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# Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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**Chair**

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj**



## Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

Tuesday, November 15, 2016

• (0800)

[English]

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

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on February 25, the committee will resume its study on family reunification.

This morning, we have officials from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration with us. We have Ms. Sharon Chomyn, area director, North Europe and the Gulf, by video conference from London. Thank you, Ms. Chomyn, for getting all of us up and at it early today here in Ottawa, Washington, and Mexico City. We have Mr. Mark Giralt, area director, United States and Caribbean, by video conference as well from Washington, and Mr. Olivier Jacques, area director, Latin America, and he's with us from Mexico City.

I understand that you'll be not splitting time in seven-minute slots, but you'll be using 21 minutes combined.

We'll begin with Ms. Chomyn from London.

**Ms. Sharon Chomyn (Area Director, North Europe and the Gulf, Department of Citizenship and Immigration):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning. My name is Sharon Chomyn, and I'm the immigration program manager at the Canadian High Commission in London, England. I'm also the area director overseeing the visa offices in London, Moscow, Warsaw, Kiev, Vienna, Abu Dhabi, Riyadh, Accra, and Islamabad.

With me today are my colleagues in Mexico City and Washington, who will provide brief comments on their own that focus on their own areas of responsibility.

It's my pleasure to have the opportunity to address the committee and to give the perspective of the public service employees overseas who have the responsibility for processing family reunification applications, among others, in a timely and responsible fashion. I will begin by giving you some general context about our network and the processing of family class applications.

Canada has a network of 51 processing offices overseas. These offices are responsible for assessing applications from foreign nationals to come to Canada on a temporary or permanent basis. Depending upon which office we are referring to, there are particular local challenges in addition to those commonly shared.

The cases we will focus on today are a minority of the overall applications received. The department uses its global case management system to expedite processing by sending the lowest-risk applications for processing to our centralized processing centres in Mississauga and Ottawa. Currently, these processing centres manage as much as 10% of the overseas family-class caseload. This allows our missions to better manage their caseloads and to concentrate more resources on complex cases or those that require local expertise.

The department continues to work hard to ensure that applications for legitimate, bona fide family class applicants are processed as efficiently and in as timely a manner as possible in order to reunite applicants with their sponsors in Canada.

Most simple and non-contentious applications are approved rapidly. Unlike applications in the economic categories, family class applicants need only establish their relationship to an approved sponsor and demonstrate to the officer that they are not inadmissible to Canada. In most cases, globally speaking, the genuineness of the relationship is not in question. In many countries, there are very reliable means to prove family relationships. In general, we are able to process cases from such countries confidently, given the reliability of the vital statistics documents.

As we were asked to talk about challenges we experience, we will focus our opening remarks on the various challenges we confront in processing the more complex cases.

In much of the world, documentation is extremely unreliable. State-issued documents can be improperly obtained, and registration is decentralized or essentially non-existent. These limitations require officers to use other means to determine whether applicants are in fact related to, or in a genuine relationship with, their sponsors. Ongoing training in fraudulent documents and close liaison with our risk assessment officers help immensely in the official assessment of these cases.

When no other conclusive evidence can be obtained, applicants and sponsors may be asked to submit to DNA testing in order to establish a claimed relationship. The big picture is that the goal of our officers is to approve as many applications as possible as efficiently as possible based on the documents before them. That said, they are also very well trained in the latest fraud trends, with a view to remaining vigilant to potential fraud that might undermine the integrity of our immigration system or the security of Canada.

I would like to say a few words specifically related to the reunification of spouses. We are aware that this is an issue of specific concern to the committee and that it is in the public interest to reunite spouses as quickly as possible. The vast majority of cases are genuine, and we are pleased to bring people together.

● (0805)

With such cases, the most common integrity concern is that of the genuineness of the relationship. Marriage fraud is a very real problem, more common in some parts of the world, but by no means absent elsewhere. This is where the local knowledge of our locally engaged staff proves to be invaluable, and our programs benefit from this contextual knowledge to aid in detecting divergences from typical cultural and/or social practices.

Awareness of the cultural norms of a particular society helps our officers facilitate the processing of the genuine cases while alerting them to situations that might not be quite right. In this regard, officers may request that applicants provide further documents or attend an interview if the relationship does not appear to be genuine or if the officers harbour doubts about the circumstances. The goal of all of these additional requests is to alleviate the concerns the officers may have and allow them to approve the application. These requests are always made after careful consideration of the information already on file, given our understanding that providing additional documentation or travelling to attend an interview may cause additional inconvenience or cost to the applicant.

Our department employs various means to mitigate the risk posed by fraud. We share intelligence with like-minded countries and, in some cases, work with the host countries. We verify information provided in applications as resources permit, and ongoing quality assurance activities serve to confirm that the level of risk being accepted is reasonable. Our goal is always to process applications efficiently and respectfully of the applicants; and to ensure, to the extent possible, that low-risk cases are processed quickly and that the more complex cases are approached systematically and equitably.

In spite of the various challenges, between 47,000 and 50,000 spouses, partners, and dependent children have been issued permanent resident visas every year since 2011. In 2016, we will admit even more, 60,000, in order to help reduce processing times. The vast majority of these cases are entirely legitimate and we are pleased to facilitate this family reunification.

Finally, as I am aware that the committee has a particular interest in the family reunification movement from certain areas of the region I oversee, I will speak briefly to the particular challenges that we deal with in my region of responsibility. The London visa office processes family class applications for residents of Pakistan, as well as more complex cases from elsewhere in our territory. I will illustrate what I mean by “complex” with examples from the area that I oversee.

A complex case from the U.K. or the Nordic countries may involve criminal convictions or custody issues. Our officers take custody issues very seriously as these cases may result in the permanent separation of a child from one parent. Accordingly, these may take longer to process than the departmental standard. For applications processed in our Abu Dhabi office, complex cases may include, among other factors, elements of proxy marriage, minor-

aged spouses, polygamous relationships, or where the intention to actually reside in Canada is not clear. Another concern of which we must remain aware is the possibility that a marriage is not consensual. A small, but disturbing number of vulnerable applicants, or sponsors, are forced into a marriage and the subsequent sponsorship process. These situations pose a unique challenge, as often the individual is threatened with harm and will be hesitant to divulge the true circumstances.

For applications processed at our Accra office, complex cases could involve marriages of convenience, polygamy, children born outside of primary relationships, late registration of birth, and previous adverse immigration history on the part of the applicant. London took charge of the family reunification program from Pakistan in February 2014, primarily due to the security situation in that country. Our office has extensive experience in processing Pakistani cases in both the family class and the economic categories.

● (0810)

We have added resources to ensure that these applications would in fact be processed more efficiently in London than in Islamabad. I'm pleased to report that our office was successful in reducing the processing times of these cases to within the departmental standard.

Complexities inherent in this caseload include concerns related to the validity of marriages, non-consensual marriages, irregularities in the issuance of civil documentation, and security concerns. Where such concerns exist, applicants may be asked to provide further documentation or to attend an in-person interview. London-based officers travel to Islamabad four to five times per year for this purpose.

Finally, we also maintain a focus on applications from parents and grandparents, as we understand that bringing the family together in Canada can provide more stability and support for the family members already in Canada. Currently London is processing applications for parents and grandparents promptly upon receipt, and all applications sent to London from the case processing centre in Mississauga in 2016 are in active process or have been finalized.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my opening remarks. My colleagues will each provide their own brief remarks, following which we will be pleased to answer any questions you might have.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Giralt.

**Mr. Mark Giralt (Area Director, United States and Caribbean, Department of Citizenship and Immigration):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My name is Mark Giralt, and I am the area director for the United States and the Caribbean, a territory that includes processing offices here in the United States as well as those in Port-au-Prince, Port of Spain, and Kingston.

For our offices in Port-au-Prince, Port of Spain, and Kingston, the majority of permanent resident applications received are in the family class. Many of the temporary resident visa services at these offices involve visits with families and include super visa applications. One of the biggest challenges is being able to communicate quickly and effectively with applicants. Although these offices cover relatively small areas, the infrastructure in many countries is poor, especially outside of the major centres.

Nowhere are these challenges more pronounced than in Haiti, which lacks a functioning postal system and where many clients do not have access to email. Cellphone use is increasing, but coverage is poor. Despite this, cellphones remain the means of communication most relied upon by Haitians, so the office in Port-au-Prince uses a commercial text messaging tool to communicate with clients.

Haiti is also still reeling from the impact of Hurricane Andrew, and rebuilding from the devastating 2010 earthquake is still very slow. The challenges posed by poor communications infrastructure will be with us for the foreseeable future, but we continue to look for innovative solutions. We also have significant concern around the reliability of the civil registry documents and records that are necessary to demonstrate existing relationships. Birth registration procedures can be open to fraud and abuse, and raise critical program integrity concerns.

In Kingston we receive many late-registered birth certificates. This limits their value as reliable evidence of a historical relationship. In these cases, identification of such concerns and the offer of DNA testing as an alternative early in the process has helped to reduce processing times and address program integrity concerns.

It can also be disheartening to see the lengths that some non-eligible applicants will go to in order to obtain a visa for Canada. Every day our officers across the world uncover fraudulent documents submitted in support of applications. Some of this fraud is very crude, but we often see fraudulent documentation that is very sophisticated. There is a vibrant industry in many countries that manufactures and distributes documents whose primary purpose is to allow an applicant to fraudulently obtain a visa for another country. Canada is not alone in this respect. At our missions overseas, we regularly meet to share information and methods with our counterparts from Australia, the United States, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. While we all encounter the same types of challenges, we are also able to work together to find solutions.

Spousal applications often have other complexities. For example, Kingston has found that up to 25% of applications are from persons who have been previously deported or have criminality concerns. Up to 10% of sponsors do not meet the legislative sponsorship requirements. Marriages of convenience are also of concern, making triaging for low-risk applications challenging.

These high-risk caseloads require significant resources, as more applicants must be interviewed. This can ultimately contribute to longer processing times for genuine applications. In recent years, we have actively moved applications between offices in the area, with officers travelling from our office in Port of Spain to Kingston and Port-au-Prince to conduct interviews. This approach has helped to reduce wait times. By managing the offices regionally, effective

exchange of local knowledge has helped to keep the program risk at an acceptable level.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee. I believe my colleague from Mexico City has a few remarks to make.

● (0815)

**The Chair:** Mr. Jacques.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Olivier Jacques (Area Director, Latin America, Department of Citizenship and Immigration):** Mr. Chair, thank you for the opportunity to appear before this committee. My name is Olivier Jacques and I am the area director for Latin America, which includes our visa offices in Bogota, Buenos Aires, Lima, Mexico, Sao Paulo and Havana. I will provide you with a summary of the family reunification movement in Latin America, and the challenges we face in managing it.

At the outset, I would like to reiterate Ms. Chomyn's comment that our officers do their best to ensure that legitimate, bona fide family class applicants are reunited with their sponsors in Canada as quickly as possible.

The members of the committee probably know that processing in the region has been increasingly centralized in our mission in Mexico. Our office has developed a solid knowledge transfer strategy. Through area trips, reporting, briefings, timely training from subject matter experts, quality assurance exercises, round table discussions, and effective communication with missions in the region, Mexico has increased processing quality and efficiency. However, as mentioned, there are some regions where we have concerns as to the genuineness of the relationship. This results in officers interviewing greater numbers of applicants. In El Salvador, Cuba and the Dominican Republic, for example, officers interview 40% of applicants on location.

In some instances, applicants and their families are known to pay tens of thousands of dollars for the opportunity to be sponsored by a Canadian citizen or permanent resident, or to be fraudulently included as a dependent on an application. There is no absolutely objective test that can be applied in such cases, so officers end up balancing the evidence available to them and using that evidence to reach a decision on the application.

While never determinative on their own, a combination of factors such as age differences, lack of familiarity with one's spouse, inconsistencies in their respective narratives, and linguistic and cultural differences may all be taken into account. Visa officers have a legal responsibility under the act to undertake a thorough review of each case they assess and to ensure that applicants have demonstrated they meet the legal requirements in the category in which they have applied.

Officers are also required to follow the guidance of the Federal Court of Canada every time they make a decision on an application. Federal Court jurisprudence requires, for example, that decision-makers apply the correct standard of proof when making a decision and that they comprehensively document any finding that an application does not meet legislative requirements. For this reason, it is usually much more time consuming to refuse a case than to accept it. It is necessary first to comprehensively assess the evidence, seek more evidence if necessary, and then use all of this evidence to render a decision which is in accordance with the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and which meets the decision-making standards established by the Federal Court.

In both the Dominican Republic and Cuba, we have also observed what can be described as "holiday romance" types of relationships where Canadian citizens, male or female, develop a relationship with a local resident during a one or two-week vacation. These applicants often have jobs related to tourism at the time of meeting the Canadian sponsor. In these cases, there is often a significant age gap, ranging from 10 to 50 years, typically with an older Canadian sponsor and a much younger applicant. We have seen many cases where the intent of the applicant is to take advantage of the sponsor to gain access to Canada. These cases can be difficult for us, as often the sponsor is genuinely committed to the relationship while the applicant is not.

As mentioned by Mr. Giralt, another complexity in the processing of family reunification applications relates to admissibility concerns. Many of the applicants in this region have previously resided in Canada or the U.S. and, as part of the application process, are required to submit police certificates. These police certificates often reveal past criminal activities. The information-sharing agreement that Canada has with the U.S. also alerts us to past criminal activity by individual applicants and also reveals previous immigration violations in the US. This information is invaluable to us in ensuring the integrity of our processes, but also adds to the complexity and time required to review these applications.

● (0820)

I know that we have only managed to scratch the surface, but I hope that this has been a useful overview. We would be pleased to answer any questions that the committee might have.

[English]

**The Chair:** *Merci.*

Ms. Dzerowicz, seven minutes please.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.):** Good morning and good afternoon to everyone. Thank you for the excellent presentations. I was fearful this morning that I might not have any questions, but after the presentations, I have many. I hope I can get through them in the next seven minutes.

I'm going to start off with you, Ms. Chomyn. You had mentioned that most applications are approved rapidly. Can you define what rapidly is? What are the service standards? By extension, to Mr. Giralt and Monsieur Jacques, I would like to understand whether the service standards are the same in all three parts of the world.

**Ms. Sharon Chomyn:** The department has established service standards for the entire network, and we aim to complete 80% of

family class applications within 12 months of the original application by the sponsor.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** Is that happening? You aim to do that, but is it happening?

**Ms. Sharon Chomyn:** We're within departmental standards for the family reunification program that was transferred to us from Pakistan. In the early days, it took us a bit of time to gain traction and to complete the knowledge transfer that we had to put into place to make sure we understood the cases and weren't unnecessarily calling people to interview or belabouring the applicants in any way. Now we're at a point where we are within the departmental standards.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** Mr. Giralt and Monsieur Jacques, is that the same case for both of you, where 80% of all the family reunification cases are completed within 12 months?

**Mr. Mark Giralt:** My comment would be that with the increases in targets within the family class in recent years and last year, it's really given us a bit of extra room within those targets. One of the effects of that, as we finalize more cases, is that sometimes the processing times at the initial stages will extend while we dig down through some of the older cases. There's a dip, and the processing times will show improvement, and we really are improving in the offices I'm responsible for in Kingston. Port of Spain is well below that target, and Port-au-Prince is doing well. It's very helpful.

Additional resources have allowed the department to send us more temporary duty officers to help alleviate some of the decision-making burdens, and we're able to do more interviews. We've had some very successful sessions. For example, in Kingston, we've been able to finalize a lot more cases because of those additional decision-making resources either taking on those types of cases or sometimes just allowing the locally engaged officers to make those decisions.

● (0825)

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** Thank you.

Mr. Jacques, do you have anything to add?

**Mr. Olivier Jacques:** As Madam Chomyn mentioned, we applied the 12-month service standard here in Mexico, which is the same across the network. In Mexico City—and I'm talking about Mexican citizens residing in Mexico—our processing time is around 16 months. We're not quite there yet, but we are very confident that we will get there in 12 months. We're working very hard, I can assure you, to process these applications within the departmental standard of 12 months because of additional resources that have been given by the department. It allows us to receive some temporary duty officers. By reviewing our processes, and with the level space that has been given by the government, we are hopeful that we will be able to reach the 12 months quite soon.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** My next question is about third party providers. In the whole processing of the family reunifications, are third parties used? For example, it could be for security, or it could be for medical. The reason I ask is that in some of the cases where I'm waiting, and someone is taking five or six years, I'm being told they're waiting for a security check to be cleared, and it takes a year and a half.

If you could maybe talk a bit about third party providers, what part of the process do they cover? Are they subject to service standards, as well, and if they are, then what are they?

Maybe we'll start with you, Ms. Chomyn.

**Ms. Sharon Chomyn:** We aren't able to comment on specific cases. There may be a unique set of circumstances in the case you're referring to that caused the case to have taken longer than normal. When it comes to matters of security screening, we work together with our colleagues at the Canada Border Services Agency to complete the assessments that have to be done under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.

If you're talking about service providers in general, I wonder if you may be referring to, for example, language testing organizations that were used in economic cases. Perhaps I'm going off on a tangent, and you're interested more specifically in the family class.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** We're talking about family class reunification. To me it's the whole process that allows a spouse, a child, or another family member like a grandparent to be accepted. Are there any third parties that we use as part of that process for approval, and if so, are they subject to service standards?

**Ms. Sharon Chomyn:** I'll start off, and I'll invite my colleagues to weigh in. As I mentioned, we work with the Canada Border Services Agency. We use panel physicians to complete the medical processing that's required for all of these sponsored cases. They are subject to service standards as well. That process is administered by a different part of the department than I am responsible for.

I should note that the RCMP is another agency that we engage as part of the screening process for adults.

I'll ask my colleagues now if they can suggest any others.

**Mr. Mark Giralt:** I'll take up the topic. Something I have been thinking quite a bit about is our processing of adoptions, both for permanent residents and for citizenship. Often, in many countries, especially those that are signatories to the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, the local adoption process generally happens within our processing time, so sponsors in Canada, especially if they have an unnamed child for adoption, will start the sponsorship process before they have actually identified a client.

We have fewer than two dozen adoption cases in Port-au-Prince right now, and about four or five of them are unnamed, so there's no actual individual attached to them. Those cases are waiting for the adoption process to take place within that window of processing time. That's something we don't control.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Giralt.

Mr. Tilson, you have seven minutes, please.

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

We've been talking about processes, and some of the witnesses who have come to the committee thus far have said that the application system that Canada has is flawed. An applicant must submit their information multiple times, essentially opening a new file as they approach the department, be it as a visitor or for a visa,

sponsorship, or residency. It has also been suggested that a better model could be used by the CRA.

Starting with Monsieur Jacques, because you did get into the topic of centralization, can you suggest a model that could be used and would be better than what we have?

● (0830)

**Mr. Olivier Jacques:** I believe that the model that we have is a solid model at this point. What we've done here in Mexico is to centralize some of our operations from the region in order to gain efficiencies.

A few years ago we started to process all the applications from the Dominican Republic, as well as from Venezuela, and Central America. By having a significant team here in Mexico we have an economy of scale in reviewing these applications, and I believe we can eventually provide a faster processing time.

If possible, we try to avoid delaying the application, and we waive the requirement for an interview if the applicant provides sufficient documentation that satisfies us as visa officers in proving that the relationship is genuine.

**Mr. David Tilson:** Mr. Jacques, may I interrupt just for a second? The reason these comments have been made is because the big concern that has come before the committee is that the delays are unreasonable. That's what a number of witnesses have told us. We're trying to figure out what we can recommend to the government and how these delays can be shortened.

One suggestion was that there be a new model. You're saying that the model is adequate. Is that what you're saying?

**Mr. Olivier Jacques:** Yes, I believe it's adequate at this point.

**Mr. David Tilson:** Why are there delays?

**Mr. Olivier Jacques:** It's a complex process in the sense that there are several steps in the process. We have to make sure that we comply with the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, and we have to follow the proper procedure.

Sometimes, in order to get the documentation we need, such as a police certificate, such as proof or evidence of relationship, it does take time. As Mr. Giralt mentioned, communicating with the clients also takes time. Sometimes it's very difficult to reach the person, and because of that, there are some delays.

**Mr. David Tilson:** Monsieur Jacques, can you make recommendations to the government as to how the regulations could be changed to reduce the delays?

**Mr. Olivier Jacques:** I am afraid it is not my position at this point to make a recommendation to the government on this. I believe that the act and the regulations that we have in place are, indeed, solid. We are working very hard to speed up the processing so that we can eliminate these delays and process people in a reasonable time.

**Mr. David Tilson:** Ms. Rempel has some questions.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC):** You can finish, and then I'll take the next round, if that's okay.

**Mr. David Tilson:** All right.

It's been suggested by some witnesses that a cap on applications for parents and grandparents be raised to 20,000 or 30,000 per year, or that the cap be removed entirely.

Perhaps we can start with Ms. Chomyn.

What would be the impact of such a move on the operations that we have? Specifically, what would be the impact on staffing, wait times, backlogs, etc.?

**Ms. Sharon Chomyn:** The department is currently resourced to deliver annual levels in the range of 300,000 each year. The exact composition is less relevant than the actual number, although some cases do take longer to process than others.

Any increase in one category would have to be offset by a decrease in another category, unless the larger levels number were to grow.

**Mr. David Tilson:** What if you didn't decrease the other categories?

**Ms. Sharon Chomyn:** I guess we would have to take a look at our operations to see if there are any additional efficiencies that we could implement to try to deal with an increased number.

• (0835)

**Mr. David Tilson:** Could you tell us about your requirement for increasing the staffing?

**Ms. Sharon Chomyn:** I'm afraid that I really can't give you a reliable answer to that.

**Mr. David Tilson:** Why is that?

**Ms. Sharon Chomyn:** The calculation of how much work is involved with individual cases is actually quite complex. The straightforward cases can be processed with fewer resources than the more complex ones.

We also have something that is uncontrollable that we have to factor into our workloads every year: the number of temporary resident applications that we receive.

So, it's really not possible for me to give you a projection. If you do wish to have that sort of projection, I would suggest that perhaps our colleagues at headquarters would be better placed than we to provide you with a more probable number.

**Mr. David Tilson:** You're responsible for Pakistan. Due to the security in Pakistan, applications from Pakistan are processed by London-based visa officers who travel to Islamabad to conduct interviews, often requiring interpreters for several different languages. How many officers in London process the workload from Pakistan?

**Ms. Sharon Chomyn:** I'll speak about the family reunification work because I think that's of greatest concern to you.

When we first took over the Pakistan family program, we had a unit made up of seven people—one decision-maker and the rest were administrative support. The unit now is at 17 people, and that includes nine decision-makers, one of them being a unit manager. It's been quite a substantial growth.

**Mr. David Tilson:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Ms. Kwan, you have seven minutes, please.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP):** Just to build on that answer, when you say that your staff has grown from seven to 17 people, when did that take place? When did the 17 staff come on stream?

**Ms. Sharon Chomyn:** They would have come on since we took over the caseload in 2014. It would have been a gradual increase.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Okay.

I think I heard from the other officers, as well, in terms of the resource increase. Could I get the numbers in terms of the resource increase and when that took place?

I'll go to Mr. Giralt, please.

**Mr. Mark Giralt:** The budgetary amount to assist us was about \$25 million in 2016, so this is part of the testimony that you heard from our assistant deputy minister, Mr. Bob Orr, when he came.

The funding has been used in a number of different ways. The one that—

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I'm sorry, may I interrupt for a second?

**Mr. Mark Giralt:** Sure.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I'm interested in how many staff you have at the moment to process applications for both streams, for spousal and for parents and grandparents.

**Mr. Mark Giralt:** In terms of permanent increases in the offices I'm responsible for, we haven't seen any permanent increases because of the particularities of the caseload. I'm talking about Port-au-Prince, Kingston, and Port of Spain. What we have seen is a significant increase in the number of temporary duty officers who have come to provide support to the local offices, and that help is invaluable. It helps us to deal with fluctuations in demand in the summer when we're dealing with temporary visas.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I see. The temporary duty officers are brought in to deal with temporary visas. So that will—

**Mr. Mark Giralt:** No, it depends on the nature of the caseload, but in some cases they will come in and do family class interviews. We've had a couple of officers who went into Kingston, and they completed about 200 interviews covering about 300-and-some people over the course of the summer.

At other times, they'll come in and they'll backfill.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I see.

**Mr. Mark Giralt:** They'll take over, for example, temporary resident visas, and allow the local officers—

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** How many permanent staff do you have at the moment then?

**Mr. Mark Giralt:** In all the offices, collectively, or...?

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Under your—

**Mr. Mark Giralt:** Okay, in Kingston we have three Canada based and three locally engaged officers. In Port-au-Prince we have two Canada based decision-makers, and in Port of Spain we have three Canada based and we have three locally engaged officers as well.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you.

Mr. Jacques, have you had increases in resources in your offices?



**Mr. Olivier Jacques:** We have not had any permanent increase to our offices in Latin America. What we have is what Mr. Giralt mentioned. We have temporary duty officers who were sent to various missions in Latin America in order to speed up the family class category.

I know that a number of temporary duty officers were sent to Bogotá and to Havana in order to speed up the processing.

• (0840)

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Can I get from each of the offices how many applications you are processing at the moment? For 2016 I think it was mentioned that right now all of them are in process, so how many applications do you have before you right now?

We'll go through the full round again.

**Ms. Sharon Chomyn:** If I may respond, Mr. Chair, it might be more efficient if we were able to provide this information in a consolidated fashion separately.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Sure, I would appreciate it if I could get a breakdown then from each of the offices. How many applications do you have that are in process, and what year did they come in? I'm asking for all the ones that have not been approved so far that are still outstanding.

Then, of those categories, I'd like to get a breakdown as well of how many of them you would consider to be easy-to-process applications or something that is not particularly unusual or has issues.

Then there are the ones that you have issues with. I understand the issue about confidentiality, so we don't want to breach that, but rather have them in categories. Let's say 10% and 60 of them—or whatever the number might be—are issues related to criminality, another 35 are to do with issues of potential marriage fraud, and others have custody issues or whatever the case may be. If I could get that breakdown, that would be very useful and helpful.

I would also like the breakdown of the staffing resources and how that has evolved. Ms. Chomyn, you mentioned that in 2014 your staff went up to 17. I'm not sure if all of those are permanent or if those are temporary officers, as the other offices have been, and what have they been doing? Are they for temporary visa applications, parents, grandparents, or whatever?

I would like to get that breakdown just so that we get a fuller sense of how the operation is resourced to do its work because I think delays have to do with resources, and if you had more resources, you'd be able to process these applications more rapidly.

In terms of understanding your operation as well, I'll ask about interviews. How often are interviews arranged? Is it 10% of the cases or maybe 20% of the cases that are an issue? Are all of those 20% then interviewed, and how many officers do you have doing interviews? How often do they take place in terms of the interviews as well? That would be useful and helpful for us to have later if you're not able to provide that information to us at this moment.

**Mr. Olivier Jacques:** It varies quite a bit from one office to the other about the percentage of cases that are interviewed. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, in the Dominican Republic, in

Cuba, and in El Salvador, close to 40% of all our clients are interviewed.

We organized and have a pool of about six or seven officers who go on area trips to visit these countries to perform these interviews, and we go on a regular basis. Four or five times a year we go to the Dominican Republic and El Salvador, and we have an office in Cuba that deals with these interviews.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Jacques.

Perhaps the additional information can be sent to the clerk.

Mr. Ehsassi, go ahead for seven minutes, please.

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

Ms. Chomyn, I'd like to ask you a few questions. To go back to Pakistan, you're saying that security concerns and civil unrest were challenges that did arise, and as a result of those it has moved to London. Has there been any attempt, on the department's part, to use technology such as video conferencing to ease some of the challenges that do arise?

**Ms. Sharon Chomyn:** We haven't used that technique in the case of our Islamabad office. We find that, although technology works well in some locations in the world, it doesn't work well equally. We've just found it more effective to conduct interviews in person.

As I mentioned, we send officers four to five times a year, depending on the number of cases that we feel we wish to call to interview. There's no quota. There's no magic number. It's all based on a case-by-case assessment and the complexities that we find in the caseload.

Sometimes, too, there are sensitive things that need to be discussed, and for the client's benefit, we appreciate that they'd prefer to have these conversations in person rather than remotely.

• (0845)

**Mr. Ali Ehsassi:** Just out of curiosity, for the Pakistan office, for example, what is the percentage of people who are interviewed?

**Ms. Sharon Chomyn:** Roughly, it's about 15%.

**Mr. Ali Ehsassi:** Okay.

**Ms. Sharon Chomyn:** That's in our family class priority categories. In the case of parents and grandparents, for example, we rarely, if ever, interview.

**Mr. Ali Ehsassi:** Thanks.

I was reading something else in your testimony where you were talking about how, in many instances, we are actually co-operating with host countries on gathering intelligence. What happens if the host country does not assist us? For example, just to explain to you what my problem is, I have a lot of Iranians in my riding. We have no diplomatic representation there. The host country, obviously, is not co-operating with us on intelligence matters, to verify documentation that's been provided. What happens in those instances?

**Ms. Sharon Chomyn:** Mr. Chair, you'll appreciate that I can't comment on a situation that is occurring with a caseload that I'm not involved in. I can tell you that in the case of Pakistan, we know there are some challenges in working with host country officials. We do our best to do verifications as we can. We liaise with colleagues from friendly missions to inquire about their experiences. At the end of the day, we have to make our best decision based on the information in front of us. Then, if the client feels that the decision has been incorrect, there are appeal mechanisms that are open to them.

**Mr. Ali Ehsassi:** Thank you.

Now, if I could move to a very different area of concern, we've heard from various witnesses that blended families are an area of concern. Could any of you kindly explain to us, in more detail, why the blended family applications pose such a challenge for processing?

**Ms. Sharon Chomyn:** Mr. Chairman, perhaps we could have a fuller explanation of what's meant by "blended family".

**The Chair:** Mr. Ehsassi.

**Mr. Ali Ehsassi:** I do remember that one witness who appeared before us had talked about this category, but I guess I'll leave that particular question.

**The Chair:** Perhaps we should move to the next question.

**Mr. Ali Ehsassi:** Okay. Absolutely.

One witness who appeared before our committee, Ms. Go, recommended that regulation 4(a) of the IRPR should be amended so that immigration officers must prove a marriage is both not genuine and was entered into for the purposes of immigration. Do you think this recommendation would be helpful?

**Ms. Sharon Chomyn:** I would comment that our officers are well trained to interpret and apply the act and regulations as they're written. As far as making changes goes, I personally don't have any recommendations to make. I am aware that, back in 2010, a change was made to simplify that regulation and to make the test a double-headed test, but I really don't have any comment on whether it should be changed or left as is. Officers applied that regulation very effectively beforehand, and they've applied it as effectively since it's been changed.

**Mr. Ali Ehsassi:** Could we ask the other officials?

**Mr. Mark Giralt:** I would second that. Clearly, officers need clarity in terms of the decisions that they're making. In either circumstance, officers will make a decision based on the legislation as it stands. They're quite adept at doing that, and it is helpful to have that clarity.

Again, that would be the extent of my comments.

**Mr. Olivier Jacques:** Indeed, I would second the comments made. We are trained and we do apply and interpret the act and regulations. I believe we have the tools right now to make such an assessment.

**Mr. Ali Ehsassi:** Thank you.

Perhaps I will go back to the first area I was talking about, which was technology, Mr. Jacques was explaining to us some of the challenges in Haiti, and how you communicate with applicants through cellphones. I would like to ask all of you about the role of

technology, and whether it would be possible for us to rely more extensively on technology and other types of infrastructure.

• (0850)

**Mr. Mark Giralt:** My comments on text messaging in Haiti were really an attempt to illustrate some of the things that we take for granted in Canada, the U.S., and in other markets, that are just not happening in other markets. One of the other attempts that we've made in Haiti, in particular, is we've added an online capacity for people to set up an online account to link into a paper-based application, and we've done an email out.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Rempel, you have five minutes, please.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

Hello, Mr. Jacques.

[English]

It's my pleasure to ask you some questions this morning.

We all watched the American election with great interest last week. We heard reports after the election that there were high-level meetings that took place with officials at IRCC and in other departments looking at the potential surge in Mexican migrants coming to Canada as a result of these meetings. This was reported on CBC. I'm just wondering if you wanted to comment on that at all, if those meetings did in fact take place, and if you are concerned about the ability for your unit to process applications looking at the context of a potential surge in migrants.

**Mr. Olivier Jacques:** Personally, I'm not aware that these meetings took place. I think it would be a question for my colleagues in headquarters at this point. I do recognize that the potential surge of Mexicans in the U.S. or Mexicans in Mexico coming to Canada with the visa lifts on December 1 is a risk indeed. But at this point the assessment of the government has been that the benefit related to a visa lift outweighs any identified risks that we have with these migrants.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** How was that determination reached?

**Mr. Olivier Jacques:** A full determination was done, with the co-operation of the Mexican government, in the past few months, until the announcement was made in June by the Prime Minister, that the visa would be lifted on December 1.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Which security factors were examined in making that determination?

**Mr. Olivier Jacques:** Canada uses various criteria to assist the readiness of a country for a visa exemption. In the case of Mexico, a review was performed, looking at various criteria, and it was decided at the end that because of our unique relationship with Mexico, because Mexico is part of NAFTA, because we live in the same kind of neighbourhood in North America, that Mexico should benefit from a visa lift.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** You mentioned various criteria. Could you specify those criteria that were looked at, and if there were any criteria that would be included in a standard visa review that were not included in this review, given the relationship that you just mentioned?

**Mr. Olivier Jacques:** Among the various criteria that Canada normally looks at when we do a visa review—and it is applicable for Mexico, it is applicable for other countries—is the approval rate for a temporary visiting visa. We also look at the number of refugee claims made by citizens of such a country in the past few years. We look at the number of inadmissibilities, so how many people were found inadmissible to Canada coming from this country. We look at the integrity of the travel documents, among other criteria.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Were there any red flags or issues that were raised that were just put aside in the rush to lift the visa requirement on December 1?

**Mr. Olivier Jacques:** I'm afraid I cannot comment on the advice that was given to the government, but certainly a number of risks have been identified, which is the case every time we conduct a visa review. The department is able [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] risks.

• (0855)

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Just to clarify what you just said, there were in fact risks that were flagged for the government, but you can't comment on them here.

**Mr. Olivier Jacques:** When Canada does a visa review, we balance risk, basically.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Sure, and my question is very specific. You just mentioned that there were risks that were flagged for the government but that you can't comment on them. Is that correct?

**Mr. Olivier Jacques:** That's correct. There's some risk, and I think that for every visa exemption there's always some risk, indeed.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Okay.

Would you be able to provide for the committee any broad strokes on what those risks might be and why they were ignored by the government in lifting the visa requirement?

**Mr. Olivier Jacques:** I'm afraid I will not be able to comment on that, because I consider that to be advice to the minister.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Thank you.

Are you aware of any measures that have been put in place by the Mexican government to educate its population on why they shouldn't be making false asylum claims to Canada?

**Mr. Olivier Jacques:** Canada and Mexico are working very closely to deter Mexican citizens—

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Just in the time I have, are there specific measures?

**The Chair:** You have five seconds.

**Mr. Olivier Jacques:** There's an awareness campaign going on.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Ms. Zahid, go ahead for five minutes, please.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.):** Thanks to all our witnesses.

My first question is for Sharon Chomyn.

I've heard a lot from my constituents about the wide variances and processing times across different regions. I'm sure you see those variances across different offices under your responsibility. Could you discuss the factors that contribute to longer processing times in

some regions? Are the applications from some regions more complex, or are there efficiencies employed in some countries or regions that we can apply elsewhere?

**Ms. Sharon Chomyn:** It's difficult to answer a question like this, because there are so many variables involved. It may be that there are variations in the population that affect processing times in one region as opposed to another. There may be variations in our ability to use technology, because we do use an electronic processing platform, and in some locations the infrastructure is better than in others. Mr. Giralt made some comment about that in reference to Haiti. There may be climatic issues that make it challenging to do work. Political factors can have an influence. The security situation in a country or the general state of health in a country can make a difference. There is really a wide range of factors.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** You mentioned today that 80% of the cases are done for the spousal visa in 12 months, but I get a lot of cases in my office from Islamabad, and it takes even more than two years for the spousal visas. Is there any specific reason for that?

**Ms. Sharon Chomyn:** Thank you for the opportunity to address that issue.

When the spousal cases were transferred to London back in 2014, some of those cases were already quite old in terms of the time they had sat in inventory. They weren't left behind; it simply was difficult for us to process them in Islamabad because of the circumstances there. As we brought them to London and we began processing them, already some of them had been waiting for some time, so that by the time we issued those visas, waiting times appeared to be very long. As we worked our way through that caseload, those who followed also had to wait.

Now that we've worked our way into a situation where we're almost able to begin processing files as soon as they arrive in the office, most clients will notice quite an improvement in processing times over those clients who applied two or four years ago. That said, there are complexities inherent in these applications that make some of them go more slowly than we would like them to go.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** You mentioned that the rate of interview in Pakistan is about 15%. How is it in comparison to the other regions? What would it be in London, for example, which is also under your responsibility?

**Ms. Sharon Chomyn:** In the case of the London files, we actually don't interview that often. We may, if there is a complex legal case or a legal element that has to be addressed or if there are issues surrounding the guardianship of children, but we don't interview often with respect to questions related to the genuineness of the relationship, because those files are all processed in Canada and they are considered to be of lower risk in triage. They're part of that 10% that are done in Canada.

• (0900)

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Is there any specific reason why 15% of the spousal visa applications are interviewed from Pakistan?

**Ms. Sharon Chomyn:** Yes, we interview when we can't satisfy ourselves, without an interview, that a relationship is genuine, that there are no admissibility concerns in the applicant's background, or that there are other factors that would not make them inadmissible under Canada's Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Sorry for cutting you off, but I have less time.

I have heard a lot from my constituents about the lack of cultural sensitivity and knowledge of marriage validation in making the process very stressful. It is leading to false evaluations of marriages because now people from London—who don't know the cultural norms of that region—are going to Islamabad to interview the people. Are there any training processes that you provide to your staff before they go to conduct interviews?

**The Chair:** Could you provide a brief response, please?

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Cultural norms there are very different from the western standard of marriage.

**Ms. Sharon Chomyn:** The short answer to your question is yes, we have quite a comprehensive training program. We also have officers on staff, who have had previous experience on assignment in Pakistan. We have London-based locally engaged staff, who are of an ethnic or religious origin that would be typical of cases found in Pakistan. We have regular training programs for new officers who have joined. We do case conferences, so that officers can sit together to look through applications to make sure that they are approached in a common way.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Just before we conclude this session, Ms. Chomyn, I have a quick question for you.

I represent the riding of Etobicoke Centre. In the last year, we've opened 515 case files. Of those files, the largest number, approximately 15%, are from Ukraine. When I look at that segment, the largest number is for family reunification and the most significant number, or subgroup, within family reunification is parents and grandparents. My question is—with a quick response if possible, in two parts—based on the department standards of 80% within 12 months, what are the numbers for Kiev and for Ukraine at the present time? Also, does that standard apply generally or is there a different standard for spouses, children, and specifically, parents and grandparents?

**Ms. Sharon Chomyn:** Mr. Chair, I'm sorry. I don't have that information at hand, but will undertake to provide that to you as soon as possible.

**The Chair:** Thank you. I appreciate that and I tremendously appreciate you providing testimony before the committee today.

We'll now suspend for a couple of minutes for the second panel to be assembled.

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(Pause)

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• (0905)

**The Chair:** I'd like to call the committee to order.

Our second panel today is made up of Ms. Elizabeth Snow, the area director for North Asia, by video conference from Colombo, Sri Lanka. As well, Ms. Shannon Fraser, also an area director, but for South Asia. Ms. Fraser is also here by video conference from Colombo, Sri Lanka. We also have Ms. Alexandra Hiles, who is the area director for Sub-Saharan Africa. She is here by video conference from Nairobi. Welcome.

We will begin with Ms. Snow, for seven minutes, please.

• (0910)

[Translation]

**Ms. Elizabeth Snow (Area Director, North Asia, Department of Citizenship and Immigration):** My name is Elizabeth Snow and I am the immigration program manager in Hong Kong and the acting area director for North Asia.

I would like to introduce to you my colleagues Shannon Fraser, area director for South and East Asia, and Alexandra Hiles, area director for Sub-Saharan Africa.

The North Asia region includes the offices located in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Hong Kong, Manila, Sydney, Tokyo, and Seoul, as well as a liaison officer located in Canberra.

[English]

In this region there continues to be great interest in both temporary and permanent residence in Canada. In particular, for China there has been significant growth year over year in temporary resident programs with, on average, 20% growth each year. We expect to finalize close to a half million Chinese temporary resident applications this year. The continued increase in temporary resident applications creates significant pressure on the management of our human and physical resources and means we constantly work to balance and reallocate resources to deliver programs.

For the purpose of the discussion today, I will speak about the work done by our region's largest full service offices, Hong Kong and Manila. I will also speak briefly to the legal framework and how the provisions in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and regulations support the integrity of our immigration programs and allow the department to focus its resources on production while continuing to manage application complexities and fraud. Hong Kong and Manila both deliver large permanent resident programs.

The responsibility for the vast majority of permanent resident processing for persons resident in China was transferred to Hong Kong in 2014. Beijing continues to process Chinese adoption cases.

In 2016, Hong Kong will finalize nearly 17,500 permanent resident applications, including 6,300 in the family class. There is also a significant economic class movement in Hong Kong, including over 5,000 provincial nominees and 3,700 applicants destined for the province of Quebec. Manila will finalize 12,500 cases, including just under 6,000 family class applications and just over 4,000 provincial nominees.

For Hong Kong, 81% of our family class priority applications are finalized within 13 months of the date of receipt of the sponsorship. For Manila, 78% were finalized in 12 months or less.

There are volumes of applications that are able to move forward with ease. However, there continues to be a considerable number of applications that are complex. They have complicated immigration histories with Canada or with other countries, complex relationships, or complex background issues, such as serious criminality. These require an additional investment of time and effort in order to finalize, and have an impact on processing times in both offices.

Historically, marriages of conveniences have been found throughout applications from China. In some of these fraudulent relationships, both parties may be aware the relationship is for immigration purposes. In others, the sponsor may believe the relationship to be genuine, while the sponsored foreign national intends to dissolve the relationship after being granted permanent residence.

To ensure the integrity of Canada's immigration program, we use a multi-faceted risk assessment and quality assurance approach. In Hong Kong we benefit from our experienced case analysis unit, which is skilled in document verification and localized research. Their efforts help us through lower-risk files to allow them to move more quickly through our processes.

We also work closely with risk assessment colleagues in Hong Kong and China. We have good working relationships with authorities, and these strong connections help facilitate the verification and the validation of the authenticity of supporting documents, allowing us to move forward more quickly with individual files.

We also profit from beneficial relationships with like-minded countries and this helps us stay current on trends or issues, which helps to better inform our work. Site visits are conducted as appropriate, however the vast majority of complex cases are resolved through in-person interviews with our officers.

In Hong Kong, we're happy to report that we've seen the volume of cases requiring interview drop from a previous high of 50% to

60% of our family class cases to 25% of these cases. This positive change gives our officers more time to assess other cases and reduces the need and associated hardship on applicants who must travel for interviews, something of which we are keenly aware.

● (0915)

This drop in cases requiring interview is attributable to the strengthening of our legislation. In particular, we attribute this change to the introduction of regulation 130(3), which put into place a five-year limitation on filing sequential sponsorships. By reducing what was a growing number of "marriage of convenience" cases, we've been better able to manage our inventory. As the risks decrease, we're better able to focus our resources on reducing processing time.

As I know it's of concern to the committee and to many of the witnesses who have appeared to date, I also wanted to briefly speak about subsection 117(9)(d) of the IRPA regulations. This provision, which was put into place in 2002, prevents a sponsor from sponsoring family members who were not previously declared by their sponsor or examined by the department. In our experience in Hong Kong, rarely has the omission of a family member been one of happenstance or poor advice. Rather, the omission appears to have been purposeful and undertaken with intent. Looking at the application process, there are approximately seven different opportunities in which to disclose dependants to the department, including prior to visa issuance and prior to landing in Canada. It's challenging to objectively see such omissions as inadvertent.

I believe the committee is aware, however, that 117(9)(d) can also be overcome where merited. To give a few examples, the sponsor may have been legitimately unaware of the whereabouts or existence of a family member at the time of application, or the existence of a child was not disclosed because the child was born out of wedlock. We also see instances where, in the case of marital breakdown, the sponsor was prevented, by the child's other parent, from having the child examined.

For all applications where a foreign national has been excluded as a member of the family class, the sponsor can request humanitarian and compassionate consideration under section 25 of the act. Officers have the authority, under section 25, to consider the reasons for non-disclosure and determine whether an exemption from the provision is merited. In reaching their decisions, officers consider the complex relationships and circumstances of the sponsor and the applicant, and they take into account the best interests of any children affected by such a decision. In this way, the integrity of the program is safeguarded, and exceptions can be made where merited.

Our staff work diligently to ensure that they make a balanced assessment of the applicant's relationships and to ensure that the applicant has entered into the marriage in good faith. Our teams strive to balance the complexities of law, jurisprudence, and the intricacies that people's circumstances bring. We have worked extremely hard over the past few years to modernize our processes and to increase our processing capacity and speed. We're committed to continuing our efforts into the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today.

I will now turn to my colleague, Shannon Fraser, who is here with me in Colombo, to deliver her remarks.

**The Chair:** Ms. Fraser.

**Ms. Shannon Fraser (Area Director, South Asia, Department of Citizenship and Immigration):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My name is Shannon Fraser, and I'm the area director for south and east Asia. I cover a very large and diverse territory that includes our offices in Bengaluru, Chandigarh, Colombo, New Delhi, Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh City, Jakarta, and Singapore.

[*Translation*]

The countries in my area of responsibility include many of the top source countries for our family class applicants.

[*English*]

I am here to provide an overview of what we do and to answer any questions you may have.

The ability of our offices to deal with quantity is a key factor in delivering our program. New Delhi has the largest family class caseload in the network. We expect to make 12,000 decisions this year in that category, representing 17% of the total family class applications for spouses, dependent children, parents, and grandparents that are processed overseas. We also have the second-largest temporary resident program in the network, at close to 250,000 applications per year, with substantial application increases year over year, particularly with students.

We also process an increasing proportion of factually complex cases, which may involve surrogacy, adoptions, refugees, and public policy cases. While the numbers may be small, they require extensive analysis, expertise, sensitivity, and focus.

In India, arranged marriages and joint families are a cultural norm with various traditions and social practices. Modern relationships, similar to the ones in North America, are becoming increasingly common, although still a small minority of our caseload. India has an incredibly diverse changing society that we must understand and assess in order to make decisions.

Marriage fraud is a very real problem and falls into three main categories: victimization, collusion, and agents. The top three countries for marriage fraud are generally understood to be India, China, and Vietnam.

Victimization, or human trafficking, includes exploitation and forced marriages.

Immigration to countries like Canada can allow people to realize their aspirations, resulting in collusion fraud. Families may make

mutually beneficial arrangements of sponsorship or may include children who are not theirs in their applications. While this type of fraud may appear to be of a lesser risk, fraud like this chips away at the integrity of our program. We know that when a fraud path works, it will be repeated.

Last, hidden and dishonest agents or smugglers thrive. Canada is a destination of choice, and facilitating entry to Canada is big business. These agents counsel applicants and engage in various forms of fraud, including false documents. While many individuals wishing to immigrate to Canada engage third parties to facilitate their entry to Canada, these shadowy practices can leave the most vulnerable open to extortion and abuse.

Visa officers recognize that most of the family class applications we process are genuine. In fact, in India our acceptance rate in the spousal category is high, around 86% historically. For Vietnam, however, where human smuggling and marriage fraud concerns are higher, the approval rate for applicants is lower, at 65%. The existence of victimization and marriage fraud in our family class caseload means that we must be vigilant and carefully review applications. How do we do this?

One way is to interview applicants. Our interview rate in New Delhi has been quite stable over the last five years at around 25%. In Singapore, which is responsible for Vietnam, the rate is higher.

While our overall acceptance rate may suggest that the caseload is not complex, we often still need to undertake interviews or document verification to resolve ambiguities in order to approve an application, while refusing an application requires an even more time-consuming and comprehensive assessment. We also know that fraud schemes move and change as they are uncovered. We remain vigilant and are aware that something that was not a concern yesterday may be one today or tomorrow.

We continually test our assumptions while pushing hard to triage cases effectively and allow for more applications to be processed in less time.

• (0920)

We aim to find the ideal balance between facilitation and enforcement, a very challenging task. Some concrete measures that we have undertaken include the introduction of a more thorough method of triaging applications in order to ensure that cases are referred to officers with a particular expertise. As a result, we have increased processing efficiencies resulting in a decrease in processing times for most cases. We are identifying files based on the application date and, for example, based on medical results, to minimize the number of applicants who will need to repeat their medical examinations or obtain new passports. We have conducted several quality assurance exercises in the last year to identify areas to improve processing, and have adapted our training of officers and support staff to ensure we are making constant improvements in processing efficiency while maintaining the integrity of Canada's immigration programs.

Officers have the responsibility to ensure that all applicants have demonstrated that they are eligible in the category in which they have applied. Officers are trained to make informed, timely, and fair decisions, and have a strong dedication to client service and program integrity. The local knowledge of our officers and that of our locally engaged staff prove to be invaluable, as knowing the cultural norms of a particular society helps our officers to facilitate the processing of legitimate cases quickly and efficiently. To cope with the complexity of caseload and risks, we have a strong cadre of locally engaged case analysts with extensive local knowledge to support decision-makers and to help Canadian officers in their understanding of cultural traditions throughout our region.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today.

I will now turn to my colleague, Alexandra Hiles, to deliver her remarks.

Thank you.

• (0925)

**The Chair:** Ms. Hiles.

**Ms. Alexandra Hiles (Area Director, Sub-Saharan Africa, Department of Citizenship and Immigration):** Good morning. My name is Alexandra Hiles. I'm the immigration program manager in Nairobi, and I'm also the area director responsible for sub-Saharan African, so I'm responsible for offices in Dakar, Dar es Salaam, Lagos, Nairobi, and Pretoria.

The territory covered by the offices in the region includes applications from the residents of almost 50 countries. It's a complex environment to operate in as a result of the size of the territory, the limited infrastructure, the security and health concerns for officers, and the diversity of the caseload in countries covered.

We face multiple challenges based on geography, infrastructure, and security, which I will briefly mention. We constantly seek to find mechanisms to overcome these obstacles, either by shifting files between offices, seeking solutions through technology, or by liaising with organizations such as the United Nations refugees agency and the International Organization for Migration to help us resolve the logistical challenges.

A significant issue in our region is the reliability of documentation required as evidence of relationship or identity. Such documentation is often of very poor quality and difficult to obtain, given the long history of conflict and unrest. Civil documents are not always reliable, and verification with issuing authorities can be lengthy or inconclusive. To ensure program integrity, officers are often required to request secondary documentation or to use other program integrity tools such as in-person interviews or DNA.

As I believe all of my colleagues have mentioned, we also see issues with the genuineness of relationships, given the incentive for many people of a better life in Canada. In spousal sponsorship applications, officers have encountered cases where the sponsors themselves gained permanent residence through sponsorship by another spouse, which may, according to the circumstances, raise questions about the bona fides of either the previous or the current relationship. We also process cases where sponsorship eligibility is not met due to non-declaration of family members during the sponsor's landing process to Canada.

For example, we do see cases where the sponsor, subsequent to landing, applies to sponsor his or her spouse with a marriage date that is prior to the date of the sponsor's landing. The omission may have enabled the sponsor to be found eligible and landed in Canada as a dependant, but the failure to declare the relationship triggers the application of R 117(9)(d), which was previously raised by Ms. Snow.

In many of these cases, officers are asked to consider allowing the applicant an exemption to R 117(9)(d), which requires a comprehensive assessment of the humanitarian and compassionate factors presented by the applicant, including the best interests of any affected children, with all factors being considered within the cultural context of the applicants and their families.

Adoption cases can also be very complex, as many of them are inter-family. In many instances, officers need to establish both the ties to the adoptive parent as well as the severance of ties between the child and the biological parents. Officers are also required to assess these relationships in the context of accompanying children in all family reunification cases, as the principal applicant often wishes to bring adopted children, often nieces or nephews, to Canada. When processing adoption applications, officers also need to ensure that they are meeting Canada's commitment to apply the standards and safeguards of the Hague Convention on inter-country adoption, which means ensuring that each inter-country adoption has been made in the best interests of the child and with respect for his or her fundamental rights. Officers are committed to preventing the abduction of, sale of, or traffic in children, and all adoption applications are processed with extreme care.

In some processing missions such as Nairobi, Dar es Salaam, and Pretoria, many of our family class applicants are also refugees in their country of refuge. This creates additional layers of logistical challenges in communication with and access to applicants, as well as challenges for the applicants even after we've issued their visas, such as the obtaining exit permits or logistics of eventual travel to Canada. On the issue of exit permits, we work closely with UNHCR and IOM, that are sometimes able to assist us successfully in advocating with the local government on behalf of our applicants.

Applicants often do not have timely or reliable access to phone services, Internet, or email. Additionally, when requesting additional documents or other information, communication is often via the sponsor, which adds to our processing times. Many applicants cannot communicate in either English or French but only in their local dialect or native language. As our territories are vast and local language requirements numerous, we do not always have the language skills amongst our staff to communicate with the applicant. To respond to these challenges, we are using contracted interpreters to assist in communicating with applicants for quick information gathering. We are as flexible as we can be in ensuring our applicants have adequate and meaningful time to respond to our requests for necessary documents, as we are very aware of the logistical and bureaucratic challenges facing them in their countries of origin or refuge.

In cases where an interview is required, applicants are often not able to travel to our processing office for logistical or legal reasons. Officers therefore carry out interview trips to meet with our applicants. We may need to wait for a core number of interviews within a region prior to organizing a trip so as to have a critical number of scheduled interviews to ensure efficiency and maximize our resources.

• (0930)

Travel in this region can be complex, time-consuming, and unreliable. These are all factors that contribute to longer processing times for family class applications. At the same time, our interview trips have a facilitative aspect to them, as we know that some of our applicants may be in a vulnerable situation. They also may not have the capacity or support necessary for them to properly complete the forms. As a result, while we are assessing the genuineness of the relationship, we are also gathering the necessary information from the applicant directly, allowing us to assess their vulnerability, in case facilitative measures need to be taken, while at the same time ensuring all necessary—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Hiles.

We do have your notes, and I will make sure everyone has a copy of those.

Mrs. Zahid, you have seven minutes, please.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Thanks to all the witnesses.

My first question is for Ms. Fraser. One of the biggest frustrations I hear about from the constituents in my riding of Scarborough Centre—and it was also borne out during this study—is inconsistent standards for acceptance between different offices and different regions.

For example, I know of some cases where an identical application, after being rejected in Chandigarh, was accepted in Delhi. In fact, Chandigarh has a reputation for an abnormally high refusal rate, to the point where some people have started avoiding it.

Why does there seem to be an uneven application of what should be consistent standards? Are there any measures you are taking to address this situation?

**Ms. Shannon Fraser:** In terms of the Chandigarh visa office, in fact, Minister McCallum just paid a visit to that office and to New Delhi last week. He was in India. There is a very high incidence of fraudulent applications submitted by agents to that office, which does impact the approval and refusal rates.

We have also initiated workload-sharing within the India network. We have the ability to shift the work around and send officers back and forth between the offices. It's a matter of sharing the information and increasing awareness of the local documentation and what is required. We also get temporary duty resources to that office and across the India network, and we make every effort to make sure people are aware of what documentation is required and to raise awareness. You will see some additional steps in terms of the work we will continue to do across the India network.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** How can we ensure we have consistent standards of evaluation in different offices?

**Ms. Shannon Fraser:** I'm sure you can appreciate that every application, just like every person, is different. Their family circumstances, their work situation, and the assets and savings they have would be according to the individuals. Certainly, we are constantly working with all the officers, as we do with any new officers, in terms of providing information.

Recently, with the occurrence of the demonetization of the rupee in India, we are certainly taking that into account as to what possible impacts there could be on our clientele, for example, or on the documentation—again, just keeping that evergreen and providing that training and information to our staff.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** I've heard a lot from my constituents, and it was also raised by several witnesses during this study of family reunification, that a lack of cultural sensitivity and knowledge is making the process of marriage validation very stressful. In many cases, when the interviews are held, assumptions of false marriages are being made.

We have heard that different cultures may have an understanding of a normal relationship between a husband and a wife that is quite different from the usual western standards.

Could you discuss what training your staff receive on the cultural norms in the region or the area in which they are working and how culture could be better taken into account, particularly when the interviews are held?



• (0935)

**Ms. Shannon Fraser:** As I mentioned in my remarks, 86% of our applications are approved under the family class priority category, which would illustrate a very high level of acceptance. We have officers who are from that region, born and raised in India, who speak the local language, as well as all of our local staff. For officers, we have various training methodologies and an India “academy” that we provide to them as soon as they arrive, as well as ongoing training, making sure we are letting them know the customs, the culture, and the norms across India, because, again, it's a very diverse country. There are many different cultures, societies, and traditions of which they need to be aware.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** In regard to the languages, do you provide interpreters, or do you have staff speaking different languages in India?

**Ms. Shannon Fraser:** A lot of our local staff speak the local language. However, what we do now for the interviews is ask the applicant to go through an interpretation agency to bring someone with them who will speak their local language and dialect. There have been rare occasions that if we have someone on the staff then we would interpret for that person.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** My next question is for Ms. Snow in regards to the family processing applications going through Manila. I represent a riding with a large Filipino population. Many of them come under the caregiver category, so the family reunification application under that category is taking a longer than many other family reunification categories. Is there anything specific to that you would like to add?

**Ms. Elizabeth Snow:** Regarding our office in Manila, they work very diligently with our colleagues in a centralized network in order to coordinate the processing of live-in caregiver and their dependant applications. I would like to highlight that Manila consistently meets their levels, as determined by the department, so they are processing very diligently and working very hard to coordinate. As you're likely aware, the head of family has to land first and then the dependants are issued and that requires a degree of coordination.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** What is the average time it is taking now for the processing of the family reunification of the dependants for the people coming in under the caregiver program?

**Ms. Elizabeth Snow:** I would suggest that we would come back to the committee with precise information on the length of time for live-in caregiver and their dependant processing applications.

**The Chair:** Thank you. That has been noted.

Mr. Saroya, you have seven minutes please.

**Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC):** Thank you to the witnesses.

My first question is to Ms. Fraser.

I represent a mixed riding with many different cultures. The biggest headache we get is from Chandigarh. It's all about Chandigarh. What can we do to improve that office? All the questions people ask are all about Chandigarh. What are the department standards for the Chandigarh office? Does it take 12 months, 24 months, 36 months? How long on average does it take to process an application in Chandigarh?

**Ms. Shannon Fraser:** I should just clarify that the office in Chandigarh does not at this time process any applications for permanent residence. It only deals with applications for temporary resident visas, for study permit applications, and for work permit applications. Most recently, the processing times for temporary resident visas in that office are approximately 18 days and would be even shorter for study permits.

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** Okay. I would like to talk about the cases when we use DNA. There was a case in Brampton, just to give you one example. This is the sort of situation we receive. We always take the department's side and we try to reason about why the case was handled this way. Somebody sponsored his wife and his son; the father was here for the longest time. At the end of it, the DNA came back negative for the father. They were married for 18 or 20 years and the kid was born under the same roof to the same parents. At least the son is the mother's son. Why do we reject those cases?

• (0940)

**Ms. Shannon Fraser:** Mr. Chair, it's not possible for myself or my colleagues to answer questions on specific cases without knowing any of the details and also for privacy reasons. I would just clarify that the use of DNA testing is for cases where there really are no other options. Perhaps the documentation is not reliable or is non-existent. Perhaps there were some other concerns with the application but, again, we are not able to get into any specifics of any of the applications.

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** In India, most of the marriages take place in the wintertime. In the spring, people come back and they do the sponsorship, especially for the spousal cases. Do we get some extra help or extra resources? Do we hire extra people in the summertime to process these cases in a timely fashion?

**Ms. Shannon Fraser:** Yes, I'm well aware that it's marriage season during the winter. The Canadian winter is marriage season in India, so all those people who have gotten married in India will be going back.

First, though, the sponsorship will be submitted to the case processing centre in Mississauga. It is that office that takes the first steps in assessing the sponsor and the sponsorship.

I can add, though, that we have received temporary duty resources during the summer to assist us not only with temporary resident increases, but also for the family class cases. I think the department is on its way in 2016 to meeting our levels for 60,000 family class priority applicants and also for 20,000 parent and grandparent applications.

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** Are all the people who are processing these applications directly employed by the immigration department, or are they temporary workers?

**Ms. Shannon Fraser:** People who are assigned overseas are Canadian-based officers, working for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. Any of our locally engaged staff, although they're working for our department and our program, are employees of Global Affairs Canada. We work very closely together to ensure that we have a strong team in place in each of our missions, embassies, and high commissions to deal with the applications.

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** In cases of marriage of convenience for the cases in China and India, what is the percentage of marriages of convenience? Do you have a rough guess? Is it 10%, 20%?

**Ms. Shannon Fraser:** I wouldn't want to give you the number, because that would be speculating. If you look at our approval rate of 86%, the remaining portion would be refused cases, but not necessarily for marriages of convenience. There could be other inadmissibilities or ineligibilities for the sponsor. It is a relatively small proportion, but it is fairly time-consuming for our office to make sure that we are able to assess each and every application fairly and in a timely manner.

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** It's 86% in India. What would be the percentage in China, in Beijing, or in any of the other centres?

**Ms. Elizabeth Snow:** It would be in the 80 percent range, as well. As I mentioned in my remarks, we interview 25%, and approximately half of that, somewhere in the range of 12% to 15%, are refusals.

There are more complexities other than marriages of convenience. There can be issues related to admissibility or other factors, but instances of marriages of convenience still exist within our caseload.

• (0945)

**The Chair:** You have 20 seconds.

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** We work with you, although it may sound like something different. We both work for the same causes. Is there anything we can help you with on our side that most of us, people born in Punjab, India, or...?

**The Chair:** A five-second answer, please.

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** I guess I'm done.

**The Chair:** Perhaps more research.

Ms. Kwan, you have seven minutes.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to follow up on the live-in care workers piece. To my understanding, some of the waits are as long as, on average, about four and a half years. This is in addition to the two-year work requirement that live-in care workers have to complete before the applications are processed. Then they have a wait of four and a half years.

Is it possible for us to get the detailed breakdown of how many applications have come in that are still in process at the moment, just to get a clear understanding of how many are waiting for processing in all the different years that the application has not been completed?

**Ms. Elizabeth Snow:** Mr. Chair, we would be happy to undertake to come back to the committee with that information, so that we can give informative advice.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** As to the resources for each of the offices, I'd be very interested in knowing what staffing levels you have to process applications and under what stream, and if we can get that breakdown, as well. In some cases, as in the other offices, we're advised that from time to time they have temporary staff who come in to assist in a particularly busy season or something like that. If you have had additional resources, temporary or permanent, I would like to get that breakdown and what stream they have been put to work in. That would be very useful for us to help understand the situation in your office. Is that possible?

**Ms. Elizabeth Snow:** Mr. Chair, we will commit to again come back with that information to help inform the committee.

**The Chair:** Thank you once again.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** We focused a lot on spousal sponsorship. I'm interested in getting some information about parents and grandparents. In those instances, there is no question about marriage fraud, yet the wait times for parents and grandparents is exceedingly long as well. For folks in China, for example, I've had constituents come in and they've been waiting close to 10 years, which is unbelievable in terms of a long wait time.

Again to get a better understanding of what you're faced with in your offices, how many applications have come in that are in process, and dating back to wherever outstanding applications have come in for parents and grandparents under different regions?

**Ms. Elizabeth Snow:** Mr. Chair, again we will commit to come back to the committee with this information, but I would like to put before the committee that each year we continue to meet our levels as defined.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** When you say you meet your levels as defined, what does that mean exactly?

**Ms. Elizabeth Snow:** It means that when we're prescribed a portion of the levels plan, we deliver what our portion is.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Is the delay as a result of the levels plan, or is it a processing question?

**Ms. Elizabeth Snow:** We deliver the levels that we're prescribed each year.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Can you give us the levels that you've been prescribed each year? That is to say, for each of the offices in each of the regions, what is the levels number that you've been given, and then to process that? Then coming out of that, how many are still outstanding?

**Ms. Elizabeth Snow:** Mr. Chair, we'll come back to the committee with that breakdown, as requested.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you.

In terms of marriage fraud, let me get into this for one minute. I do not want to get into a specific case, but just a sampling of situations. I've had applicants, constituents, who have come into my office. In fact, both divorced spouses in China were making an application to come to Canada. They were red-flagged in that application and were refused in the first round, so they're making a second round of applications. In that process, they were refused because they are suspected of marriage fraud. The husband, who divorced from the woman, actually passed away, and the result was that they still suspect marriage fraud. They suspected that because both divorced spouses were making an application to come to Canada. Even though one passed away, there was still the issue of marriage fraud.

I'm simply curious as to how you determine marriage fraud. What is the thing that gives you a red flag about marriage fraud?

• (0950)

**Ms. Elizabeth Snow:** Mr. Chair, I'm not in a position to speak to the specifics of certain cases, but in general, when we're looking at applications, we look to assess what we understand to be the histories of the individuals involved with Canada previously. We take a look at the situation related to the marriage, the cultural norms, and our understanding of habits and the way couples would normally meet and develop relationships, and we would then look to interview in order to have a better understanding of the nature of the relationship. When officers are making these decisions and assessing cases, they don't do this lightly. They are being very diligent in making sure they understand the complexities.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** In terms of the delays with respect to interviews, you mentioned earlier that sometimes delays are as a result of language barriers and you have to have the interviews at a location, and you have to have a critical mass in order to maximize efficiency to get the interviews completed.

How much of the delay is attributed to the requirement for interviews and the waiting for that critical mass to come together? Do you have a sense of what that looks like in terms of the delays for all the different regions?

**Ms. Alexandra Hiles:** If I could jump in, Mr. Chair, I believe that was from my opening remarks for Nairobi and for Sub-Saharan Africa.

It wouldn't be a large proportion of our caseloads. Many of our applicants, for example from Nairobi, are based out of Ethiopia. At the moment, Ethiopia is not particularly accessible because there is state of emergency, but normally we go to Ethiopia regularly. We do occasionally have outlier cases that maybe are based in Djibouti or Eritrea or South Sudan, where accessibility is very difficult.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Sarai, seven minutes, please.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.):** I want to thank all three of you. I know you work with an extremely hard workload and in different jurisdictions and different cultural norms. I commend you for working in such different climates and trying to make the applications process smooth and fast, and hear us complaining all the time. You probably get a ton of our letters regarding concerns.

I want to also thank Ms. Fraser for the good measures that you're looking at for triaging cases. If these are implemented, I think they

would help free up a lot of space. I was hoping that with these measures, the cases that are easy could actually be fast-tracked and moved out, so you might have two streams of process times: those that are simplified and easy get out a lot quicker, and those that require interviews, or others, would understandably take a little longer.

My question is in terms of fraudulent marriages. We've talked a bit about it and I understand that 86% of marriages in Chandigarh or Delhi are considered valid and fine, but there's about 14% that are fraudulent. How well are the officers trained in cultural sensitivity? I noted in your discussion paper you were well versed in understanding that there are a lot of modern marriages that are similar to western marriage and there's also a big chunk of traditional marriages. A lot of the spouses, specifically the females, will have a tough time talking about intimate details. We get a lot of cases that are rejected based on, perhaps, an officer feeling that the reluctance to tell information is a cause of concern. But in a culture that is, perhaps, more traditional, talking about your intimate first details of when you met or your first time together, is something that a woman is not going to reveal that easily. Have your officers been well versed in that or trained in understanding those issues?

**Ms. Shannon Fraser:** Again, we're very proud of the training that we give our officers who come to India. We have a Delhi "academy", which is something that I think is quite unique, and a network where new officers will get a week-long training course. Again, we do use very much our local staff, who are certainly familiar—born and raised in the culture—with their traditions. We've dealt with this clientele for many years. We're certainly aware of sensitivities, whether it's questions.... Certainly, we don't want the officers delving too much into private details, but there is a certain level of knowledge that one would expect about a new spouse, such as what they do, where they spend time together. We are able to get that information through various questions without having to get into any sort of details that people might not feel comfortable with.

• (0955)

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** Another area of concern—and I had never realized this before until getting into this position—is people with disabilities, whether physical disabilities, cognitive disabilities, hearing impairment. If they get married to somebody, even with similar disabilities or no disabilities, they automatically seem to be red-flagged. I believe there's less attention to sensitivity for them. I've seen cases with notes stating, "I believe you're just coming to be a caregiver for the person, because you would never want to marry them otherwise" to "Why would you want to marry a person like this?" I find those very offensive. Has there been any issue of sensitivity of that nature that you have addressed? If not, would you be able to consider looking at that, since I've seen recently in my own office at least four to five cases of that?

**Ms. Shannon Fraser:** That's something that we've never come across, or I've not heard before, so I thank you for raising that. I would undertake that we would look into that. Again, we have to look at the traditions and the cultural norms in the country, the society from which both parties are coming. Again, we certainly want to respect all of our clients, all of the sponsors, and we would undertake training if it, in fact, is required.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** I know your department officials are always hesitant about giving any recommendations. I'm going to try to see if you'll undertake to give us any recommendations. Is there any possibility of an internal review process? Say, you have 14% of marriages that are rejected. It comes to an MP, and an MP sees that actually this marriage is warranted. Rather than having them either appeal it or reapply, is there a possibility that your office or department would consider an internal review? A senior officer can review the file and say that this was perhaps overlooked or that they could review this rather than having the spouse or the applicant go through the whole process again, wait another 18 months to two years. They would just have somebody look at it.

A lot of times we know the applicant very well. We've seen the person. We know about the marriage. We know the family members who flew in for the wedding. When we see it rejected, it's very frustrating for us. Rather than having the person go through it all again, it would be very beneficial if there's a senior visa officer or a reviewing officer who could reconsider that decision.

Is that something you would consider recommending to your department?

**Ms. Shannon Fraser:** I'm not in a position to make any recommendations or to say we'll consider any recommendations. But thank you very much for raising that.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** How many of the 14% that are rejected in terms of marriage cases would you say are based on fraudulent marriages versus just those that are based on criminality, income, or other issues? How many of the 14% that are rejected in New Delhi would you consider are primarily the result of fraud?

**Ms. Shannon Fraser:** I would only be speculating. I certainly don't want to give a number. That is an issue for officers, marriage of

convenience or fraud or some sort of documentation versus other refusal reasons.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** Any speculation on the amount?

**The Chair:** Ten seconds.

**Ms. Shannon Fraser:** I would only be speculating, sir.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** Okay, that's fine. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Just before we conclude this session, Ms. Snow, you had committed to providing us with some levels, numbers. Perhaps I could extend that request to all of the participants, if they could provide the levels for all the consular sections that their centres deal with.

Finally, a quick question to Ms. Fraser. You're an area director. You just said that it's not your role to provide recommendations. You're out in the field. You see the conditions in the field. Do you provide any sorts of recommendations or are you strictly a functionary who does what they're instructed? Is there no flow of information, perhaps recommendations from the field, from area directors, back to the centre?

• (1000)

**Ms. Shannon Fraser:** Yes, I am an area director so that means oversight of the offices under my territory, looking at productivity, looking at the operations. Certainly there are opportunities where we'll provide input, recommendations...also coming in the other direction to my headquarters.

**The Chair:** So you can provide recommendations.

**Ms. Shannon Fraser:** Within our department, yes. There may be some processing issues or something that I think we could take some steps to correct or to make some improvements upon or to share best practices among the different offices.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

That will conclude this session.

We will now suspend for a couple of minutes and move in camera.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]







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