



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

CIMM • NUMBER 004 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, March 8, 2016

—
Chair

Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

Tuesday, March 8, 2016

• (1110)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.)): Good morning.

I would like to welcome our witnesses. Pursuant to the motion adopted by the committee on February 23, 2016, the witnesses are here to discuss their experience with the situation facing Zimbabwean and Haitian nationals in Canada.

I would invite Mr. Cima, Mr. Vaval, and Ms. Simon to proceed with any opening comments they might have. We'll start with Mr. Cima. You have a maximum of 10 minutes, sir.

Yes?

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): If I may, I would like to make a point of order, please.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

There are two individuals here today I would like to introduce to the committee: Mr. Serge Bouchereau, who is a representative of the action committee for persons without status; and Mrs. Oriol, who is a person without status.

They are actually not part of the witness group, but rather they travelled on their own to come and hear the committee's work. I would like to introduce them to the committee.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kwan.

We'll take a very broad interpretation of points of order on that. When witnesses or individuals travel to the committee on particular issues we always appreciate the fact that people come here, and there will be an opportunity after the committee meeting, if they would like to talk about their experiences in an informal way with committee members.

I would like to return to committee business. Mr. Cima, you have 10 minutes, please, should you wish to make a presentation.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Fritz Cima (As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Greetings to all members of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. Thank you for inviting me to testify before you today.

My name is Jean-Fritz Cima. I was born in Torbeck, Les Cayes, Haiti. I am 44 years old, am married and have six children.

I would like to start by giving you a brief summary of my experience in Haiti, and then I will tell you about my experience here, in Canada. Lastly, I will talk about my expectations and the expectations of my fellow Haitians who are out of status.

I spent my childhood and adolescence in southern Haiti. When I was 20, I went to live in Port-au-Prince, where I studied civil engineering. However, I worked mainly in business, which enabled me to meet the needs of my family fairly well until 2009.

In July 2009, I was kidnapped by bandits who demanded \$25,000 U.S. for my release. My wife had to go into debt to have me freed. My savings vanished. From then on, I had only one thought in my head: to leave my country. However, I hesitated because of my children, who were minors, and the pleas of my wife, who wanted me to stay.

Just before the earthquake in 2010, which left more than 300,000 dead and many injured, my business began to improve, but unfortunately for me, thieves looted the warehouse where I had stored merchandise during the disaster. However, I had started to forget the idea of leaving the country, but with the looting of my goods during the disaster, the constant harassment of racketeer bandits threatening to kidnap me a second time or attack a member of my family, I decided to leave for good. From that point on, I took steps to come to Canada, a very safe country I was told, in Haiti.

I arrived in Quebec on August 8, 2012, and made a claim for refugee protection, which was rejected. I appealed, then withdrew the appeal to make an initial application on humanitarian and compassionate grounds, which was allowed by Quebec but refused by Canada. I am now making my second application on humanitarian and compassionate grounds, which is under way.

I currently have two jobs. I am a forklift driver, a job I trained for here, in Montreal. I also have a permit to drive taxis in Quebec. So far, my steps to obtain permanent residence have cost me a lot of money, about \$16,000, and more in legal and immigration fees, not to mention the expenses for family obligations and providing for my needs here. I even had to borrow money from my boss to bury my 11-year-old son, who died of cholera last December. Fortunately, my 13-year-old son survived the illness. In September 2015, even though I wasn't in Haiti, bandits set fire to my house and my family lost everything.

In closing, my greatest wish is to obtain permanent residence to stay here, live here and bring my entire family so I can give all my children a place in the sun.

I must end my testimony by thanking the non-status action committee, which helps out-of-status individuals like me who want to live in Canada legally and who are waiting for one thing: the Canadian government's adoption of a global, collective and inclusive measure, as was the case in 1973 with Bill C-197, which launched opération mon pays.

Once again, thank you very much for inviting me to testify before your committee.

●(1115)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cima.

It's now your turn, Ms. Simon. You have 10 minutes.

Ms. Marie-Jocelyne Simon (President, Concertation-action des citoyens et des citoyennes d'origine haïtienne): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good morning.

We acknowledge the work the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration is doing on this important matter concerning the moratorium on deporting citizens of Zimbabwe and Haiti living in Canada. It is with great enthusiasm that we respond to the invitation to appear before this committee, and we intend to provide a brief. Mr. Vaval and I will give the presentation.

My name is Jocelyne Simon. I left Haiti in 1979. I worked for the federal government. I am currently retired, but I am very active as a volunteer in my community. I am president of a group called Concertation-action des citoyens et des citoyennes d'origine haïtienne, mainly in Rivière-des-Prairies. This organization has been around for 12 years, and its mission is to work to facilitate the true economic, social, cultural and political integration of members of the Haitian community in Montreal, specifically in the Rivière-des-Prairies area.

Mr. Vaval is the director of Équipe RDP. For the past 20 years, the mission of this organization has been to contribute to the social development of and to improve the quality of life of the population of Montreal and the surrounding area by providing recreation and social intervention programs.

Conducting a study like this shows us that that government is willing to find a fair and equitable solution to the living conditions of thousands of people affected by this moratorium. We hope that the findings of this study will mean that this first step of suspending the moratorium, as announced on December 10, 2015, will take place and will make it possible to regularize the status of those affected.

Who are the foreign nationals affected? Canada is well known and recognized for its openness. It is a country that welcomes many people who have chosen to live here. Canada also opens its doors to people who are required to leave their country or who cannot return there because of violence or instability. Therefore, in 2012, Canada established a moratorium on deporting immigrants to Zimbabwe and, in 2004, to Haiti.

Haitian nationals came in waves. The first wave of individuals arrived after the earthquake. More arrived in 2010, after the earthquake that devastated the country and left more than

300,000 people dead, as our colleague mentioned. They stayed because of the moratorium. They are concentrated mainly in Montreal, Ontario, and British Columbia.

The second wave included people who had to leave Haiti urgently after the earthquake and who were evacuated in a Canadian Armed Forces Hercules aircraft. These individuals arrived with their family, without any belongings. In the meantime, these people adjusted to life in Canada, and many of them gave birth to Canadian children.

Both groups include people of a certain age. We estimate the number of Haitian nationals between 3,500 and 4,000. They have taken the steps needed to participate in life in Canada, even though they face a number of difficulties because of their situation. The Canadian and Quebec governments and the Haitian community are taking care of them.

After the earthquake, there was a major movement in Montreal to put in place multiservice centres, among other things, and to take care of the Haitian population in Montreal in areas where there was a high concentration of members from that community. Special programs were put in place to provide support.

Lifting the moratorium gave hope to some people, while others were concerned, given the many compliance rules that are not always simple.

Today, with the moratorium lifted, these foreign nationals still have a lot of fears. Living under the moratorium has its shares of troubles, but not knowing the outcome of the steps with the lifting of the moratorium gives rise to other concerns.

●(1120)

Given the moratorium, people are facing tremendous difficulties, at every level, particularly children and seniors. Those difficulties include obtaining a work permit, getting access to health care services, education and so on. The following scenarios illustrate their hard reality.

I will now turn things over to Mr. Vaval.

Mr. Pierreson Vaval (Director, Équipe Rivière-des-Prairies): Thank you, Marie-Jocelyne.

I would like to thank the members of the committee for giving us the opportunity to speak to an issue that is important for the development of Canada's Haitian community, especially in the Montreal region of Quebec, where 90% of nationals and of that community are concentrated.

I arrived in Canada, in Quebec, when I was young, two years old. That was in 1974. In 1972, my father travelled around the world and accidentally found an interesting place, a place to live that was good for the development of his family. Today, I am happy to be a Canadian who contributes to the growth of his country, but also to the promotion of his country abroad.

We are very moved by the comments of members of our community who, we think, are the most vulnerable. In our community, the most vulnerable are those individuals who are the least equipped to successfully integrate into Canadian, Quebec society. Mr. Cima's story, a scenario that illustrates all the difficulties and challenges these people face, ensures that we have the duty to suggest solutions and try to influence the decision-makers. That is why we are before you today.

The challenge of obtaining a work permit is a priority for us. In fact, for integration to be successful here, in Canada, the economic issue comes first. I'm talking about employment, the possibility for foreign nationals to develop some economic stability in order to develop socially within our various communities, and so on.

There are many challenges. Given everything involved in obtaining and renewing a work permit, keeping a job is a challenge in itself. The permit costs \$255, is valid for six months to one year and needs to be renewed. Many people in the community will mention some difficult aspects of the renewal process. For example, since they need to take action every six months or year to meet this requirement, they must ask their employer to be released. In addition, the application processing time is long. It takes four to five months to get a response, and when you do get one, the period of coverage is from the date the application was made until the end of the six-month or one-year period. Under these conditions, if someone waited for five months, there are only seven left out of 12. It's absurd. The situation for work permits means that you are constantly in an active process.

Problems also exist for access to education. The children of an individual without a work permit cannot get equal access to education. When they arrive, they have access to primary and secondary schools. However, when they go to CEGEP or university, the children of these nationals are treated as foreigners and must therefore pay the full tuition, which is \$6,000 for CEGEP in Quebec, and about \$10,000 for university. These are costs that we cannot take on.

Integrating these young people is also an issue. When they arrive, they can't necessarily study at high school, which means that they can't go to CEGEP either. A kind of unhealthy inactivity is created and causes frustration in these young people. So they sometimes turn to marginal behaviour. They look to the sub-culture to try to survive and find a way to meet their needs, those of their parents and their family. We certainly see these problems in our youth intervention programs, and we are trying to prevent them.

• (1125)

Access to health care also presents a particular situation. Foreign nationals benefit from the interim federal health program, or the IFHP, which supports them when it comes to their health care. However, even when they have a permit, not every hospital or health care institution will accept it. In the Montreal region, only one health care facility, the Santa Cabrini Hospital, accepts the permit from individuals who go there to receive treatment.

There is something inconsistent about that, and more should be done so that all health care facilities can accept these individuals, who do not live in a single area in Montreal. The Santa Cabrini

Hospital is in the eastern part of the city. So people who live in the Montreal region have to travel to get there to receive treatment.

We think children and the elderly are the most vulnerable, the elderly in particular. These people left Haiti and left their community in a situation that is no longer the same now. With everything that has happened, from the earthquake to periods of political, social and economic instability, the country is changing very quickly. If these people, who are already vulnerable because of their age, are sent back, they will no longer identify with the environment they left. Their friends are dead, or they no longer own what they left behind or they believe they still own it. The environment has really changed. We would be putting them in an even more vulnerable situation. We think it is very important to pay attention to that.

Stability of the family unit is extremely important in the process of integrating into society in Quebec and Canada. Grandparents have a big role to play in integrating into society. They often try to provide direct support to the parents in their role of supporting and coaching their children. That is why sending those people back would create a vulnerable situation for both the elderly and the children growing up here.

There is something else we consider very important. Since 2004, these people have been working to integrate into Canadian society. They are trying to find work and are making constant efforts to do so. They are trying to make sure that their children attend school and receive services. If their children 18 years of age or older can't attend school, they take steps to try to get them a work permit so they can work. These people are constantly taking steps and experiencing a kind of instability.

We think the first step would be to eliminate the red tape so that these people can function in society. It will help them to work and keep their job as long as possible, and will help their children to continue to develop—

• (1130)

The Chair: Mr. Vaval, you have 30 seconds.

Mr. Pierreson Vaval: Thank you very much.

Another thing we consider important is that the government continue to think about this. I know that you are in contact with people at the provincial level. Steps have been taken. The City of Montreal is putting structures in place. The community is always willing to work with the federal government to find a solution. We are there and we want to work with you.

Thank you for giving us the time to share our concerns.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vaval.

[English]

Pursuant to the routine motion adopted by the committee on February 16, we'll now proceed to rounds of questioning.

The first round of questioning will be from Mr. Ehsassi.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I'd like to thank the three witnesses we have here today for their incredibly helpful testimony. It was quite impressive to highlight all the challenges and the hurdles and the various barriers that are faced by members of the Haitian community.

I suppose it would be best to start with Ms. Simon. I wonder if she would kindly highlight the contributions that the various members she has been in contact with have made to the social life of Montreal, and the contributions they continue to make to Canadian life in Montreal, in Toronto, and in British Columbia.

• (1135)

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Jocelyne Simon: The Haitian community took action after the earthquake. We set up crisis centres. We set everything up to welcome these individuals, and we asked the community and the government for help. We gave them clothing and a little money. We found people who wanted to host those individuals who did not have family here. We tried to find them a place to stay, because some people arrived in Montreal without even having one. Our duty was to welcome them and make sure that they had a roof over their head and something to eat.

Certainly the government helped us a little, but it was mainly the community that gave a lot of money to help these people. Some community organizations provide support services still today. For example, if they need to go to the hospital or fill out a form, we are there to help them. That is how we can help them.

In Canadian society, when someone has a problem, that person can talk to a psychologist. For Haitians arriving here, we are the ones who take on that role. They come to us crying and tell us their troubles. All we can tell them is that we will work with the government and the various authorities to see what will be set up. When they learned that we were coming here, it was a great ray of hope for them. They think that this will finally end, but the work will not be done at all, because they will still need support in their integration process.

[English]

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you for that, and thank you for the incredible work you continue to do by helping nationals of Haiti in Montreal.

There was a segment of your testimony where you stated that many members of this community were “living with a lot of fear”. I wonder if you would kindly expand on that, the types of fears that in your experience have proven to pose quite a challenge to members in —

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Jocelyne Simon: What these people who are in Canada fear is being sent back home. We heard from Mr. Cima, who explained the atmosphere in Haiti. They wonder what might happen to them if they return to Haiti. After they arrived here, there was the earthquake in Haiti that killed over 300,000 people. Often, their family has been killed and they have no assets. So what will they do if they return to their country? If they return to Haiti after a few years, they will be considered worse than strangers. People will look at them and wonder, “But where did they come from?” So there is no hope at all for their return to Haiti.

There is so much red tape for them that they are nearly discouraged. They often come and see us. What do we tell them? We tell them to be brave, to continue working, even if sometimes they lose their job when their permit expires. We encourage them. We tell them that they need to fill out the form, wait a little and find something else.

They are really afraid of returning to Haiti and fear retaliation, kidnapping and illness. There have been cases of endemic diseases, like chikungunya and cholera, which have taken place several times. There are always hurricanes. In fact, something is always hitting Haiti.

So that is what they fear.

[English]

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you. Perhaps I could also have one more question.

Mr. Vaval, given the fact that you spoke to the issue of instability faced by various members of the Haitian community in Montreal, I was wondering, given that backdrop, if you could kindly inform us what in your opinion has been a barrier to certain members of the community coming forward to apply for permanent residence. We did hear from government officials last week, and we're concerned that there is a certain percentage of Haitians who have not come forward to apply for permanent residence. What could the challenge be?

• (1140)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierreson Vaval: It's difficult to get all the information you need in the permanent residence application process. People are often unable to apply because the situation in Haiti has changed. The documents and people who could testify are no longer there. The more time passes, the more complicated the situation becomes, so that it is more and more difficult for these people to meet the requirements.

It was noted that these requirements do not change and that they became a constant barrier because people do not have the tools or information they need to complete the forms and apply properly. People are hopeful and expect the forms or requirements will change, or that stakeholders in the Haitian community will increase the government's awareness about the need to adapt the requirements to the situation in Haiti.

There is still a false impression that—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vaval. Mr. Ehsassi's time is up.

Mr. Saroya, you have seven minutes.

[English]

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for all coming in. If you look around here, we're all immigrants. We all feel for you, especially Mr. Cima...kidnapped twice and the family is dead. We all feel for you. A quick thing, why was your case rejected twice? What was the reason given for rejecting your case? Listening to the witnesses the last time there is a 93% approval rate for the Haitians who applied for this. Was there any special reason that your case was rejected?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Fritz Cima: Actually, my refugee protection claim was rejected. I was told that it was because of my testimony, which they did not believe. As for my application on humanitarian and compassionate grounds, I was told that I had not signed the affidavit in certain spots, but it was not my problem if my representative had not given it to me to sign. I did not know what I had to sign. That is the first thing.

Then, I didn't know what my representative had written because he hadn't even had me read all of what he wrote. He decided to write what he wanted and then sent it.

I just learned why my application was refused. When it was refused despite my problems and everything I was facing there, I wondered why. I asked my representative to request the reasons so that I could know why my application had been refused. He told me that it wasn't possible. I called him several times, and he finally asked.

I finally understood what had happened. The testimony contradicted the one I had given at the embassy to enter the country. The representative said that I had nothing in Haiti, and several other things, including that my family lived in makeshift tents. But that wasn't true; my family lived in a house. That is why my application was refused.

• (1145)

[English]

Mr. Bob Saroya: Is there anybody else you know whose application was rejected?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Fritz Cima: Yes, I've heard of other people. There are others I know. There's Ms. Fatima, who is there with us, and her case is different from mine, but her application was refused, too. Other Haitians have this same problem.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Tilson.

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

Thank you very much for coming to tell us your stories.

Mr. Cima has indicated that he wants Parliament to have a more inclusive approach in dealing with these issues. Mr. Vaval said he wants to eliminate administrative hurdles.

My question is to you, Mr. Vaval, on that issue. You've all described, Ms. Simon as well, some of the problems that people from Haiti have had in coming to this country. Can you give specifics on how the government can improve the system? We're talking about making application for permanent residency and about

a number of things. All of you have described all the roadblocks that you come upon.

Mr. Vaval, can you advise the committee as to how the system could be improved?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierreson Vaval: Thank you for the question.

I think the process could be improved in various ways.

For example, in terms of employment, you could make sure that all the red tape is eliminated so that people are more active and constructive in Canada, rather than constantly being in the process of trying to obtain permits if they want to contribute to the country.

That costs businesses money. They have to make sacrifices. After a certain amount of time, they aren't interested anymore, and after that, the individuals are no longer productive. If people could have permits valid for a longer period of time, for a year and a half or two years, for example, instead of six months, that would give them time to work.

Health care permits are issued to each family member individually, and the validity period is different for each. So people have to take different steps for the entire family. A family permit could be issued that would be valid longer.

There is one very important aspect. I am referring to these 4,000 people with respect and fairness. In fact, since 2004, these people have worked and done everything they can. They continue to be involved and engaged. Out of respect for the Haitian community that Canada and Quebec have been growing since the early 1950s and 1960s and that is involved in its development, something needs to be done to regularize the situation of these people. In fact, the entire world witnessed what happened in Haiti. People around the world came—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vaval.

[English]

Ms. Kwan, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much to all the witnesses.

I would like to ask Mr. Vaval to finish that last thought. When you say “to regularize them”, can you expand on that? Do you mean to say that for the moratorium...? Actually, I'm going to let you tell us how that should be regularized.

• (1150)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierreson Vaval: Their situation needs to be regularized so that they can be full Canadian citizens, so that they can continue to build without fear of rejection.

When these people are sent back, it's society that rejects them. To a certain extent, when that happens, it is also like a rejection for us, Haitian nationals who are Canadian, as if we are accepted, but only to a certain extent.

These aren't people with criminal records, but people who contribute to society, who are engaged, who have been involved since they arrived and who the community supported. Their story is public and everyone knows it. So why not make this gesture? What is the barrier? Let's do it so that these 4,000 people can make ends meet. It's long overdue. These people are ready to work and help us build Canada.

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

I have a question for Mr. Cima.

Mr. Cima, thank you for your testimony. You mentioned the process in which you relied upon your representative to submit papers. There appear to have been administrative errors, among other things. In one minute, could you let the committee know how difficult it is to get the application forms filled? When there are administrative errors made, do you have an opportunity for those errors to be brought before you so that you can correct them, as opposed to waiting until the end of the process for the application to be rejected? Then you're nowhere, right?

How difficult is it to fill out those forms, and how difficult was it for you to access help with respect to filling out those forms?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Fritz Cima: From the beginning, I asked someone else to tell me what I had to do to fill out the form. I was always told that it was better to find a representative, a lawyer, so that it would be more compliant. So I always tried to meet with a lawyer so that he could help me.

However, it would probably have been better if I had written my story and completed my form. That is what I think because the representative did not know my background. I think the problem is that the representative thought my case was the same as the others. That explains why I encountered this difficulty. I think my problem is similar to that of others, but it is still different.

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

For the other two witnesses, I'm interested in this question. As you know, the government brought forward a new directive whereby, within six months, people can make an application to get their permanent resident status. A number of people have not made an application for one reason or another. Do you have any suggestions as to how we could reach out to them?

It could be that those individuals are not even aware of the process. It could be that they're afraid to come forward for the fears that you had mentioned. How can we ensure that they come forward to make an application? Do you think that there's another way to deal with it as opposed to going through the special order of the six-month period to make an application?

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Jocelyne Simon: First, the Haitian community needs to rally and find people who, sometimes for fear of being sent back, do not fill out the form. Certainly, a lot of them were afraid when the previous government was in power. They said that if they showed up, they would be sent back home.

Those of us in the community working with them, we can form a coalition, tell other organizations that the government is willing to work with us. So we need to find these people and tell them that we are ready to support them and help them to fill out the forms. As you said earlier, Ms. Kwan, a federal public servant could then make sure that at least the form has been completed properly before it is sent. There are several steps to follow. These people need to be reassured.

• (1155)

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: You mentioned that people are afraid to be sent home. Is part of the fear—for example, working without status, the issues around the permit application process and so on—that somehow, if they make contact with the government to apply for permanent residence, the Canada Border Services Agency will be alerted and then they will be deported? Is that the fear?

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Simon, you have 30 seconds to answer.

Ms. Marie-Jocelyne Simon: The relationship these people had with the governments of their countries means they are afraid. They think that it will be the same here. They do not know that here they can speak with government representatives when they go to them. And some people may have gone to them and been sent back. That is why they're afraid.

These people will feel safe with us. We have to reassure them and tell them that we are working with the provincial government. The Government of Quebec will participate. The City of Montreal has set up a program to welcome them.

So all these people need to work together to reassure these individuals, to help them fill out the forms and, as soon as possible, allow them to stay in Canada and live with dignity.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Simon.

[English]

Mr. Sarai, you have seven minutes.

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

As you've noticed, the special measures program is probably one of the most generous and compassionate programs the government has been able to offer almost any group or any community; that is, it's a window of opportunity where anyone who is without status from Haiti and Zimbabwe can apply to this. There's not much more, I think, a government can do with respect to that.

What I'm hearing from you is that it's a messaging problem. People are not reaching out. I know this was elaborated on earlier in some of the questions, including Ms. Kwan's, but what is the best way the community can reach out more? As well, what is the best way for the government to help facilitate that?

That's for either Ms. Simon or Mr. Vaval.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierreson Vaval: As my colleague said, there has been a breach in the trust between the government and the community because of negative experiences. The people have experienced difficulties at every step they have taken. What Mr. Cima went through is an example, a typical case. There are a number of typical cases.

Trust is a key element in reconciling with the community and these people who are in a vulnerable situation, in rebuilding the bridge. The government's rhetoric needs to change. We need a discourse that favours the emergence of this trust. We need to stress that we don't want to send them back. We need to say that these are not tactics for sending people back.

The requirements need to be adapted to the reality of the information and other things that can be obtained to regularize the status of individuals. As we were saying earlier, the situation in Haiti is not a deception; it happened in front of the entire world. The whole world provided assistance because it saw the enormity of the situation. There is still political instability in Haiti. There cannot be a government, only a transitional government. The current situation, the economic and social insecurity, the health problems because of all the epidemics, all those things have not been dealt with.

Traditionally, Canada is not in the habit of sending people back to a country where they are still more vulnerable than they are at present. We need to develop a discourse to encourage this trust, so that people feel that when they deal with the Canadian government, the experience is positive, and that they have no reason to be afraid because things work when we do what is required.

• (1200)

[English]

Mr. Randeep Sarai: As we found out from speaking to government officials in our last session, the acceptance rate for the program, implemented last time, was 93%. Those who have applied for the humanitarian and compassionate grounds under special measures have seen a very high acceptance rate.

Could it be better if we were able to share—if the Haitian community and the Zimbabwean community could share with their fellow community members—that the acceptance rate is very high and that in fact the rejection rate of 7% may be due to criminality or may just be due to applications, as Mr. Cima had said, that may not have been filled in properly?

Then I'll have a follow-up question in regard to the application process.

The Chair: It will have to be a very short follow-up.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Okay. Then I'll reiterate it right now.

What documents can we eliminate or have reason.... Which ones are the obstacles to getting permanent residency that you specifically are targeting that might be hard to get from Haiti now?

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Jocelyne Simon: I will say a few words on the topic.

You talked about an approval rate of 93%. As for the remaining 7%, my advice would be to reach out to the people concerned. There

are many tools that can be used to reach out to them. In Montreal, there are community stations and small neighbourhood newspapers.

As I said already, there is a great deal of mistrust, even in terms of coming in to fill out the forms. We have to figure out how we can sit down with someone to tell them that we are prepared to walk them through the procedure, that they don't need to be afraid and that we will be there for them.

You may think that 7% of 3,000 to 4,000 individuals is not a lot, but that is still a good number of people. I recommend that you work with us, in Montreal, to reach out to those people and implement tools to help them fill out the form. I am sure that, provided they have no criminal record, their application will be approved and they will be ready to stay. As for us, we have to work together to help them with their integration.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left to answer.

Mr. Pierreson Vaval: Yes, the approval rate is high, but we have to make sure that, each time a program is implemented and a particular situation arises, the requirements are adapted. In this case, we are talking about a situation that has been ongoing for 10 years. The requirements are poorly adapted to our experience. There are 4,000 people, and we will have to find a way to proceed, out of respect for the Haitian community that is building Canada. It is not as if we were no one. We are asking for adaptation. For example, people may not be able to provide a baptismal certificate, ID cards or a passport, but that is due to the situation in the country. So what should be done?

Of course, the community stakeholders will have to have faith, but let's work together. We understand that there is occasionally some resistance. We want Canadians to be safe. How can we find a solution? We will find one by working together, by trusting each other and by supporting people adequately, but without bringing suspicion. We sometimes feel like we are deceiving Canadians. But that's not what is happening at all. Haitian nationals are facing difficult situations. They are ready to testify, to appear and to collaborate. Let's work on resolving their status.

• (1205)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vaval.

Ms. Simon and Mr. Vaval, we heard Mr. Cima talk about his situation. He gave \$16,000 to lawyers and representatives for their services. You have done a lot of work in the Haitian-Canadian community. Are there many cases like his? Is that something that happens occasionally? Are there many similar situations? Also, who are the lawyers asking for a lot of money to move applications forward, as in Mr. Cima's experience?

Mr. Pierreson Vaval: There are people like that everywhere. It's not news to you that there is a sort of economy in place that exploits the most vulnerable people. Mr. Cima is a good example of that. He received dubious assistance from certain individuals.

The authorities should strengthen the support provided to the official organizations that work, along with the Government of Canada and the Government of Quebec, on raising awareness across the community. As Marie-Jocelyne explained, the Haitian community is in the habit of mistrusting anything coming from the state because of the situation in Haiti and traditions related to everything that has happened in the country—dictatorship and so on. They try to go through the sea and not through official channels, believing that things will go better and they will arrive safely.

Still today, there are people in the community who propose alternatives. That is what we need to fight by changing the Government of Canada's message, which could mean that people will realize that they can get more effective solutions with the

government's help. I believe there is much work to be done in that area.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I want to thank all the witnesses.

[*English*]

We will now suspend once again.

Thank you so much to the witnesses. I understand the witnesses have requested that we take a group photograph after we've suspended.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante : <http://www.parl.gc.ca>