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Chair: Mr. Peter Fonseca

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• (1840)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order. Welcome, everybody, to meeting number seven of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights. Pursuant to the order of reference of October 27, 2020, the subcommittee will begin the study of the impact of COVID-19 on displaced persons, particularly from Venezuela and Myanmar.

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would encourage all participants to mute their microphones when they're not speaking, and to address all comments through the chair. When you have about 30 seconds left, I will put this up so that you can see that you have 30 seconds left for your comments. For those who require interpretation, at the bottom of your screen you'll see a globe icon. You can switch that to French or English, as you like.

Today, members, witnesses, everybody, we are meeting on December 10, Human Rights Day, the day the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 adopted the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. It's a real honour today that it is December 10 and we have our ambassador to the UN, the Honourable Bob Rae, with us.

Welcome, Ambassador Rae, who is joining us here today also in his former role as the special envoy to Myanmar.

I will just list the other two witnesses before we hear from Ambassador Rae. From the Lutheran World Federation, we have David Mueller, country representative, Myanmar and Laos; and from Human Rights Watch, we have Manny Maung, Myanmar researcher.

We will hear now from Ambassador Rae for five minutes.

Ambassador, the floor is yours.

Hon. Bob Rae (Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations (UN) in New York, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the chance to come back to familiar haunts. It's good to see all of you.

I am going to focus my remarks on both Myanmar and Bangladesh to give you a sense of the condition of the Rohingya refugees as well as other refugees in Myanmar.

With respect to Myanmar, there are about 600,000 Rohingya still in Myanmar, one in five of whom live in what are called IDP camps, or internally displaced persons camps. They've actually been called or compared to concentration camps by Christopher Sidoti, who's a former member of the UN fact-finding mission on

Myanmar. I've actually visited one of the camps—the biggest one, in Sittwe—and it is like an open-air prison. Basically, that's what it is.

While COVID-19 has led to further restrictions on movement and access to services for these persons and has highlighted the vulnerabilities of very highly congested living conditions, we have to recognize the reality that these are hardships that are simply continuing. COVID has made things worse, but we need to understand how bad they were at the beginning in order to appreciate the circumstances.

The deterioration we've seen in Rakhine State, which is the northwestern state of Myanmar and on the border with Bangladesh, is that there's been significant fighting between the Tatmadaw, which is the army of Myanmar, and what's called the Arakan Army, which is not the Rohingya but are representative of the local Buddhist population in what is called Arakan, or Rakhine State.

There are still significant issues of discrimination affecting the Rohingya. There are still significant issues of hate speech. Their situation continues to be extremely vulnerable.

I think we have an opportunity now, after the election in Myanmar, to increase our level of engagement and try to push much harder with respect to what needs to be done to resolve the political crisis inside Myanmar. It's proving to be very difficult.

We have been a leading voice as well, as you know, in international efforts to increase accountability for serious violations, both in the International Criminal Court as well as in the International Court of Justice.

Inside Bangladesh, there are about 860,000 Rohingya refugees who remain in crowded makeshift camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, which I've had the opportunity to visit on a number of occasions. Right now there's not much prospect, in the near term, for their return to Myanmar. I'll be glad to answer some questions on that, if you'd like, but we do have some new issues, which have been enhanced by COVID.

It's important to remember that COVID is both a health event and a social and economic event, as it is for us in Canada. It is the economic impacts that are driving some of the internal issues inside Bangladesh and leading to extremely difficult conditions for the Rohingya.

In response to the report I wrote and in response to the situation described in that report, Canada has committed itself to a three-year program. I'm not in a position to say what the next three years are going to be, but I know from my discussions with the department that there will be a new program starting in April. New efforts will be made to deal with the humanitarian impact.

• (1845)

We need to understand that it's been very difficult during COVID with the camp being essentially shut down to outsiders. It's been very difficult for us to engage successfully with many of the international partners we've been dealing with. We have been continuing to assist with local partners in trying to get the necessary food assistance and health interventions that benefit both the Rohingya, as well as the local Bangladeshi population.

There have been severe restrictions on movement and serious problems with respect to communication and access to the Internet. These remain very serious problems. Essentially, the camp is now in lockdown. I have not been there in recent months, but those who have seen it will say there's extensive barbed wire around the camp and that it is very difficult to get into and out of. Conditions in the camp, generally speaking, have deteriorated.

The latest data I have is that there have been 5,098 COVID-19 cases and 73 deaths in the host communities at Cox's Bazar, and 335 COVID-19 cases, resulting in only 10 deaths, in the camps. I am not sure about the reliability of this data, because the collection of information is extremely difficult to do.

To sum up, the solution to the political issues still lies in Myanmar. That's where the essential efforts have to be made. We are facing enormous challenges with respect to humanitarian conditions both in Bangladesh and Myanmar.

When it comes to education, we have a real crisis with the next generation. Kids are not getting access to education. This is going to prove to be a serious problem, not only in these two countries but, from my observations at the United Nations, around the world.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Ambassador Rae.

We'll go to the Lutheran World Federation and Mr. David Mueller.

Mr. David Mueller (Country Representative, Myanmar and Laos, Lutheran World Federation): Honourable Chair, vice-chairs and members of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights, on behalf of the Lutheran World Federation, I thank you for the invitation to make this statement.

There are 700,000 Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh who continue to wait for safe, dignified and voluntary return to their homeland. There are 600,000 Rohingya who remain in Myanmar, including 130,000 confined to camps since 2012 in central Rakhine State, where they are denied freedom of movement, equal access to citizenship and access to essential services.

In both Bangladesh and Myanmar, the significant restrictions put in place to reduce the further spread of COVID-19 have limited

camp residents' access to services, including access to protection, education and livelihood support.

In partnership with the Canadian Lutheran World Relief and the support of the Canadian government, LWF implements a project that assists 85,000 vulnerable displaced and marginalized people in eight camps and six host villages in Rakhine. The work addresses urgent needs for clean water, non-food items, gender-sensitive shelter facilities, dignity kits and COVID-19 prevention materials.

Despite the COVID-19 outbreak and government restrictions, LWF is able to implement activities through community-based staff and remote management techniques. However, the limited physical presence has increased protection challenges, such as extortion and gender-based violence.

After years of effort, camp management committees have accepted a terms of reference that mandates increased representation of women. Each committee now has at least four women out of 15 members. LWF continues to work toward the goal of gender equality in decision-making.

In the meantime, women and girls' groups are learning and practising rights-based empowerment, livelihood skills, leadership and good governance. Men and boys' groups discuss gender equality, and women and girls' rights. Whole communities are orientated on the prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment and core humanitarian standards.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that humanitarian needs in Rakhine are a complex web of vulnerabilities arising from natural disasters, ethnic tensions, armed conflict, statelessness, institutionalized discrimination and protracted displacement. The situation is further compounded by chronic poverty, violence against women and girls, and COVID-19.

Durable solutions are elusive, but if they are to be realized, more integrated approaches that holistically address the human rights, humanitarian, development and peace perspectives are needed. The international community must balance accountability with engagement, as without sustained in-country engagement, transformational change will not be possible.

Every effort needs to be made to make the peace talks more gender and ethnic minority inclusive. More must be done to promote trust among and between the conflict-affected people, and all parties to conflict in Myanmar. The international community must continue to call for ceasefires and encourage inclusive dialogue.

The complex challenges Myanmar faces are further exacerbated by COVID-19. The potential spread of disease among displaced Rohingya and their host communities has further isolated them, and further restricted their access to adequate health care and necessary resources.

The pandemic has also restricted humanitarian work, workers and aid supply chains. The lockdown has adversely affected employment and access to education. It has strained relationships between host communities and camp residents, and has placed additional burdens on Rohingya women and girls, putting them at risk of gender-based violence.

Humanitarian, development and peace work in Myanmar is underfunded. The generosity of Canada is greatly appreciated, but the needs are tremendous. For example, the COVID-19 addendum to the 2020 humanitarian response plan is, so far, funded at only 52%.

• (1850)

Finally, the human rights universal periodic review for Myanmar will take place in January 2021. LWF supports the local and international NGOs in their stakeholder reports and recommendations. We would appreciate the support of this subcommittee in raising concerns about citizenship law reform; freedom of movement for the Rohingya and all ethnic minorities; the fulfilment of women's rights; children's right to education; rights of people with disabilities; and housing, land and property rights.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Mueller.

Now we will move to Human Rights Watch. We have Manny Maung, who is the Myanmar researcher. We also have with us Farida Deif, the Canada director of Human Rights Watch. Manny will provide us with an opening statement, and I believe Farida will be available to answer questions.

During those questions, Farida, if you don't mind, please hold your microphone close to your mouth so that our interpreters can hear you well for their interpretation.

Go ahead, Manny.

Ms. Manny Maung (Myanmar Researcher, Human Rights Watch): Thank you to the chairperson and the honourable members of Parliament for inviting me to appear before this committee to discuss the impacts of COVID-19 on internally displaced people in Myanmar.

My name is Manny Maung and I'm the Myanmar researcher for Human Rights Watch. Prior to COVID, I was based in Yangon for several years, documenting rights abuses from inside the country, and I'll speak more about the context there.

The decades of conflict have resulted in over 360,000 internally displaced people across the country. They are mainly members of ethnic minority communities, spread across northern Myanmar in Kachin and Shan states, in western Rakhine, and in the southeast, near the Myanmar-Thai border. Renewed conflict has created fresh displacements in 2020 in both Rakhine and Shan states.

Humanitarian agencies overwhelmingly report that the government didn't take measures to ensure it could deliver emergency aid under the government-imposed travel restrictions to protect against the spread of COVID-19. In October, Human Rights Watch released a report, "An Open Prison Without End", on Myanmar's detention of the 130,000 Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State since 2012. We found that the squalid and oppressive conditions imposed on the interned Rohingya and Kaman Muslims amounted to the

crimes against humanity of persecution, apartheid and severe deprivation of liberty.

In the incidents on August 2017, military campaigns of killings, sexual violence, arson and forced eviction of Rohingya in northern Rakhine State forced more than 700,000 to flee to Bangladesh. Human Rights Watch has determined that the Myanmar security forces committed ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity and acts of genocide.

Now, as you know, COVID-19 creates more vulnerability in already vulnerable groups. To date, Myanmar has just 29 confirmed COVID-19 cases among IDP populations in Rakhine. There aren't any reported cases among IDPs in Kachin, Shan or the southeast. However, we don't think this is an accurate reflection of reality. Factors such as a lack of testing resources and services, fears of stigma in crowded camps, and fear of officials is likely contributing to severe under-reporting of COVID-19 among the IDP populations. Government blocks on humanitarian access for international organizations and aid agencies make it difficult to investigate further on the ground.

The situation in Myanmar is complex and dire. Aid agencies report extremely difficult circumstances in which their ability to deliver aid is frequently impeded. The government requires aid workers to apply for travel authorizations on a monthly basis and has imposed stronger rules on movement and access to curb possible COVID-19 infections.

While authorities have the responsibility to take measures to protect public health, they must ensure availability of essential humanitarian services without discrimination. However, we found that in some cases, aid workers were limited to dropping off supplies at the camp entrances, and in other cases such as in Rakhine, they're completely denied entry into the camps. Camps outside of government-patrolled areas in Kachin and Shan states are totally inaccessible because of government blocks on movements to disputed areas.

Discriminatory restrictions on freedom of movement, which disproportionately impact the Rohingya population, have been longstanding in Rakhine State. The Myanmar government has prevented virtually all Rohingya from obtaining citizenship. Lacking legal identity documentation, they are particularly vulnerable to rights violations linked to barriers on freedom of movement. Numerous checkpoints and ID requirements have expanded opportunities for police and military extortion, arbitrary arrests, violence and further limitations on movements during the COVID-19 crisis.

Since June 2019, a government block on mobile Internet services in Rakhine State has curbed access to information amid armed conflict. This has seriously hindered outreach and education around COVID-19 prevention and management, particularly for displaced people. Though displaced people recognize the dangers from COVID-19, many told us that the daily challenges for survival conflict areas—fighting, land mines, explosive remnants of war—take precedence. This is similar in Kachin and Shan states.

Myanmar has taken few steps to reform and revise laws, policies and practices that have effectively entrenched the statelessness of the Rohingya and the forced displacement of other ethnic minority communities. Therefore, we ask this committee to urge the Government of Canada to take several concrete actions.

Press the Myanmar government to allow humanitarian organizations, independent media and human rights monitors unhindered access to IDPs, including to overhaul the government's travel authorization process.

• (1855)

Demand that all arbitrary restrictions on freedom of movement, including discriminatory groups, cease all practices that restrict movement that directly affects access to emergency medicine and livelihoods.

Continue to support relevant UN agencies by ensuring that humanitarian groups have adequate personal protective equipment and that IDPs have adequate access to medical facilities, including quarantine facilities.

Support oversight to ensure health care is compliant with safety and dignity for those who are exposed to illnesses.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Maung.

Now we're going to have an opportunity to go to the members for questions. We are going to begin with the Liberals and Ms. Khalid for seven minutes.

• (1900)

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for your very compelling testimony and your continued hard work on the plight of those who are most vulnerable.

I want to focus my questions specifically on a theme that all of you have touched on today, and that is on women and girls. We saw the impact of COVID on women and girls in Canada, where, I know, over 80% of care providers are women.

Maybe I can go to each of you to see what the impact is of COVID on women and girls in an IDP camp in Myanmar or in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, where there is limited access and where, you have mentioned, there is rampant gender-based violence. What is the impact on women and girls?

Mr. Mueller, I will start with you, and then I'll tweak my question for Ambassador Rae. Please go ahead.

Mr. David Mueller: Yes, the COVID outbreak has put more restrictions on the camps, like access to health facilities. Of course, the burden of care is also on women in the camps, as everywhere, but with reduced access to health services. That has been the biggest impact on families and women in particular.

The increase in tension, of course, is also seeing violence against women in the communities. We've seen an uptick in that also due to the fact that we don't have a presence there. Our lack of international presence, due to the further restrictions in movement for us as well as the people, has meant that psychosocial support, health support or even complaints mechanisms are not working as well during this COVID period. Also, for women, the health facilities are not in the camps. They're outside the camps, so that really exacerbates their position as well.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you, Mr. Mueller.

Ambassador Rae, first of all, thank you for all the work you've done over the past number of years as a special envoy for Canada. Congratulations on your new appointment as a representative to the United Nations.

You spoke about possible resolutions to the political crisis in Myanmar and how difficult that is. Over the past number of years, the United Nations has been working quite actively to include gender-based violence, which is often used as a weapon in areas of conflict. Obviously, we are talking in the context of COVID. Maybe you can shed some light on how not just Canada but the international community can continue to include women and girls in that conversation for conflict resolution in the climate that Myanmar has been faced with.

Hon. Bob Rae: First of all, I would just endorse everything that David said. I think the evidence for that is growing.

The other disturbing thing is that, where we thought we'd made progress, things are going backwards, like with early forced marriage, for example. Girls are being married off at very young ages. It's a source of income in the Rohingya culture. When there's no other money and no other work, it just feeds into the system.

There have been significant increases in gender-based violence. I think the point you're making about the role that women and young people can and must play in peacebuilding is very significant.

For the last year, Canada has been the chair of the peacebuilding commission at the UN. We've made the inclusion of women a theme of our work. In all the work we've done around the world and in our hearings that we've held at the UN, we're always focusing on this question of how we can make sure that women are present and that women are part of the solution. We've been doing this even in terms of the recent discussions in Afghanistan.

It's tough. It's a challenge because there's still a lot of resistance from many sources of patriarchy that say that's not the way they do things. The reality is that women are demanding a place at the table and are demanding to be involved. We see it in the effective leadership of the camp in Cox's Bazar, as well as in the larger camp in Sittwe. They are women. They are playing such a critical role. They are tired of being marginalized.

We have a significant issue with respect to education, as it relates particularly to women. The very small efforts and progress we were able to make in education had the most significant impact on women and girls because it finally allowed them to get access to education, which they never had. In northern Rakhine, most young Rohingya and other groups do not have access to education, particularly women. It's often just said there that there's no education after the age of 10 or after the age of 12. This is a really big issue.

I think it's where the logic of the feminist foreign assistance program and the feminist foreign policy becomes overwhelming. It's not an ideological statement. It's just the reality that this is where the major inequities lie right now. If we can drive that agenda, then we can do better on a number of other fronts as well.

• (1905)

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much, Ambassador.

There's a minute left and I know Mr. Zuberi had a question as well, so I'll just concede my time to Mr. Zuberi.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): My girls are in the background. I apologize in advance if they're making a lot of sounds.

I want to ask you quickly, Ambassador Rae. I want to thank you for your comments around the Uighur people. Our committee found unanimously that genocide is, in fact, occurring against the Uighur people in China.

I want to know if you can shed extra light on what led you to make your comments, if you want to say that in 30 seconds.

Hon. Bob Rae: My comments were made in the context of what the law is on genocide and what the allegations were that had been made. That's one reason that I've argued so strongly, and we continue to argue strongly, that the human rights committee in Geneva needs to take this issue to heart and needs to allow us to take the same kind of approach to fact-finding as we did, frankly, on the Rohingya issue.

Once we have evidence, we then have to see how we can gather that evidence effectively. That's the next step that has to be taken.

The Chair: Thank you, Ambassador Rae.

We have to move over to the Conservatives for seven minutes. We have Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Thank you.

Just before moving to the situation of the Rohingya, maybe I'll just make the comment.

I think I'm right, Ambassador, that ultimately you are making a decision as to whether or not a technical definition had been met.

The technical definition of genocide has, in this case, been met, up to a standard of evidence that you regard as satisfactory.

Is that a good way of summarizing your findings?

Hon. Bob Rae: Not exactly, because there's a process of further confirming evidence that has to take place.

I said in the committee that there is a definition of genocide. There are categories that are there. There are serious allegations. As I said in my answer to the committee, there now has to be a next step where one goes forward and starts the process of gathering the evidence.

We went through this very similar process on the Rohingya issue, where there were serious allegations. We have to find out how we can gather more evidence. That's exactly what's being done. That's why Canada has been so supportive of the fact-finding mission and of the independent investigative mechanism that exists for Syria and Myanmar.

When it comes to the situation of the Uighur, I've said that there's a threshold. Now we have to figure out a way of gathering more evidence and creating a stronger dossier that will then allow us to take the steps on how we go forward. That's the approach I think we should be taking.

That's the approach Canada is taking. We are urging the human rights committee to do that.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

Turning to the Rohingya, the numbers we've heard regarding actual COVID cases and COVID deaths are low, and I'd say surprisingly low from my perspective, given the large number of people crowded into very congested conditions. I've been wrestling with why these numbers might be low. One, of course, is failure to report or even perhaps intentionally dishonest reporting.

Another thought that occurred to me, though, is this. I don't know what the age profile is of the Rohingya population. I suppose it is possible that it is a fairly young population, or a very young population—

• (1910)

Hon. Bob Rae: Yes, very young.

Mr. Scott Reid: —and that may account for it. Is that a possibility?

Hon. Bob Rae: Yes. I think there are a number of factors.

First of all, I'm not a doctor and I'm not an epidemiologist, but we have discussed this issue. I would say that most of the discussion I've seen talks about not so much false reporting as under-reporting, in the sense of people not coming forward because they're afraid to come forward. I think that's a factor.

I think the other factor is, as you've said, the age of the camp. The significant majority of the camp are under the age of 21, and there are a lot of small children. As you know, the evidence is that people are often asymptomatic, but as in Canada, the other thing I just would bring to bear is that conditions of great isolation sometimes are at the beginning a protection, because it doesn't get carried in.

The virus doesn't get carried in, but the problem is that when there is a breakout, it tends to have a very dramatic effect. We're seeing that in northern Ontario, northern Manitoba, northern Saskatchewan and northern Alberta.

Mr. Scott Reid: Also, I might add that we saw that a century ago with the influenza pandemic, where the highest recorded death rate in the world was in an isolated Inuit village in Alaska, after most of the rest of the world had gone through the pandemic.

Hon. Bob Rae: That's the fear. We're seeing this in other countries, in Haiti and elsewhere. While the numbers up to this point are very low, the fear is that if there were to be an outbreak, it would have a significant impact because of the social and economic conditions—the underlying social conditions in the country or in the camps. That I think continues to be a significant worry, and then the question becomes how quickly we can get the vaccine into the conditions of greatest vulnerability, and I—

Mr. Scott Reid: I'm sorry. Forgive me, but I only have a couple of minutes left.

I want to ask you my next question as well, Ambassador, but I want to redirect you a bit to ask it this way. The question is, of course, on what Canada can do to be useful in this situation. I guess the question is whether trying to get the vaccine into the camps is the rational thing to do, or is there some other measure that we ought to be advocating for in the case of the Rohingya?

Hon. Bob Rae: I think Canada should be actively participating in ensuring that the most vulnerable populations around the world are among the first to be vaccinated. I think that's an essential humanitarian principle. That's certainly something that we've discussed.

I know it's being discussed in Geneva at the WHO and elsewhere. We have to make sure the vaccine gets to the most vulnerable places. That includes refugee camps, but it's not confined to refugee camps. I know that we live in an era where everyone is concerned and it's “well, what about me?”, but I think we also have to recognize that it's also “what about everybody else?” We have to keep that in the back of our minds all the time.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

Could I just ask one of the other witnesses to comment on this? Perhaps, if I have to choose, Ms. Maung could comment.

Ms. Manny Maung: Yes. Thank you.

I mentioned before that factors such as lack of testing and resources are definitely an issue, and absolutely, as Mr. Rae says, so are the stigma for people to go ahead in crowded camps and the fear of officials. The context in Myanmar specifically is that most of the situation has been caused by conflict, and that's conflict between the ethnic armed groups and the Myanmar Tatmadaw. When you have government officials coming into the context of IDPs having to seek health resources, that's really a frightening prospect for them. They don't want to be separated from their families. They fear that.

I also wanted to just quickly mention something about access to health care. This context has not been created by COVID-19, but has been compounded. If we talk about women and girls pre-COVID, we found that just 7% of Rohingya women were manag-

ing to get access to maternal health care, and now, because of COVID, we have absolutely no idea what that statistic is, but we can intelligently assume that it's much lower.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we'll move over to the Bloc, with MP Brunelle-Duceppe for seven minutes.

● (1915)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I thank all the witnesses for being here today to address this very important issue.

I will come back to Myanmar very quickly in a few moments.

We spoke about the genocide of the Uighur people in Xinjiang committed by the Chinese Communist Party. I didn't think I would be talking about this, but I will, since my Liberal and Conservative colleagues have done so.

Mr. Rae, you just told us that we need more evidence and more field observations. However, a subcommittee of the House...

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, I know I let it go a bit with other questions, but if you could, please keep the scope to Myanmar and Venezuela and COVID.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Mr. Chair, you should have stopped my colleagues before. That's not fair. Since my colleagues have talked about it, I don't see why I shouldn't be allowed to do so.

If you agree, I will proceed quickly and then I will move on to my questions about Myanmar.

[*English*]

The Chair: Sure.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you.

A House of Commons subcommittee, which will be producing a report very soon, has issued a statement stating bluntly that there is a genocide of the Uighur people.

It's not every day that we receive a Canadian ambassador to the United Nations.

In that capacity, do you agree with the statement of the House of Commons Subcommittee on International Human Rights that genocide is currently being committed in Xinjiang by the Chinese government against the Uighur people?

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Duceppe, in my opinion, the issue is determining what the next steps should be.

I have a lot of respect for Parliament. I was a member of Parliament and a committee member for many years. We did the same for the Rohingya; Parliament made a statement.

However, in the international arena, the question is to determine what the next step will be and how we will get there. For the Rohingya, for example, we supported Gambia in going to the International Court of Justice. We also offered assistance in finding the facts on the ground, because that was important.

It is precisely because we have great respect for the opinion of Parliament that I have said, and continue to say, that we must try to convince the international commissions to find more facts on the ground. This is the next natural step that we have to take.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: We will be pleased to send you the report, Mr. Rae.

Hon. Bob Rae: Thank you.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: You will see that...

Hon. Bob Rae: I will read it with pleasure, as I read the others.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Perfect.

I apologize to the witnesses who are here today to talk to us about Myanmar. I will return to the main topic.

My question is for Mr. Rae.

In Bangladesh, the government forcibly transfers Rohingya refugees to an island that is deemed dangerous by the UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR, and the World Food Programme—thus by the UN.

Normally, the island should be able to accommodate 100,000 people. It is said that there are about 1 million Rohingya in Bangladesh. Bangladesh says that all transfers are voluntary, except that many personal accounts deny this and reveal that the army beats people and forcibly transfers them.

I'd like you to expound on what I just said. Is this true? What do you think about this?

Hon. Bob Rae: I saw the same photos and the same film as you. I was troubled by what I saw.

Two important things need to be said. First, Canada insists that UN committees be allowed to visit the camp on the island of Bhasan Char to see the conditions in which people live. Even when I was special envoy, I spoke with Bangladeshi government officials and told them that there was a process to be followed. So far, the government has not accepted this important point.

There are currently 300 people in the refugee camp on the island of Bhasan Char. The government of Bangladesh has said it is ready to send them back to the Cox's Bazaar camps, because they are not on the island on a voluntary basis, obviously.

The Bangladeshi government says publicly that it accepts the principle. For me, it is not a matter of principle, it is a matter of knowing exactly what is happening on the ground to make sure that people go voluntarily. It's a very important issue.

• (1920)

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I agree, but in this context, how can Canada intervene? What can be done?

Hon. Bob Rae: Our government is working with other governments, particularly those of France and the U.K., who are major donors and funders in the camps, to tell the government of Bangladesh that we want to have a more transparent and clearer process. Discussions are ongoing. That's all I can say. Canada is there.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Perfect. I have one more quick question.

You may recall that in 2018, the House of Commons unanimously passed a Bloc Québécois motion to strip Aung San Suu Kyi of her honorary citizenship for refusing to condemn the abuses against the Rohingya.

Do you feel that taking away this leader's honorary citizenship has helped to improve or worsen the situation?

Hon. Bob Rae: It didn't make much difference.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: It had no effect?

Hon. Bob Rae: On the other hand, just like you—I know that—I personally attach a lot of importance to Canadian citizenship.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Did you see any changes in behaviour?

Hon. Bob Rae: Not at all. We are continuing our efforts, as are other governments. We are not the only government to have responded very strongly to the events in Myanmar.

As for Aung San Suu Kyi, I haven't spoken to her since, but I know she has work to do in her country. She has just been re-elected.

The most important issue at the moment is to create conditions for a dignified return of the Rohingya population.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Mr. Rae.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we'll move to the NDP and Ms. McPherson for seven minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair. This has been very interesting and fascinating, so much so that my dog has joined us today.

I have so many questions for you all. Of course, the biggest burden is that we have such a short time.

Ms. Maung, I think I will start with you. I was very interested in the discussion we were having in terms of legal recognition, legal empowerment—or disempowerment, I guess, as the case may be. Could you speak a little bit more about that? Then, perhaps, just comment on what you would like to see this committee say and this government do to help address some of those issues.

Ms. Manny Maung: Thank you very much.

On legal recognition, the key factor is that the discriminatory 1982 citizenship law effectively strips the Rohingya of any entitlements to statehood or citizenship rights. This is a key factor when we're talking about things like freedom of movement, access to health care and being able to go home. We've seen that with these spates of violence and communal violence, as well as military violence, usually there is a process by which people who can go home are genuinely considered Burmese or Myanmar, and in this case Rohingya have been denied that right. In a country where citizenship is synonymous with the freedom of movement, we really want the Myanmar government to address these issues.

This is really important in the context of Canada, because Canada has been a key ally for human rights groups in maintaining that their citizenship rights need to be reinstated and that they must be allowed freedom of movement, including the removal of discriminatory regulations.

This has become worse since COVID-19, where the factors of restrictions to curb the infection rate have compounded the lack of available services for Rohingya.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Do you feel that is legitimate? Is COVID being used as a shield or is that a legitimate thing?

Ms. Manny Maung: It's a legitimate concern. I mean, prior to COVID-19 humanitarians were already stressing that they had such problems getting access. Having a monthly provision that they need to apply for a travel authority to go into the same areas in which they work on a regular basis is just nonsense. Then with COVID-19 coming into it, we expect that the government needs to put measures in place to curb infection rates, but some of these are being applied arbitrarily, unfairly.

Without eyes on the ground, without humanitarians, without independent monitors, we can't monitor the situation, but we're hearing such disturbing stories, as Mr. Mueller brought up before. There is extortion just to be able to go from one area of a camp to another, bribery and more violence on these people who have been deprived for, now, almost eight years.

These movements, of course, and these factors are really systemic, because we've seen similar infringements being placed on the Rohingya in Bangladesh as well. We can see a precedent taking place, and it's very disturbing. We need to really demand that these things end.

• (1925)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Is that what you would ask the Canadian government to do, the vocal demanding of that? Are there any other things that you need the Canadian government to do? That's what we put in our report.

Ms. Manny Maung: Thank you. Yes, exactly, we do need Canada to demand that citizenship rights be reinstated and that free-

dom of movement is not intrinsically linked to statehood. A key process to this is access for humanitarians to go into these camps and have unfettered access to deliver the services they need to.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you. Thank you for your work and all of the wonderful things you're doing and sharing with us today.

Mr. Rae, I had an opportunity to chat with you in the foreign affairs committee as well, but I would like to just take a moment to talk a little bit about a humanitarian response from the Canadian government. We know that \$400 million has been allocated: \$200 million for development and \$200 million for a humanitarian response during the COVID-19 crisis. What I'm hearing from organizations is that this has not rolled out.

What I'm wondering is this. When we hear from witnesses, like we are tonight, how do we get the Canadian government to recognize the urgency of this? You spoke of children not being able to go to school. We have heard time and time again that there is an education program coming, particularly focusing on girls, yet it hasn't happened. How do we get the urgency to be recognized and acted upon?

Hon. Bob Rae: Well, not to argue with you, but I think the reality in the camps, whether it's a camp in Rakhine State or whether it's the camp in Bangladesh, is that the absence of education is not because of the absence of funding. It's because the governments are not allowing those programs to take place.

There was no access to the Internet for an extended period of time, partly because of COVID, but even before COVID it was introduced and that had to do with security issues, as they were described, in both Cox's Bazar on the Bangladeshi side and in Myanmar.

It's important that the money gets spent, that it gets allocated and that it gets distributed. I think that's something we have to continue to make sure happens, but I think the big issue—

Ms. Heather McPherson: How do we do that? How do we make that happen?

Hon. Bob Rae: You know how to work in Parliament as well as anybody. You'd have to do it.

I think very clearly the big issue now, though, is what's going to happen after March 31. The money has been allocated. It's going to go out the door. The key thing now is to make sure that we are looking at a situation in 2021, 2022, 2023, where we have an assurance of long-term stable funding at levels that will meet the degree of the situation.

Since we last spoke, since I last spoke to you, we were talking about aid levels. Most unfortunately, the British have cut back on their foreign assistance by a very substantial amount, by over four billion pounds.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Yes, but of course that means they're still ahead of us in terms of their GNI.

Hon. Bob Rae: No, Heather, come on. Let's put partisanship aside for a second.

Ms. Heather McPherson: But that is accurate. I'm from the sector. That is an accurate piece.

Hon. Bob Rae: We're spending more than we did last year. We've increased dramatically from last year. We have to keep on spending more. I'm just saying—

Ms. Heather McPherson: We have a long way to go.

Hon. Bob Rae: Yes, we do. I'm not disagreeing with you. I am saying that we have to keep moving in the right direction.

The Chair: Thank you, Ambassador. Thank you, MP McPherson.

We're moving into our second round. There's a great discussion taking place. I propose that we finish the full second round, even though it goes past the hour. We started a little bit late. It will go into our committee business, members. Once we conclude the second round, we will then go in camera after that second round.

As we move into the second round, we have, for the Liberals, Mr. Simms. You're up for five minutes.

• (1930)

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, for being generous with the time and extending it. I was hoping you'd do that. I appreciate it.

I want to start with Ms. Maung, as well as Ms. Deif. Something you said earlier was a "severe deprivation of liberty", and yes, no doubt...with all the examples that you gave. Some of the other issues you brought up, for me, are very important.

With where we are as a country and the international influence we have, some of the issues that concern me greatly are things like severe under-reporting of what is happening now in the midst of COVID-19. I'm assuming it's quite severe all over. I'm talking about internally displaced persons in general, whether they be in Bangladesh or in Myanmar. The blocked Internet capabilities have been discussed, and just the lack of transportation infrastructure for anybody to provide the aid, notwithstanding the fact that the vast majority of medical supplies will be outside the camps themselves, obviously, that is problematic.

Before we get to installing more of the liberties for these people to access education, to access a better life, what do we have to do as a country to first say to them that we have to get in there and provide better communications, better transportation for all those involved, whether it be your organization, UNHCR, and so on and so forth?

I'll start with Ms. Maung.

Ms. Manny Maung: Thank you, Mr. Simms.

I mentioned this earlier as well and I keep stressing it, because overwhelmingly, when I speak to humanitarians on the ground, they tell me how frustrating and difficult it is to deliver these services when they simply don't have access. The problem isn't that the aid isn't there. The aid is there. They just can't deliver it because of these barriers that have been put in place.

To be fair to the Myanmar government, they are allowed to create mechanisms to prevent the spread of infection, but I wonder sometimes whether it's ignorance or just incompetence that they can't make these processes faster.

I have been really grateful to the Canadian government because we've seen them as such good allies, especially in regard to being vocal about accountability and justice, and intervention with Gambia on the case before the International Court of Justice. However, within Myanmar, we need stronger voices.

With their lack of access, humanitarians already are fearful. They're timid and they're muted because they're so concerned about losing what little access they already have. They can't speak up—

Mr. Scott Simms: How do we overcome that timidity?

Ms. Manny Maung: We really need governments to speak up on this, and the Government of Canada can do that. We can pressure the Myanmar government to allow more access. In some ways, they might be feeling some pressure, but the step to actually remove those barriers still hasn't quite happened. Therefore, we would ask the Canadian government to pressure the Myanmar government more, to be more vocal, to speak up more, to have these conversations with government as well.

Actually, one really important factor I forgot to mention is that, overwhelmingly, humanitarians kept saying to me, "We think these conversations are happening with governments, where one government is advising the other, but we don't know."

It would be helpful if we had more advocacy on this, and certainly, public advocacy, but it would also be really helpful if governments took a stronger stance. Right now, as we said, humanitarians are muted because they're so afraid of losing their access. I think the responsibility really falls on the governments and the missions within the country to speak up.

Mr. Scott Simms: Being more forceful would certainly help out their situation, because they have to be in a timid position right now. It's up to us to help them out, to bring them through.

Ms. Manny Maung: Yes, and we do know that we're working with an Aung San Suu Kyi government. We do know that we're working with the NLD again. We can't give them a free pass again. We did that in the last five years, where we gave them full benefit and credit to prove that they would revoke their repressive laws. They haven't done that. Therefore, we can be stronger.

Mr. Scott Simms: That's a good point.

Ambassador Rae, it's good to see you again. Thank you for your report, "Tell Them We're Human". There are 16 recommendations. You lean a lot on the education aspect of it. I'm so glad you did. That's a shining example because in many cases the vast majority, I'm assuming almost half, are children.

Can you very quickly talk about the impact that just that bit of education has on the population?

• (1935)

The Chair: Mr. Simms, I'm sorry, but that's our time. It's a great question. I'm sure the ambassador will be able to get back to you off-line.

Hon. Bob Rae: Don't worry. I'll find a way to get it out there.

Mr. Scott Simms: Thank you, Ambassador.

The Chair: I'm sure you will, Ambassador.

We're now moving to the Conservatives and MP Chiu, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Kenny Chiu (Steveston—Richmond East, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm actually intrigued by the question and wouldn't mind using my time to provide Mr. Rae the chance to answer.

Please go ahead.

The Chair: Excellent.

Hon. Bob Rae: We have to really appreciate the consequences of denying education to a whole generation of children. To me, the treatment of the Rohingya inside Rakhine State was terrible. There was serious discrimination in terms of access to education.

In the camps, I thought there was an opportunity for Bangladesh to authorize more. Finally, after two years of lobbying and efforts that we all made, both vocally and quietly, every way you can possibly pressure, the Government of Bangladesh agreed to make progress on education. Then along came COVID, as well as some other situations inside the camp, which made it more difficult for us to get those decisions implemented. We're now seeing a generation, over a long period of time, not have access to education.

Scott, you'll appreciate this as a broadcaster. I had a conversation with a young man in the Sittwe camp, where he started talking to me in an American accent. I said, "Where did you learn your English?" He said, "I learned it on my phone. I like watching western movies. I watch western movies; that's where I got it." What do you think? It's amazing.

When you deny people access to the Internet and you deny people access to communication, even any informal type of education becomes impossible. That's the tragedy we're facing. That's the issue we have to face up to.

I very much endorse what Manny Maung said about humanitarian access. I can only say that it is front and centre in everything the Government of Canada says, in Bangladesh and in Myanmar, both publicly and privately. It's a fundamental principle that humanitarian actors have to be able to get access to places where they can't go—

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Thank you, Mr. Ambassador. I appreciate that.

My next question is actually for Mr. Mueller.

Mr. Mueller, during the committee's November 26 meeting, witnesses reported that Rohingya refugees are eager to return to their lands and homes in Myanmar. The first question that I have for you is what elements are necessary for a safe repatriation of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar, in your opinion?

Mr. David Mueller: The situation is not conducive for any return, either for the local IDPs or for the refugees outside the country to return at this time. The primary thing that's blocking it is that there is a war going on. The AA and the Tatmadaw are fighting in the home areas of the Rohingya, and they can't go back. Unless the fighting stops, they can't go back. Then there are the other aspects. Villages were bulldozed and there's no place for them. Their homes are not even recognizable anymore in northern Rakhine, and properties have been confiscated. They've moved people in to settle in areas, and I don't think there's a genuine interest for anybody to come back. The other problem is that a lot of the problems are political in nature, and it's not a matter of fixing something technical. It's a political will that needs to be changed.

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Thank you.

My next question is for Ms. Maung.

In your earlier answer to our questions, you mentioned something that is actually quite concerning to me, almost to the point of suggesting that Rohingya are quickly becoming stateless in the international community's eyes. Are the internally displaced Rohingya stateless? In other words, it doesn't matter whether they're in camps in Myanmar or in Bangladesh. Are they stateless, and what about those Rohingya who are not in IDP camps in Myanmar?

Ms. Manny Maung: The quick answer is, yes, all Rohingya are stateless at this point in time, and that is due to this discriminatory 1982 citizenship law that effectively stripped them of all their rights. They didn't used to be stateless. They were recognized as Myanmar citizens prior to 1982, but since then, the subsequent governments of Myanmar have endorsed this law, which we effectively want repealed. As for the conditions for the 600,000 Rohingya—

• (1940)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Unfortunately, I'm going to have to raise a point of order, Mr. Chair.

I'm really sorry and I hope it will be possible to stop the clock, but the interpreters are having a hard time.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'll see if we can get that fixed and put it in order. Can someone speak so we can see if it's working now?

Ms. Manny Maung: I just wanted to finish up by saying, on the issue of the 600,000 or so other Rohingya in Myanmar—

The Chair: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, is it working now?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I've just been told that the lady should move her microphone closer. I guess she has to bring it closer to her mouth.

[English]

The Chair: Okay. Now, we're actually going to be moving to you, Monsieur Brunelle-Duceppe, for your five minutes. We'll ask you, Ms. Maung, if you could just keep your mike as close to your mouth as possible when answering questions, for the interpretation. Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I may have interrupted Ms. Maung's intervention. If she continued it, I would appreciate it.

No? Very well.

In any case, I was just about to ask a question.

Ms. Maung, witnesses before the subcommittee predicted that the Rohingya refugee crisis would last a very long time.

Is this also your opinion?

I would like to hear your comments on this.

[English]

Ms. Manny Maung: Yes, absolutely. The situation is already far too protracted. As Mr. Mueller said, the conditions right now, even in Rakhine State, are such that the Rohingya within Myanmar cannot go back to their places of origin. The Rohingya in Bangladesh have already been there for three years with little opportunity, and the situation is such that there's no way they can come back to similar situations where there is active conflict. In fact, their homes aren't there anymore.

When we're discussing accountability and justice, it's very important that we collect evidence as we go along. It's very important to the key element of ICC. This is the ongoing element of genocide. People's homes are now still actively being razed or people cannot go back because of safety concerns, and we need to look at that in the context of the existing crimes against humanity that have already been committed against them.

We have not made a genocide determination at Human Rights Watch because it is a legal determination, but we do acknowledge that acts of genocide have been committed. Humanitarian access, the rights of the Rohingya and the IDP situation that exists there right now are all intrinsically linked to issues of accountability and justice.

We look at the situations of IDPs from other ethnic minority groups, such as the Kachin, the Shan and the Karen in Myanmar, and these issues have not been isolated. Their situations are also protracted. Ultimately, this is an accountability and justice issue, because right now Myanmar continues to act with impunity and its military continues to commit atrocity crimes with impunity.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: As you just said, it's already been three years and we know it will last for several more years.

How does a humanitarian organization like yours prepare for the Rohingya refugee crisis that will last such a long time? How can we help you in all of this?

[English]

Ms. Manny Maung: I'm very grateful to Canada, to start with. I think there have been some really positive and brave steps made, especially in regard to joining the intervention with Gambia and the Netherlands. We definitely want to continue these conversations to encourage Canada to do more. As we said before, we need Canada to be more vocal within the country and outside of the country.

These next five years are going to be crucial. We don't want IDPs to be in the same situation they are in now, and it is getting worse for them. We haven't even touched on the mental health issues that are stemming from this. People are living in a constant state of uncertainty and violence. We have talked about the gender-based violence that's going on because of this protracted crisis, but the mental health situation for adults and children is dire. We don't want this to continue. It's getting to a crisis again, and the international community really needs to come together to make some decisions so that we have agreed-upon elements to press Myanmar on. Right now everyone seems very muted.

I'll be really candid. There is such a fear of losing access to Myanmar generally, and its government has already had five years to prove its worth and has fallen well short. We're nowhere near a democratic level yet. We really need to—

• (1945)

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I want to thank you for your incredible work. Thank you so much for being here tonight.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe and Ms. Maung.

We are moving to our final five minutes, and they will be for the NDP.

Ms. McPherson, go ahead.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I need to reiterate what Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe has said. It's incredible work from all of you. Thank you so much for what you do.

I would like to ask Mr. Mueller some questions now, and I have a very quick question I wanted to touch on that I didn't have time for in my last intervention.

Mr. Mueller, you talked a bit about January 2021 being a time when there will be a report and when a review will be done of what is happening. Could you follow up on that? First of all, what will that look like? Second of all, will it be possible to do so, understanding the current COVID context we're in?

Mr. David Mueller: The universal periodic review will take place in Geneva. It will still go forward, and it will be done virtually. It's a peer review. All nations will have a chance to give their feedback to Myanmar. There are over 40 civil society groups that have actively made recommendations. They've already presented in the presessions this week. Groups are going from mission to mission, promoting their recommendations.

I took this opportunity in my statement to list some of the issues that the INGOs collectively want to raise. Among them are the things we've talked about. Rights of women are among them, including education, as has been pointed out. The freedom of movement is probably the biggest one in relation to the Rohingya.

If Canada will be making recommendations as well, if you could take a look at the recommendations from any of those 40 groups and put those on your list as well, they are all valid and hitting at the main key points. They are really at a political level, not at a humanitarian level. There are many humanitarian workers ready and willing to work, but we can't do our jobs if there's not a political will to access that.

One big challenge is that if we don't change these laws about citizenship and such, the international community is allowing this thing to go forward and supporting a government in an apartheid policy. The Government of Myanmar will continue to separate these people. It has no intention of giving them a state. We need to take this opportunity, in the peer review, to strongly recommend that the citizenship laws be struck, that people's access to services be granted and that they are granted a state identification, so they can have their lives back.

Ms. Heather McPherson: That's a very strong opportunity for Canada to raise that voice and raise the issues that Ms. Maung has brought up as well.

- (1950)

Mr. David Mueller: Exactly.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I have one last thing that I want to touch on with all three of you, if I have time.

In terms of the actual response to COVID-19 and what COVID-19 means on the ground, both in terms of getting a vaccine to populations that are particularly vulnerable but also in terms of providing the supports that we want to provide to the Rohingya people, what would be your number one recommendation?

I'll start with Mr. Mueller, and then I'll ask Ms. Maung and Mr. Rae.

Mr. David Mueller: The government is doing what it can. The ministry of health and sports is working closely with the WHO. I also sit on the COVID-19 core group. More money is needed. Canada provides resources, but only 50% of the COVID-19 addendum of the UN for the HRP has been given. More resources are needed for testing and vaccines. The last report indicated that only 40% will get the vaccine by the end of 2021 with the resources available at the moment. More resources need to be provided for vaccination and testing.

Ms. Heather McPherson: It's the COVAX method, yes.

Ms. Maung, would you have anything to add? I know that if we don't see the vaccine distributed equitably, we will be looking at a 30% higher morbidity rate.

Ms. Manny Maung: I couldn't stress enough what Mr. Mueller has said. Money is always an issue. Certainly, more donors would be appreciated. If we're looking at the context of providing services, medical facilities, quarantine facilities and oversight are really important to support the needs of IDPs, as well as the general population, to ensure that health care is compliant and that it's being done with dignity for those who have been exposed to illness.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Mr. Rae, is there anything you'd like to add to the vaccine conversation?

Hon. Bob Rae: Vaccines globally are underfunded. That's a huge issue, and it's going to become a bigger issue as the vaccines become more widely produced. That's just a fact. It's going to become a much bigger issue.

The second connected issue is that the social and economic costs of COVID are huge, much bigger, I think, than we've appreciated, much bigger than we yet understand. To talk about speaking up, I've been doing everything I can. There's the report I wrote over the summer, and ever since then, I've been speaking up as much as I can about the fact that, globally, we're going to have to make a far bigger, better response to the overall impact of COVID-19, much bigger than is currently contemplated.

The Chair: Thank you. That will conclude our second round.

What a fantastic way to conclude our final meeting of the sub-committee for 2020. On behalf of all the members, we can't thank our witnesses enough. Of course, Ambassador Rae, Mr. Mueller, Ms. Maung and Ms. Deif, you are just tremendous advocates, champions and ambassadors—literally and figuratively—for human rights on this Human Rights Day.

Members, just before we go in camera, just to do this in public I'll thank, of course, the clerk, the analysts, the staff, the interpreters and everybody who makes this committee such a wonderful place to be and supports the work we are able to do. Thank you for your tireless work.

I want to wish everybody a very merry Christmas, happy Hanukkah, happy Kwanza, *feliz Navidad*, joyous Festivus and a very happy new year. I bid good riddance to 2020, hopefully, and wish a much better 2021 for everybody here in Canada and around the world.

Thank you, everyone.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you.

We will send you the report, Mr. Rae. It's a promise.

Hon. Bob Rae: Absolutely. I'll be waiting for it.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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