatemala and Panama, but mainly are arriving in Mexico. As we all know, it's difficult for them to cross into the U.S. to claim asylum.

Anyway, we think in Mexico there's a good prospect for us to stabilize those populations, provided that the asylum system in Mexico can grant them refugee status, provided that we can offer them access to livelihood opportunities so that they can get bread and butter and can have access to education, and that we support the host communities, in particular, the poor Mexican communities that are hosting them. We have the COMAR in Mexico, which is doing the same work as the IRB is doing here in Canada.

One point where Canada can play an active role is in the resettlement of the most vulnerable of those community members. Again, I'm speaking about women at risk. I'm speaking about survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. I'm speaking about the LGBTQ community, with an emphasis on transwomen.

We have mechanisms to identify those most at risk in the three countries of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, for them to avoid being persecuted or at risk of traffickers where they would be exploited, including for sexual purposes, to extract them from their country and resettle them to a third country. The U.S. provided more than 800 spaces for those people last year.

● (1540)

Let me briefly turn to Nicaragua. You know the situation well. Since April 2018 there has been some political violence in Nicaragua linked to social security reform, higher taxes and fewer benefits. What is important to note here is that 32,000 Nicaraguans have already left to go to Costa Rica to seek asylum, and the Costa Rican authorities believe there are between 250,000 and one million Nicaraguans who were already in Costa Rica prior to the April event and who are therefore what we call *réfugiés sur place* because they potentially cannot return now to Nicaragua. This has put a strain on Costa Rica in terms of their asylum system but also in terms of services and livelihood opportunities for those Nicaraguans.

The last point is on Venezuela, which has been in the media over the last two or three months. Here are a few numbers to explain the current situation. There are more than 3.4 million Venezuelans outside their country, both as refugees and as migrants. Another important point to note is that since 2015, 2.5 million have left the country. The bulk of the Venezuelans outside their country left after 2015. We expect that at this rate, by the end of 2019, 5.3 million Venezuelans will be outside their country, 3.6 million of whom will be in the sub-region. Here we are speaking about Colombia, Peru, Ecuador and Brazil, in that order in terms of numbers of people.

Notably, we have witnessed 5,000 people leaving Venezuela every day. There has been no increase over the last few days or weeks in the number of people leaving the country, but you know that there has been an increase in militarization and in police being deployed at the border, and UNHCR is reminding the authorities on both sides of the border that people should be entitled to leave their country if they are fleeing for their lives and want to claim asylum.

We have done some surveying, particularly in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, about the reasons people are leaving Venezuela. You know the situation well. It's a mix of economic factors, but also of violence. Sixty-seven per cent of them have reported a protection incident. Thus, two-thirds of the people we interviewed were certainly to be considered as refugees and not as migrants, because they were fleeing a situation of persecution or human rights violations. Only half of them had reported the incident to the authorities, claiming that they feared either reprisals or no action from the authorities, if they were to complain about those protection incidents.

Let me flag rapidly a few profiles of the people we see arriving in Colombia, Peru and Ecuador in particular. Ten per cent have medical needs. Here in particular we have lactating mothers or pregnant women who didn't have access to services in Venezuela. Sixteen per cent of them are elderly people who have difficulty surviving and getting access to medication in particular. Seven per cent are children with medical needs. Two per cent are persons with disabilities. Three per cent are unaccompanied or separated children, children moving on their own without a legal guardian or their parents.

We are trying with the United Nations to beef up our response in Venezuela on nutrition, health and protection. UNHCR has had a long presence in Venezuela, because there are more than 850,000 persons in Venezuela who are of concern to UNHCR, mainly Colombian refugees and asylum-seekers. A number of those Colombians have been forced to return to Colombia, maybe sometimes against their free will, to be resettled in their own country.

Unfortunately, as we speak now, the funding that has been requested by the United Nations, which also includes the NGOs, has a funding gap of 55%.

●(1545)

I will stop here. I welcome questions, remarks or suggestions from the committee.

The Chair: You're at exactly 10 minutes and zero seconds. Thank you.

We begin with Mr. Whalen for seven minutes.

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): I'm sorry, Mr. Chair. I don't think I can promise that level of precision.

The Chair: Do your best.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Thank you again for coming, Mr. Beuze. It's always very helpful to get the factual information.

When we're talking about the scope of the problem that exists for displaced people in Central America and northern South America, it seems to me that the problem in Venezuela is really orders of magnitude larger than in the other countries.

Can you describe whether or not you have sufficient funds for any of the problems that are occurring in the region, let alone what you're talking about—a problem in Venezuela that will be growing from 3.4 million people now to 5.4 million at the end of the year—and what the magnitude of that change means?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: Thank you very much for this important question.

The funding issue is always critical. I've had the opportunity in the general study to brief the committee that we still receive generous funding from the Middle East and to a lesser extent sub-Saharan Africa. Just to give you some numbers, we started the year in Mexico with 2% of the funding we need to respond in particular to people who are in the caravan or those who come on their own. Two per cent of the funding was made available to us to start the year.

If you look at the situation of internal displacement in the three countries, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, where it is important to address the root causes and also to have those who are being forcibly returned settle down, we have extremely limited funding—I don't have the number, but it's extremely limited funding—to provide livelihood opportunities, to help children go to school or to provide medical and psychological care to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

Venezuela has in relative terms attracted quite sizeable funding. What is important is that we don't forget the 3.4 million who are outside Venezuela. That's of concern not only to UNHCR but to all the partners. The attention, in particular from the media and some political circles, has been very much within Venezuela, but we have 3.4 million Venezuelans outside, and it's becoming difficult for the countries in the region, which are all low- and middle-income countries, to provide all the services. It has created tension with the host communities. We have seen xenophobic attacks, in particular in Ecuador.

Mr. Nick Whalen: UNHCR, of course, particularly is there to help displaced people in a third country or the country they've arrived in. Could there be a role for an internationally funded organization to receive people back into their home countries? Is there a role for the UNHCR to play in Venezuela, both in helping Colombian refugees or asylum seekers, but also helping the repatriated Venezuelans who are being sent back?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: Our brand is very much focused on refugees, as the name of our institution indicates, but our mandate does not stop when refugees are returning to their countries. We also have the reintegration back home, especially when it's a voluntary repatriation, meaning when people have been able to make a free and informed choice about their return and have not been forced to return. We have that mandate.

We also have the mandate of internally displaced people. We have some population displaced in Venezuela who are going to walk the border with the intent of perhaps crossing the border, or in the three NCA countries. We have the mandate to take care of them from a protection/human rights point of view and from a shelter point of view.

Other UN agencies—UNICEF for education, the WFP for food—is taking care of the internally displaced, but this is coordinated between the UN agencies.

Our mandate, then, is not limited to refugees. It includes returnees, people who are being repatriated, but also internally displaced.

• (1550)

Mr. Nick Whalen: The jump you talked about that is expected this year, from 3.4 million to 5.4 million, is quite a lot; that's 6% of Venezuela's population. I'm wondering what additional supports are going to be required along the border, where Venezuelans are leaving for Chile or Peru or Brazil and, if they're closing the border to food now, whether this has gone beyond something the UNHCR is truly able to deal with on the ground.

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: There are two parts to your question. One is what we can do inside Venezuela. Very much the UN Secretary General has been offering to assist the Government of Venezuela in the delivery of assistance. You know that over the weekend all the borders, including the maritime border and the special air, were closed by the Government of Venezuela, but the UN stands ready to assist the authorities in delivering humanitarian aid inside the country.

Now, with respect to the needs in the countries that are hosting refugees, indeed it's going to be a major increase in numbers, which is going to strain the resources of those host countries. You may have seen that over the last three days, the border between Colombia and Ecuador has been closed, limiting people's movements. We know that what Venezuelans have been doing up to now is really moving from Venezuela to Colombia—there are still one million in Colombia—and moving down towards Peru.

If you look at the map, Peru is rather south, compared with Venezuela. By closing the border between Ecuador and Colombia, you limit the capacity of people to find safety, but also to find livelihood opportunities, access to health care, access to education for their children and so on.

That was justified, I understand, because of the rise in xenophobic attitudes of the hosting communities in Ecuador, who were competing for the same resources as the newly arrived Venezuelans.

Without support, we will see more and more of those borders being closed.

The Chair: You have half a minute, but I'll just interrupt and stop the clock for a second.

The UNHCR has provided a kit with a map and these statistics. We have to have it translated. You will be getting a visual for this as well; we just haven't had it translated yet.

I'm sorry. Continue.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Very quickly, you're talking about sexual violence, but you didn't mention anything about human trafficking. Is there any evidence that it is also part of the problem in Latin America and South America?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: Thank you very much for reminding me. I should have mentioned it.

The Chair: Very quickly.

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: Indeed, there are a number of trafficking rings operating out of the NCA countries, in particular to Mexico and in Mexico.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Rempel.

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

Just briefly on the topic of Venezuela, it's our understanding that the Maduro regime, as has been mentioned, is blocking aid, which is exacerbating the situation further. It has been suggested that if a motion were moved at the United Nations to remove the credentials of Maduro diplomats around the world, it would perhaps allow organizations such as the IMF to prevent the Maduro regime from continuing to draw on Venezuela's limited gold reserves.

Has there been any attempt by Canada to push for such an action at the United Nations?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: I'm not in a position to respond to this question, because we are dealing with the humanitarian side of the crisis.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Okay. Thank you.

Chair, I am going to move:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Committee conduct a study on Yazidi refugee family reunification; that this study examine the backlog in existing sponsorship cases for Yazidi refugees; that this study consider expanding the definition of family members for Yazidis given the severe trauma they have experienced at the hands of ISIS; that this study review the One Year Window of Opportunity Provision; that departmental officials be in appearance for at least one meeting of this study; that the Minister of Immigration be invited to appear; that the Committee report its findings to the House; that this study occur before May 1, 2019; and that pursuant to Standing Order 109, the government table a comprehensive response thereto.

• (1555)

The Chair: We can receive notice of motion for that.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: —and we have.

The Chair: We have?

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Yes.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

Chair, I'd like to spend some time discussing why I believe it is incumbent upon us to undertake this study at this particular point in time.

First of all, there have been many reports in the media this week about the Yazidi community as ISIS is being rooted out in some of their strongholds in Syria. Earlier this week, for example, in one of several stories it was reported that 11 Yazidi children were rescued from one of the holdouts and were brought to the Iraqi border.

In fact, this morning I had the opportunity to meet with Ms. Nafiya Naso, who is the head of the Canadian Yazidi Association. In a press conference she stated that some of these recently rescued children actually have family members here in Canada who have been brought to the country.

I want to give a bit of history for my colleagues on this committee and for you, Chair, who may not have been here throughout the course of this Parliament, on the initiative and why this is important for us to undertake today.

First of all, in terms of an annotated history of this particular issue, in the 2015 campaign, an audit was brought to light that had been conducted at the behest of former immigration minister Chris Alexander to look at the list of people being referred to Canada as government-sponsored refugees from the United Nations. The goal of the audit, from my understanding, was to see whether persecuted minorities were being included on that list.

During the course of the campaign, the audit became a source of much controversy, to the point that we found a clip of the now-Prime Minister being asked, point blank, "Would you, if you form government, prioritize or allow persecuted ethnic minorities or religious minorities into the country?" His response was, "No, that's disgusting."

After that, it became very clear that members of the Yazidi community had not been prioritized by the United Nations or by Canada as part of the Syrian or Iraqi refugee initiative that the government undertook in late 2015 and early 2016.

From there the opposition moved two motions in the House of Commons—the first was defeated—declaring a genocide against the Yazidi people. Then there was quite a bit of political effort and pressure on the government again to declare a genocide, as well as to ensure that members of the Yazidi community were prioritized into the country.

Subsequent to that, there were many questions in the House of Commons, because it took the government quite a long period of time to meet its commitment under that motion. Then, of course, we had other studies in this committee that talked about the resettlement of the Yazidi community, given that they were in an exceptional situation in Canada, in that there was not a large diaspora community in the country. Many people who were being brought here had obviously suffered severe trauma. There were not translators available, as we experienced in our committee here. Chair, you'll remember that well.

One of the key recommendations coming out of this particular study was to expedite the reunification of surviving family members from this community, because.... I've met with people from the

community. I met with one woman in Winnipeg, who had survived being abducted. She said she wanted to go back, because at least she could be with her family. She had been told by the government that the family would be reunified, but then of course the minister did not respond to that.

Subsequently, because the government did not move on those recommendations, I sought concurrence in that report in the House of Commons, which forced a vote of the House of Commons on this issue. Subsequent to that vote, the government has still not moved on this issue.

For colleagues, I just want to outline the situation right now, because I have been emailed and called by dozens of members of the community who are in Canada right now who have been told by the government that, even in cases in which their cases meet the criteria for the one-year window of opportunity and they have funds raised through the privately sponsored refugee program...the minister is currently telling these families that it is going to take more than 24 months for their applications to be processed. The response to me was, "How come somebody walking across the border from the United States in upstate New York gets a zero-day processing time, but"—insert name of relative here—"who has just escaped ISIS is being told it's going to take over two years?"

• (1600)

To be clear, the situation in northern Iraq while ISIS strongholds are being removed in Syria is no safer for Yazidis than it was a year or two ago. Many of the camps in Iraq itself are in a dire situation. The community itself is facing persecution within these camps and abroad. They can't go home because their homes have been razed by ISIS. There are mass graves in their former homes. There is still a great degree of threat to this community, and frankly trauma as well.

We're in a situation which, again, has been discussed umpteen times in this committee. The community itself is still largely internally displaced within Iraq. Some people have been rescued—children who had been abducted by ISIS, women who had been abducted by ISIS for the purpose of sexual slavery—but they are not in situations in which they have family members to care for them or in which they have any safety in the camp.

Outside of this particular issue, I think Canada and many communities need to have a conversation about what constitutes a refugee, because we are now seeing instances in which the government here in Canada is pouring an inordinate amount of resources upon people who are in the United States of America and telling survivors of genocide that it will take many years for them to come.

I want to point out something else. The one-year window of opportunity, or the program by which refugees can be reunited with their families, defines family as the following: spouse and children under the age of 19. There is some provision for grandchildren, but it's very small and very narrow.

Here's the interesting thing. I'm not sure whether my colleagues are aware, but under the safe third country agreement with the United States, if somebody illegally enters Canada today from upstate New York and claims asylum, exceptions to the safe third country agreement apply to any family member of that person who is in the U.S.

We have thus a potential situation of chain migration or chain asylum claim processing that's going to happen in Canada. Essentially, if you or I illegally crossed the border from the United States and claimed asylum, the next day your family could go to a legal point of entry and claim asylum under an exception to the safe third country agreement.

Going back to the one-year window of opportunity definition of family, it's spouse and children under the age of 19, but if you're a family member and you're claiming an exception to come to Canada to claim asylum, here is the definition of family under the STCA exemption: spouse, legal guardian, child, father or mother, sister or brother, grandfather or grandmother, grandchild, uncle or aunt, nephew or niece, common-law partner, or same-sex partner.

We have a situation whereby a survivor of genocide who's in Canada is being told by our government that their family member does not qualify to come to Canada, but somebody who has legal status in the United States in upstate New York can cross the border illegally and then have their family members come the next day under a much broader definition of family.

I would argue that this sounds slightly ridiculous. It sounds like a complete...I don't know; I would argue it sounds like a complete abrogation or misunderstanding of priorities. I know that my colleagues here don't feel we should necessarily be prioritizing genocide survivors in the first instance, but to me it seems there's something wrong with this.

Members of the community have been writing to my office after diligently writing the minister, after watching us vote on this report in the House of Commons, after coming to Ottawa over and over again, and they are very frustrated with the way the government has chosen to prioritize things in this situation.

• (1605)

In terms of giving some validity as to why this study should be happening now, and to build on the debate that we had in the House of Commons on the concurrence motion, I'm going to read for you some of the letters that I've received in my office. These are from Yazidis who have survived ISIS and are in Canada now. These are some of the cases we are seeing where the immigration minister has chosen to prioritize perhaps not in the right way and are why I believe we need this study.

The first group of people is from Calgary and then there are some from Winnipeg. There are two broad classes of people who fall into this. In the first group are people who have had group-of-five sponsorship funding raised, either through Project Ezra, the work there...the funds are there and their applications are in. They qualify for the one-year window situation, and the minister is telling them that they can stay in their refugee camp for three or four years while we are prioritizing people who are coming in from upstate New York.

There's that group of people, and then there is a large group of people who, for whatever reason, are being told that their families don't qualify to come to Canada, either because they didn't list them on their one-year window application or because the definition of family for victims of genocide is not the same as it is for somebody in upstate New York.

I'm going to start with the latter set of cases because I want to illustrate to you what happens in a situation of genocide if you are rounded up, taken and put into sexual slavery and separated from your family. When you are filling out an application to come to Canada, you might not know if your family is still alive. What we have seen in many instances is that people have presumed that their family is dead and then, through some miracle, they were found to be alive, but we have bureaucrats in IRCC telling them that they are not eligible even if they fall in under the existing definition.

I won't read out names, for safety, but I'm happy to confidentially provide them to the chair, should he be interested, so that he can verify that these are in fact real letters, which I can assure him that they are. These are letters both to me and to the immigration minister.

The first one is as follows: "I am writing to request your help in reuniting me with my family. I came to Canada in 2019 as part of the victims of Daesh program, and my family suffered unspeakable horrors at the hands of ISIS. I arrived in Calgary with only four of my seven children. The other three children and my husband are still in captivity with ISIS. Before ISIS I lived in a village with my husband and seven children. We were not a rich family, but we were a happy family because we were all together. When ISIS arrived, my family was captured. We were transferred to Tal Afar, where we were separated. My husband was taken away, but he then was returned to us because he convinced our ISIS captors that we were Muslim. After a month in Tal Afar, we were transferred to Mosul. We were then transferred back to a village near Tal Afar. We were constantly moving across the country in order to hide from the frequent bombing attacks."

She continues: "One day ISIS decided to take away the men and boys so that they could be used as soldiers and labourers, and they took my 11-year-old daughter, two sons and husband. My 11-year-old daughter was forced into marriage with a Muslim man, and two sons and husband were taken to work as soldiers and labourers for ISIS. I have no idea what has happened to them and thoughts of them suffering haunt my mind. When my husband, daughter and two sons were taken away, my four remaining children and I were placed in an underground prison where we were abused. After three months, we were then transferred to another prison. One day our names were called and we were escorted to a bus where we were taken to our freedom as a result of a prisoner swap. After being released from ISIS we were approached by Canada and offered resettlement in Canada. Initially I was very reluctant to leave, because I still had my husband and three children in captivity and I wanted to be there for them in case they were released. However, as a single mother with four children, I was unable to support my family in Iraq because as a woman I did not have any job opportunities. Therefore, I decided to accept resettlement in Canada because I needed to provide a future for my children. It is for their benefit that I moved with them to Calgary, Canada."

•(1610)

She continues: “I am now living in safety in Canada and grateful to be safe. However, I continue to be plagued by worry for my family, who remains in captivity. I constantly think of where they are, what they are doing and whether or not they are suffering. I have no idea if they are dead or alive. I feel guilty being so far away from my children who remain in captivity with ISIS. I worry about what they will do if they are released and I'm not there to comfort them. My body is in Canada but my mind is in Iraq. These worries prevent me from sleeping and learning English. I am struggling in Canada, where it is difficult being a single mother to four children while trying to adjust to a new culture, new environment and new language. I need the help of my family. I would like the government to reunite me with my remaining living relatives, namely my sister and uncle. My sister is—and she puts their names here—and they have five children.”

She lists where they are and in which camp. She lists her uncle and his wife and their children. She says, “Please bring them to Canada in order to both keep them safe and help me and my children resettle in Canada. Please help me reunite my remaining family that survived so we can help support each other, heal from our trauma and work towards a productive future in Canada.”

The next one is also from—

Mr. Nick Whalen: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, first, I would just like to suspend for a couple of seconds so we can figure out how to respond.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: No, I'm not ceding the floor.

Mr. Nick Whalen: I appreciate that it's the member's time to continue, but—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: You cannot move a motion to suspend on a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: He hasn't actually moved a motion. He's made a request for a suspension of the meeting, which is in order.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: No, it's not.

The Chair: Could I confer on that?

Hon. Michelle Rempel: No. You can't move a motion on a point of order, Chair, and you can't arbitrarily suspend the meeting while I have the floor.

The Chair: I believe, actually, I can—

Mr. David Tilson: Show the authority.

The Chair: I've just consulted with the clerk that it's not a motion. It's a request. I'm going to hold it for a moment, and this gives me a chance to explain to the witnesses.

Monsieur Beuze, I know, has been here often enough to know that this does happen, and that during a member's seven-minute time, he or she may take time to move a motion that has had due notice. This is a motion that came to the committee in February, on February 11, so we do have the required notice for it.

The member, as long as he or she does not get redundant and speaks to the motion, has the floor for as long as he or she wants. I want to note to the committee members that we do have further

witnesses who have come to discuss the millions of people who are displaced and at risk in Latin America, in Central and South America. Unfortunately, one of them will have to leave right at 5:30 and may or may not get to speak to the important issues that we had on our agenda today.

With that said, I'm going to hold the request to suspend until Ms. Rempel perhaps finishes, and then we'll have a time to suspend.

Ms. Rempel.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you, Chair.

I will continue with this, but I would like to say that I think there was an implication in your comment that this is not important, and I would argue the exact opposite.

To the witnesses who are in the room, sometimes you need to fight the government to get action, and that's what I'm doing for a group of genocide survivors that has not had action from this government.

The next case, and why I believe that this particular—

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): A point of order, Chair.

The Chair: We have a point of order.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Just to put it on the record, the member mentioned that there's no action from this government. I would argue the contrary. I believe the genocide—

Mr. David Tilson: That's not a point of order, Mr. Chairman. That's debate. He shouldn't be allowed to ramble on like that.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: I would mention that—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: This is debate, Chair.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: I would mention that in 2014—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: On a point of order, this—

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: I'll retract the—

The Chair: I recognize that this is a point of debate. The member has framed it as such and the committee can hear what he says, but we'll get back to that point later. Thank you.

•(1615)

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

The next letter states: “I am requesting your help reuniting with my family so that I can resettle successfully in Canada. I arrived in Canada in December 2017 with my wife and two daughters. Pre-ISIS, I was a student until 2010. I had to quit because I had work as a house cleaner for four years to support my family. When ISIS arrived I was at home. Normally when I work, I am in a different city far away from home. As soon as we realized what they were going to do to us we fled to the mountains. We stayed in the mountains for seven days. One of my brothers stayed behind to help our neighbour who was going into labour. Eventually my brother arrived in the mountains safely with our neighbour. We left the mountains, walking about four hours to the Syrian border. Upon arrival at the border we were greeted by PKK fighters who provided us with vehicles. We were able to make it to a town where we lived in a school for about three months. After that, we were transferred to another camp. We were in that camp until we left for Canada. I still have family members in that camp. While I was in camp I was working with some NGOs. Here are the following family members that are surviving and their location.”

Then it lists mother, brother, sister-in-law, brother. Again, people that would be eligible under the safe third country agreement aren't eligible under this.

It continues: “The separation of our family”—and there are numerous names here—has affected me in every way you can imagine. We cannot stop thinking about them. Their living conditions are not good. It is not safe for them over there. It is difficult to concentrate in school because we are worried about our family. I would ask the Canadian government to help bring my family over to Canada. My mother's health is poor and the living conditions are not good. My brother recently got into an accident and is now handicapped. They need our help.”

Again, this one is from Calgary: “I am writing to request your help in reuniting me with my fiancée”—he gives the name—“who is currently living in Zakho in an abandoned building. I am very concerned about my fiancée. Her mental health is suffering due to having survived imprisonment with ISIS. Since her escape from captivity she has been living in very difficult conditions. She is living in an abandoned building with seven other people. She is constantly fearful for her safety. She does not have any resources and is living in poverty. We were engaged several months ago and we need to be reunited in order to start our life together. We would like to start a family. Our separation is painful. It is difficult for me to resettle and I am worried about her safety in Iraq. During my interview prior to coming to Canada I told the officials about her. We would like her to come and join me in Canada so that we can start our life together, including having a family of our own. Please help me reunite with her.”

As you know, Chair, and you can imagine, I get all of these letters so I feel that it's important justification for this motion.

The next letter states: “I am writing to request your help in reuniting me with my family. I came to Canada as part of the victims of Daesh program in December 2017 after being held in captivity with ISIS for nine months, where I was abused, raped and tortured. Before ISIS came to Sinjar I was living with my mother, father, four brothers and their families in a village called Tal Banat where we worked in farming and construction. One day ISIS came to our

village and we were forced to flee to Sinjar, where we were surrounded by ISIS. In a bombing perpetuated by ISIS my sister and mother-in-law were killed. Eventually ISIS invaded Sinjar and confronted us, giving us an ultimatum: convert to Islam or be killed. In order to save our lives we converted to Islam.”

It continues: “Our lives may have been spared but our torment was only beginning. We were held hostage where we could smell the decaying flesh from mass graves and saw the dead bodies rotting in the streets. Later the girls and unmarried women were sold to Muslim men. Eventually I was transported to an army base in Mosul, where my ISIS captors tried to marry me off to Muslim men. However, I have a disability and confined to a wheelchair so I could not be married off. I was kept in a prison in deplorable conditions where I could not bathe and never had enough to eat. I was then transferred to another prison and transferred again”—I'm not mentioning the location—“where I was put up for sale. An organization paid for me and my mother to be released and then a few days later we were given our freedom. After our release my mother and I travelled to Zakho, where we lived in a camp there. In this camp our living conditions were difficult. It was hot. There was not enough to eat and there were no services. Eventually I was chosen for resettlement to Canada as part of the victims for Daesh program. I came with my sister and her two children. Unfortunately, my mother was not chosen for resettlement and I had to leave her behind. She remains in Iraq with my father, brothers and sisters. My brothers remain in this camp in order to wait for relatives who continue to be in captivity with ISIS. My sisters are also living in these camps. They are suffering and want to join me in Canada.”

• (1620)

It continues: “I am writing to request the following members be brought to us in Canada”, and he lists them: daughters, sisters and parents. “They are living in very difficult conditions in these camps, and they are living in tents and dangerous conditions. In fact, there are frequent fires, and my sister's tent burned down and her father-in-law was killed in the fire. They do not have enough food, money or health care, and they continue to be at severe risk of persecution. I am very worried about my family. I am always thinking about them. Because my mind is always in Kurdistan, I am unable to concentrate in school. Therefore, I am having difficulty learning English. Because I know what it is like to live in this camp, I understand the suffering of my family members who remain there. In addition, I have a disability and am in a wheelchair. I am unable to leave the house without help. Therefore, I need my family to join me in Canada so that they can help me successfully resettle in Canada. I have applied for reunification with my family, but the application was denied. I am desperate to have my family here and fear I will not have peace until my family is by my side. Please help me reunite with my family so that they can be safe and we can build a future together in Canada.”

Here's another: "I am writing today to ask the Canadian government to help the Yazidis and help me reunite with my family. I arrived in Canada in August 2017. I arrived with my sister, my wife and two kids. In 2014, ISIS came to our village and captured my family for eight days. We were able to escape, and fled to the Sinjar Mountains and then Kurdistan, which is in northern Iraq. My life here in Canada is good, but I am always thinking about my family and our people back home. I hope the government can reunite me with my family. My sister is living in Kurdistan with her husband and two children. My sister said [that] life in the camp is very poor. They are under threat of persecution, and the government there is not able to give money to pay for food. Every time I speak to my sister, she is crying and asking [me] to bring her to Canada. I care about her and become very sad thinking about her. I appreciate that the Canadian government is bringing us here. I hope the Canadian government can help the Yazidis who are still living in camps, especially our families. The living conditions in the camps are very poor. There is no medicine and no food and no water. It is not safe for Yazidis to live in the camps. We still have a lot of women and their children in captivity with ISIS, and [we] need help to find them."

Here's another: "I am writing you today to ask for help to reunite with my family. I arrived in Canada in December 2017 with my sister-in-law and her children. On August 3, 2014, ISIS came into my village and was forcing us to convert to be Muslim, and they threatened us, to kill us all. I stayed in the village for nine days. While ISIS was eating dinner on the 10th day, my father, brother and others fled from the village. We walked to the mountains because it was not safe to stay there. We made our way to Kurdistan. Over 1,500 families lived in a school in Kurdistan for about three months. I then moved to another camp with my father, two brothers and nephew. One brother is still held in captivity with ISIS, and we do not know where he is right now. My mother and sister with a disability were released from ISIS in 2015 and 2016. My sister is now living in Canada. I hope the Canadian government can help bring my cousin here. He is living in a camp with his wife and two children since 2014. He lost both his parents while they were trying to flee the mountains. When I talk to my cousin, he is not living a good life in the camp. He completed university, but he is not able to go to school or work while living in the camp. There is also no food, no water, no medicine in the camp. The government brought us here, but we are still not feeling safe. We are also very scared that ISIS will kill our family back at home. Please help me bring my family to Canada."

Here's another: "I am writing today because I am suffering from my ongoing separation from my family, who are captives of ISIS. I arrived in Canada in September 2017 as part of the program. In Iraq, I was captured by ISIS on August 3, 2014, and held in captivity for two and a half years. I was taken to different places and sold six times in the sexual slave trade. I was taking medications for my mental health problems. Since arriving in September 2017 alone, I do not feel okay because I am separated from my family and I feel alone. I am currently living with a family of five members because I arrived alone. To help me with my mental health, I have been talking to a therapist. Since arriving in Canada, I have been told that my abdominal pain is due to taking too many medications. I have

stopped taking my medications because I'm feeling tired and sleepy. After the session, I have very bad headaches.

● (1625)

It continues: "Please help me bring my family over to help me resettle into Canada successfully. I would like to ask the Canadian government to help bring over my family. My sister was released from ISIS on April 4, 2018, and is currently living in a camp in Iraq. I would also like to bring over my mother, who was released from ISIS captivity in 2016 and is also living in a camp. Both my mother and sister suffer from mental health problems. My brother is also living in a camp in Iraq. My other brother is still in ISIS captivity, and we don't know where he is right now. He was engaged to be married to a woman about one month before he was captured by ISIS. He has been living in a camp in Iraq and she is waiting for my brother. She has put her life on hold, as she is waiting for him and does not want to marry anyone else. My older brother is living alone in Germany, and I would want him here in Canada with the rest of my family. I appreciate the government's help in bringing me here. However, I have mental health problems, and I'm living with another family just so I don't have to be alone. Because I don't have my family here, I cannot focus on my school and I cannot focus on my life here in Canada. I cannot sleep well and I cannot eat. I am always worrying about my family back home, because it's not safe for them. If I tell you I am okay here, I would be lying. Yes, I am here and I am safe, but I cannot live on my own, because I am scared that someone will do what ISIS did to me. I appreciate every country that is taking the Yazidis, but ISIS caused our family to be separated, and I want my family all together now. Please help bring my family to be safe here in Canada."

Here's another: "I am writing to request your help in reuniting me with my family. I came to Canada as part of the program in December 2017, after living in a refugee camp for a year and a half. I came to Canada with my son and daughter. My family of five daughters, three sons and husband were destroyed by ISIS. My husband and daughter were killed by ISIS. I have two daughters in Germany. My other two sons and my precious daughter are living in precarious living conditions in a camp in Kurdistan. My daughter is also living in this camp after being released by ISIS following three years of captivity, during which she was abused and tortured. She is struggling with her mental health as a consequence of her torture. In fact, she committed suicide a few months ago by jumping off the upper floor of a building and suffering multiple fractures as a result. For her mental health to recover, she needs the support of her mother and sister who currently reside in Calgary. Because she does not have access to adequate health care, she is in constant pain from her fractures. She does not have enough money to buy what she needs. She is dependent on handouts from the international community for food. In Kurdistan she has no future. I am writing to plead with you to bring my daughter to Canada. I would also like my surviving sons to be brought to Canada. My sons are.... He is to be married to.... They have one son. I would like my family to be reunited in Canada so that they can be safe and have a future. I am also very worried about my niece, who is deaf and mute and living alone in a camp. Her entire family has been killed by ISIS, and she is alone and vulnerable in the camp. Because of her medical condition, she is at risk of violence and crime. I am so worried about her, and I would like her to join me in Canada so that she can be safe and have the chance for a peaceful future. I worry about my children and niece all the time. I have never had any peace of mind. I have difficulty concentrating, because I worry about my family. I will not have peace until all of my children are safe. Please help me reunite with my children so that they can be safe and build a future in Canada."

Here's another: "I am writing today because I want the Canadian government to help the Yazidi people and help bring my family over to Canada. In August 2014, ISIS captured my cousin, myself, and my two daughters and took us to Syria, where we stayed for four months. My two daughters and I were able to escape from ISIS, and my brother was able to help me get back to my husband in Iraq. I arrived in Canada in September 2017 with other Yazidi refugees. I arrived with my husband and four kids. Since arriving in Canada, I feel I am here in a safe place with my family, but I constantly worry about the rest of my family back home, because there is no food and no water. I would like to ask the Canadian government to safely bring over my family members. My mother passed away a long time ago, when I was a kid. My brother has been living in a tent in the mountains in Sinjar since fleeing from ISIS in 2014. He is currently living with his wife and daughter. My father is also living in the Sinjar mountains with his wife, in a separate tent from my brother."

•(1630)

It continues: "I would also like to ask that the government bring over my sister who is living in a camp in Iraq. ISIS killed her husband, leaving her to raise five children on her own, and she is relying on the generosity of others to get food for the children. My other sister is living in a refugee camp in Iraq. I don't know the name of the camp, and I have not been in contact with her for almost two years. I am not able to resettle successfully in Canada because I am

separated from my family. I was always with my brother and my sister, and we were all happy together. I appreciate that the Canadian government has done a lot for me and my family, and I hope they can continue to help the other Yazidis, because they need a lot of help. I have witnessed many horrible things since my mother passed away, and I hope the government can help bring my family here."

Another—

The Chair: I'm going to interrupt you for one moment.

It is 4:30 p.m., and the honourable member has been speaking for 37 minutes. We have come to the end of our first hour of this meeting.

At this point, Mr. Beuze, I'm going to recognize that your time is now finished.

We have a second panel. I'm very prepared to continue the meeting after 5:30, if Ms. Rempel wants to continue. We could go to the witnesses who have travelled to be with us today.

If you would prefer to continue, that's also your right.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you. I will continue.

Here's another: "I am writing today to help"....

For folks who are here, I should say that this is something we have had to fight the government on tooth and nail.

I appreciate that the UN is here today. I know that the United Nations, especially with the refugee resettlement component, is under an inordinate amount of pressure. There are 65 million people on the move—by their own accounts—in the world today.

However, there's a very difficult conversation we have to have as a global community. It's not a conversation that's comfortable. It's not one that's politically sexy, and it's not a conversation that immediately results in a photo opportunity at an airport, and that is, who are the world's most vulnerable?

It's not a great conversation to have, but certainly the point I'm trying to make today, and also trying to convince my colleagues of, is that we need to have a study on this. There are people here who have survived genocide, sexual slavery, and are being told that they don't have the same ability to be eligible to come to Canada as a refugee as somebody who has reached upstate New York.

So I will read another—

The Chair: Before you continue, out of courtesy to the witnesses, could I ask in your estimation how long you will go, so I could tell them that they should leave?

I'm prepared to call extra meetings this week. To let the committee members know, we could have quite lengthy meetings this week.

I would just like the member to let us know whether or not I should release the witnesses who have been invited at your request to come today.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Well, we have, I don't know, several hundred—

The Chair: We don't have them; you do.

How many do you have?

Hon. Michelle Rempel: There are several hundred cases such as this, so it will go probably for the rest of the meeting, but we'll see. I will continue.

Another—

The Chair: Well, I will let the witnesses know then that we will not be having a second panel today to discuss the issue of migration from Venezuela and Central America and South America.

However, I'm going to suspend for a moment, because it is also important for the committee to take a little break as we normally do at an hour.

I will suspend the meeting for a few moments for the committee to take a necessary biological break. We will resume shortly.

• (1630) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1640)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

The first thing I will do is ask if I have unanimous consent to receive the testimony that has been prepared in writing by at least some of the witnesses who will be presenting in the second hour. Do I have unanimous consent to have that presented into testimony, to be used in our report?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you.

[See appendix—Written testimony by Rachel Kiddell-Monroe]

[See appendix—Written testimony by Rodrigo Dominguez Villegas]

The Chair: Ms. Rempel.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

Yes, Chair, I would also like to acknowledge the presence in the room today of members from the Yazidi community, specifically the Canadian Yazidi Association. I would like to thank them for their work in bringing this issue to the attention of Canadians.

I want to be clear, too, that these are letters that have been written to members of Parliament, and I believe also to the immigration minister in some instances. The feedback I get is that these letters are often not responded to, so I think it's important to give them voice in support of the motion we have before us today.

The next one is as follows: "I'm writing you today to request your help for reuniting my family members who are still in Iraq. I truly believe that the only way for me to successfully resettle in Canada and become an active member in my community is to bring my family together once again. Even with all the help I'm currently receiving in Calgary, I don't think I will ever be able to feel at ease in Canada as long as my family is not safe here with me. I arrived in Calgary in March 2018 with my sister and two of my brothers. Before ISIS started attacking my people, I was living with my family in the city of Kocho near Sinjar. I was working at home, taking care of my family. The day ISIS attacked our town, I was in Erbil for a doctor's appointment. After hearing the news, I fled through the Duhok region. However, my parents and my siblings were in Kocho when it was attacked by ISIS.

The letter continues: After many months of captivity, my three siblings who came with me to Canada managed to escape ISIS and meet me in the Ronga camp"—apologies if I am butchering some of the names here—"but ISIS had already murdered my parents. My other sister was also captured by ISIS, and her whereabouts are still unknown. We had to pay \$20,000 to a smuggler for him to go liberate my brothers captured by ISIS. My sister, who is here with me in Canada, was liberated by the Iraqi troops months later, when they reached Mosul. She then joined us in the camp. After that, I stayed with my siblings in the camp until coming here to Canada. Here is a list of all my family members who are still alive with their current location." They list a sister, brother, sister-in-law, aunt and two cousins. "Being separated from my family has greatly affected me. I think about them every day. This ultimately prevents me from focusing on my new life in Canada and moving on to better things. My family members are living in terrible living conditions at the moment, and it is simply not safe for them over there. They do not have access to clean water, electricity or health care. This constant worry has had a significant negative impact on my mental health. Also, my sister and one of my brothers have serious mental health problems due to their separation from the rest of our family members. Being the oldest sibling in Canada, I have to take care of my younger siblings, which is extremely difficult for me. Bringing my older siblings to Canada would help me greatly to take care of my family. We have already started a community here in Calgary, which would really facilitate the integration of the rest of my family. I hope the Canadian government will sympathize with my situation and bring my family over to Canada. My family and I really need your help."

Another states: "I am requesting your help reuniting with my family—"

• (1645)

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Sarai.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): On a point of order, Chair, as the member opposite has mentioned, I think there are some family members here. I just want to give a reminder that when three or four Conservative members in 2014 went to Iraq and went to a Yazidi camp—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Chair, this is a point of debate.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: —when there was a genocide happening, they recommended no action.

Mr. David Tilson: That's not a point of order, Mr. Chairman.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: A point of order, Chair.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: [Inaudible—Editor] came, and after that, when we did a motion [Inaudible—Editor] \$14 million for extra health services, and they wanted to—

Mr. David Tilson: He can't just ramble on like that.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: A point of order, Chair.

Mr. David Tilson: He's wasting the time of the committee, Chair.

The Chair: I want to just see whether it's a point of order or a point of debate.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: It sounds like debate, Chair.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: I think everyone should know—

Mr. David Tilson: It's certainly a point of debate.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: A point of order.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: —that it's very rich of the opposition to make these mentions when only—

The Chair: I think you have now moved into debate. Thank you.

Continue.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

I know that my colleagues opposite have trouble sometimes justifying the fact that they voted against a motion to declare this a genocide and then sat in a committee meeting where they.... One of their colleagues wrote an article in the Toronto Star saying it would be difficult to unify or to resettle Yazidis to Canada because they have a caste system in their religion.

Then their Prime Minister, in the campaign in 2015, in a video clip that I'm so excited we found, said it would be disgusting to resettle ethnic and religious minorities, and then proceeded to resettle none of them in the Syrian refugee initiative. But it is not our voices that count; it's just the voices of people who have survived this and who are not getting action by this government, which I feel is material and important to the motion at hand.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: In terms of action from this government, we've brought in—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I have a point of order, Chair.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: —over 1,400 Yazidis—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Point of order, Chair.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: —whereas the opposition has brought in a total of three Yazidis—

Mr. David Tilson: Mr. Chairman, [*Inaudible—Editor*] opportunity—

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: —and we've also invested \$14 million in health care services, which the previous government had cut.

The Chair: I believe that this is debate as well.

Mr. Tilson, I also ask that you speak when your turn comes. Thank you.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Another letter states: "I'm requesting your help reuniting with my family so they can resettle successfully in Canada. I arrived in Canada in December 2018 with my family and five children. Before I arrived in Canada, my life was horrible. Before ISIS, we were very happy making a living raising livestock. We were not very rich, but we were happy as we were all together. After ISIS arrived, our village was surrounded by the militants for seven days. We were not able to eat. We were told that the women

would be taken into slavery and that the men would be taken into ISIS. After seven days, we decided to escape during the night. We were able to make it to a different village. Our father was in a different village and advised us via telephone to remain silent about our escape, as he was going to try to escape to join us. That was the last time we talked to our father. The village he was in was totally destroyed."

It continues: "We walked all night and reached a shrine in the mountain. I was pregnant at the time with my fifth child. We were warned not to stay, as ISIS was targeting religious shrines. We continued to the other side of the mountain. We were able to get a ride the next day to safety. We lived—18 family members—in one room in a building that my brother-in-law had. My sister-in-law was captured and eventually released after two years, bought out for \$15,000. She was allowed to select my family to join her in Canada due to her past history of being captured. There are 16 other family members who are presumed dead—grandmothers, aunts, brothers, cousins, nieces and nephews. My surviving family members are: a sister, a brother-in-law, three children, his sister and brother-in-law, and two more children."

It continues: "We were torn apart as a family. I have only two sisters left in my family. The situation in the camps is not very good. It is not a safe place for them. My mind is always preoccupied with worry. I am not able to learn anything at school. As soon as I leave my class, my mind is thinking about my missing family. We are here in Canada in a safe place. With all of my family still over there and all of us apart, I would like the Canadian government to help reunite us so that we can have a new future in Canada. I would like the Canadian government to get my people out of ISIS' hands."

Another—

Mr. Nick Whalen: Excuse me, I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Whalen.

Mr. Nick Whalen: I allowed Ms. Rempel to finish her letters, because I like to have them read in their entirety without interruption. As she herself said, however, before reading that last letter, the reason she was reading the letters was to give voice to those who had written to her. Yet the purpose of her time now is to move the motion. It's my view that she's strayed beyond the ambit of what she's permitted to do. She's not actually trying to move the motion; she's just taking this opportunity to read letters, which she has other opportunities to do.

● (1650)

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Chair—

The Chair: I'd like to consult with the clerk for a moment.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Can I respond to that? I'd like to make my argument for your consideration.

I am reading these letters because they speak to the need for this study. We have gone through committee study after committee study, to the point where I actually concurred in a report where the recommendations were nearly unanimously supported, and yet the government has not moved on this key recommendation in the report on resettlement services for Yazidis.

This is why this motion is so important. Every single one of these letters is a justification for this study. I want to be clear to my colleagues and make a strong, cogent argument that this is something that we need to do, and we need to do it quickly.

Chair, also for your consideration, I would like my colleagues to be very careful about making any insinuation that somehow these letters are not material to the motion at hand. What you are saying is that they are not important, and that the voices in here—

Mr. Nick Whalen: I have a point of privilege.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Can I finish my point, sir?

The Chair: I believe Mr. Whalen has a point of privilege.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Ms. Rempel has totally put words in my mouth. I was saying that, by her own words, she stated the purpose for which she was reading these letters into evidence. I did not make any statement as to why it was. Those were her words, not mine.

The Chair: I understand that.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I used the term “insinuation”, Chair. The exact words I—

The Chair: “Insinuation” is a strong word. It's the second time you've used it today.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Well, this is a strong matter, Chair.

The Chair: Perhaps you would like to complete your argument, and then I'm going to make a ruling on whether I am agreeing or not agreeing with Mr. Whalen.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Well, again, Chair, each of these letters is an example, a concrete example, of why this study is so important. They are unique and different; there's no repetition in this, and therefore the argument of relevancy, which I believe is what my colleague is trying to make, is not in order. These are all unique arguments that speak to the motion here at hand.

Thank you.

Mr. Nick Whalen: So if I get a point of rebuttal on the point of order, I'm not making an argument as to whether or not it's relevant. The member herself has said that she is not reading them for purposes of the motion. If she wants to clarify that, she can, but not based on what I'm saying.

The Chair: I did understand what you said, and I understand how Ms. Rempel interpreted it differently than I understood it. I'm going to take a moment now, and suspend the meeting to discuss this with the clerk.

I'll suspend for a moment.

I call the meeting back to order.

Ms. Rempel, you can continue.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

This letter states: “I am requesting your help reuniting with my family so I can resettle successfully in Canada. I arrived in Canada in August 2017 with my family and five children as part of the initiative. Before ISIS, life was good. My husband and brother-in-law were working together at construction jobs. We were captured by ISIS in Sinjar. To them, our life was not worth anything. We were treated poorly. We were taken away to Baaj, and the men were separated from the women and children. The women and children were put in a school. The men were put in a fenced backyard several hours later. ISIS identified all the unmarried girls and any married women that they liked, and took them away. All of the other women were told that, if they did not convert to Islam, they would be killed. Even those that converted to Islam would be killed if ISIS decided that they did not trust them.”

It continues: “Then we were transported to another place for a few days, and again housed in schools without any food or water. They took everything from us, jewellery, phones and money. The men were left behind in Baaj. We were then taken to a prison in another town and were searched again, and again women were selected out by ISIS for their own use. They took girls as young as seven years old. This time, my two older sons were separated from me, leaving me with my two younger sons. My older son was with my husband in the fenced yard. Any boys that had armpit hair were considered men and were killed. The prison was bombed, and we were evacuated by ISIS to the previous city that we had been in. My husband managed to get a phone and contacted his brother for help. His brother appealed to ISIS. Some of them had been his former neighbours, and someone started to help us.”

It continues: “We managed to be reunited with my husband and were taken to Kojo. In Kojo we were all learning about Islam and how to pray. The women and children were constantly guarded by ISIS. Someone from our group escaped, and subsequently ISIS threatened to kill us all. Someone from ISIS helped us reunite with our two older sons. An ISIS leader was killed, and we were all separated again. I heard shooting. Subsequently, ISIS selected whatever women they wanted. The remainder of the people were put in an animal barn and then moved to Mosul with the intention of killing everyone. They lined my husband, son and other relatives up and told them to recite an Islamic prayer as they were planning to shoot them. Fortunately, at the last minute, ISIS left quickly due to a phone call from someone. We eventually managed to escape, as my husband was working in the fields for ISIS tending animals and was able to survey the landscape for possible escape routes. The following family members that are surviving and their location are”—and they list a son, a daughter-in-law, a sister, a brother-in-law, six nieces and nephews, a mother-in-law, a brother-in-law and a sister-in-law.

It continues: “We were very close to my sister and her husband. My sister is like a mother to me. I want her to be with me. This affects me a great deal. I would like to ask the international community, not just Canada, to look into the mass graves and to help our people. We need help in getting our families back together. I'm writing to request your help in reuniting me with my family. I'm writing to request reunification with my parents who are called”—they list the names—“my four brothers who are called”—they list the names—“and my sister. They are currently living in a camp”—and they list the location.

It continues: “I would also like to be reunited with my older sister who is living in a camp with her husband and her husband's family. I came to Canada in January of 2018. In 2014 our family escaped ISIS by running to safety on Sinjar Mountain. My family then ran away from ISIS by travelling to Kurdistan. Unfortunately, my brother was captured by ISIS, and he remains in captivity today. I was separated from my family when my husband and I were resettled in Canada because we were caring for my young sister-in-law who had been released by ISIS after having suffered years of torture. Since coming to Canada, we have been suffering without our family. Our hearts are heavy because we are missing family. We are very worried for them since they are not safe in the camp, and they have no money, food, medicine or adequate shelter. My mother has multiple medical problems, including mental health problems and diabetes. My father is missing an eye and has hypertension and heart problems, and my brother has asthma, which is uncontrolled due to the dusty environment in the camp. Unfortunately, they are unable to afford medical care and medicines and are becoming more sick. We are very worried about their health. We are also very worried about them because they are still not safe and are at constant risk of violence and persecution.”

●(1655)

It continues: “My mind is full of worries for my family, and I have difficulty concentrating at school and learning English because of my constant worries. Their life in the camp is not good, and I worry for their welfare and safety. Please help reunite our family so that we can help support each other, heal from our trauma and work towards a productive future in Canada.”

Here is another: “We are writing you today because we hope the Canadian government can help us reunite with our families so that we may be able to resettle successfully in Canadian history. We arrived in Canada on December 28, 2017, with our one son. On August 3, ISIS came to our village, and we tried to run.” There are two people writing this letter, a man and a woman. This is the woman: “On August 4, ISIS took me to different places, and I lived in Syria for two and a half years. The man who bought me broke both of my son's legs, and he raped me and beat me. In Syria, this man sold me to another man who also beat me a lot. Because of those beatings, I now suffer from pain in my back. In Syria, I was able to escape, and I fled to Pakeke with my son, and we lived there for a week. After that, my family took me to Kurdistan, where I lived in the camp for almost a year. I hope the Canadian government can help me reunite with my family. My aunt lives with her husband and six children in a camp. My cousin is also living in this camp with his wife. My uncle is living with his wife and five children in this camp. I talk to my family, but they tell me it is not a good life there in the camp. It is not safe, and there's no food or water or medicine. Since

arriving in Canada, I'm always thinking about my family at home. They need a lot of help. My brain is not working here. It is hard to focus. I'm also five months pregnant and feeling very stressed.”

Here is the male: “In 2014, I heard that my wife and son were taken by ISIS. I tried to go to Sinjar, but it wasn't safe. I stayed in Erbil and worked in the hospital there. I continued to work at the hospital, even when my wife and son were released from ISIS. I hope that I can be reunited with my family. My sister is still in captivity with ISIS, and they forced her to marry someone from ISIS. She has now two children with this man. This man has taken the children and left their home, and she does not know where they are. My sister has since fled to Pakeke and was released in September 2017. She is now living in the camp in Kurdistan and is suffering from poor mental health. I care about my sister so much, and when I talk to her, she tells me she just wants to kill herself. My uncle is living with his wife and two children in the camp. My cousin is living with his wife and two children in the camp. My other cousin is living with his wife and one child in the camp. My other cousin is living in the same camp with his wife and three children. My aunt is living with her three adult children in the same camp. I have an uncle who is living in this camp, as well, with his wife. My mother's aunt is living alone in a camp. I have another uncle who is living with his wife and four children in Erbil since 2014. I hope the Canadian government can help bring my family here because no one is safe back at home. It is hard for me to focus on building a new life here in Canada without our families here for us.”

Here is another: “I am writing to request your help in reuniting me with my family. I came to Canada as part of the program in December 2017 after living in a refugee camp for 1.5 years. I came to Canada with my mother and brother. My family of five sisters, three brothers and parents was destroyed by ISIS. While my mother and two brothers escaped capture by ISIS, the rest of my family was captured. Because one of my sisters refused to convert to Islam, ISIS burned her alive. One of my brothers managed to escape ISIS following his captivity. My father is presumed killed by ISIS. My other two sisters eventually escaped ISIS and are now resettled in Germany. Finally, my sister escaped ISIS in 2018, and is now living in very precarious situations in the camp in Kurdistan. My sister is currently living in the camp in Zakho, after being released by ISIS following three years of captivity during which she was abused and tortured. She is struggling with her mental health as a consequence of her torture. In fact, she attempted suicide for a few months by jumping off the upper floor of a building, suffering multiple fractures as a result. For her mental health to recover, she needs the support of me and our mother, who currently resides in Calgary, because she does not have access to adequate health care. She is in constant pain from her fractures. She does not have enough money to buy what she needs.”

•(1700)

The letter continues: “She is dependent on handouts from the international community for food. In Kurdistan she has no future. I am writing to plead with you to bring my sister to Canada. I would also like my surviving brothers to be brought to Canada. My brothers are [named...]. They are married, have one son. I would also like my family to be reunited in Canada so that they can be safe and have a future. I am also very worried about my cousin who is deaf and mute and living alone in the camp. Her entire family has been killed by ISIS, and she is alone and vulnerable. Because of her medical condition, she is at risk of violence and crime. I am so worried about her, and I would like her to join me in Canada so that she can be safe and have the chance for a peaceful future. I worry about my family all the time. The doctors tell me that my stomach pain, lack of appetite and weight loss are because I am so worried about their well-being. I am constantly thinking about them, and my thoughts and worries are preventing me from sleeping. I feel guilty all of the time because I am safe in Canada and they are suffering. Even though I am going to school, I cannot learn because my mind is preoccupied by worries about my family.”

Here is another: “I am writing you today because we are asking the Canadian government to help us, not just my family, but the other Yazidi families, as well. The living conditions in the camps are not safe, and the tents are getting burned. There is no food and no water. I arrived in Canada in December 2017 with my husband, four children and sister-in-law. On August 3, 2014, ISIS came to our village and said “we won't kill you if you have a white flag.” It was not true. ISIS shot at us and killed our men and captured the women and children. We ran to the mountains and stayed there for seven days with no food and then we fled to Kurdistan. We lived in the camp for four years until we went to Canada in 2017. I hope the Canadian government can help me be reunited with my family. My sister is living with her husband and seven children in the camp and they have lived there since 2014.”

It continues: “My sister's husband was running from ISIS and sustained a fall from the car. Since then, he has suffered severe back pain and cannot stand straight. Especially in the winter, he has trouble walking. When I talk to my sister, she tells me there is no food or water in the camp. My other sister is living with her husband and four kids because she is now two months pregnant with her fifth child. ISIS shot my sister in her stomach because she was trying to run away and has undergone seven surgeries since. They are living in a camp in Kurdistan. My brother is living in a camp with our parents. Because our families are back home, even though we are in a safe place here, we are always thinking about our family back home. Our family is always hearing news that ISIS will be returning. We go to school every day. We are trying to learn English and when we go home, we hear stories about how everyone is suffering and we are not able to remember what we learned at school. The Yazidis are a very poor people. There is no school, no work and no food for the Yazidi people. The Yazidis are afraid to live in Kurdistan because ISIS is still there. I hope the Canadian government can help us and open the door to bringing more Yazidi people.”

This is another: “I am writing to request your help in reuniting me with my family. I came to Calgary in 2017. I came to Canada after being held in captivity and tortured by ISIS [for] 2.5 years. Although

I am safe in Canada I am unable to resettle because I am always thinking and worrying about my family who remain in danger in Iraq. My body is here in Canada but my heart and my mind remain with my family in Iraq. My parents, sisters and brothers—”

•(1705)

The Chair: I have to interrupt you for one moment.

Because you are the vice-chair and you are busy and the second vice-chair is not here, I'm just going to ask Salma to take the chair for a moment while I take a break.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: The letter continues: “My parents, sisters and brothers are living in very difficult circumstances, without access to adequate shelter, food, water and electricity in Dohuk, Iraq. They have no financial support and are living in extreme poverty. In addition, they are constantly at risk of further violence and persecution by ISIS. My husband, sister and brother-in-law are still missing and I fear the worst. Moreover, there are 16 members of my husband's family who remain missing as well. I worry for my missing family members and for my family who remain in danger in Dohuk and this consumes my mind. I am unable to sleep or eat because of my worry. I cannot concentrate at school. I am having difficulty learning English. My thinking and focus is so bad that I'm considering dropping out of school, even though I realize that if I do not learn English I will have difficulty integrating into Canadian society. The only way that I find peace is by having my family reunited. I respectfully request that the government help me bring my family, who is in Dohuk, Iraq, here to Canada, where they can be safe.” She lists her father, mother, siblings and the husband's sister. “I also plead with the government to do more to try to find those from the Yazidi community who continue to be missing in Iraq. Please help me reunite with my family. Without my family here, I will not be able to successfully resettle in Canada.”

This is another: “I am writing today to ask the Canadian government to help bring my family here because it is just me and my brother alone. On August the 3, 2014, I was captured by ISIS, and the next day I was raped and taken by one man to Tal Afar to live with him for 16 months. I had to go with him everywhere he went even when he was fighting in the war. He beat me a lot. If I did something that he didn't like, he would beat me and rape me. In 2016 I was able to escape and fled from Tal Afar to the Sinjar Mountains, and eventually to Kurdistan. I arrived in Canada on December 21, 2017 with my brother. My family was captured by ISIS, but they were able to escape before me in 2015. They are living in a camp in Kurdistan. My brother, my sister, my mother, my brother and father are all living in a camp in poor living conditions. My sister is living in a different camp with her husband and three children. When ISIS came to our village, my cousin tried to escape by driving a car and he unfortunately got into an accident. From that accident he has injured his leg and now has difficulty straightening his leg and trouble walking. My cousin is living in the same camp in Sulaymaniyah with his wife and four kids.”

It continues: “Since arriving in Canada I’ve been visiting a psychiatrist. I suffer from very bad headaches because I’m always worried about my family. I have trouble sleeping, and when I sleep I can only sleep for an hour before waking up again. Sometimes I cannot breathe and I feel like my breathing is trapped in my chest. My brother is the same as me and is thinking a lot about our family. I appreciate the Canadian government to help us and I hope they can bring our family here so we can start focusing on rebuilding our lives here in a safe place.”

Here is another: “I’m writing today to request your help reuniting my family members who are still in Iraq. I truly believe the only way for me to be able to successfully resettle in Canada and become an active member in my community is to bring my family together once again. Even with all the help I am currently receiving in Calgary, I don’t think I’ll ever be able to feel at ease in Canada as long as my family is not safe here with me.”

It continues: “On August 3, 2014, ISIS came to Sinjar, Iraq, and we tried to escape but ISIS captured us. After we were captured they separated me from my husband. I also have two sons who were taken from me when we were in Tal Afar, Iraq. I was there in Tal Afar for five months and was reunited with my husband at that time. ISIS then took all the men to “a mosque” and from that day I haven’t seen him again. My youngest son was able to escape. My oldest son, who was 12 years old when I last saw him, I was told by my youngest son that he was killed by ISIS. I was sold along with my youngest two children and forced to marry someone from Morocco. He was killed in the war and I was again sold and forced to marry another man. For two weeks I tried to find out information about my son and discovered where he was through networks. I managed to conceal him in a vehicle with me that was going to Turkey, but I met with some anti-ISIS fighters on the way and they helped me and my children get back to Iraq. I managed to find my sister and stayed with her for four months. With the help I got from the UN, I was brought to Canada with my children.”

• (1710)

It continues: “Here is a list of my family members who I desperately want to be reunited with:” She lists her sister; her daughter remains in captivity; her husband’s whereabouts is unknown; his brother—they have located him and he’s living with his wife and three children in a camp; her husband’s brother is living in a different camp; his uncle is living in a camp; and a niece. “Being separated from my family is greatly affecting me. I think about them every day. I am terrified about the safety of my daughter and husband. I can’t sleep well at all due to worrying about them. I don’t feel that I am able to function here properly, and I can’t focus on resettling here. I am mentally very affected by the experiences I have been through. I am scared all the time. I am still constantly in fear that my children could be taken away from me. This will take time to heal, but I cannot heal properly without the rest of my family being here safe too.”

It continues: “I have no supports here to help me, and I am trying to raise three children by myself after all this. If my family were here with me, I know I would have some peace, and they would be able to support me and my children. I have suffered some of my physical injuries from a bomb, which affects my ability to walk as well. Many of the family members I have mentioned are living in very hard

conditions with no proper housing and things are not safe for them. I am very grateful to the Canadian government for helping me to come here with my three children, but I am respectfully requesting that they continue to help me by bringing my family here, too, who not safe where they are. I hope the Government of Canada will respond to this plea.”

Here is another: “We are writing to you today because we need help from the government to bring our family here to Canada. We arrived in Canada on December 21, 2017—my husband, three kids and my sister. On August 3, 2014, ISIS came to our village and was forcing us to be Muslim. They gave the villages time to consider and think about converting. We stayed in the village for nine days while ISIS surrounded the village. One night some of the ISIS members left to fight, so I escaped with my family. We walked for two days and reached the mountains, and then went on to Kurdistan. My sister was left with ISIS at the time and was held captive for almost a year.”

Again, there are two people who are writing this letter. This is the woman: “It is very important for us to have our family here. Back at home in the camp there is no food, no water, no money. My sister is living in one camp. Her tent was burned down and now has to live—with her husband and daughter—with my parents. My father and my mother are also living in this camp, and have lived there since 2015. When I talk to my family they do not feel safe, and report there is no food and no water. Day after day the living conditions get worse. My grandparents are living in the Sinjar Mountains, and both have physical disabilities. They are living with my uncle, and they also have no food and water. My other sister is living in the camp, and has lived there since 2014 with her husband and one daughter. I believe that God saved my sister because ISIS tried to shoot her, but shot the sheet beside her instead.”

This is the man writing: “My father and mother are living in a camp with my three sisters and three brothers. They have lived there in poor living conditions since 2014. Since arriving in Canada, we feel safe here, but we have bad moods because my family is not here with us. It is difficult to focus and we are not happy because our families are back home, and we are always worrying about them. We appreciate the government bringing us here safe, but nobody knows what it’s like to be back home. When we talk to our family they tell us how bad it is to live there. We told our family that we are writing these letters to the Canadian government, and everyone was happy and jumping.”

This is a different letter: “I arrived in Canada seven months ago. I arrived with my five children. In 2014, my husband and children and myself were all captured by ISIS. I was separated from my husband and son, and my daughters and I were held in captivity by ISIS for over two years. I have not been in contact with my husband and son, and I don't know what happened to them, or where they are right now. I want to ask the Canadian government to help me reunite with my family so that I might be able to resettle here in Canada. My entire family is living in a camp in Iraq: my three sisters”—she lists them and continues—“my three brothers and my mother. My family has been living in this camp since fleeing ISIS in 2014. I am able to stay in contact with my family, and they tell me in the camp that there is no water, no food, and my family has no money. My brother got bitten by a snake about a month ago, and he lost a toe. He continues to lose a lot of blood and be in a lot of pain.”

• (1715)

It continues: “My mother has been sick for the last four months. She has high blood pressure, diabetes and pain in her leg. Please help bring my mother here. I am in a safe place here in Canada, but my mental health is not good because I am separated from my family. All day and all night I am focused on my kids, because I am afraid of what ISIS did to us while we were in captivity. My kids also have poor mental health. One of my children has trouble hearing, and another one of my children has a disability. I need someone to be with me to help me with my kids. I am alone here—no brothers, no sisters, no husband. I have to take my children to many medical appointments by myself. Please help me reunite with my family.”

This is another letter: “I am writing to request your help in reuniting me with my family. I came to Canada in December 2017, after my family and I suffered unspeakable horrors at the hands of ISIS. ISIS came to my village on August 3, 2014, where I was living with my husband and five children. We were held in captivity in our village for several days before the men were taken away to be executed. My husband was shot three times and left for dead, but he survived and managed to escape. The women and children were taken away and most were sold into sexual slavery, including my 15-year-old daughter, 11-year-old daughter and one-year-old daughter. My oldest son was taken to be trained as a suicide bomber, while my younger son was taken to be taught the Quran. When I was sold to a Muslim man and pretended to be a faithful Muslim woman, I gained my captor's trust and he returned my two sons to me. Eventually, my children and I escaped to a camp after a ransom was paid by my family.”

It continues: “ISIS destroyed my extended family. Most of the men in my family were killed by ISIS, including my father and three brothers. My husband's family too has been decimated. Most of his family continue to be missing and presumed dead. My mother is missing and may be in captivity with ISIS, or she may have already been killed. My husband, children and I have been provided safety and a chance for a future in Canada. I am hoping the Canadian government will provide the same opportunity for my remaining relatives who are alive, namely, my aunts and their families. I have four aunts who live in various camps in Iraq who I would like to bring to Canada so that they can be safe. My aunts and their family are...”. They go into great detail here, and then it goes on: “My aunts and their families are all the family that I have left in the world. I am very worried about them because they do not have their basic needs

met, such as access to clean water, food or adequate shelter. My mind is always preoccupied with the thoughts of my family. Because my mind is always thinking and worrying about my family, I am unable to concentrate and learn at school. I worry that my ongoing separation from my family is preventing me from successfully resettling into Canada. Please help reunite our family so that we can help support each other, heal from our trauma and work towards a productive future in Canada.”

The next letter states: “I am writing to request your help in reuniting me with my family. I am writing to request the unification of my six brothers”—they list the names—“my sister and my mother. They are all living in...”. They list the tents, the names, that they're living in, in the specific camp, and it continues: “I came to Canada in January 2018. In 2014, our family escaped ISIS by running to safety on Sinjar Mountains. My family then ran away from ISIS by travelling to Kurdistan, where we were separated because I was taking care of my sister who had escaped ISIS, and therefore we were offered resettlement in Canada so that my sister could remain safe. Since coming to Canada, we have been suffering without our family. Our hearts are heavy and missing our family. We are very worried for them, since they are not safe in the camp, and they have no money, food, medicine or shelter. Please help reunite our family so that we can support each other and work towards a productive future in Canada.”

Another letter states: “I am requesting your help reuniting with my families so that I can successfully resettle.”

I'll just pause for a moment, because I hear the chair whispering that there is a same line.... Many of these refugees have been supported by immigration resettlement services in Canada that have been advocating on their behalf for their reunification. Of course they are going to have help drafting letters. This was not done at my behest. These are letters that have come to me from resettlement services agencies.

• (1720)

The Chair: I was speaking to the redundancy factor, because I have now heard some of the lines 10 or 15 times. I've been keeping track. I've heard exactly the same lines, word for word, so it does raise some concerns for me about redundancy.

I am very impressed with the quality of English. It's much, much improved since we had our.... We've had many meetings with Yazidi members of the community who struggled with their English, so their English has improved tremendously, but I am concerned about the number of times that I am hearing exactly the same words around “reuniting my family” and “productive life in Canada”. I'm just giving you a little note that if I hear those lines continually.... I will be happy to receive all of these letters, too, as you've offered them to me. I'm just giving you notice that if it is getting redundant, I don't think the committee would want to have redundancy.

Mr. Maguire.

Mr. Larry Maguire: I've listened intently to these letters as well, and I'm sure there are many more. I want to hear them.

As a point to that, Mr. Chair, when I take in what's being said, I'm not sure that you can help but have redundancy from letters like this, if that's the case. These are tragic, tragic circumstances that these people have been faced with.

We've heard testimony from people before our committee on these issues, but to hear from this many persons, I think really drives home the point of the motion we're talking about today.

• (1725)

The Chair: I think you're adding to the debate, so I would end there.

I think you're into the debate about the issue.

Mr. Larry Maguire: All right. Thanks, Chair.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Chair, if the implication is that somehow these stories aren't valid, I'm reminded that many of these were put together with the translation and assistance of the Calgary Catholic Immigration Society. I would like to take time to put on the record my deep and humble thanks to this organization for the work they have done to help resettle members of the Yazidi community.

Essentially to your point, Chair, this is the key component to their resettlement. Can you imagine having to go through IRCC bureaucracy as somebody who has gone through this channel...? I want to thank the Calgary Catholic Immigration Society for their work in trying to get these stories to members of Parliament. Again, you've just proven the need of why we have to do this study.

I don't think that any single one of these stories is redundant. I think that they speak to the need for us to do this study. I am very grateful for the opportunity to continue to prove that point by sharing their experiences in being unsuccessful in reuniting with their families.

The other point on this is that some of the stories are similar because they're family members, and they each have the right to make these cases.

So another—

The Chair: Does Mr. Tilson have a point of debate or a point of order?

Mr. David Tilson: Sir, it's a response to your comment that you might be saying in the future that there is redundancy.

I'd like to comment on that, if I could.

The Chair: Yes, and it gives me a chance to clarify it. I did not say that the stories were redundant, but making the same point over and over again in a debate is redundancy.

Mr. David Tilson: The stories that have been read to us are all different. The incidents are all different. What may be redundant, and it's not redundant, is they're all asking for assistance. They're all asking for a situation that particularly women, who are being left alone in this country with children with no—

The Chair: Thank you. I think that is debate as well.

Mr. David Tilson: But I'm responding.

That is the redundancy. They're asking for assistance. I think they're all asking for the same thing. That's the whole point of the letters.

They're not all telling the same stories. I think it's important that we hear the different stories, because they all come from different points of view. That is not redundant.

The Chair: I believe you're debating the point.

Ms. Rempel, you may continue.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

Again, every once in a while when we move motions in this place, Mr. Chair, my colleagues opposite will essentially ask why this is more important than what we're studying right now, when we have all these other things that are so important. The volume of stories and casework being presented here today I hope will leave the impact about why this is so important.

I will continue with another letter. They are asking for assistance in resettling their family in Canada. It states: "Before I arrived in Canada, we were all one happy family. I was a student, but we were not rich. We were happy. After ISIS arrived, all of the women were forced into marriage and made into sex slaves. ISIS started killing the older boys and men. My father told my mother, my sisters and me to escape. We escaped with some help from the people in our village who had cars. My father and two brothers stayed behind. We were in the mountains for seven days. We had no food, only dirty water, which had dead animal carcasses in it. We left the mountains after seven days, walking across the Syrian desert to reach the Syrian border. We were eventually picked up by vehicles and taken to a camp by the border. After one day it was possible to enter Kurdistan, as we were able to rent a vehicle and buy our way across the border. We were provided food and clothing, and we went to the Khanke camp, where we remained for two to three months."

It continues: "We eventually went to another half-built house—no windows or doors—and eventually had to go to a different camp when the owner of the house evicted us. We remained there for two years. My cousin's wife was captured and then eventually bought out for \$52,500 U.S. She selected my mother, sisters and me to come to Canada to help comfort her. The following family members are still surviving, and their locations are"—and they list a sister, a brother-in-law, three children, a brother-in-law, two children and a fiancé. "Pre-ISIS, we had a complete family and were very happy. After ISIS, we have been scattered. We no longer have the comfort of our family. We think about our surviving family members all of the time. The conditions in the camp are not good. People have to line up at 3 a.m. to get water. There is little food, and what there is, is not good. It is not very safe. And there are many bare electric wires, and fires happen often. I would like the Canadian government to help reunite our family."

That letter was not...legitimately.... I don't know how it snuck in there—this one that I just turned aside since we don't have visuals today.

I will read one that is. This is another request for family reunification: “I’ve come to Calgary as part of the victims of Daesh program in 2017. I’ve come to Canada with my brother after being held in captivity in a prison and tortured by ISIS for nine months. I joined my sister and her family who resettled in Calgary five months before me. Many of my family members missing—parents, four sisters and four brothers. My younger sister, who was 10 years old, managed to escape ISIS after being tortured by ISIS for two years, but was killed by a bomb on the day of her escape. My heart is broken for her, my family and the Yazidi community. My brother-in-law has 10 missing family members too. One of my brothers, whose name is”—I won’t read the name—is living in a camp in Iraq in deplorable conditions. Many members of my brother-in-law’s families are living in the Mamrashan camp. My brother-in-law’s families who are there include his mother and my siblings”—They list all the names. “They are unsafe and living in difficult conditions. I constantly worry about them. My constant worry makes me very uncomfortable. I am unable to do anything with my new life in Canada because of my constant worry and stress.”

It continues: “I am requesting that the government help bring my family members to Canada so they can be safe and secure with hope for a future. I also plead with the government to do everything possible to find my family members who remain missing, who are either dead in captivity with ISIS or are suffering unspeakable horrors. In addition, I would like to plead with the Canadian government to advocate on the international stage for justice for our community. I would like to see those responsible for the genocide be held responsible for their crimes. Please help me reunite with my family who are living in Iraq, and help me find my missing family members. I am unable to find peace without knowing the fates of my family members. I would like the Government of Canada to work with the international community to help those who are missing. I would like the Government of Canada to reunite all living family members. My heart is broken and will not be able to mend without being reunited with my family.”

• (1730)

This is another one: “I am writing to you today to request your help in reuniting my family members who are still in Iraq. I truly believe the only way for me to successfully settle in Canada and become an active member in my community is to bring my family together once again. Even with all the help I am currently receiving in Calgary, I don’t think I will ever be able to feel at ease in Canada as long as my family is not safe with me here. I arrived in Calgary in January 2017 with my husband and my son. Before ISIS started attacking my people, we were living in a village called Wardiya in Iraq. I was working at home taking care of my family. When ISIS attacked at night we stayed in our village hiding for eight days before we managed to escape. We escaped to the mountains for a few weeks. We then walked to the Syrian border where we stayed in incomplete houses before going to another camp. We stayed in this camp until coming here to Canada. Some of my siblings were captured by ISIS and I don’t know their whereabouts. My other family members who are still alive are waiting in camps in terrible conditions.”

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Point of order, Chair.

I have other time commitments at 5:30. I think others may, as well.

The Chair: The meeting does continue at the will of the committee. I’m not sure whether or not I’m allowed to have a motion to adjourn, because we have a motion on the floor. So, I would need unanimous consent to stop the meeting. That’s what I thought.

• (1735)

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Can we do a motion to adjourn?

The Chair: We don’t have a....

Mr. Nick Whalen: I’m on the list, aren’t I?

The Chair: You are on the list, yes.

Do I have unanimous consent to adjourn the meeting?

Hon. Michelle Rempel: No.

This is another one: “I am writing you today to request your help reuniting my family members who are still in Iraq.”

Chair, on a point of clarification, you cannot move a motion on a point of order, so it was not even appropriate to call a question on that.

The Chair: If I had unanimous consent, I could do it, which is why I was asking. I did not accept a motion.

Just to be very clear, every time a member questions whether or not I understand the rules, I need to take a little bit of time then to explain the rules, because I am very aware of the rules.

I do have the right to recognize a member on a point of order, and that point of order can actually look at the clock and discern that our meeting was called from 3:30 to 5:30, and it is very appropriate for a member to wonder whether or not we are adjourning the meeting, because normally we adjourn without a motion. We adjourn with what is called implied unanimous consent because that’s the order of the day that we operate under. So it is very appropriate for me to have taken time to listen to someone raising that issue and to listen to that issue. Then my next step was, as it will always be, to check whether indeed I did have unanimous consent to continue. To have a member suggest that that is inappropriate is inappropriate.

I think I might want to just continue with this for a little while as the chair, because I actually do have the right to clarify the rules. I could actually read from the rules at great length at this point if the member wanted me to.

An hon. member: Forty minutes.

The Chair: For 40 minutes, I could read them.

Mr. David Tilson: I’d like to hear them.

The Chair: I’m just saying I could do that.

Mr. David Tilson: I would like to hear them.

The Chair: Thank you for voicing your opinion. You don’t have the floor.

We will now continue with Ms. Rempel.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

This letter states: “I am writing to you today to request your help in reuniting with some of my family members who are still in Iraq. Even with all of the help I am currently receiving in Calgary, I don't think I'm going to be able to feel at ease in Canada as long as my family is not safe with me here. I arrived in Calgary in January of 2017 with my husband and my son. Before ISIS started attacking my people, we were living in a village called Wardiya in Iraq. I was working at home taking care of my family when ISIS attacked at night. We stayed in our village hiding for eight days, when we managed to escape. We escaped to the mountains for a few weeks. We then walked to the Syrian border, where we stayed in incomplete houses. We stayed in this camp until coming here to Canada. Some of my siblings were captured and I don't know their whereabouts. My other family members who are still alive are waiting in the camps, in terrible conditions.” They list all of the remaining family members, including a son, brother-in-law, sister, a brother, and a brother and sister-in-law.

It continues: “ Being separated from my family has greatly affected me. I think about them every day. This ultimately prevents me from focusing on my new life in Canada and moving on to better things. My family members are living in terrible conditions at the moment, and it is simply not safe for them over there. This constant worry has had a significant impact on my mental health and I have difficulty functioning. My sister and my son in Iraq are suffering from severe PTSD, and the situation in the camps only makes it worse. My brother-in-law also suffers from a heart condition and cannot get appropriate treatment in the camps. We have already started a community here in Calgary, and we would facilitate the integration of the rest of my family. I hope the Canadian government will sympathize with my situation and help bring my family over to Canada. My family and I really need your help.”

This is a different letter, to be clear: “I arrived in Canada on September 19, 2017 with my three children. On August 3, 2014, ISIS captured the people in my village and separated the men from the women and children. Since that day, I have not heard what happened to my husband. My three children and I stayed in Telafer for 20 days. After that, ISIS sold me and my children into the sexual trade, and we lived in Syria for three years. We were sold 16 different times, living in different places with different men. My children and I ran away from the man who bought us.” She goes through the different places where she was bought and sold:

It continues: We reached Peshmerga, and then Kurdistan. We lived in a camp starting in October of 2016, and we lived there until we came to Canada. Our lives in the camp were bad because there was no food and no money and my parents were not with me. To this day, I do not know what happened to my father and brothers. I know that ISIS took them, but I don't know if they are alive or dead. My mother was released after being in ISIS captivity for a year and a half and is now living in the camp in Kurdistan. She lives with my sister. Her husband took her one child away. My uncle lives in a camp with his wife, daughter, one son, who is married and has three children, my uncle's other daughter-in-law lost her husband when ISIS killed him. She is left to survive with her two daughters. My husband's uncle is living with his wife and four children in a camp. Since arriving in Canada, I am upset and keep thinking about my family. As soon as I

leave school, I forget everything I learnt. I hope the Canadian government can help us bring our family here.”

Here's another request: “I came to Canada in November 2017 after my family and I were forced to flee from our homes when ISIS invaded our village. I arrived in Calgary with my husband and four children and my sister and her five children, two of whom have significant developmental problems. Before ISIS, I lived with my extended family in a village in Iraq. We farmed the land and were happy with our lives. After ISIS came, we ran away to the mountains. Unfortunately, my sister and her husband and children were captured by ISIS. Eventually, we travelled to Kurdistan, and then onward to Turkey in search of safety. We lived in Turkey for four months, then returned to Kurdistan, where we lived in various places before settling in Shikhan, where we lived in an abandoned building. We moved to a village called”—I'm going to omit some of the village names for confidentiality.

•(1740)

It continues: “My sister was eventually released from captivity and had the opportunity to come to Canada as my sister's companion for resettlement. My sister and I are safe in Canada but our family continues to suffer in Iraq. The situation is not safe for my family there. They continue to be at risk of persecution and of violence. I worry about them all the time. My constant worrying is causing me great difficulty with learning. I have trouble remembering what the teacher tells me and I have difficulty learning English. Moreover, my sister and I need the support of our family in order to help raise our nine children, two of whom are medically complex. My two nieces who are here in Canada with me have significant developmental issues and require a lot of attention and care, including frequent trips to the Alberta Children's Hospital. We are struggling with child care and managing the busy schedule of nine children. My sister and I would benefit from having our parents and siblings here with us. The family whom I need to be reunited with”—and there's a long list of family members, sisters, brothers....

It goes on: “I am now living in safety in Canada and I am grateful to be safe. However, I continue to be plagued by worry for my family who remain in Iraq. These worries prevent me from sleeping and from learning English. I am struggling in Canada, where it is difficult caring for a large family while trying to adjust to a new culture, a new environment, a new language. I need the help of my family. Please help reunite my remaining family so we can support each other and heal from our trauma.”

This is a different letter: “I am writing to request your help in reuniting me with my parents and siblings who remain in danger in...”. The camp name is given, in Kurdistan. It continues: “I came to Canada last year as part of the program. I was grateful to be safe in Canada, but I am constantly worried about my family who remain in danger in Kurdistan. My parents and siblings remain in danger in Kurdistan since there are still ISIS members who are targeting the Yazidi people in Kurdistan. My father is....” He names his father, his mother, and siblings and goes on: “I am worried about my family since they continue to be at risk of persecution, and because they are unable to get adequate medical care my father has had a stroke that left him with weakness in one of his hands, and my mother has diabetes and rheumatoid arthritis, and my 11-year-old brother has cerebral palsy. All of my family members are suffering psychologically due to the atrocities that they encountered with ISIS. My siblings, who are all school-aged, are unable to afford to go to school. In addition, my 11-year-old brother with cerebral palsy does not have any access to services to help him lead a full life. I am very worried about them and I am unable to do anything because of my constant worry. I feel helpless being so far from them and unable to help them. I feel guilty being so far away from them and not being able to help them.”

He continues: “I would like them to join me in Canada so that I can help them and so that they can be safe, go to school and receive medical treatment. Being separated from my family is causing me psychological distress and I don't think that I'll be able to overcome my psychological trauma caused by ISIS as long as I am separated from my family. Please help me reunite with my family. I would also like to plead with you to help the single girls who were raped and tortured by ISIS for many years [and] who are living alone in the camps of Iraq. These girls have no future in Iraq and deserve to have a life of peace and safety in Canada. Please help bring them to Canada so that the resettled Yazidi community in Canada can support them.”

Another letter states: “I am writing to you today because I am asking for your help to reunite me with my family. I arrived in Canada in December 2017 with my four children and my brother-in-law. In August 2014 ISIS came to my village and took three of my children to many different places. The last was Syria. My one son had fled with his uncle. I am not sure what happened to my husband. I lived in Raqqa, in Syria, with my three children for three years. I fled with my friends and my children to Pakeke and eventually to Kurdistan. We arrived in Kurdistan in March, 2016, and we lived in a camp there, where the living conditions were very poor. I hope the Canadian government can help bring my family here. My father”—he names his father—“and my mother live together in a camp in Kurdistan. My two sisters and youngest brother are living with my parents in this camp. My oldest brother is living with his wife and six children in the same camp. My sister lives with her husband and six children and they also live in this camp. My other sister lives in the same camp with her husband and three children.”

• (1745)

It continues: “Another of my sisters lives with her husband at this camp. My older sister lives with her husband in this camp. My other sister lives with her husband and one daughter in this camp. When I speak to my family, they tell me there is no food and no water and it is extremely hot. Every day another tent burns down. I'm not feeling

okay here. We suffered a lot at the hands of ISIS. I don't have my husband with me now. Mentally, I am not okay, and I cannot focus on my life here, because I am constantly worrying about my family back at home. When I was back at home and I was doing the interview, I was told that if I moved to Canada that they would bring my family here. I need help because I have to go to school in the evening, and when I get home, I am alone raising my four children. Other countries who are welcoming the Yazidi people are also bringing their families to be reunited. We hope the Canadian government can help bring our families here.”

Here is another letter: “I am writing to request your help in reuniting me with my fiancé, who lives in [...tent in the...camp]. I'm one of the Yazidi refugees who were brought to Canada as part of the program in 2017. I was told that my fiancé would be able to join me in Canada once I had resettled in Calgary, but it is almost a year, and I have not been reunited with him. In my culture, once a woman is engaged, she is committed to her fiancé, as though they are husband and wife. The only reason we were not married is that the immigration official told me that I would not be able to resettle in Canada if I got married. In fact, the official told me that my whole family would be prevented from coming to Canada if I got married. The official told me that I could bring him over to Canada later, once I had landed in Canada. I was faced with an impossible situation; either I could marry my fiancé but remain subject to violence in Iraq, or I could postpone marriage and come to the safety of Canada, with the hope of bringing my fiancé at a later date.”

It continues: “I chose to come to Canada, but since coming, I've been told that it's impossible to be reunited with my fiancé since I'm not officially married with a marriage certificate. I'm terribly worried about him, since he is very unsafe as a member of an ethnic minority with a long history of persecution in Iraq. As you know, Yazidis are still being kidnapped and killed in Iraq. My worry about him and his safety is debilitating. I do not feel well psychologically because I am separated from him and worrying about him. I am unable to focus at school, and therefore, I am having difficulty learning English, which is impacting my ability to integrate. Please help me reunite with my fiancé. I will not be able to resettle successfully in Canada without him.”

Here is another request: "I'm writing you today to request your help in reuniting my family members who are still in Iraq. I truly believe that the only way for me to successfully resettle in Canada, and become an active member in my community, is to bring my family together once again. Even with all of the help I'm receiving, I don't think I'll be able to feel at ease in Canada as long as my family is not safe. I arrived in Calgary in December of 2017 with my husband and six of my children. Before ISIS started attacking my people, we were living in Tal Banat near Sinjar. I was working at home taking care of my children. We were in Tal Banat until the day ISIS attacked my people. My husband and I fled at 2 a.m. to the mountains, and we finally managed to reach the city of Duhok. We then went to nearby villages to hide with relatives. Finally, we went to the Mamrashan camp, where we stayed until we came to Canada. One of my sons managed to escape to Germany, but the rest of my family were separated from us at the beginning, and they were stuck in the mountains for weeks. The ones who are still alive, listed below, are now living in various camps across Kurdistan. Here are all of my family members who are still alive, with their location:" Sisters and mothers and brothers are listed.

It continues: "Being separated from my family has greatly affected me. I think about them every day. This ultimately prevents me from focusing on my new life in Canada and moving on to better things. My family members are living in terrible living conditions at the moment, and it's simply not safe for them over there. This constant worry is affecting me. My children are suffering from mental health problems because of the separation of their family. Most of my siblings in Iraq are suffering from PTSD, and the situation in the camp only makes their mental health worse. We have started a community here in Calgary, which would really facilitate the integration of the rest of my family. I hope the Canadian government will sympathize with my situation and bring my family over to Canada."

● (1750)

I have another: "I came to Canada in December 2017 after my family and I suffered unspeakable horrors. I arrived in Calgary with only my brother, his wife and their four children. Before ISIS I lived with my parents, siblings and my sibling's family in Tel Azer, where we did farming and construction. Once ISIS came, our family was captured. The men were taken away, the women sold into sexual slavery. I was captured and held in captivity for two and a half years. I was finally released when my family paid a ransom for my freedom. When I was released from ISIS I was brought to a camp where I was approached by the Canadian representatives who offered me resettlement in Canada. I was allowed to bring only one member of my family for support. It was a very difficult decision for me, but I chose to have my brother come with me. I was told that I might be able to sponsor my other family members after I arrived in Canada, but I have since learned that it will be impossible for me to do so. I am devastated to learn that I may never see my family again. At this time I have many family members in captivity with ISIS: my mother, my younger brother, my sister and her three children and my sister-in-law and her three children. I have no idea if they are dead or alive. Fortunately, I have some relatives who have survived and they're living in various camps in Kurdistan. My surviving family members are:" They are listed with their camp locations.

It continues: "The lives of my family members living in the camps are very difficult. Even though they have escaped imprisonment with ISIS, they continue to feel like they are threatened and that their safety is in jeopardy. Because they continue to be a minority in a Muslim majority region, they live in constant fear of being attacked again. Moreover, they live in tents, which are very warm and don't provide adequate protection. It gets very hot and they don't have enough access to water. Moreover they tell me the water tastes very bitter. They are limited to collecting their water every three days and sometimes they run out of water. In addition, they often don't have enough food to eat. Because of their suffering, I am suffering. My brother and I came to safety in Canada; however, even though I am safe, my mind is not at peace because my family is suffering. I can't learn, and this is causing me difficulty in learning English. Please help me reunite with my remaining family so that we can support each other and heal from our trauma."

I have another letter: "I am writing you today to request your help in reuniting my family members who are still in Iraq. I truly believe the only way for me to successfully settle here and to become an active member here is to bring my family together once again. Even with all the help I am receiving, I don't think I'll be able to feel at ease because my family is not safe. I arrived in Calgary in March 2018 with my sister and two of her brothers. Before ISIS started attacking my people, I was living with my family in the city of Kojo near Sinjar. I was working at home taking care of my family. The day ISIS attacked our town I was in Erbil for a doctor's appointment, and after fleeing the news I fled to the Dohuk region. However, my parents and siblings were in Kojo when it was attacked by ISIS. After many months of activity my three siblings who came with me to Canada managed to escape ISIS and met me at the Rwanda camp but ISIS had already murdered my parents. My other sister was also captured by ISIS and her whereabouts are unknown. We had to pay \$20,000 to a smuggler for him to go and liberate my brothers captured by ISIS. My sister who is here with me in Canada was liberated by the Iraqi troops a month later when they retook Mosul. She then joined us in the camp. After that I stayed with my siblings in the camp until coming here to Canada. This is a list of my family members who are alive with their current location."

It continues: "I think about my family members every day. This ultimately prevents me from focusing on my new life and moving on. My family members are living in terrible conditions and it is simply not safe for them over there. Then don't have access to clean water, electricity or health care. Also my sister and one of her brothers have serious mental health problems due to their separation from the rest of our family members. Being the oldest sibling in Canada, I have to take care of my younger siblings, which is extremely difficult for me. Bringing my older siblings, listed above, to Canada would greatly help me take care of my family. We have started a community here in Calgary. I hope the Canadian government will sympathize with my situation and help bring my family over to Canada. We need your help."

• (1755)

I have another letter: "I am writing today to ask the Canadian government to help the Yazidis and to help me reunite with my family. I arrived in Canada in August 2017. I arrived with my husband, two kids and sister-in-law. In 2014, ISIS came to our village and captured my family for eight days. We were able to escape and fled to the Sinjar Mountains, and then Kurdistan, which is in northern Iraq. My life here in Canada is good, but I'm always thinking about my family and our people back home. I hope the government can help me reunite with my family. My family is living in...." They list the camp in Kurdistan. "My mother, my sister and my brothers...." They list their names. "I am able to contact my family while they are living at the camp, and they tell me that their life is very bad. There is no medicine, no food and no water. Since arriving in Canada in August 2017, my life here is good with my husband and children, but I'm always thinking of my family back home. My mom has high blood pressure and diabetes, and she has no money to go to the doctor. I appreciate the help of the Canadian government, and I hope they can bring our family here."

This is another letter: "I arrived in Canada in November 2017 with my brother, sister-in-law, nephew and sister, as part of the program. On August 3, 2014, ISIS captured my family. They separated my husband and kids. They took my children and I to Syria. I have not heard from my husband since ISIS took him on that date. I was held in captivity with ISIS for one and a half years. I escaped to Pakeke, and then to a small village in Kurdistan. While there, I lived with my parents. My 15-year-old son is still held in captivity with ISIS. If I hear anything about him, if he is released, I hope he can come here to Canada. My other son and daughter were released from ISIS, and they arrived here in Canada about a month and half ago. I don't know what happened to my brother-in-law and his family. I also don't know what happened to my uncle and his family."

It continues: "Since arriving in Canada, it is difficult to focus, because I keep thinking about my son, my husband and my parents at home. Every time I'm thinking that ISIS has captured my family at home, I am not able to sleep well. I hope that the Canadian government can help bring my family here. My father and mother are still living in Kurdistan with my brother. My brother has four children with his wife. It is a bad life for my family, and not just my family but all the Yazidis. There's no water. There's no food. I hope the Canadian government can help the Yazidi people, especially those living in the camps, and our family members who are still held captive by ISIS. ISIS is brainwashing our children. I appreciate that

the Canadian government helped me to bring my kids here. I hope to have the rest of my family here as well."

Here is another request: "My story: On August 3, 2014, ISIS came to my village in Sinjar. After they came, I ran to the mountains and stayed in the mountains for three months. At that time, I managed to escape to Kurdistan. I stayed in a refugee camp called Khanke and was there for two months, and then I left to stay in an unfinished building. I didn't feel I was safe in the camp or anywhere there in Iraq. I wasn't able to work or go to school. I came to Canada with my sister-in-law who is alone with her children here. Here is a list of my family members who I desperately want to be reunited with:" She lists her sister, and says she was in captivity with ISIS for two and a half years, and her six-year-old daughter. Her sister was able to escape and is in the mountains with her husband and four children. Sometimes she is in contact with them. She lists other people.

It continues: "Being separated from my family is greatly affecting me, and I think about them every day. My sister and her family"—this is the one who escaped from ISIS captivity—"are living a very terrible life now. They have no food and they can't find work. They are suffering there, and I worry about their safety and their well-being all the time. The children are unable to go to school. My sister is struggling so much with her mental health and is not functioning. She lives in fear all the time, has panic attacks and requires a lot of help. I feel I cannot resettle well in Canada without my family being here. We need to help each other to move on from this terrible thing that has happened to us all. All I think about is my sisters. I can't focus on school here. I find it difficult to concentrate on anything other than thoughts of my family. I worry daily about their safety. It is affecting my ability to move on. I know that having them here will make my life better, to know that they are safe. I also want to be with my fiancé, as we hope to start a life together. We need to be together. I think about the life we might be having now in Iraq if ISIS had not destroyed our lives. I am very grateful to the Canadian government for helping me to come here, but I am respectfully requesting that they continue to help me by bringing my family here, too, who are not safe where they are. We need to build a new community here so we can focus on the future and go to school and build a life here. I hope the Government of Canada will bring my family here and help the Yazidi people. I hope the Government of Canada will respond to this plea. My family needs your help."

●(1800)

This is another letter: “I arrived in Canada in December 2017. I arrived with my husband and four children. In August 2014, my three children and I were captured by ISIS and we were held in captivity for eight and a half months. My husband and two other children were able to flee to the mountains and lived in Kurdistan for about eight to nine months. After eight months, my children and I were able to escape ISIS and we fled to Kurdistan as well and we were reunited with my husband and other children. Since arriving in Canada in December 2017, my life here is safe, but I'm always thinking about my son who was left back at home. My son Jamal is 27 years old and he is living in a tent in—I won't say where for confidentiality—“with his wife and eight-month-old son. He is unable to have regular work because of his pain in his back and I worry about him. He does construction periodically to make money because his wife is taking care of their baby.”

It continues: “My sister is living in a tent in the Sinjar Mountains with her husband and four kids. They are struggling with no food, no water and rely on neighbours to help. My brother is living in a tent in the Sinjar region with his wife and six kids. While fleeing from ISIS, my brother suffered a fall and fractured bones in his chest. Because of this, he has trouble breathing and [has] a lot of pain. My other sister is also living in the mountains with her husband and eight children. My other brother is also living in the Sinjar mountains with his wife, seven children and our mother. I have only been in contact once since arriving in Canada and I know that he is living a bad life. My other brother is also living in the Sinjar mountains with his wife and four kids and they have expressed that they would like to come to Canada. My sister is living in Sinjar mountains with her husband. My brother is also living in the Sinjar Mountains. Mentally, I am not good as I have pain in my arm and my children have to help me take care of the house. I have the pain in my arm because ISIS tortured and beat me up. I am having trouble sleeping because I am worried about my family and because of the pain in my arm and shoulder. I care a lot about my family in Iraq, especially the children—my nephews and nieces. I am here safe with my four kids, but I care about my other son a lot and I want him here with me. My other son is alone. I am asking the Canadian government for help to bring my family safe here in Canada.”

Here is another letter: “I am requesting your help reuniting my family. I arrived in Canada in June of 2017 with my wife and two children. Before ISIS, I was working in farming. We were a happy family. Our life was normal and we were able to support our family. All of our family was together. After ISIS, many people fled to the mountains, taking whatever they could at the last minute. We barely made it alive. We lost everything that we had worked for for our entire life. We were lucky to make it out with just our lives. We were in the mountains for three days. There was an open corridor and we managed to make it to the Syrian border. We had to walk for four to five hours and then at the border, we were loaded onto buses and taken to a camp in Syria. Then we were taken into Kurdistan. We went to a Christian village. I had worked there before and I knew some people to stay with. We lived there for three years. We were dependent on international aid during this time. Occasionally, we would be able to find work. My sister-in-law was smuggled and brought out and she was one of the people contacted by the Calgary Catholic Immigration Society. My sister-in-law was selected to come

to Canada and she requested that her sister join us and that is how we came to Canada. The following family members that are surviving and their location are:” She lists her father and mother, five siblings and aunts and uncles.

It continues: “We are always thinking about family over there. We have lived with our parents for more than 20 years and then all of a sudden you don't see them. I have had a child in Canada that my parents have yet to meet. It would mean a lot to us if the Canadian government could bring my family over to Canada. They are always on our minds. There is always a danger that the same thing will happen to the Yazidi people again in Iraq.”

Here is another letter: “On August the 3rd, 2014, my village was captured by ISIS and ISIS surrounded our village and they were forcing us to convert to Muslim and threatened to kill us. We stayed in the village for five days and one night we ran to the mountains. We walked for four days and stayed in the mountains for four days. After that, we went to Kurdistan and we lived in the camp until we came to Canada. We lived a bad life in the camp. No water, no food, no medicine. We hope the Canadian government can help us reunite with our families.”

●(1805)

Again, there are two people writing this letter. The first says, “My brother ran from Iraq with his family, and they are staying in a shelter in Greece. He is living with his wife and three children. My brother is stuck in Greece, and I would very much appreciate if the government could bring my brother here. The government in Greece is telling my brother that they are not able to stay there and must return to Iraq. In Greece, the Yazidis are being killed in the refugee camp.” The next person says, “Our sister is living with three children in the camp since 2014. Our other sister is living with her husband and one child. Our other sister is living with her seven children alone in the camp. She is a widow because ISIS killed her husband, so she is left with her seven children to raise on her own. Our nephew is also living in the camp. Since arriving in Canada, we push ourselves to live a good life here, but it is hard because we are always thinking about our family back home, especially our brother in Greece. We just hope that the Canadian government can help bring our brother from Greece and our sister in Iraq. We know that they are not in safe conditions. We appreciate everything that has been done for the Yazidi people. Our whole life, the Yazidi people have lived together, and now we are all living separately.”

Here is another letter: “We arrived in Canada in 2017. In 2014, I was captured by ISIS and held in captivity for about nine months, and I was taken to Tal Afar and Mosul. I was able to escape from ISIS, and fled from Mosul to Kurdistan.” Again, there are two people in this letter. “I ran from the village to the Sinjar Mountains, and another ran from the village to the Sinjar Mountains and then to Kurdistan. We appreciate the Canadian government bringing us here, but we hope to bring our family here. It is hard because our family is not here. We do not feel mentally okay.” The first woman says, “I am having trouble sleeping, and I am afraid to go out because I see people who look like they are a part of ISIS. I am also having trouble sleeping because I am worrying that my family is not safe. I am hoping the Canadian government can help me reunite with my family. My father and mother are currently living in a camp in Kurdistan, and they have been there since 2014. When I speak to them, my parents tell me that it is not safe to live there. My father suffers from an amputation in one leg, and my mother sustained a fractured foot about six months ago and is unable to walk because she can't afford care. My sisters are also living in the same camp, and are also living in the same poor camp conditions. My brother is also living in the same camp with his wife and three kids. My two sisters are also living with her husband and four kids.” The next person says, “My brother was captured by ISIS and was able to flee after two months. He is now living in the camp with his wife and three month [old] son. My two uncles are living in the camp for four years.” This is a different camp. “I still have family members captured by ISIS. My father and my sister have lost contact with them for the last four years. We are never going to be good here in Canada because we are always worrying about our family back home. We hope that our family back home can come here. We want to focus on our life here in Canada.”

Here is another letter: “I arrived in Canada in March 2018 with my brother and sister as part of the program. I was captured in August 2014 by ISIS and taken to Syria on August 5. I was held in captivity for one year. My captors beat me and raped me. I escaped and ran from ISIS, and went to a Syrian family who helped my cousin and I for 28 days. After that, we went to Turkey to meet the rest of the family. My brother is still captured by ISIS and is living in Syria. I hope that if he is ever released or if he escapes from ISIS, he is able to come to Canada. I hope the Canadian government can help bring over my aunt who is living in a camp in Kurdistan. She is living with her husband and six children. I spoke to her today, and they tell me that the life in the camp is not good. There is no food, and there is no water. My life here in Canada is good and safe, but I think a lot about my family back home. My mood is not good, but I am trying to be strong. I push myself at school. Even if everyday at school I can learn two words, it will be better for me. Every night I am having bad dreams, and I cannot stop thinking about what happened to me and what is still happening to my family. I hope the Canadian government will hear me. I want to help my people still living in the camp because it's not a good life, and I hope that my aunt will be able to come here. The Yazidi people here in Calgary look like my family, but I need my aunt to be here with me. I also want to tell the Canadian government that we still have a lot of women and their children still held as prisoners with ISIS, and they need our help.”

●(1810)

Another letter says: “My story: On August the 3rd, 2014, ISIS captured me and my husband. I was pregnant at the time and we had our daughter with us as well. We were taken to Tal Afar. At that time I was separated from my husband and I saw them beating him. I have not seen him since that time. I was taken with my daughter to Syria and I delivered a baby girl while in captivity with ISIS in Syria. I witnessed many terrible things there: girls being taken away and boys being forced to fight for ISIS. I was beaten many times, and they beat my daughters as well. They tried to force me to become Muslim. They told me my name was a Kurdish name and they changed it. I was going to be sold, along with my daughters, but my family found me online and they paid for us to be released. My oldest daughter was sent ahead and I walked four hours with my youngest daughter until we found the Peshmerga people of Iraq. I was able to find my parents and stayed with them for one and a half years, and after that I was brought to Canada. Here is a list of the family members whom I desperately want to be reunited with.” She lists her sisters.

It continues: “They are living a very difficult life in temporary, makeshift housing without a proper roof and they often go without food as their children always live with safety concerns. I worry about them so much. Being separated from my family is greatly affecting me and I think about them every day. I am terrified about their safety. I cry every day thinking about my husband and not knowing what has happened to him, though I know he might be dead. My daughters ask about their father and when he will be with them. All I want is for my sisters to be here with me, to be able to help move forward here. I believe my life would be better with them here. Otherwise I'm alone with my children and just my brother-in-law. My parents are old and they can't come here. I am very grateful to the Canadian government for helping me with my three children, but I am respectfully requesting that they continue to help me by bringing my family here too, who are not safe where they are. I would appreciate this help from the government because my mental health here is not good. I can't concentrate and I am not able to settle here well living like this. I hope the Government of Canada will respond to this plea. My family needs your help.”

This is one stack of letters from one city in this country, and we have had this conversation so many times. We went through a whole study of the factors that we needed to consider as a Parliament and as a government to help resettle victims of genocide. The top recommendation in that was expediting the reunification of genocide survivors with their family members, and even after we concurred that report into the House of Commons, the government is still not acting on these.

I have piles of letters. This is just for Calgary. There is Winnipeg. There's London. There's Toronto. I have piles of examples where people are being told even within the tight confines that currently exist for the one-year window of opportunity, that their applications aren't going to be processed for over two years.

I humbly ask this committee to take into consideration the study so that we can ensure that these people are able to resettle into Canada and that we order our priorities accordingly in terms of who comes to Canada through our humanitarian immigration system.

Thank you.

•(1815)

The Chair: I have Mr. Maguire next.

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

I have listened intently to these, I don't know how many letters—tens of tens at least, if not over a hundred. I look at the study that we've been asking for here and the motion that's come forward today. It's totally about refugee family reunification, Mr. Chair, and I believe—

The Chair: The bells are now ringing for a vote. I need unanimous consent to continue this meeting. Do I have unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: Is it your will that I adjourn?

Mr. Nick Whalen: You don't need our will because you don't have unanimous consent to continue.

The Chair: Is it your will that I suspend?

The meeting is suspended.

(Meeting adjourned [See Minutes of Proceedings])

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Presentation to the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, 42nd Parliament.

25 February 2018

Rachel Kiddell-Monroe

Fleeing Violence in Central America: Time to Implement Canada's Resettlement Policies

Good afternoon and thank you for inviting me and giving me the space to raise the crisis of Central America with you. I also want to personally thank Jean Nicolas Beuze who has been a tireless advocate on Central America refugee issues.

Today I am appearing in my capacity as a Professor of Practice at McGill's Institute for the Study of International Development. The opinions I express are my own.

I have spent most of my working life with Médecins Sans Frontières. I have lived and worked in many countries where people fear for their lives and for the security of their family on a daily basis and who are forced to flee their homes.

Today the nearly 70 million people in the world on the move have no choice - they are fleeing the extreme violence of war or gangs, structural poverty, corruption, and the impacts of climate change. Yet, despite international legal norms, people forced to flee are being rejected or blocked from entering host countries or being forcibly sent back to the violence and misery they escaped.

My last humanitarian mission in January 2019 took me to Venezuela, where I witnessed an entire people's survival being instrumentalized for political aims. A country where food and medicine have become luxuries and where people dream of safe refuge. 1 in 10 Venezuelans have left the country since 2014. Not out of choice. Out of necessity.

The situation in Venezuela is all too familiar for the people of Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala. The pattern of violent displacement, persecution, sexual violence, and forced repatriation in Central America is akin to the conditions found in the deadliest armed conflicts in the world today.

I witnessed that myself when I was in Mexico with Médecins Sans Frontières. I met with Gloria. She had been forced to leave El Salvador. Gangs threatened to kill her young son if he refused to work for the gang and her daughter if she refused to be the gang leader's girlfriend. Fearing for their lives, Gloria and her children fled.

Gloria's story is all too common. Nearly 500,000 Central Americans flee to Mexico every year.

When she arrived in Mexico, Gloria expected to find sanctuary. And on the books, Mexico has the formal instruments to protect refugees. However this is not reflected on the ground.

Instead of being welcomed, Gloria was kidnapped. Within a day of entering Mexico, Gloria was caught by a gang. She was raped multiple times. So was her 16-year old daughter. Her son was forced to be a witness. Gloria remained confined with her children for weeks. 2 in 5 migrants mention direct attacks or threats, extortion, or gang-forced recruitment as the main reason for fleeing their country. Over half of Salvadorans MSF surveyed had a relative who died due to violence.

Local authorities knew who kidnapped Gloria, but they turned a blind eye. Violent crimes against migrants are rampant in Mexico. 99% of them go un-investigated and unpunished.

Gloria told me she did not feel safe in Mexico. She did not believe she would get permission to stay in Mexico. In 2015, 96% of Guatemalans, 92% of Hondurans and 87% of Salvadorans detained in Mexico were deported back to their home countries.

The reality is that Mexico is not able or ready to host these people, from either a legal, human rights or economic perspective. Violence, criminality and the absence of protection and health care are major challenges facing Central American refugees in Mexico.

So, like many before her, Gloria continued her perilous journey north to the United States and beyond. I don't know what happened to her but the prognosis was not good. Aside from the dangers of the journey, at the US border she would face an increasingly restrictive US immigration policy. She would face hostility inspired by the fear incited by the growing anti-immigration, securitization and xenophobic populist discourse.

The Central American humanitarian situation is at its heart, a crisis of compassion, of humanity. Like other refugee contexts globally, this crisis of humanity causes immense human suffering and indignity. Perverse policies and discourses deny people access to basic protection and safety. They deny a person's right to flee extreme violence.

All of this runs contrary to international norms and our values as a Canadian society. Canada has played a lead role in the development of both Global Compacts on Migration. The humanitarian crisis in Central America provides Canada an opportunity to demonstrate that leadership on the ground by helping people like Gloria. I have 4 recommendations for this Committee. Canada should:

1. Fully recognise the humanitarian and international protection needs of Central American asylum seekers.

2. Advocate for safe passage, protection and access to healthcare for Central Americans on the move regardless of their legal status
3. Implement Canada's policy to offer resettlement to Central American refugees and to enforce gang-related violence as a criteria for acceptance. In the whole of 2017, Canada resettled only 28 Central Americans.
4. Given the reality of the Safe Third Country Agreement, Canada should take measures to ensure people passing via the US can enter Canada officially and safely.

Canada has helped 40,000 Syrians resettle in Canada since 2015. It is long past due for Canada to offer resettlement to Central Americans.

And we can't forget, Canada is a country built by the courage and determination of immigrants. Central Americans who are forced to flee their homes are courageous and determined. Often with young families, they want to build a better life for themselves and their children. And in 8 years, they can become net contributors to the public coffers. They are not a burden, they are an investment.

But at its base, this is not an economics debate. This is a question of humanity. As we sit here, there are thousands of Glorias and their children fleeing Central American countries for their lives. We have a responsibility to make sure they do not suffer her fate.

Thank you.

Remarks by Rodrigo Dominguez-Villegas
Migration Policy Institute, Washington D.C.
Before

The House of Commons' Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

Mr. Chairman and members of the standing committee, my name is Rodrigo Dominguez Villegas. I'm an independent consultant for the Migration Policy Institute in Washington, D.C., and a researcher at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst.

I am pleased to be here to discuss two issues: The challenges of reintegrating deportees in Mexico and Central America and recent changes in Mexico's migration policies.

Between FY 2012 and FY 2018, the United States carried out approximately 1.8 million repatriations of Mexican migrants. The United States and Mexico together carried out approximately 1.4 million deportations to Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador -- the three countries known as the Northern Triangle of Central America.

Imagine Daniela, a 23 years old, high school graduate from Honduras. She grew up in the United States since she was 7. She got apprehended in a raid, and after a few weeks in detention she was deported to Honduras. Not only was her life completely changed but she faced many challenges that come with deportation.

First, she had been away from Honduras for so many years that she had no Honduran identification documents. This blocked her access to basic services from opening a bank account to enrolling in social assistance programs.

Second, her high school diploma from the U.S was not recognized. She was then denied access to jobs that require a high school degree. Her English, though fluent, was not backed up with a certification, so English schools did not believe she could teach it.

And now, when she goes to job interviews, employers hear her broken Spanish, realize she was deported from the U.S., and associate her with gang membership.

Our recent fieldwork found that deported migrants face many common challenges, three of which are exemplified in Daniela's story: lack of identification documents, difficulties getting education and skills recognized, and social and employment discrimination.¹

¹ Ruiz, Ariel, Rodrigo Domínguez-Villegas, Luis Argueta, and Randy Capps. Sustainable Reintegration: Strategies to Support Migrants Returning to Mexico and Central America. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute. Available at <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/sustainable-reintegration-migrants-mexico-central-america>

Additionally, all deported migrants face the persistence of key push factors of endemic poverty and gang violence that drive emigration from the Northern Triangle.

Though at different stages and with varying success, the governments are responding to these challenges by improving services available for deported migrants.

When deportees first step off the plane or the bus after deportation, they are greeted at reception centers and receive food, basic medical checkups, free phone calls, and transportation subsidies to get home. The governments in the region and the IOM have made significant investments to renovate reception centers and improve reception services.

The challenge now is to strengthen longer term reintegration services.

Existing government reintegration services mostly aim to help deportees find a job through training programs, access to job boards, or loans to start small businesses. But existing reintegration services are only available to a tiny fraction of people and lack a holistic approach to address the economic, social, and psychosocial needs of deportees.

Non-governmental actors fill some of the gaps unaddressed by government institutions through a variety of programs. For example, Hola Code, a social enterprise in Mexico, provides an accelerated software development training program that places graduates in high paying jobs in the tech industry. Beyond learning how to code, deportees participate in activities from group therapy to lessons on how to navigate Mexico's bureaucracy. And in El Salvador, the Salvadoran Institute for Migrants provides psychosocial support for migrants and their families to address migration-related trauma, which is otherwise rarely available.

Strengthening the reintegration capacity in Mexico and the Northern Triangle is particularly urgent now. The U.S. administration's decision to terminate the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals or DACA Program, and the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for immigrants from El Salvador and Honduras may lead to higher volumes of deportations to the region and will likely impact the number of people wishing to migrate to Canada.

The second topic I want to cover is Mexico's new migration policy.

Mexico's new federal government, inaugurated on December 1st of 2018, has vowed to shift the country's focus of its migration policy from detention and deportation to protection and regional cooperation.

When a caravan of Central Americans reached the Guatemala-Mexico border in mid-January, instead of detaining and deporting migrants, the Mexican government issued over 12 thousand humanitarian visas that allow people to remain in Mexico for a year and get employment.

The benefits of promoting regularization were two-fold: first, Mexican authorities were able to know who was entering the country. Second, humanitarian visas allow migrants to use safe transportation in Mexico and avoid traffickers.

However, high demand for humanitarian visas forced the government to stop registering people at the border. Central Americans are now required to apply for these visas at Mexican embassies and Consulates in their home countries.

The reliance on temporary humanitarian visas rather than granting permanent refugee status to those with a credible protection claim is unsustainable. To achieve its protection and integration goals, Mexico's administration will have to strengthen its asylum system.

The number of asylum claims in Mexico increased 23 fold between 2013 and 2018 causing a growing backlog. Mexican law requires that applicants receive a response within 90 days, but decisions are now taking months. The UNHCR is working closely with COMAR to upgrade its capacity. But it will require funding and commitment to change the inertia around the Mexican asylum system.

Mexico is also leading regional negotiations to launch a CAN\$39.5 billion development plan for the Northern Triangle of Central America. The details of the plan remain uncertain, but it offers opportunities for fruitful cooperation that could help address the root causes of migration in Central America.

Investments on reintegration of deportees and upgrading the Mexican asylum system are two areas with clear needs where Canadian cooperation would be promising.

I commend the committee's endeavor to conduct the study that brings us here today and I thank you for inviting me to testify.