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Chairs

**The Honourable John McKay
Mr. Robert Oliphant**

Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

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• (0845)

[English]

The Co-Chair (Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.)): Ladies and gentlemen, I will call this meeting to order, please.

My name is John McKay. I'm the chair of the public safety committee. Next to me is Rob Oliphant, and he is the chair of the immigration committee. It's an unusual meeting, of two committees meeting together to hear what you have to say.

Formally, I have to open on behalf of the public safety committee, and my friend Rob Oliphant has to open formally on behalf of the immigration committee.

The Co-Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.)): We're now starting a second meeting.

[Translation]

I welcome everyone to the 71st meeting of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

[English]

We welcome all of our witnesses and thank you for coming on relatively short notice to this special meeting.

For the first hour of the meeting, Mr. McKay will be the chair; then we'll turn it over to me. If, however, anything goes on in the meeting that is a procedural issue, if it arises from one of the members of the public safety committee, John McKay will be the chair of that part; and if any procedural issue comes from one of the members of the immigration committee, it will be my responsibility.

We'll go over to John.

The Co-Chair (Hon. John McKay): I'd like to call upon our witnesses to go in whichever order they choose.

We are going to be a bit hawkish about time, because we have two hours, and this is a very important subject. When we signal, then, that time is up, I would appreciate your respecting that.

I also encourage all hon. members who tend to look away from the chair when their time is expiring to pay attention to the signals of the chair.

With that, I will ask whoever is the lead to introduce himself or herself and their fellow witnesses.

Thank you.

Mr. Patrick Tanguy (Assistant Deputy Minister, Government Operations Centre, Emergency Management and Programs Branch, Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness): Thank you, Mr. Chair. My name is Patrick Tanguy. I'm the assistant deputy minister responsible for emergency preparedness and programs at the Department of Public Safety and I'll be the first one to speak.

First of all, I want to give members an overview of the role of the Department of Public Safety.

Public Safety is responsible for providing leadership relating to emergency management in Canada and ensuring a coordinated response to events affecting the national interest, including terrorism and human-induced and natural disasters.

In 2004, following a wide range of emergencies, the Government Operations Centre was created by the Government of Canada in order to provide a centralized, stable, 24-7 facility to coordinate and support a whole-of-government response to these events. As such, the Government Operations Centre is the principal means by which the minister of public safety exercises a leadership role in establishing an integrated federal approach to emergency response, as mandated in the Emergency Management Act.

The mandate of the Government Operations Centre is to support response coordination of events affecting national interests, as I was saying previously. It is—and it's important to focus on this—an interdepartmental, response-focused asset of the Government of Canada, working in support of departments and agencies at the national level.

The Government Operations Centre is charged with the following functions: to provide definitive national-level situation awareness to partners and senior decision-makers; to provide 24-7 watch and early warning for government, and in support of partners' mandates; to ensure a whole-of-government response capability; to ensure the efficient use of Government of Canada strategic assets and, when offered, provincial and territorial assets. This is a key asset for the minister and the deputy minister community to get the mechanisms and advice to support their direction.

During operations, the governance of the Government Operations Centre is in accordance with the federal emergency response plan.

What is the federal emergency response plan? It is the Government of Canada's all-hazards response plan, designed to harmonize federal emergency response efforts with those of provinces, territories, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector. The plan outlines the processes and mechanisms to facilitate an integrated Government of Canada response to an emergency.

• (0850)

[*Translation*]

I will now take a little time to talk about the situation in Lacolle.

In early 2017, there was a notable increase of migrants seeking refuge in Canada through Emerson, Manitoba. That trend did not ease at all during the following summer months and the number of asylum seekers increased significantly, particularly near the border crossing at Saint-Bernard-de-Lacolle, in Quebec

The increase in the number of asylum seekers created significant strain on the resources available to federal authorities, who play a key role in process processing asylum seeker claims, and on provincial authorities, who provide lodging, medical and social services.

Last August 4, the Government Operations Centre activated an event team to ensure the ongoing whole-of-government coordination of the federal response to manage the influx of asylum seekers arriving in the area of Saint-Bernard-de-Lacolle. Subsequently, from August 4th to August 28th, departmental liaison officers and subject matter experts from the Canada Border Services Agency, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada, Public Services and Procurement Canada, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and Shared Services Canada arrived at the Government Operations Centre to identify key requirements for interim lodging, a triage centre and a joint processing centre.

On August 7, the province of Quebec requested federal assistance for temporary shelter for the asylum seekers. That same day, the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness and the Minister of National Defence promptly accepted the Quebec government's request for federal assistance in dealing with the asylum seeker situation.

It is important to recognize that the Government Operations Centre, the GOC, is working closely with all the partners.

I would like to close with a word on the role that the GOC will play in the strategic response plan.

Based on the lessons learned from the events at Lacolle, and in cooperation with the responsible departments and agencies, we are developing contingency plans so that we are able to respond as well as, or better than, we did before, to another influx of asylum seekers.

I will finish there, Mr. Chair,

The Co-Chair (Hon. John McKay) Thank you, Mr. Tanguy.

[*English*]

We have Joanne Crampton from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

Assistant Commissioner Joanne Crampton (Assistant Commissioner, Federal Policing Criminal Operations, Royal Canadian Mounted Police): Good morning, Messrs. Chairs and honourable committee members. Thank you for the invitation to speak to you this morning concerning the RCMP's roles and efforts with regard to the current situation of irregular migration.

Before addressing the specific situation in Quebec, I would like to explain the RCMP's enforcement role and place it in context as part of a larger response, with federal partners, to the influx of asylum seekers we have been experiencing.

The RCMP is responsible for border security and enforcing the laws between the ports of entry. To do so, we employ a layered approach involving the targeted deployment of resources and technology, intelligence and information analysis, and leveraging our domestic and international partnerships.

The RCMP's primary objectives are to prevent, detect, and disrupt cross-border criminality, as well as to respond to other cross-border activities. We meet these objectives by working closely with federal counterparts, such as the Canada Border Services Agency, as well those from the United States, including U.S. Customs and Border Patrol and U.S. Homeland Security Investigations.

In border enforcement, the RCMP is at the front line, and for the most part represents the first point of contact for individuals intercepted between the points of entry who are making a refugee claim. In all cases, the RCMP must put the safety and security of Canada at the forefront while also ensuring the welfare and well-being of those attempting to enter the country.

As we all know, Canada has requirements for entry either through standard immigration processes or for refugee claims. Failure to report upon entry is an offence under section 11 of the Customs Act, and any individual who commits an offence may be arrested and subject to removal, detention, fines, or imprisonment. Individuals intercepted by the RCMP are arrested, after which a risk assessment is conducted, including an interview and background check to determine whether there has been any involvement in illegal activity, such as drug trafficking or possession of contraband, or any connection to organized crime or terrorism.

It should be emphasized that the RCMP does not simply intercept and then turn individuals over to the CBSA. A significant amount of time is taken to confirm identity and assess activities to ensure that there is no threat to Canada or Canadian interests. If threat verification is negative, the claimant is then referred to the CBSA for appropriate processing.

In the last several months, Canada has been experiencing a spike in asylum seekers, particularly in Quebec and to a lesser extent in Manitoba and British Columbia. From January to August of this year, the RCMP intercepted 13,211 people entering irregularly to make a refugee claim. The majority of intercepts—11,896—have occurred in Quebec. In July and August alone, just over 8,500 individuals were intercepted in the Saint-Bernard-de-Lacolle area of the province. To put this into perspective, total RCMP “between ports of entry” intercepts across the country for 2016 were approximately 2,500 people.

As Canada's national police, the RCMP is present across the country, which allows our organization to adjust enforcement efforts and resources relatively quickly. The RCMP has significantly increased the number of resources allocated to border protection. Additional resources are on the ground in Quebec and have been for several months, to provide the required RCMP presence and monitoring, which includes conducting regular patrols along the Quebec-U.S. border.

In particular, resources have been deployed near the area of Roxham Road, as this is the point where most irregular crossings are occurring. Currently, the RCMP maintains a 24-7 presence at this location, with temporary facilities and additional infrastructure that have been set up to facilitate processing of the irregular arrivals, including a satellite detachment in close proximity to CBSA, which allows for promoting efficiencies in overall processes.

As previously stated, our primary goal is to protect the safety of Canadians and the integrity of our border. I am confident in the ability of the RCMP and the partners here today to work together to do so while upholding Canada's long-standing commitment to being a nation that welcomes those in need. Officials are working diligently to ensure that our response is effective as things continue to evolve, and that interdepartmental work that has been undertaken to date is commendable.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

● (0855)

The Co-Chair (Hon. John McKay): Thank you.

Now we have, from Canada Border Services Agency, Jacques Cloutier.

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Cloutier (Acting Vice-President, Operations, Canada Border Services Agency): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

It is a pleasure for me to be here today on behalf of the agency and to have this opportunity to contribute to your joint committee study of arrivals between Canada's ports of entry.

[Translation]

My name is Jacques Cloutier, and I am acting Vice-President of the agency's operations branch.

As members of both committees are aware, the CBSA has a dual mandate to facilitate travel and trade at the border while protecting the safety and security of Canadians.

Together with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, the CBSA administers the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, which governs both the admissibility of people into Canada, and the identification, detention and removal of those deemed to be inadmissible under the act.

[English]

All persons who seek entry to Canada must demonstrate that they meet the requirements to enter and to stay.

Mr. Chair, now I would like to turn the focus of this special joint committee meeting to the arrival of asylum seekers who travel

between designated ports of entry from the United States. In our communications and outreach we continue to emphasize that coming to Canada in this fashion is both a violation of the law and potentially dangerous.

At the same time, in accordance with Canadian values and our humanitarian tradition, individuals who seek asylum in Canada must be treated with compassion and afforded due process under the law.

● (0900)

[Translation]

Rigorous immigration and customs rules must be followed, which the agency continues to apply to protect Canada's border while respecting domestic and international obligations.

Those who enter Canada outside of ports of entry are arrested by the RCMP or local law enforcement, and are brought to CBSA officers at a port of entry for processing.

Asylum seekers undergo a rigorous process to determine whether or not they have a legitimate claim according to Canadian and international law.

Our robust security screening process includes interviews with claimants and the collection of information and biometrics to help us confirm their identity.

[English]

CBSA officers further examine records for any immigration, criminal, or national security concerns against Canadian, international, and other partner databases.

No one leaves the port of entry without completing this initial security screening and in cases of concern, the interviews are treated entirely at the port of entry.

All eligible claimants are assessed by the Immigration and Refugee Board. If the IRB determines that they are not in need of Canada's protection, the CBSA may remove them from Canada. Many federal government departments, along with provincial and local partners, are working together to address the current situation at the Canada-U.S. border.

[Translation]

We are making every effort to ensure that adequate resources are available at key locations to address volumes. We are using all of the technology, intelligence, and partnerships at our disposal to monitor and respond to the demand.

With IRCC, the agency has put in place contingency plans to redeploy staff and expedite intake processing. The agency has deployed resources to the regions of highest activity between ports of entry, such as Saint-Bernard-de-Lacolle.

To effectively manage the volume of arrivals, asylum claimants who have cleared security and health-related checks are moved inland, where IRCC and CBSA officers continue the process to determine their eligibility to claim asylum.

[English]

Given the influx of asylum claimants, we have increased our capacity on several fronts in Montreal. We have more than tripled our daily processing output.

To conclude, Mr. Chair, as key partners in the admissibility continuum, we continue in close collaboration with our partners to give this situation all the attention it deserves.

Merci.

The Co-Chair (Hon. John McKay): Thank you, Mr. Cloutier.

Finally, from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, Michael MacDonald, Paul MacKinnon, and Louis Dumas.

Mr. Michael MacDonald (Director General, Operations Sector, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Good morning. I'd like to thank the committee chairs for inviting us to speak today, and Chairs, noting the time, I will be brief.

[Translation]

My remarks today will focus on Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada's operational efforts in response to the asylum seekers arriving in Quebec this past summer.

[English]

For claimants who enter between ports of entry, IRCC's role is to assist the CBSA in the eligibility determination process after individuals crossing the border have been intercepted by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

[Translation]

Eligible claims are then referred to the independent, quasi-judicial Immigration and Refugee Board, the IRB, who hear the asylum claim.

[English]

Last spring, when we began seeing an increase in the number of intercepts and refugee claimants, IRCC and the CBSA began to reassign staff and expedite processing to alleviate backlogs in determining asylum claimants' eligibility to be referred for a hearing to the Immigration and Refugee Board.

In our department, IRCC, we increased our capacity in the following ways. We opened a new floor and reception room at our Peel Street joint processing centre in downtown Montreal, allowing us to process more than triple the output of claimants every day. IRCC also set up operations at a temporary processing centre at Complexe Guy-Favreau in downtown Montreal, and we have expanded this facility to include a dedicated service counter to help those who have already completed their application forms to come in and reschedule their interviews with IRCC for an earlier date. Thus far, more than 2,400 asylum seekers have used this dedicated service counter, and we launched it on September 5.

● (0905)

[Translation]

Through these measures, we are working to reduce the wait times for eligibility interviews from a few months to a few weeks, after which eligible claims are referred to the IRB.

[English]

This timely scheduling of eligibility interviews is crucial because in order to apply for an open work permit, an asylum seeker must first have their initial eligibility interview, have their claim referred to the IRB, and undergo an immigration medical examination.

To also help ease pressures, IRCC has begun to fast-track all work permit applications across Canada from asylum claimants with a commitment to process these within 30 days. In most cases, asylum claimants become eligible for interim federal health program, IFHP, coverage only after an officer has determined that their claim is eligible to be heard before the IRB. IFHP coverage is now available to asylum seekers who enter Canada between ports of entry in Lacolle, and are being processed on or after June 1, for those who have not yet had an eligibility interview.

To date, more than 5,600 persons have been issued this interim federal health program coverage under this special provision.

In closing, Chairs, IRCC, with the CBSA and all other partners in the federal family, continue to address irregular migration in accordance with Canadian and international law and in keeping with our values of an open and welcoming country.

[Translation]

Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to speak with you today.

[English]

The Co-Chair (Hon. John McKay) On behalf of the committee, I'd like to thank each of you for your testimony but also for your respect for the time limitations. I'm rather hoping that members will have similar respect for time limitations.

There is a parallel process. The immigration committee and the public safety committee have exactly the same processes, and so the first seven-minute rounds will go Liberal, Conservative, NDP, Liberal; and then the five-minute rounds, Conservative, Liberal, Conservative, Liberal, NDP.

I'm going to call on Madame Zahid for the first Liberal seven-minute round.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Thanks to all the witnesses for coming and providing information on this important issue.

My first question is about the border between Canada and the United States. It's nearly 9,000 kilometres long. It includes lakes, mountains, farmers' fields, and even towns. Is there any realistic action that could be taken that would prevent irregular border crossing?

The Co-Chair (Hon. John McKay) Did you direct that to the RCMP?

Mrs. Salma Zahid: I think it would be for the RCMP, because you control....

A/Commr Joanne Crampton: In terms of investigations, and in terms of border security, we already use a lot of different techniques and deploy a lot of people to work on the border itself. A lot of those techniques are privileged information so I wouldn't be able to speak to them, obviously, for investigative and security reasons, but we do carry out security all along the border, whether on lakes or on land.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: So we should be assured that proper measures are being taken?

A/Commr Joanne Crampton: Absolutely.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: My next question would be for the IRCC.

Is there any evidence that asylum seekers are not getting a fair and impartial hearing in the United States, or that any of the terms of the safe third country agreement have been breached?

•(0910)

Mr. Paul MacKinnon (Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic and Program Policy, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): I can respond to that, Mr. Chair.

It's our view that the U.S. refugee determination system is fair and credible, and there is nothing happening with the U.S. refugee determination system that would cause us to be concerned about the safe third country agreement as it now stands.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Are all the conditions for the safe third country agreement being met?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: Indeed, yes.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Has there been some assessment done on that case?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: Yes, we do a review of the situation in the U.S. on a regular basis. We look at their refugee determination system, and we look at their policies around immigration broadly. We did one just a few months ago, even after the executive orders came out, and we maintain that their system is fair and does not affect the safe third country agreement as it now stands.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: My next question is also for the IRCC. Could you please outline the responsibilities that Canada has under the United Nations 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, as well as under Canadian law, when a person within Canada's borders makes an asylum claim?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: Generally, Mr. Chair, we have to respond to the convention and ensure that folks are not being returned to mistreatment or torture. We look in great detail at the conditions that they are claiming exist in their home country. The IRB, as an independent body, will ensure that this person is not going back to any type of persecution, whether that be torture or mistreatment.

I would provide that as a general response, Mr. Chair. We can certainly give you the exact details and share that with the committee.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Can that information be provided to us?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: Certainly. We can provide that later today.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you.

To the CBSA, could you provide some more insight into what background and security checks are performed on irregular crossers making an asylum claim, before they are released? Is there any evidence that these irregular crossers, if not intercepted at the border, are not reporting to authorities to make an asylum claim?

Mr. Jacques Cloutier: I will defer to my colleague from the RCMP to begin, and I will complete the answer afterwards.

A/Commr Joanne Crampton: In terms of someone crossing the border between the ports of entry, the RCMP would intercept the person or persons. We then advise them that they are breaking the law under the Customs Act by crossing the border between ports of entry. The persons are then detained. Their possessions are searched to ensure there is no contraband or other illegal items. Their person is searched, because they are under arrest under the Customs Act. We then verify their identification. We do background checks and local indices checks, as well as international indices checks. If there is no noted criminality or concerns for national security and, once we have interviewed them and had a lengthy discussion as to where they came from and what their intentions are, if nothing negative comes as a result of that, we pass the individual over to Canada Border Services for further processing.

Mr. Jacques Cloutier: At this point, for the CBSA, we receive the individual from the RCMP, as well as the information collected by the RCMP. We proceed with fingerprinting, taking of biometric information, and a cursory interview to elicit additional information. We verify identity. In those cases where we are satisfied that there are no immigration-related issues from an admissibility perspective, these individuals would be released on the terms and conditions and given an appointment to complete their eligibility interview. In cases where issues are discovered, several actions are taken immediately, including completing the interview for eligibility in its entirety, or proceeding with detention if the person is deemed to pose a risk to the public.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: My last question is for the IRCC officials. I understand that a lot of misunderstandings and bad information are circulating in the Haitian and Hispanic communities, among others, which has fuelled the irregular crossings by leading to the false impression of an easy asylum claim in Canada. Could you provide some detail on what is being done to get better information to these communities specifically?

●(0915)

The Co-Chair (Hon. John McKay): Regrettably, you have only about 20 seconds to do that. Perhaps you could answer very briefly, and then maybe work it into some other response. Thank you.

Mr. Louis Dumas (Director General, Domestic Network, Operations, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): A number of outreach activities have taken place in both the United States and Canada. Currently in Montreal we are reaching out, especially to the Haitian community, through a variety of different channels, including social media. We're reaching out to refugee organizations and to the regular media.

So things are well under way. We're passing on the message that individuals should come to our dedicated service counter at Guy-Favreau to avail themselves of the possibility of doing their eligibility process.

The Co-Chair (Hon. John McKay): Thank you, Ms. Zahid and Mr. Dumas.

Ms. Rempel.

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

Since the beginning of 2017, what percentage of asylum claims made by people illegally crossing the border between Canada and the U.S. has been processed?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: I don't have the exact percentage for the entire year being processed. It often is moving with the volumes that are coming through.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I am going to interrupt, just because of time. Can you please table that number with the committee? Can you also please table the percentage of claims that have been rejected? Thank you.

Similarly, can you please table with committee the following information? With respect to border crossings occurring at unofficial points of entry since the beginning of 2017, can you please provide a full breakdown of costs associated with asylum claims made by people illegally crossing the border; for winterized trailers installed at the U.S.-Canada border; perimeter fencing and lighting for winterized trailers; the use of Montreal's Olympic Stadium to house border crossers; the tent village built to house asylum seekers along the Canada-U.S. border; any other temporary accommodations used to house asylum seekers crossing the border; any other costs associated with housing and supporting asylum seekers, including food; any relevant transfers made to provincial governments related to the increase in asylum seekers crossing the border; any relevant transfers to municipal governments related to the increase in asylum seekers crossing the border; any transportation provided to asylum seekers crossing the U.S.-Canada border; all costs associated with opening and operating the new floor and reception room at the Peel Street joint processing centre that you alluded to; the number of staff reallocated to the Peel Street processing centre; the streams of processing that those staff have been reallocated from; and similar information for the processing facility that has been opened at Complexe Guy-Favreau?

Can that be tabled with the committee?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: Yes, it will be.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you. When?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: I'd have to look to the department. That's a lot of data, but we will do our best to do that as fast as possible.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

An IRCC official stated: "We are taking a number of pro-active measures—both in Canada and abroad—to counter misinformation that has been circulating and ensure that everyone is aware of the facts about Canada's asylum system." This was IRCC spokesperson Hursh Jaswal.

Does a formal plan exist? Is there a formal departmental plan that has been written to communicate this information?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: There is. We have a communications and outreach plan—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Can you please table that with the committee?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: —that we are following.

I will take that back; yes.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

Earlier this week there was a CBC article stating that Nigerian asylum claims were wanting to come to Canada because they're aware of the "pipeline". What additional measures is IRCC taking to outreach into the broader international community that the asylum claim system is not a, quote, "free ticket" to Canada?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: We did several things. The first was to look at our communications and outreach plan and determine the best way to reach the Nigerian diaspora population here as well as in the United States as well back in Nigeria itself.

Second, we are also liaising and working with our American colleagues. We have a mission overseas, as do other allied partners, so we've also gone back to our immigration program overseas to try to look for ways and ideas to reach populations

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

Over to Mr. Maguire.

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

I have a couple of quick questions. Just because of the time frame here, perhaps I'll get you to table some of these answers as well.

What's the average full cost per failed asylum claimant to the Government of Canada? I don't know if you can provide that off the top right now.

Mr. Michael MacDonald: It varies with the individual case, but overall, as a general estimate, one can look at anywhere from \$15,000 to \$20,000. I think we'll give you a more precise response, but it very much does vary.

●(0920)

Mr. Larry Maguire: I'd appreciate that response.

What are the social service costs being borne by provinces while asylum claimants await the IRB hearings?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: On average, the number I gave you includes the social cost to the provinces and territories.

Mr. Larry Maguire: If you could include that in your answer, that would be great. Thanks.

I know there was some reference to the specific medical. What are the specific medical, background, and security checks claimants go through before they're referred to the IRB, how many people have been allowed to move forward, and how many have been denied following those initial checks? Could you include that in it as well, please?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: Just for precision, Mr. Chair, do you mean in the medical sphere or do you mean in other inadmissibilities around criminality and/or any other ineligibility? It's just for precision, that's all.

Mr. Larry Maguire: In all of those, please.

The Co-Chair (Hon. John McKay): Mr. Maguire, are you directing that question to IRB or are you directing it to border services?

Mr. Larry Maguire: Both, I guess, if we could get an answer on that, but IRB for sure in that area and anything that might be there as well. I'm just wondering how many people have been allowed to move forward and how many have been denied following those initial checks from border services as well.

Mr. Michael MacDonald: Sorry to interrupt. I could briefly answer that now. Overall, in terms of the Lacolle movement itself and in terms of the Haitian movement, the vast majority of individuals are being determined eligible to move forward to the IRB. It is a very significant number.

The IRB's decision is a different situation, but overall, the movement in Lacolle is proceeding through eligibility, admissibility, health checks, and so on.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Earlier, the Prime Minister made a tweet, "Regardless of who you are or where you come from, there's always a place for you in Canada." I'm wondering how many individuals seeking refugee status have specifically mentioned that tweet of the Prime Minister as they sought refuge in Canada.

Mr. Michael MacDonald: That is not a specific question we asked during the admissibility eligibility determination process.

Mr. Larry Maguire: I know that. I'm just asking how many of them have offered that type of an answer or that response because we know there have been some in Manitoba.

I just wanted to say that we know and understand at least that the CBSA didn't meet the targets for removing failed refugee claimants from Canada. I believe the target was to remove 80% of them within one year and only 47% of them were removed. The other 53% who are still in Canada—

The Co-Chair (Hon. John McKay): Thank you, Mr. Maguire.

Go ahead, Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of the witnesses for their presentation.

This has been a long time coming. I've been trying to get a study with respect to irregular crossings for almost a year now and it has been shut down four times by the government members, so this is a really good beginning of a new session and with a new chair.

In this regard, I am particularly interested in actually getting the sense of—this is to the IRCC—how many cases have been accepted through the IRB? Do you know how many cases have been processed and accepted from the IRB with these asylum seekers?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: That's a complex and multi-layered response because asylum seeking goes on all during the year. We just saw the real peak over this year.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Let me be very specific then, regarding the very peak that we're talking about and this particular subset of asylum seekers.

Mr. Michael MacDonald: In terms of the greatest peak this year, which was in the month of August, those claims are being worked through, but the IRB has yet to hear them. They're being scheduled now. In addition, the IRB does have its dedicated task force, which is existing to look specifically at this issue over a three-month period.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'm interested in the comment about the United States that everything is good on the safe third country agreement piece, yet we do know, for example, that Mr. Seidu Mohammed, who crossed over there in the dead of winter, and lost digits as a result of it. His claim was rejected in the United States, and yet when he came to Canada, his claim was accepted. This is an outed LGBTQ man from Ghana.

Amnesty International also did a study, if you will, though informal, and the people they interviewed indicated that they don't feel safe in the United States. That's why they are crossing over. There seems to be some discrepancy in terms of the reality, at least from the IRCC's perspective and the government's perspective, versus what people are experiencing on the ground, which I think is very important to note.

There was a large influx in the last year, I would say, and yes it peaked in the summer for Quebec. It peaked in Manitoba in the winter, so there are different periods of time when it peaked.

Do I understand correctly that these cases have been referred to the IRB, and that the vast majority of them have not been heard? What are the wait times for people waiting for their cases to be heard? How does that compare with previous times? In the meantime, in terms of the resources for these individuals, who is providing resources to house them? Is it the province, and has the government provided additional resources to the province to support these asylum seekers? Regarding the NGOs that are on the ground doing this work, are they provided with additional resources as well, and if so, how much?

• (0925)

Mr. Michael MacDonald: Thank you, Chair. There are a lot of parts to that. I'll generally answer as quickly as I can, Ms. Kwan.

In terms of the IRB, I understand that next week—next Tuesday I believe—the IRB is appearing with IRCC officials so that we can get more clarity on how the IRB is scheduling. The IRB is coming up with some innovative ways to work through this massive movement that they now have before them.

In terms of the stats on the IRB decisions coming out, particularly on the Haitian population for 2017, I'll let the IRB speak to that. In terms of the housing, indeed, the provinces are the ones that have carriage of helping asylum seekers until they become permanent residents, post-IRB hearing—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: If I may interrupt, I'll ask if you can share this information with the committee then. Has the federal government provided any additional resources to provinces with these asylum seekers, not just for the housing component but also to support the asylum seekers as they wait for their claims to be processed?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: The federal government does not provide direct support to provinces for asylum seekers awaiting their claims. The support comes at the permanent resident granting determination process, afterwards. That being said, we have taken various measures to help the provinces and to help asylum seekers by expediting across Canada all work permit applications and trying to—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: If I may interrupt then, how many work permit applications have been processed and approved?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: About six or seven weeks ago, we had over 6,000 work permit applications for all asylum seekers across Canada in our inventory. That is now almost eliminated, and we are processing in under 30 days any new asylum seeker's work permit that is coming in from across Canada. We are doing those in well under 30 days. The idea is to help people get into the work force quicker.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Back to the resources and the provinces, the federal government is not providing any resources to the provincial governments to manage the situation. NGOs are not getting a dime from the federal government to deal with the situation on the ground. I know that in British Columbia, for example, one NGO is actually about to close their doors. They've had to turn asylum seekers away because they have no resources. People who are coming over are now rendered homeless and in shelters, and the federal government knows this.

Has the federal government taken any action with respect to that in supporting the provinces in dealing with the situation? This is most notable in B.C., but B.C. is not alone. In Manitoba, for example, the NGOs that stepped up to deal with this situation are still out of pocket, due to the lack of resources from any level of government with respect to that.

Has the federal government done any work with respect to that?

The Co-Chair (Hon. John McKay): You have about 30 seconds to answer that question.

Mr. Michael MacDonald: I'll be very brief.

The assistance that the federal government does give to the provinces and territories to help for this population, specifically around the asylum, is part of the overall social transfers that go through any of the housing strategies—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: So there are no additional dollars.

Mr. Michael MacDonald: No additional dollars. The dollars are with the existing programs.

The Co-Chair (Hon. John McKay): Thank you.

Monsieur Dubourg.

● (0930)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

My thanks to the witnesses for their presentations. I would like to direct my first question to Ms. Crampton.

The United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment indicates that states shall not expel persons who, after a case by case assessment, are in danger of being put to death or tortured in their countries of origin. In your opinion, has Canada honoured this convention, meaning that we have not sent people in that situation back to their own countries?

[*English*]

A/Commr Joanne Crampton: In terms of the RCMP's role when people are crossing between borders, as I mentioned, our responsibility is to assess to make sure of their background. We're looking for any links to possible terrorism, bringing in contraband, or anything in terms of illegal activity. That's our role in terms of assessing the people. We do so through background checks, through searches of their person, and through interviews.

From there we would then pass it to CBSA to make a determination with their process.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Okay, thank you. That means that there is an agreement.

Still on the RCMP, could you tell me if you implemented any special measures on our borders last summer when the asylum seekers arrived? If not, was the situation the same as always?

[*English*]

A/Commr Joanne Crampton: No. We have put in a special process. We have a satellite detachment in close proximity to CBSA that facilitates our joint partnership. We also have a temporary processing centre, of sorts, at Roxham Road, which is where the majority of people are crossing at this time. We have set up special facilities there in order to accommodate the people coming through and our employees who are working there so that they're working in a safe environment.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Thank you.

On the subject of a safe environment, you are responsible for protecting Canadians, as are we. Have you seen specific cases on the border where criminality was involved? Can you tell us, of the 13,000 asylum seekers who have arrived, how many have been suspected of criminality?

[English]

A/Commr Joanne Crampton: It's exceptionally low in terms of what we have seen for criminality. Any sort of criminality we find that requires further investigation we pass on to the police of jurisdiction, depending on the province where the people are coming through. From there, they will be processed through the regular criminal process by the police of jurisdiction, and they would determine whether charges would be laid or further investigation would be warranted.

In terms of Quebec in particular, there has been a very low percentage of people who have been involved in criminality.

[Translation]

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, my next questions go to the officials from the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship.

You know that this massive influx, so to speak, really started in July and there was also a spike in August, when we were almost talking of hundreds of people arriving each day. You are aware that government sent members of Parliament, including myself, to go and meet the Haitian community, because false information was circulating to the effect that Canada was open and welcoming Haitians. After that, my colleague Pablo Rodriguez, who is Argentinian by origin and who speaks Spanish, also went to Los Angeles. Can you tell us what impact those two missions had on the border and on immigration?

Mr. Louis Dumas: Thank you for that extremely important question.

I believe that those efforts bore fruit, both in the United States as well in communities in Canada. It was important for people to have accurate information, that coming to Canada irregularly at ports of entry is not a ticket to permanent residence. There is a process to be followed, a process to determine refugee status that is set in motion at the IRB. It is very important for people to understand that process. I believe the efforts that were made greatly assisted us and I thank those who contributed to those efforts.

● (0935)

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Thank you.

You also know that an interdepartmental and intergovernmental committee exists, that includes Ontario and Quebec.

How does the existence of this ad hoc committee support the efforts to stop the massive influx of asylum seekers?

[English]

Mr. Michael MacDonald: As with any interdepartmental task force, the whole concept of ensuring that we are working together, that our plans are well known and well devised, and that we respect each other's individual operational needs, individual communication needs, policy needs, housing needs, and social needs, are discussed

by this body. It's about alignment, and it's about making sure we can proceed as fast as we can with our operational plans. It's also about communication to Canadians. It's also about all levels of government working toward this issue and helping Canada respond.

[Translation]

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: I have one last question, because my time is running out.

The Co-Chair (Hon. John McKay): You have less than 30 seconds left.

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Thank you.

A number of businesses and communities want to welcome asylum seekers because they have labour problems.

What measures has IRCC taken to make it easy for these people to enter the labour market?

[English]

The Co-Chair (Hon. John McKay): You have 15 seconds.

Mr. Michael MacDonald: The key to this from our perspective is allowing all asylum claimants to get their work permit faster and be able to enter the workforce if they have to.

At the same time, we work with community organizations as part of our regular outreach, and we do that across Canada so partnerships and getting that work permit is the key.

The Co-Chair (Hon. John McKay): Thank you.

Mr. Motz.

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Thank you to the witnesses for coming today.

I will be asking a lot of questions specific to the RCMP and CBSA only. Don't be offended if I interrupt you. I have a lot of questions I want to get through.

Do either of your agencies have a detailed accounting of the actual number of resources deployed and all the costs related to the reallocation of those resources to deal with the large number of illegal border crossers including the per diems, travel, accommodation, and staffing costs including overtime?

Mr. Jacques Cloutier: These figures are being vetted at the moment, and we intend to release them as soon as we have the degree of comfort that allows us to do it.

Mr. Glen Motz: Okay. And the same with the RCMP?

A/Commr Joanne Crampton: The same. Yes. We're looking at incremental costs and tracking those incremental costs.

Mr. Glen Motz: Can you please provide those to both committees at your earliest convenience?

Recently, articles have indicated that multiple border crossers have been in possession of, for example, child pornography when they cross the border. That was reported on "Global News", and I understand there were no national guidelines in place prior to these occurrences.

Is that accurate?

A/Commr Joanne Crampton: The Criminal Code would apply to someone crossing with child pornography, and we would look at the policing jurisdiction to investigate such an occurrence. Those occurrences have been very low.

Mr. Glen Motz: I appreciate that, but there were no national guidelines to deal with those occurrences with respect to the illegal border crossers.

Is that correct?

A/Commr Joanne Crampton: The Criminal Code would apply, so yes, there are.

Mr. Glen Motz: Okay, and now you have those guidelines in place, and you're following them.

Is there any other contraband or areas of criminality where national guidelines are in place or need to be in place?

A/Commr Joanne Crampton: Everything that we would look at falls under the Criminal Code. Possession of child pornography would fall under the Criminal Code so we would process that as we would anyone else in Canada in possession of child pornography, or any other contraband, or anything that would fall under the Criminal Code itself.

Mr. Glen Motz: If you have those guidelines, can you please provide them to both committees?

A/Commr Joanne Crampton: Certainly.

Mr. Glen Motz: I understand that resources have been reallocated from across the country to deal with illegal border crossers, and I understand that these reallocations are having negative impacts in some circumstances on the communities policed by the RCMP, and resources are being depleted at some border crossings across the country.

I have a two-part question. Do either of your agencies have an accounting of the service reductions and impacts these reallocations are having? If you do, great. Can you provide them in writing to the committee? If you don't, can you give us a timeline for when those impacts can be provided to us?

The second part of the question is, have your enforcement capabilities and the community expectations for policing been reduced for deportation hearings with inland enforcement officers at official ports of entry, such that it strains current resources or limits their normal enforcement duties and roles?

• (0940)

Mr. Jacques Cloutier: On this point, Mr. Chair, it's been the practice of the CBSA to respond by deploying resources in a way that does not jeopardize the operations across the country. Our approach has been measured, and it's been responsible. You will note that generally speaking, there have been very few issues at any of our ports with respect to border wait time, and that's because of the approach we've taken, being measured in the deployment of our resources to respond as required. I do not believe there have been issues such as the ones you've highlighted.

A/Commr Joanne Crampton: The RCMP has reallocated federal resources from across Canada as we would for any significant event, and this does not impact front-line policing

because these are dedicated federal resources, and we already have several dedicated to border.

Mr. Glen Motz: Okay. I have time for one more question.

As we know that CBSA handles the screening, evaluation, and deportation of illegal border crossers, I understand also that many times when it has been determined that a person is to be deported, you're either going to detain them in custody or they're free. Once a hearing has ordered them to be deported, how long until they're removed from the country? What's the average cost for an immigrant to be detained? What's the average cost for someone to be removed from the country to their country of origin?

If you don't have that data with you, can you please provide them to both committees in writing?

Mr. Jacques Cloutier: We'll certainly provide the information. But I think it's important to know in the very general sense that removals are prioritized depending on issues related to—

Mr. Glen Motz: I'm just going to interrupt you for one last one. Approximately how many illegal border crossers are currently deported?

The Co-Chair (Hon. John McKay): I appreciate your effort to extend your time, Mr. Motz, but it's not going to work.

Some combination of Mr. Tabbara and Mr. Fragiskatos. Whoever is lead.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Thank you from the committee for being here.

There's a notion, a myth, that asylum seekers entering Canada from the United States are taking away spots from other refugee claimants. I've heard this is a separate channel. Can you please describe that and clarify that for the committee?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: Yes. This is the myth, and we've been dealing with that on an educational level. Different kinds of refugees come to Canada or persons who would eventually be protected persons or asylum seekers. Those we select overseas and bring to Canada are on a completely different stream and a completely different processing way. Asylum seeking has always existed. We have systems set up to do this separate kind of stream. The two do not commingle. From a processing perspective, spots are not taken from each other.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Can you provide the committee with previous numbers of asylum seekers? Can you go from 2005 until now because I think some people are not understanding that maybe in one month you might have seen a high number, but if you take a whole year, you might see a larger number, which we may have had in 2007, 2008, or 2009, etc. If you could provide that to the committee, that would be beneficial.

Mr. Michael MacDonald: Chair, I can provide that right now, if you'd like.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Okay, that's excellent.

Mr. Michael MacDonald: I'll read off the numbers very fast.

Overall, the point is this. Asylum seeking in Canada has its natural ebbs and flows, even through the year. It is tied to things like visa regimes, and when we don't have visa regimes, it's tied to world movements, natural disasters, wars, civil conflict. So there are a lot of push and pull factors. That said, in 2004, for example, there were just over 25,000 asylum seekers. When we jump to 2007 that number goes up to 28,000. In 2009, you see it going up to 33,000, however in 2010, it drops down to 23,000. In 2011, we see a spike back up to 25,000.

What's interesting though is in 2012, we see 20,500 and a few, but then in 2013, that goes down to 10,400. We then see that climbing to 16,000 in 2015. What's key for us is in 2016, last year, 23,915 asylum seekers came to Canada. That number obviously is very different thus far this year. We are looking at just over 32,000 asylum seekers. In other words, this represents a fairly significant increase over last year's numbers. Where 2018 goes, again, you can see the historical comparisons. It's very hard to predict what happens, and the world stage has a real impact on that.

● (0945)

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Thank you very much.

I'll be sharing the rest of my time with Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): You cited numbers, and thank you for doing that. A recent study was put forward by the University of Calgary's School of Public Policy that said that, based on estimates they've put together from the Department of Immigration, by the end of the year, 36,000 people will have sought asylum in Canada. Then they compare that to previous years. It's quite interesting because I think it's important to put things in context. None of you have a political role, and this might come as a huge surprise, but politicians sometimes take advantage of things for political gain and ignore the context.

Let's put things in context. According to this study, 38,000 people sought asylum in Canada in 2000; 45,000 sought asylum in 2001; 37,000 sought asylum in 2008. While the numbers are quite high this year at around 36,000, we've dealt with these challenges before. Obviously, the sky has not fallen, if I can put it that way.

Could you speak to this? I think there's a sense in the country right now that this is a unique crisis, but obviously it is not a unique crisis, we've met these challenges before.

The Co-Chair (Hon. John McKay): Unfortunately, Mr. MacDonald, Mr. Fragiskatos has used all but 10 seconds of your time. If you have a 10-second answer...

Mr. Michael MacDonald: I think you raise an excellent point about the migration of people. We also have to remember that the Canadian border is extremely long. Asylum seekers move through natural corridors; there are about four natural corridors across Canada. What is different about this year compared to other years, and this is the anomaly, is a large number of people using one specific corridor though Lacolle, Quebec. Otherwise, the migration patterns, as well as the nationalities are very much aligned with the historical trends.

The Co-Chair (Hon. John McKay): Thank you, Mr. MacDonald.

Mr. Bernier.

[Translation]

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Beauce, CPC): Thank you very much.

I am pleased to be with you today.

I have some questions about the situation on the border, particularly in Quebec. We know that the situation will be quite expensive for the Government of Quebec in terms of social costs. The Government of Quebec has already begun to issue cheques to these illegal immigrants. Could you tell me if you are aware of an agreement signed between Quebec and Canada to reimburse the expenses that Quebec is going to have to incur as a result of this crisis?

[English]

Mr. Michael MacDonald: At this stage, I'm not aware of any such agreement.

[Translation]

Hon. Maxime Bernier: Okay.

We know that people are crossing the border principally at Saint-Bernard-de-Lacolle. That is the main place. Have you considered making Saint-Bernard-de-Lacolle an official port of entry because that is where people are mostly showing up?

Mr. Jacques Cloutier: Thank you for the question.

A number of considerations are currently under study. We have various proposals to respond to the situation, including the one you mentioned, Mr. Bernier. They are currently being discussed, but there is no official position on the matter.

Hon. Maxime Bernier: In other words, the Government of Canada could slow the flow of irregular or illegal immigrants—depending on how you see the situation—by creating an official port of entry where people are crossing the border. That solution could be adopted if the government so decided. When could we be ready to put that solution into effect? Is it a matter of months or weeks?

● (0950)

Mr. Jacques Cloutier: Once again, this is one scenario that is being studied and that we are continuing to work on. I am not able to answer a question that remains hypothetical at the moment, a question that is under consideration, other than by saying that, operationally, a number of issues have to be weighed, validated and checked. That analysis is currently under way.

Hon. Maxime Bernier: Okay.

Are we ready to deal with a second wave of irregular or illegal immigration? Have contingency measures already been taken in the wake of what has happened in the past? We can expect another wave of immigrants of different nationalities in the future. Are we ready for it?

Mr. Jacques Cloutier: We have already been working on contingency plans for several months, not only to deal with the situation like the one last summer, but also to prepare for the future, in the event of additional movements in other places in the country. That is what we are doing in collaboration with our colleagues at the Government Operations Centre.

Hon. Maxime Bernier: Can you give us a little more detail on those contingency plans that you are studying, including the one we discussed earlier about an official port of entry at Saint-Bernard-de-Lacolle? What other contingency plans are you considering?

Mr. Jacques Cloutier: Again, as to the possibility of an official port of entry at Saint-Bernard-de-Lacolle—we are talking about Roxham Road—the question is being studied. I am looking at it from an operational perspective. Those are the considerations that interest me.

As for the contingency plans, once again, we have to consider our ability to set up, elsewhere in the country, a situation similar to the one that we have put in place at the port of entry at Saint-Bernard-de-Lacolle, and, in collaboration with our colleagues at IRCC and the RCMP, to be able to respond to those situations to the best of our abilities.

Hon. Maxime Bernier: Great. Thank you.

I would like to bring up the matter of analyzing criminal records of the people coming into the country. Earlier, we said that we look into the criminal records when it is possible, because we are noticing that people are leaving their identification papers or their passports behind in the United States. When you conducted that check in the past year, what percentage of the people actually had a criminal record?

[English]

A/Commr Joanne Crampton: I'm sorry, I don't have that exact number with me. I would be able to provide it.

Hon. Maxime Bernier: Yes, perfect.

Also, how many people did you ask to leave the country because they had a background of judicial proceedings for behaviour that is against our law in Canada? Can you give us the data on that?

The Co-Chair (Hon. John McKay): Ms. Crampton, there remain 15 seconds or less. Thank you.

A/Commr Joanne Crampton: In terms of the RCMP's role, we're simply looking at threats to Canada, threats to security, so our role is very different. CBSA would be more engaged in that area.

The Co-Chair (Hon. John McKay): Thank you.

[Translation]

Hon. Maxime Bernier: We would like to receive that information. Thank you.

[English]

The Co-Chair (Hon. John McKay): Mr. Spengemann.

Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Thank you, all six of you, for being here today. Thank you for your service and your important work.

This is a joint session that reflects the increasing complexity of the work that faces parliamentarians. I'd like to thank our two chairs for the leadership it took to make this meeting happen.

I'd like to focus my questions on the human elements of the situation we're facing—the qualitative side—from the perspective of the claimants but also of the women and men who do the law enforcement and immigration analysis work.

I'd like to start with a question on the running of security checks. My colleague Ms. Zahid alluded to it earlier.

Canadians want to be sure that they are safe. When you face applicants who have potentially no background documentation, and face claimants from jurisdictions that may not co-operate with requests for security background checks in their jurisdiction, how can we be sure that the people who are being admitted to Canada have actually gone through a background check that is as close to perfect as we can get it?

Mr. Jacques Cloutier: On this very point, I think it's important to note that as we conduct our verification at the port of entry through biometric record checks, if there are concerns around the identity of the individual who presents, that person will likely be detained until that ambiguity can be resolved. In the process of reviewing the claim as such, it is suspended until we're satisfied that we know who the person is and what the history of that person is.

• (0955)

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Okay.

Now let me ask, from the perspective of a constituency politician who often gets inquiries on immigration cases—when it comes to security background checks in particular—is it fair to say, then, that this is one of the most labour-intensive aspects of the department's work and also potentially one of the most time-consuming and lengthy?

Mr. Jacques Cloutier: It's a lengthy process, in that it's one that we do in a very regular manner; it's labour-intensive in that our preoccupation is to ensure the safety of Canadians as we go through the process. It's one, however, that we do on a daily basis. It's more obvious now because of the situation that evolved over the summer, but these types of verification happen on a daily basis at all of our ports of entry. It's very much part and parcel of what we do. It's what I was referring to earlier when I talked about our dual mandate: facilitation, but also ensuring the protection of Canadians.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Thank you very much.

I'd like to ask you about your perception of the stories that are coming our way. I realize that you are not on the front lines, but from what you've heard working with colleagues, what is the story of this particular group of applicants who have come through our borders in the past months? What kind of narratives are there, what kinds of challenges, just to make it real for the Canadian public about who is coming our way here?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: I'll answer that question, Chair.

In response to an earlier question, I can say that, as part of the eligibility determination process at IRCC, we have had some very limited conversations with people, asking them some very basic questions about why, what they were thinking, how they ended up here, and so on.

Again, overall, you are talking about over 32,000 asylum claimants. Getting a general sense is difficult. However, what we have learned from the interviews of admissibility, eligibility, and then some of the questions we've asked—plus the outreach, the conversations that have gone on in the United States and elsewhere—is that a variety of factors are pushing people north. I'll be quite honest. Social media is a very significant factor in how people are making what looks to be a very quick decision in their life overall. It's not any one particular reason why people are moving. Some people are very much fearing persecution for themselves from their government. Others are just following a trend on social media.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Very briefly, because time is limited, what are the gender-specific aspects of your work? Are there gender components, both on the law enforcement and on the immigration side?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: Maybe I'll just go with the immigration side. Overall, when you look at the movement through Lacolle, in particular, it tends to be males, primarily. However, there are a significant number of children. The age variation is usually between 30 and 50 years in the adult population, and the children are a variety of ages. Again, this is not necessarily different from normal trends. However, we are seeing a good number of children coming with family units.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Thank you very much.

The Co-Chair (Hon. John McKay): Mr. Dubé, you have the final three minutes of this round.

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Clouthier, you mentioned that the wait time has not decreased as a result of the reassignment of resources. However, wait time aside, there is an impact on the working conditions for customs officers.

What are the repercussions, specifically in terms of things like post-traumatic stress? The wait time may not be decreasing, but there is still a lack of staff at the busiest ports of entry.

Mr. Jacques Cloutier: Let me start by telling you that the health and well-being of our employees is one of our most significant concerns. We are actively working in partnership with our colleagues in the union, in order to make sure that we really have our fingers on the pulse of the situation.

At the CBSA, just like our colleagues in the RCMP, we have the privilege of being able to count on an extremely professional workforce that is extremely committed to its work and that is fully supported. We do all that we are able to do, as the needs arise.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: In that case, what explains the contradiction between the union's position, saying that it does not have enough staff, and the fact that your agency says that it does not want to ask the minister for additional resources, so that you do not have to make assignments on a temporary basis?

• (1000)

Mr. Jacques Cloutier: I do not believe that the agency has ever said that it does not want to make a request of any kind. The minister has been very clear. He has told us that he is waiting for the requests, should they become necessary.

In our current situation, I continue to feel that we have the resources we need to provide our services and to respond to situations such as the one that occurred at Saint-Bernard-de-Lacolle.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Thank you.

Mr. MacDonald, one of your comments was that, in terms of the figures and the countries of origin, there are a lot of similarities with situations that have arisen before. However, you also said that having asylum seekers concentrated on that one location was something new, something extraordinary.

In your opinion, and perhaps in the opinion of other witnesses, what explains the fact that there has been an increased presence of asylum seekers in that area?

[English]

Mr. Michael MacDonald: As I mentioned, historically, different populations migrate into Canada through different corridors from the United States, largely because different diaspora communities are centralized in different areas in the United States. For example, in places like Minnesota and so on, you have a high degree of Somali and Djiboutians, whereas on the Pacific coast you have a lot of Chinese, Iraqi, Afghan individuals, and so on.

What is unique about the Lacolle situation is that, post-earthquake, Haiti has a significant number of individuals located in Miami and New York City. Plus, the French language draws a lot of the Haitian claimants into Montreal, largely for their children to go to French-speaking primary and secondary schools.

The Co-Chair (Hon. John McKay): Thank you, Mr. Dubé and Mr. MacDonald.

The time remaining together I'll turn over to my joint chair.

[Translation]

The Co-Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant) Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We will now start the second round with the Liberals, but I would like to add something first.

[English]

I wanted to say that there have been many requests for information. I think it would be helpful to send it to the clerks of both committees at the same time, except for the Criminal Code, which is very thick, and we have it.

Thank you, Ms. Crampton.

[Translation]

Go ahead, Mr. Picard

Mr. Michel Picard (Montarville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am going to share my time with my colleague Ms. Damoff.

Before I begin, I would like to highlight the professional work you have all done at this time, and I am specifically referring to the episode at Saint-Bernard-de-Lacolle. I also acknowledge the respect that you have shown to the people arriving at the border.

Maybe I am a little naïve, but personally, I believe that this humanitarian operation had a much greater impact than simply setting up encampments and providing food. That said, we will see what effect the operation has in Quebec.

Mr. Tanguy, you alluded to the study that went on in the summer in order to better understand this experience, to learn something from it, and to be better prepared in the future. I do not believe that this year was the first periodic and concentrated wave of immigration or asylum requests. I believe that there have been others in the past. What are the factors you are looking at in order to improve your operations, if you have to?

Mr. Patrick Tanguy: Thank you for the question.

As my colleague from the Canada Border Services Agency mentioned, the Government Operations Centre supports all departments and agencies in order to plan for the future. In concrete terms, one of the most important things is to thoroughly go over the lessons learned from the past. For example, it is important to plan the sites and the facilities, to assess the potential need for a triage centre and a place to conduct checks, and to ensure that you have access to the site specifically to avoid travel.

The role of the Government Operations Centre is to provide tools to our colleagues in agencies and departments in order to accurately assess the measures that can be taken in advance, to provide resources, whether computer-related or anything else, so that the staff, as my colleagues have suggested, is even more prepared than before.

Mr. Michel Picard: I have a concern, which may also be shared by those listening to the debate outside this room.

My question is for both Mr. Tanguy and Mr. MacDonald. After their arrival, how do we keep track of people, how do we keep in touch with them? Since this has been a fairly regular movement over the course of history—I know we are making assumptions—studies are likely to show trends in rejections and refusals. What happens after the admission of those who are allowed to stay? Ultimately, how many will not be admitted and will have to return home?

• (1005)

Mr. Patrick Tanguy: Let me turn to my colleague, who is in a better position to answer.

Mr. Michael MacDonald: Thank you.

[English]

The ability for us to keep in contact with people is really carried through our operation centre, our contact centre. When people are intercepted and then processed at the port of entry, we are taking their contact information, and so on, so we have the initial information in order to reach out to them. In addition, when people submit all of their forms to continue down the process, we are gathering more and more information with them.

That said, we also have been finding that in this particular situation in Lacolle, Quebec—as Monsieur Dumas has outlined—the

outreach with the community organizations is key. We also have a very healthy relationship with the Canadian Bar Association and all of the immigration consultants who work with individuals.

So we have many ways to keep in contact with people and encourage them to keep in contact with us.

Mr. Michel Picard: With respect to the percentage of all those getting in, historically, how many do you expect may not be admitted?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: Do you mean those who may not be determined eligible by the IRB?

Mr. Michel Picard: Yes.

Mr. Michael MacDonald: If one were to follow the IRB historical trends—which we can talk about more next Tuesday—for the Haitian population *grosso modo* is around 50% acceptance/rejection rate, but it varies year by year. Sometimes it's higher, sometimes it's lower.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Picard: Thank you.

I'll let Ms. Damoff ask the last questions.

[English]

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thank you for your time, and thank you for being here today.

There are a number of myths about these asylum seekers, so I have some quick questions first.

My first question is for the RCMP and CBSA. I watched on CBC a report this week where it showed an RCMP officer standing at the border explaining to people the process that would happen. When they cross the border, do they just wander around and join society, or are they arrested?

A/Commr Joanne Crampton: They are arrested as soon as they cross over, and they're advised of that in advance of crossing, so it's really clear to them that they will be arrested and detained.

Ms. Pam Damoff: As a member of the public safety committee, we've had a number of dealings with the RCMP and the CBSA. I compliment you on the work you do to keep Canadians safe.

Is there a risk to Canadians from these asylum seekers? Is there a risk to Canadians' safety from the people who are crossing the border?

A/Commr Joanne Crampton: In terms of people crossing, obviously their intentions are unknown to us at the time. That's why we have the processes we do. We verify their identity, verify status, and do an interview process before ever passing them to the CBSA. We clarify exactly what their intentions are and why they're there.

Mr. Jacques Cloutier: I would quickly add that once we take custody of these individuals and they go through our process, no one is released if there is even a doubt that there could be a security issue or a risk to the Canadian population. All of those cases that present risk are dealt with at the border immediately in their entirety.

Ms. Pam Damoff: My next question is for the Department of Citizenship and Immigration.

You touched on this in a previous answer. Many people think that these asylum seekers are jumping the queue. Could you answer whether they are jumping the queue by doing this, or whether in fact there are two streams of people who are seeking asylum here?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: Those who cross through the regular port of entry or jump the border are not jumping a queue, because the system is designed to deal with that type of movement. There is no queue-jumping for those. That processing is not in any way connected to the overseas refugee processing system.

Ms. Pam Damoff: We had heard previously about the ebbs and flows in immigration. I'm assuming that there was additional money spent in previous years, such as in 2009, when you would have had to deal with additional asylum seekers, and that all of your departments are prepared from year to year for these ebbs and flows because they've been happening historically for over a decade.

The Co-Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant): Very briefly.

Mr. Michael MacDonald: The asylum system right now is currently funded at a baseline of 22,500 claimants a year. That's what we are funded to deal with. Departments individually, under the authorities of the deputy ministers, will have their own contingency and reserve funding. Plus, we also have a pretty strong ability, certainly within IRCC, to search for and find innovative ways to do work quicker, faster, and better, therefore maximizing our output and the dollars that we spend and/or save.

It's a system that is funded, but we also have ways to help ourselves respond to any type of issue, should it arise.

•(1010)

The Co-Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant): Thank you.

Ms. Rempel.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you. Numbers have been put forward to the committee today by the IRCC stating the total number of asylum claimants in various years. Can you provide the number of asylum claims, in those years, which were made by people at official points of entry as opposed to unofficial points of entry?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: We do have those numbers, indeed. We can provide them.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: When?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: It will probably come with the package of all the other data, I suspect.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Can you provide that immediately, right now?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: No, I cannot, right now.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: You can't tell us how many asylum claims were made this year at illegal points of entry versus legal points of entry.

Mr. Michael MacDonald: I may actually have that.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Oh, wow.

Mr. Michael MacDonald: No, I don't.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: You don't. That's unfortunate.

Of the number of people who have made asylum claims through unofficial points of entry this year, how many have been ordered deported?

Mr. Jacques Cloutier: At this point, no such order has been issued, because the process has not been completed.

Are we speaking specifically about Lacolle or in general?

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I'll repeat my question. For all people who have made asylum claims through an illegal point of entry or an unofficial point of entry, how many have been deported?

Mr. Jacques Cloutier: I'm aware of cases in British Columbia—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: How many?

Mr. Jacques Cloutier: I believe there were nine, but we will provide those numbers to you.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Okay, thank you.

Can you please provide the specific number of cases of people who have made asylum claims at an unofficial point of entry in 2017 and have been connected with criminality, suspected of criminality, or have any sort of criminal flag associated with them?

Mr. Jacques Cloutier: We will provide that.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Do you have that information right now?

Mr. Jacques Cloutier: I do not have it with me in the detail that you're asking for, but we will provide that information to you.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: When will that be provided?

Mr. Jacques Cloutier: It will be as soon as possible.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

As to the number of asylum claims that have been made in 2017, Mr. MacDonald, I believe you said in response to one of my colleagues that ebbs and flows are associated with visa regimes. In this year, how many asylum claims have been made by Mexican nationals?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: I don't have the Mexican number right at hand.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: What numbers do you have?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: No, I do not have the Mexican number at hand.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Can you please provide it to the committee as soon as possible?

How many staff within IRCC have been reallocated from different streams of processing to the new processing centres in Montreal, and what streams are they from?

Mr. Louis Dumas: I would say approximately 80 staff have been deployed from across Canada to the centre at Guy-Favreau. In addition to that, we have created back offices in various locations across Canada and have an approximate total of 40 staff helping the processing at Guy-Favreau.

As Mr. MacDonald pointed out, we have capacity within our resources to divert individuals from one project to the other. We took, for example, some people from the citizenship line and have asked them to assist on the project. We've also taken people working on, for example, certain immigration lines and have asked them to participate in the process.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Have the processing times for temporary foreign worker work permits increased in 2017 over 2016?

Mr. Louis Dumas: I don't have that information, but as Mr. MacDonald has indicated, over the past few weeks we have substantially reduced the processing times for refugee claimants to get work permits.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

In the 2017-18 immigration levels plan, there's a line item that says "humanitarian and other". Is that the line item in which asylum claims would be projected?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: No, the asylum claims would be projected under the "protected status" persons.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: How many were projected in that area this year?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: In 2017 the target is about 15,000.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Is that specifically for asylum seekers, or does it also include other streams of refugees as well?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: That's for the asylum seekers; then we have a column called "resettled refugees".

•(1015)

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Okay.

This year, just to be clear and for the record, the government projected 15,000 asylum claimants in the levels plan, and last week in New York the immigration minister was projecting more than 40,000.

Is that correct?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: Well, just to provide a bit of precision, the protected persons number of 15,000 is the anticipated level of asylum claimants who would actually become protected persons in this year. It doesn't equate to the number of asylum claimants who might show up, because the process—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Do we have the figure for how many asylum claims have been made versus how many have been approved this year?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: We certainly have the number of asylum claimants who have come in thus far, which I think is 32,000. As to when you actually become a protected person, it's a staggered pace: you don't become a protected person until the IRB actually makes the determination that you are a protected person.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Sure.

There is one other area that came to my attention about which I was curious. You were talking about expediting health care coverage for asylum claims that had been made at a legal port of entry.

Is that being undertaken for other streams of refugees as well?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: No, the discretion of the minister to do that is exclusively for those who cross through the Lacolle situation. We are processing most other asylum claims across Canada either completely at the port of entry, and they're issued their IFH certificate, or we are processing them inland within the three-day window.

The Co-Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant): You have about 30 seconds left.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Great. I'll just finish the thought of my colleague Mr. Maguire. He was asking the RCMP about the number of outstanding deportation cases from asylum claims that had been rejected.

Could you speak to those numbers?

A/Commr Joanne Crampton: Mr. Chair, I'm sorry, I'd have to defer to CBSA for that question.

Mr. Jacques Cloutier: Again quickly, we will provide those numbers to you.

The Co-Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant): Thank you very much,

Mr. Dubé.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Mr. MacDonald, I want to go back to the question of diasporas, because if that's what's explaining a concentration at certain border crossings, I have a hard time reconciling that fact with what we see in policy terms in the United States.

Just as a couple of examples, you talked about the Somali diaspora in Minnesota. We know that in November 2016, Mr. Trump was saying that Somali migrants are a disaster for Minnesota, and we see increases at Emerson.

We know that his interim director of the immigration agency in the U.S. was contemplating removing protections for Haitians, and we see an increase then in Lacolle.

If you're acknowledging that we're seeing migrants at specific crossings because of where diasporas are located in the U.S. and that these specific groups of people are being targeted—and we have this on the public record—how does the department then say that American policies are not behind this massive movement of migrants at these specific border crossings?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: It comes down to whether the individuals actually choose to move. Again, historical patterns of migration movement across Canada from the United States exist. We know that. We have our regional footprints, regional infrastructure, and regional offices set up, and we are staffed accordingly. We are baseline-funded to amounts where typically the system is working.

Again, why people are moving and whether people will move is very much a question we are engaging with colleagues, not just Americans but colleagues around the world, to try to figure out factors that push people or pull people.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: In your opinion, though, the fact that we are seeing these crossings happen at specific areas means that specific groups of people are moving. Is that correct?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: Correct, specific people are moving across specific areas, as well as all kinds of nationalities. All nationalities make asylum into Canada. There just happen to be populations that tend to move more, for a variety of world factors, world reasons, such as war, as I explained.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: I think it's safe to say that Emerson and Lacolle are the two key points over the last nine to 10 months.

If we look at the fact that in Manitoba, if I am not mistaken, the majority are Somali, a group targeted by Mr. Trump in Minnesota, and in Quebec the majority are Haitians, a group that was also targeted, how does the department believe that the status quo is reigning? Is there anything specific that leads you to believe that these groups of people are not being targeted and that's not what the numbers are reflecting? The numbers do reflect that those groups of people are the ones who are moving at those specific areas.

• (1020)

Mr. Michael MacDonald: Again, what we are noticing is that, despite some of the temporary protection lifts the United States has done, there is movement of people, but they are not telling us that these are necessarily the reasons. Some people are saying those are the reasons. We also don't know what other measures the U.S. or any other country might take when they lift temporary protection status, and what people could benefit from. It's very difficult to pinpoint why.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: I just want to make sure I understand correctly. The basis for the department not believing that discriminatory policies are the reason for migration is simply what we could almost call "exit interviews". Is that correct?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: No, not at all.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Then what is the basis for not thinking that these groups are moving because they are being targeted via certain policies?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: As Mr. MacKinnon was explaining, there is a combination of factors. We do regular reviews through our department on country conditions of all countries around the world in terms of refugee movements. We are members of the UNHCR, and we are working with members of the UNHCR. We work with international organizations to figure out migration patterns: why people are moving and what's pushing people. We have bilateral and multilateral relationships where we talk about these issues, in particular asylum claiming, refugee issues, and so on. It's a combination of factors that go into it.

We are talking about how to plan and prepare ourselves for possible future movements that are difficult to predict. What I am communicating is that we have taken—you have to take—a very holistic approach to trying to figure out human behaviour in the future.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: That's fair. You're the experts. I look at Emerson having a huge increase in asylum seekers, the majority of whom are Somali, a group that was specifically targeted in that area by Mr. Trump as a candidate, who is now president, and, as a layperson on these particular issues, I see that as a pretty determining factor.

If that is not the key factor for the department, what else is at play?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: Part of the answer to that question is that it's not just Somalis, if we take the Emerson example. In fact, there is a significant number of Djiboutians, who are also moving up. The factors driving them may, in fact, be different than for the Somali community, yet the volume of movement is quite high. Similarly, Emerson tends to have a very healthy movement, if I can call it that, of people from Ghana and Eritrea. The mixture of other populations is making it difficult for us to say there is one factor pushing—

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Respectfully, is it correct to say that the majority of those who crossed at the Emerson crossing between January and August were of Somali origin?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: Correct.

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Okay.

My question is for the officials from the Canada Border Services Agency.

I would like to better understand the role that your U.S. counterparts are playing right now. We hear a lot of rumours about that.

Are you able to clarify the role that U.S. Customs and Border Protection currently plays in coordinating the efforts at the border?

Mr. Jacques Cloutier: Mr. Chair, it is actually important to note that the USCBP partners are as much partners with the RCMP as they are with us. We have operational discussions on a regular basis. They are very familiar with our approach to the situation. It is an exceptional collaborative effort, from our point of view and from an operational point of view.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Can you elaborate on that agency's role? Does it have the role of defining movements or trying to control what happens at the border? Are you able to elaborate on its operations?

Mr. Jacques Cloutier: No. Broadly and generally speaking, the U.S. agency has its own mandate and responsibilities to follow; but I can tell you that we have operational relations that allow us to work together and assess how the situation is unfolding.

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Thank you.

[English]

The Co-Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant): Thank you very much.

Mr. Sarai.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, guests.

I think that for Canadians, particularly for my constituents and British Columbians, the integrity of our border and compassion for those who need it are the two utmost issues that are important to them, and balancing those two is what's integral for our country. I applaud all of you and the answers that you've had. You've been balancing the integrity of our border, as well as being compassionate to those in need.

What shocks me more are some of my colleagues on the opposing side who only ask questions pertaining to costs, illegal migrants, criminality, deportations, how many removals, how much they cost to our country, and how they're a burden. It kind of reminds me of newspaper articles I read from over 103 years ago on the *Komagata Maru*. There were the same kinds of responses at the time from a lot of the politicians of similar stripes, and I find it appalling that 103 years later, we are still more concerned about criminality and calling them illegals than finding out why they're coming and what's needed.

There was a question asked about putting a port of entry at the place with the largest crossing. The reason people are going to that particular place is because it's not an official port of entry where they would otherwise be turned back. If we put a port of entry there, would that not just start another road or site that would be a place where asylum seekers would come? Could either the RCMP or CBSA answer that?

• (1025)

A/Commr Joanne Crampton: That would be our concern. It could displace people to other locations, certainly.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: So it wouldn't really solve the situation?

A/Commr Joanne Crampton: No, not from our point of view. We don't believe it would.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: There is an argument, and probably a very valid one, that there is a loophole in the system between Canada and the U.S. in this third party agreement, which does not specify people falling through the cracks on port of entry. Have governments prior to this one or the IRCC tried before to negotiate with the United States to perhaps close that gap?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: We're not aware, post the 2002 negotiation, that governments tried to renegotiate. We're not aware of that.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: There was an article in 2010 in which the former minister of immigration stated that they had attempted to renegotiate this with the Obama administration, and that there was push-back and no result from that. Is that not true?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: I've read that same article, but I can't verify that the negotiation or the attempt actually happened.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: So you're not aware of any previous government trying to negotiate that, particularly the previous government?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: I'm personally not aware. I don't know if colleagues are aware, but I'm not aware.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: It could be just some smoke and mirrors that previous immigration ministers are using to justify that they tried.

I would like to find out if we have identified any smuggling rings that might be using human suffering as a way to make money off of this. Since thousands are coming over into one particular crossing, has there been co-operation with U.S. law enforcement agencies and intelligence agencies to identify whether there are any large-scale human smuggling rings that are organizing a mass migration through particular routes through South America from Africa or Haiti, or have we not identified any of these?

Mr. Jacques Cloutier: I can certainly tell you that it is for us a major, significant preoccupation and that efforts are engaged. I'm sure that if such networks existed, we could effect a response to those networks. Up until now, there is no evidence of such organized networks. There are people who are benefiting from the situation, but from our perspective we are not yet aware of human trafficking that would support these movements at this time.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: As to integrity—this is a joint question to the RCMP and CBSA—can you comfortably say to Canadians that each and every migrant person seeking asylum in Canada is getting a thorough background and criminality check and that we can rest assured and be safe knowing that our law enforcement is doing a great job?

Mr. Jacques Cloutier: I can certainly tell you that we put in place every factor to mitigate risk as we understand it. I think it's also important to understand that once people are released for the second part of the process, our security evaluations continue; they don't stop at the initial interview. If new information were to come to light, action would be taken, it would be factored into the eligibility hearings as well, and it would be subject to a number of different mechanisms to mitigate those risks further down the chain also.

• (1030)

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Do you see any higher rate of criminality from these asylum seekers, in comparison with previous patterns?

Mr. Jacques Cloutier: On this particular point, Mr. Chair, I haven't done the analysis to compare it with prior years, but I can tell you that, as my colleague from the RCMP pointed out, the numbers are negligible when it comes to criminality overall, at this point.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: So it's very low numbers...if any of those are taken into account and either removed or detained, depending on the severity?

Mr. Jacques Cloutier: Depending on the scenario, the person would either be handed over to the local police jurisdiction for proceedings to take place or, depending on the nature of the criminality, the case could be viewed by the CBSA as an admissibility question, which would first be cleared up before the process continued for that individual. Necessary actions would be taken at that point, depending on the nature of the offence.

The Co-Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant): Thank you.

Mr. Saroya is next, for five minutes.

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC): Thank you to both chairs and thank you to all the witnesses for coming.

Mr. MacDonald, you mentioned that 80 people were taken away from their regular duties and have gone to Montreal. What effect did this have on the regular immigration files? As you know, we get the most calls in our offices looking for spousal sponsorship, family reunion sponsorship, and many other matters. I have one and a half full-time person equivalents working on these delays.

What was the delay before and what is the delay now, after taking these 80 people from their regular jobs?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: The answer to that, Chair, goes back to the way we process immigration applications overall within our department. We have different processing networks, which process different kinds of applications in different offices in different places under different management.

It's true that within our domestic network, of which Mr. Dumas is the director general, we looked primarily to his area and chose officers with appropriate skill sets and took efforts to backfill for those officers, all in the context of mitigating as much as possible any impacts to other lines of business.

Some lines of business in Immigration and Citizenship will not be touched or affected by this at all, because of the way we choose our officers to go to Montreal. We are also now looking at sending officers back from Montreal as we get through the work that we need to get through.

Overall the impact has been relatively minor, and we'll only know at the end of the year, because we still have several months of production during which we can adjust and calibrate our output.

Mr. Bob Saroya: What was the delay before? Do we have any numbers on the delay in taking these people out? How much longer does it take to process these applications today, compared with before July?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: That would depend on which line of business specifically we are talking about. As you are aware, sir, we have multiple and different lines of business. It's a very difficult question for me to answer.

Mr. Bob Saroya: In the government definition, what is a refugee?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: The refugee definition goes back to various international conventions, and that is the best place to look. Generally speaking, it is those who fear persecution or prosecution for a variety of reasons.

Mr. Bob Saroya: Some of the people we see on the news on a daily basis, on CBC or CTV, are people coming to Quebec or to various other places. They're driving SUVs and carrying iPhones, among other things. In your opinion, are they refugees, or are they just taking advantage of the Canadian generosity?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: The socio-economic status of a person claiming asylum or of an overseas refugee is really not part of the equation. It is based on what circumstances the individual is facing in terms of persecution, fear, and so on. It is not about how wealthy or economically stable they are.

Mr. Bob Saroya: Going back to a similar question, if some of the people are spending thousands of dollars—you see it on the news or read about it on a daily basis—how many of them would be sent back 30 or 60 days from that initial interview? Would they all go through the regular process?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: Well, that all depends on what stage of the asylum processing continuum.... Decisions are made around a person's inadmissibility, which may be at the port of entry. Inadmissibility can also be looked at through other partners. Then, you go to the eligibility processing, at which point people can be determined not eligible and would have 30 days in which to leave the country. Then there's the IRB hearing, which may make a determination on a person's application, and they may be asked to leave the country if they're not.... Sir, it depends on where in the process....

• (1035)

Mr. Bob Saroya: Mr. Jacques, what are the chances of a criminal organization slipping some people through? Knowing that they won't be eligible for refugee status, they slip through. What are the chances of somebody slipping through, not even claiming refugee status?

The Co-Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant): You have twenty-five seconds.

Mr. Jacques Cloutier: I'm not sure I understand the question. You want to know, if they do not present at the border...?

Mr. Bob Saroya: What are the chances of criminal organizations slipping people through the border? They're not even claiming refugee status because they know they're not going to get it.

Mr. Jacques Cloutier: Did you want to...?

A/Commr Joanne Crampton: If I may, I could perhaps answer that.

In terms of human smuggling, which I believe is what you're referring to, we have several programs in place. We have a terrific partnership internationally in many different areas where we continually investigate human smuggling, to prevent and deter it from coming to Canada.

The Co-Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant): Thank you very much.

Ms. Damoff.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I'm going to share my time with Mr. Whalen.

I want to follow up on a question my colleague asked, as did a Conservative member as well, in terms of who a refugee is. Does Canada take refugees for economic reasons, or are people coming here because they fear for their lives?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: Canada does not take refugees for economic reasons. We select immigrants for economic reasons in our levels plan, under those economic streams.

Ms. Pam Damoff: That's a totally different system.

Mr. Michael MacDonald: You are correct.

Ms. Pam Damoff: In terms of the people who are crossing illegally, if we're accepting them into Canada, we're only accepting refugees who are coming here because they're afraid for their lives.

Mr. Michael MacDonald: We are accepting people to make a claim before the Immigration and Refugee Board where they will present their basis of claim as to why they should be granted refugee protection status by Canada. Then, if they are granted status, they have the ability to apply for permanent residency and to enter Canada through that stream.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you.

My second question has to do with how you act proactively. When we were in Washington, all members of the committee asked the American border services—because at the time, it was an issue in Manitoba—what they do to try to prevent this.

You did touch on this in your remarks, but I know that historically—because this isn't a new problem—you've worked quite closely with the U.S. to identify where there are issues and have even gone to other countries' embassies to try to stem the flow of people. We sent two of my colleagues down into the United States to deal with that.

Could you talk briefly—I only have a short time—about how you work with the United States throughout the years to stem these types of asylum seekers?

Mr. Jacques Cloutier: Mike, did you want to speak from your perspective?

Mr. Michael MacDonald: I'll start at the very strategic level and will be very quick.

As I mentioned, we have long-standing relationships in the immigration and citizenship world with American colleagues—and all colleagues, quite frankly. We belong to bilateral and multilateral organizations. We deal with foreign governments here in Canada through their diplomatic presence. We have a healthy relationship, and we use it. We also, of course, have our missions abroad, so we actually have a Canadian footprint that we can engage as we go across the world.

When it comes to the operational aspect, we have well-established lanes of communication, information sharing, protocols, and so on in the operational world, in particular with the United States in terms of immigration overall.

Ms. Pam Damoff: One thing they said to us is that it's not illegal to leave a country; it's only illegal to enter a country. There is thus nothing they can do by way of stopping people from leaving the country.

I guess I had better turn it over to my colleague.

The Co-Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant): Mr. Whalen.

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Thank you all. It was a very enlightening presentation, and I feel much more confident now that the situation is being handled properly and well, in accordance with our expectations.

In terms of what might happen, Mr. MacDonald, you seem to have a lot of expertise and information regarding flow patterns and what might change in the future, and it seems that your organization monitors that.

I have two questions in that line.

The first is, would your model suggest that next year we should see a continuation or a drop-off in the Haitian migration to Canada?

The second is, should we suspend the safe third country agreement with the United States? How much of an additional impact might we see, as a result of doing so, at our normal border crossings, given the 11 million undocumented migrants in the U.S.? And if doing so were to become knowledge, what type of flow would you anticipate such a change in Canadian policy would cause?

• (1040)

Mr. Michael MacDonald: Chair, to answer both those questions, honestly, it's extremely difficult to talk about hypotheticals. I know that's not a great response, but it is the truth. It's impossible to determine people's perceptions versus the realities and all the factors I have talked about, which push and pull people.

In terms of next year's numbers, you're right: certain decisions could occur in the United States that might or might not have an impact on next year's volumes. You do have, as you pointed out, sir, a large number of undocumented workers in the United States. How that plays into the factor is extremely difficult to talk about.

In terms of the hypothetical situation of having or not having a safe third country agreement, it's really very hard to predict, but I will say this again in closing. We have an asylum system established, we have regional and national footprints established in order to handle our number one goal, which is a managed border asylum system, and that is what we're striving for every day when we go to work, to be frank.

The Co-Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant): I'm afraid I need to end it there. We don't have time for another round, so I'm going to suggest that this brings the end of our time for questioning.

I want to thank the officials who are with us today. Some of you are relatively new in your positions.

Mr. MacDonald, welcome to your first time in this position in this committee. Your testimony was excellent.

I will remind the members of the citizenship and immigration committee that we will continue with our study on Tuesday and Thursday of next week.

Now I'll turn to Mr. McKay.

The Co-Chair (Hon. John McKay): I'll add, to the members of the public safety committee, that Bill C-21 passed second reading last night, so the committee's order of business will be Bill C-21 on Tuesday morning and on Thursday. The minister will appear first thing on Tuesday morning.

The meeting is adjourned.

The Co-Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant): The meeting is adjourned..

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