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Chair

Mr. Michael Levitt

Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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• (1300)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.)): Good afternoon, everyone.

In advance of beginning our study on the Yezidis and other religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq, I have a bit of business in advance for Tuesday.

We want to put out a notice of our emergency session, a news release or press release. We just need notional support from around the room that we're okay to do that, so that we can put that together, and that's something that can be then passed around. Do we have agreement that would be something we'd like to do?

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Chair, the Wednesday date that we're—

The Chair: It will be the Tuesday meeting of the committee, the emergency session.

Ms. Hardcastle.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): I thought we were doing a Wednesday, though.

The Chair: We had discussed it and what happened with our schedule was that—

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Angela Crandall): It's not the Aleppo meeting that's on Wednesday.

Ms. Karine Azoulay (Committee Researcher): It is Tibet.

The Chair: Yes, Tibet is on the Wednesday. I think we have an agreement.

I'd like to introduce our two witnesses from Foreign Affairs, Emmanuelle Lamoureux, director, Gulf States relations division; and Giuliana Natale, director, inclusion and religious freedom. Welcome

Thank you very much for being with us here today at the very start of what I think, as we have seen this week in Parliament, is something with which we're all very much seized. This study is going to be a very important light shining upon this region.

You are our first two witnesses. If you can take 10-12 minutes, that would be fantastic.

Mrs. Lamoureux.

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux (Director, Gulf States Relations Division, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will making the first part of my presentation in French and the second part in English. It is indeed an extremely important and timely topic.

[Translation]

I have been asked to speak to you today about the human rights situation of Yezidis, Christians, and other religious and ethnic minorities in Syria and Iraq.

Your subcommittee has been seized recently by the situation of the Yezidis, which was debated last week in the House of Commons.

• (1305)

[English]

The Chair: I am sorry, we were having a translation issue.

It is fixed. Please continue.

[Translation]

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: Okay, thank you.

To begin with, I would like to review some recent events in Iraq and Syria in order to provide context for the current human rights situation for religious minorities in the region. I will then describe what Canada and the international community are doing to address this situation.

Iraq and Syria have long been home to many ethnic and religious groups. Shia and Sunni Arabs and Kurds lived alongside smaller communities that made up around 10% of Iraq's population. Many of these groups have lived in Iraq for over 1,000 years and even enjoyed a certain level of protection.

In recent years, however, many of these minority groups faced persecution and forced displacement. For many of them, the areas where they lived were subject to power struggles between emerging militias. Geographically, it is important to point out that the region of Iraq that holds the most diverse population is in the north, including around Mosul, where the current military campaign is underway and that is still partly occupied by Daesh.

After years of violence and displacement, more recent data suggest that these groups now make up less than 3% of Iraq's population. I will add a caution here: there are very little reliable data because of the length of time since the last census.

But, according to official estimates, the number of Christians has dropped from about 500,000 in 2003, to 80,000. Even that figure is regarded as high by some religious leaders.

Let us recall that, in recent years, Canada has welcomed about 23,000 refugees from Iraq. Of course, there is also the current ongoing operation to welcome refugees from Syria. Some of those minorities are represented in the groups that have arrived.

Iraq has yet to implement a model of government that successfully balances power between Baghdad, Iraq's governorates, and other authorities. The country has over 31 major political parties, which still reflect strong internal divides along sectarian and tribal lines. Tensions between these factions risk undermining Iraq's very fragile political unity. And this problem will only become more pressing once the military campaign to liberate Mosul is completed and the need for cooperation is diminished. The glue that currently holds them together—Daesh—will quietly dissolve and the situation is in danger of getting worse.

Syria has an equally long history of ethnic and religious diversity, with approximately 70% to 75% of the population Sunni, but another 13% non-Sunni Muslims, and significant Christian and Druze populations. There is a small number of Yezidis, but they are mostly located in Iraq.

The current civil war continues to disrupt and alter Syria's demographic map.

While many minority groups, as well as Sunni and Shia Arabs and Kurds, have long faced discrimination in one form or another, the situation has become worse with the arrival of Daesh. A major factor affecting communities in Iraq and Syria is that there is no freedom of religion or belief in Daesh-held territories.

Of course, even beyond freedom of religion, there are problems with persecution. We are very aware of them. Religious minorities are forced to pay a tax or to convert. Some members of the Shiite and Sunni communities are judged to be "kuffar", or apostates, and are therefore vulnerable to violence at the hands of Daesh.

No one is really safe. The crimes committed against the Yazidis and other minorities include killings, sexual slavery, torture, forcible transfer, and forced conversion. It has separated Yezidi children from their families. It has taken groups of hundreds of Syrian Christians hostage for extended periods of time. Its fighters have forcibly married Sunni women living in the villages it controls. Those groups were already in a position of vulnerability before 2014. They are even more vulnerable now.

● (1310)

The effects of Daesh's reign of terror are being felt now but they will still be felt in coming years.

[English]

It's important here to say we're talking about degrees of horror. No group has been spared.

[Translation]

I would now like to give you a brief overview of what Canada and the international community are doing to improve the situation being faced by these groups.

In the immediate term, it is important that the survivors of these grave abuses are provided with the assistance they need. In particular, women and children who have suffered sexual violence and slavery require urgent psychosocial and medical assistance. Since 2014, Canada has supported humanitarian partners in Iraq including the United Nations Population Fund and other non-governmental organizations to provide this assistance to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

Our partners have established centres in camps and host communities across Iraq, where women and girls are able to access that assistance, specialized medical care and legal and other services. Support to women and girls affected by violence will remain at the centre of our humanitarian assistance to Iraq in the years to come.

[English]

Through the peace and stabilization operations program, Canada is also supporting the Center for Justice and Accountability, and its efforts to prepare for the criminal prosecution of breaches of international criminal and humanitarian law committed by Daesh.

You've probably heard about this programming. We view it as very important. CJA has developed legal case files focusing on Daesh criminality in Syria and Iraq, including sexual slavery. In Iraq, CJA has strengthened the investigative capacity of the Kurdistan regional government's war crimes investigative and prosecutorial unit. Some courts in the Kurdistan region of Iraq have also begun hearing cases relating to these crimes under Iraqi terrorism law.

At the same time, we're also looking at ways we can provide capacity-building support to elements of the Iraqi justice sector because we know that some of the Daesh criminals will be judged by local courts. For the moment, the Iraqi foreign minister has indicated that Iraq requires assistance to build the necessary capacity to collect and preserve evidence, and especially technology related to criminal justice and forensics. This is a request we are exploring.

The Canadian government has also acknowledged international findings that indicate Daesh continues to perpetrate genocide against Yezidis. That's something you're well aware of given the recent debates.

In June, the Minister of Foreign Affairs recognized the evidence to that effect from a UN report prepared by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic that recognized the crimes that were committed specifically against Yezidis, and the fact that those amounted to genocide.

The minister has twice written to the president of the Security Council in New York, in May and June of this year, to request that the Security Council take action on the matter of Daesh's crimes. He requested that a mechanism be established to investigate reports of violations of international law by Daesh in Iraq and Syria, to identify the perpetrators of such violations, and ensure accountability.

In September in New York, the minister also participated in a dedicated event at the UNGA on the subject of Daesh accountability. The event helped to raise awareness about the need for the international community to hold Daesh accountable for its crimes. Many other foreign ministers and senior UN officials also participated.

As you know well, on Tuesday the government also supported a motion in the House of Commons that recognizes Daesh genocide against Yazidis, and acknowledges that many Yazidi women and girls are still being held captive as sexual slaves. The motion also called for implementing recommendations in the UN report I was mentioning, and also commits to providing asylum to Yazidi women and girls within 120 days.

Canada is not isolated among governments in pursuing the need for further action. The U.K., in particular, is pressing for further action within the UN framework. They have called for the creation of a UN special representative mandated by the Security Council to lead a campaign supporting national and international efforts, and to empower survivors.

• (1315)

We'll continue to work closely with the U.K. and others in the coming months to activate a core group of actors and to coordinate between governments and other relevant organizations.

I also want to flag that Iraq's participation in these efforts is critical, and that's why Canada supports the Iraqi government's efforts to improve governance in the country, strengthen institutions, and mend ethnic and religious divides.

Daesh has targeted all ethnic and religious communities across Iraq and Syria, and that includes Yazidis, Christians, Turkmen, Sabean Mandeans, and other groups. It has subjected these groups to horrors, including the use, in some cases, of chemical weapons. The Yazidis have suffered terrible and particular losses that require special attention. At the same time, the international community must continue to assist Iraqi and Syrian communities affected by Daesh to overcome their losses and rebuild viable economies and societies, which will require wider commitments to justice and reconciliation.

Thank you. I'm now open for your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your testimony. That was a very good way for us to kick things off. With that in mind, I'm going to pass the floor to MP Sweet with the first question.

Mr. David Sweet: Ms. Lamoureux, thank you very much for your testimony. I greatly appreciate it.

I wanted to tie two of the things that you mentioned in your opening remarks together and ask you a question in that regard. You mentioned, just in your closing, that Iraq's participation is critical, and I certainly agree with you. Earlier in your remarks you mentioned that there are already cases being heard through the Kurdistan regional government—not only heard, but being prosecuted—relating to these crimes. Is there any concern in that regard that they are starting the prosecutions now and without the international community being there, in the sense that some of these crimes are obviously going to be concerning some people who have been instrumental in the deaths, torture, incarceration, and enslavement of many? I'm certain that there should be an international accountability in that regard for this magnitude of crime.

ment of many? I'm certain that there should be an international accountability in that regard for this magnitude of crime.

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: Yes, there are various accountability mechanisms at our disposal to prosecute crimes committed by Daesh. We're studying, along with other members of the international community, including Iraq, these various mechanisms at our disposal. One such mechanism is the ICC. There are other mechanisms, including hybrid tribunals, which are international tribunals that would be set up specifically in the context of the situation in Iraq and Syria. There are, as well, local tribunals.

There are pros and cons to each of those options. Certainly the ICC has a certain legitimacy, and it would bring those cases to the forefront of the international agenda. One element that we want to consider, when we consider the ICC, is the fact that it only allows for the prosecution of smaller groups of high-level, more visible individuals responsible for those crimes, and that's why we want to analyze every option, including local tribunals. Local tribunals are important to the extent that the country itself has suffered a lot. Having Iraqi courts judge criminals in Iraq has a certain value, as well, but the Iraqi judicial system requires a lot of support. These institutions are fairly new, as we know. Iraq has been through successive wars, and it has had little opportunity to build its institutions. That's also part of the programming that's being considered for governance and for supporting the judicial system.

• (1320)

Mr. David Sweet: Do we have international partners present at these current undertakings, right now, and at these prosecutions that are happening? Is the Kurdistan regional government co-operating, so that we have judicial professionals there from Canada, the U.K., and other partners?

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: I'll have to get back to you on that. Certainly, I can say that from Canada I'm not aware of us being present at any of those prosecutions. One of the reasons is that we had a very limited presence in Iraq until recently, so we're ramping up our presence, including with a Canadian who will be based in Erbil. To what extent it will be possible through that new presence to monitor more closely those processes, I think it should help.

As far as access to the courts, I'm not able to answer. We can get back to you with a more fulsome response.

Mr. David Sweet: I would appreciate that.

Chair, this is profoundly troubling, and I think we need to keep a monitor on this. These cases are extremely important, particularly if there is somebody of a high level who's been orchestrating these crimes.

Obviously, there's a number of departments that are involved, from DND to immigration, and yourselves. Now that we've seen this conflict, we've seen multiple victims from Turkmen to Yazidis to Christians, and different communities of Christians, as well as different communities of Muslims, Somalis, is there an effort now for us to re-evaluate how we deal with the delivery of aid, as well as those we target for refugees, asylum seekers, and refugee status, in regard to those groups that may be victimized more than others? I know that hasn't been the case in the past, but I think there's a clear demonstration here that sometimes when evil combatants start to target people, they victimize some groups more than others. Is there some effort in the department now to take that into consideration?

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: I will not be able to speak to resettlement obviously, because that falls under the purview of IRCC.

With respect to our assistance, I will start, and maybe I will ask Giuliana to complement my response, if she wishes to.

There are several elements to our assistance. Humanitarian assistance is the first part. Humanitarian assistance is provided with a focus on the most vulnerable people, without consideration of ethnic or religious background, but because it focuses on the most vulnerable, we know that several members of minority communities are receiving such support. I was giving the example of the psychosocial support that's provided to women and girls who have suffered abuses by Daesh. We know that several of these women are Yazidi women, but—

Mr. David Sweet: My time is pressing, so to steer your answer a bit, I'm clear on that. But in this case, many of the most vulnerable didn't make it to the camps because they would even be victimized in the camp. That's why I was asking you if there is a reassessment about how we do things, based on those kinds of variables, that people are victimized in different degrees depending on who the combatants are.

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: Humanitarian assistance is not only focused on people who are in displaced person camps or in refugee camps, it's also in host communities where we know that some of those minorities have fled. That's for humanitarian assistance.

The other element of our assistance is development assistance—development, security, and stability assistance actually, which the work of my colleagues falls under. In that case, we're able to target a bit more specifically. That's where, for example, the CIJA project I was talking about, falls.

• (1325)

Ms. Giuliana Natale (Director, Inclusion and Religious Freedom, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): I'm not sure I would be able to add additional information, in terms of whether work is being evaluated within Global Affairs, much more than my colleague has, but what I can say is that from the perspective of the office of human rights, freedoms and inclusion, and more specifically from the perspective of inclusion and religious freedom, the division has been in touch closely with faith communities here in Canada that are in touch with communities on the ground in Iraq and Syria. We are in the process of gathering information on precisely what the question is referring to in terms of

what the violations are, how grievous they are, and what can be done. We're working with faith communities and speaking to faith communities to learn more about the challenges that are being faced.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Thank you very much for coming in to speak to us about this very important issue.

When I was in law school, I had a very dear friend from Iran who was of the Jewish faith, which is a very small minority in Iran. He was a very dear friend, continues to be, and he would tell me stories of discrimination and persecution that he and his family faced in Iran prior to moving to the west.

I understand the plight, and it is very dire. I was a little bit troubled, Ms. Lamoureux, when you indicated that after dealing with Daesh the problems of discrimination would still not end. I am wondering what role Canada can play, not only with respect to a political solution to work towards a more humanitarian way of governance in that region, but also in ensuring that these incidents are lessened.

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: Thank you for the question. I would say it's a question that's at the centre of our daily work.

I think one thing we have to understand is that these problems did not start with Daesh. They were certainly made much worse under Daesh, but the persecution of minorities has been ongoing, certainly in Iraq, for years, including under the regime of Saddam Hussein. So I think we have to be realistic in our expectations, which does not mean idle. The three-year strategy that has been adopted for the region is a positive step, because it is multi-year. We have to recognize that defeating Daesh is not the end of this. It's the beginning of another phase that will be just as complex and difficult as the one we're going through. That's the first step.

We have tools at our disposal such as our development programming, our stabilization and security programming. There's much we can do in the area of governance, helping Iraq. Canada has an interesting model to offer, because we're a federal country, and when dealing with diversity, it's a model that is often viewed as interesting. Especially when communities have a history of violence and discrimination, sometimes decentralization helps a little bit. Certainly, we already have programming in that area through our development funding, and we're looking at expanding on that programming in the context of the three-year strategy I mentioned.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I want to follow up on something my honourable colleague said with respect to accountability.

We have called on the UN Security Council to bring Daesh to justice. I've also recently suggested that the ICC should play a role. Can you explain why the UN Security Council has still not referred the situation in Syria to the ICC?

• (1330)

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: In order for the Security Council to refer the situation to the ICC, there has to be agreement within the Security Council. That would be the first step in this case. Iraq and Syria are not parties to the Rome statute. They said they would have the possibility to refer the situation in their countries to the ICC, but they have chosen not to do so yet.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I'm not sure if this is in your purview or not, but can you describe what other nations such as Russia and the U.S. are doing toward ceasing the discrimination against minorities in that region?

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: Russia?

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Yes, and the U.S.

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: Specifically on Russia, I would have to get back to you. I'm not aware of any specific efforts led by Russia on that specific issue.

With respect to the U.S., it's definitely one of the countries we're working with. I was referring to Minister Dion's participation at the UNGA side event and holding Daesh to account. The U.S. was present there. They're part of a network of countries that are actively looking at these options.

One thing I want to say on accountability is that Iraq has to be a part of it. I'm not talking about Syria, obviously, because it's a completely different business. The solution has to be Iraqi-led. We're working with all of these countries to hopefully come to an accountability mechanism that will work. As I said, so far the focus has been from the Iraqi government. They've really asked for assistance to collect evidence.

The risk is always that with such evidence, if you don't collect it rapidly, there's none to be found by the time you have a tribunal in place to consider the crimes. That's been the focus so far, but certainly there's a lot of work happening as well within the international community to have those discussions about accountability mechanisms.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Do I have any time?

The Chair: You have an extra 30 seconds.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Then I'll just make a comment that oftentimes I don't think it's a specific religion that is targeted or that is the oppressor. I always think it's the vulnerable groups that always suffer, like women and children. I want to thank you for all of your efforts with this important file.

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Next we're going to go to MP Hardcastle.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you very much for your presentation. It was very concise about the plight that we're facing today. I was very intrigued to hear you talk. I would like to hear more about our support or the role that we're playing in advancing the Iraqi government's response, specifically with their judicial system. Can you identify areas where there could be a more supportive role for Canada?

I'll ask you a couple of things, and then you can just talk until my time is up. I think that's one of the best uses of our time in this format.

The other question I wanted to ask was with regard to rolling out humanitarian aid and effort while there are ongoing military campaigns as well. What are some of the challenges with that?

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: Maybe I'll start with your last question, and then I'll move to the first one. On the challenges involved in rolling out our humanitarian assistance, yes, you're correct. Particularly in Syria, I think we're all seeing the problems with respect to access to the most vulnerable people and the people who need assistance. So it's definitely a challenge. This said, some of the assistance is also going to host communities and refugee camps outside of Syria. For Iraq, it's also challenging, although in a different way, because we don't have the same multiplicity of actors as we see in Syria. Efforts at the moment are very much focused on the Mosul campaign because of the number of IDPs expected in the context of that campaign. The latest number I've seen is over 10,000 IDPs, but we expect many more, so our partners are working very hard to provide those vulnerable people with basic services to meet their basic needs. One of the challenges we're facing is also access in a way, because some of the civilians are being used as human shields by Daesh, so that, of course, complicates the matter. Nonetheless some civilians have been able to escape and partners are doing their very best to meet their needs.

I think I have numbers for you. If you give me a moment, I can tell you exactly how much assistance has been provided. In Iraq, we've committed \$150 million at the pledging conference that took place in Washington in July, and of that amount \$63 million has been disbursed so far. In Syria so far, it's \$65.35 million for 2016. The total amount of humanitarian assistance committed for the region is \$840 million, and that's for Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. That's over three years. That gives you an idea of the proportions.

In terms of our work with the Iraqi government to help with their governance, and I think you specified the justice system, those are definitely areas that are being considered in the context of the three-year programming, an amount of which has been set aside specifically for development programming. I am not aware of any specific programming focused on the judicial system, but I believe it's an area that's being considered actively. I can get back to you on this after speaking to my development colleagues. I don't have the answer right away, but it's being considered, that I know.

• (1335)

The Chair: You still have a little more time.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Then I have just one more related question. Any program that we would do for the judicial system would be under the CIJA, or do we have our own or separate initiatives that also impact how they roll out with their judicial system?

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: It would not necessarily be under the CIJA. The work that the CIJA is doing, with our support, is very specific. It's basically collection of evidence. There are trained lawyers or legal experts who are putting together files, with the expectation that those will be used in future prosecutions. Nothing binds us to working exclusively with them on an eventual program that would focus on strengthening the judicial system of Iraq. There are other partners that could be considered.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Thank you.

The Chair: We'll move right along. In the second round of questions, for five minutes, we have MP Miller.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs, Lib.): Thank you both for your testimony.

We have just started a vast study that could be even more vast. Unfortunately, in a humanitarian situation, the right to life is the basic right at stake.

I would like to focus the discussion on the right to practice one's religion and religious freedom. Groups like the Yezidis are more specifically affected by Daesh's genocidal discourse.

To what extent will that discourse influence what is going to happen later, after Daesh is eliminated? Will the situation get worse because of religion and distinctions based on religious practices or because of the fact that people are simply united against Daesh?

I know that that question could take half an hour to answer. Perhaps you could answer concisely by focusing specifically on religious freedom.

• (1340)

Mrs. Giuliana Natale: Thank you very much for your question.

I will start by mentioning that today, October 27, is International Religious Freedom Day. That is very symbolic and relevant for today's discussion.

Yes, actually we can expect consequences and that religious communities will be in danger.

[*English*]

I'm going to switch to English to be able to respond more succinctly.

With this in mind, the office of human rights, freedoms and inclusion is exploring opportunities to support partners who are on the ground and who are working on inclusive projects that will bring together faith communities, faith leaders, and other members, youth for example, to dialogue and work together to address some of the issues that faith communities will be facing on the ground.

These are existential questions for faith communities in this particular region, so Canada is looking to find opportunities to support programming and projects that will bring together these communities in an inclusive dialogue.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: I would like to add one thing.

One of the reasons we are mentioning this is that some reports note the fact that some members of Sunni communities specifically, either out of conviction or because they felt threatened, have sometimes been complicit in some of the abuses that Daesh has committed.

I talked about the situation getting worse. The risk is in putting all members of the same community in the same basket. The same goes for the Shiite militias. We know that Shiite militias have committed some abuses and that there are reports to that effect. The risk is in tarring them all with the same brush because of some specific incidents of abuse.

• (1345)

[*English*]

The Chair: [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

Okay, we're back in action.

MP Genuis, back to you.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): I'm going to talk really fast, because I have a lot to say.

I wanted to start on the specific issue of the *jizya*. This might seem like a technical point, but I think it's really important. Sometimes people say that ISIS charges *jizya* to certain religious minorities. I think it's really important that we not say that, because *jizya* has a specific, historic, theological meaning within Islam. The *jizya* implies that the practice of religion is allowed for those religious minorities and that protection is provided in exchange for a fixed taxation. That is not what Daesh does. Daesh uses the historic claim of *jizya* to undertake extortion against religious minorities, but that extortion is not a fixed tax. It is ongoing extortion, and it does not include protection for the practice of religion. This is really just a way of getting resources as a prelude to subsequent extermination, so to me, it's important that we not unintentionally give Daesh a propaganda benefit.

I'm curious about your comments on that issue, if you have thoughts on it.

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: Thanks. I think it's a useful clarification.

One comment I will make is that these, I don't want to call them taxes now, but this extortion has been a very important source of revenue for Daesh, especially recently, because the coalition has bombed several of the oil fields they were using to have access to resources. So they've been relying a lot on those taxes. With the territorial loss they're suffering now, their resources are seriously curtailed.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you. That's a great point.

They are using this to significant effect in terms of resources, but it's an interesting indication again of the efforts by Daesh to cloak itself in the legitimacy of historic Islamic traditions when they're very clearly violating a lot of those basic tenets.

I want to ask you about the treatment of religious minorities by Iranian-backed militias and the extent to which western forces are co-operating with Iranian-backed militias that are also involved in human rights abuses against minorities.

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: Yes, there have been reports of abuses by some of the militias that are active in Iraq. Most of them operate under the umbrella of popular mobilization forces, but there are also independent militias that operate separately from that group. Such reports came out namely in the context of the liberation of Anbar province, which is predominately Sunni. Of course, the international community, including Canada, has been monitoring very closely and has condemned such violations and has expressed very strong views about not repeating the same mistakes in the context of the Mosul campaign. I don't know if you've listened to recent statements by Prime Minister al-Abadi. He's been very clear that the protection of civilians will be extremely important in the context of the Mosul campaign.

Unfortunately, we're seeing lots of civilian casualties at the hands of Daesh, but if at least Iraqi security forces pay attention to this, I think that's certainly an important goal of ours. You're probably aware that there was a conference on Mosul stabilization and governance in Paris two weeks ago. That was an important element that was stressed by all of the participants, including the Iraqis.

Your other question was in regard to what extent we or the coalition collaborate or work with those militias, correct?

• (1350)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Yes.

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: The answer is quite simple: we don't. We collaborate with the Iraqi government.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Excellent.

I have about 30 seconds left, and I just want to ask about this discussion about the definition of genocide. I know we had a sort of back and forth in the House and questions about it.

Does the department have its own objective definition of genocide which you can then use to advise the minister, that, yes, this is genocide based on the facts, and this isn't, or is it a political decision ultimately whether or not to call a thing genocide?

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: No, the convention on genocide has a definition that is clear, which is the one that we use.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you very much.

The Chair: We're going to move on to MP Tabbara.

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

I thank you both for being here today.

My first question is this. Is Canada engaged in negotiations to prepare for a post-Daesh? For example, if we look at a neighbouring country to the west, Lebanon, we see it has a governmental system where the president is a Maronite Christian, the prime minister is a Sunni Muslim, and then the speaker is a Shia Muslim.

What I'm trying to get at is, if we see a post-Daesh, do we see Canada helping to work to stabilize the region with a stable government? For Lebanon, it's a government that's stable right now, but it's very fragile.

My question is, post-Daesh, is Canada engaging with the international community to have a stable central government?

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: The current government in Iraq started its mandate just before Daesh started to take over some of the territories in the north in spring 2014. It's been, if not stable, remarkably resilient, given the situation it's facing with a financial crisis, a major security crisis, as we know, with an insurgency, and a difficult situation with respect to sectarian tensions. The current government's mandate is normally until 2018, so there will be elections somewhere in that time frame.

In terms of preparing for a more stable government, I think, certainly, we're considering governance programming. I explained a little of what was already happening in terms of support to a decentralization.

You made the comparison with Lebanon, and I think it's important to say that we have something a bit similar in Iraq, where the president traditionally is Kurdish, the prime minister is traditionally Shia, and the speaker of the House is traditionally Sunni, but that does not necessarily foster stability.

• (1355)

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Yes, and that's what I'm trying to say. Can we move away from those distinctions?

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: The answer is not necessarily with us. There will have to be some political reconciliation within the community so that all politicians, especially at the highest levels, represent the whole country and not necessarily just their communities.

I would not say that at the moment the people at the top in the countries are only representing their constituencies, but certainly they're vulnerable to pressure from these communities. What can Canada do? Canada can support with our programming, but at the end of the day, the solution is political, and it will have to be Iraq-led.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: In the meantime, right now, is Canada helping to develop any kinds of safe zones for ethnic minorities?

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: Not at the moment, but we are aware of the statements that were made by Chancellor Merkel to that effect.

The idea of safe zones can take different meanings. I think the way it's understood in the context of Iraq is territory that would be governed where security would be controlled by a specific group. It certainly raises several questions, including duties, and safe zones become more vulnerable to attacks from people who would want to specifically target those communities.

We're reached out, through our embassy in Berlin, to Germany to hear more about their ideas and find out if they have any specific plans on this, but so far we haven't heard anything.

The Chair: We're right on time. That brings us to the end of our time for this afternoon. Once again, I want to thank Ms. Lamoureux and Ms. Natale for coming in and really getting the ball rolling on what's going to be an important and insightful study over the next number of weeks. Thank you to you both.

Ms. Emmanuelle Lamoureux: Thank you.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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