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

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Chair: Mr. Peter Fonseca



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• (1830)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.)):** I call the meeting to order.

I am going to get started, members, because I want to bring up an item just before our meeting. I'm going to beg the indulgence of the witnesses while we do this.

I've received requests from a couple of our members to discuss an issue that has been sent to all members. It would be unfair to do this during our scheduled committee time with the witnesses who are coming before us today, so I've asked our clerk to put an in camera link for a quick five- to 10-minute meeting after our session concludes today, and I'm looking to the members right now to see if there is consensus to do that.

I see MP Sidhu. Please go ahead.

**Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Brampton East, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

With regard to having an extension of this meeting, I've already got something. It's Ramadan Iftar. I have to attend right after this meeting, so that won't work. I don't know if we're able to do it at a later date, but I obviously want to be respectful to the witnesses who are here with us today and respect their time.

**The Chair:** I understand, and that is what's most important.

I don't think we have consensus, members, to do that at this time. I don't want to take up more time and I want to respect the witnesses. They are waiting to get started, so thank you.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Naaman Sugrue):** Before we begin, Mr. Chair, I need to test Monsieur Brunelle-Duceppe very quickly.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ):** Great.

So, I'm sorry, but I had some technical problems. My favourite clerk is going to do the checks. I hope there aren't any sound issues.

Good evening to all the witnesses and all my dear parliamentary colleagues.

Is it working?

**The Clerk:** Everything's working well. Thank you.

You can continue, Mr. Chair.

[English]

**The Chair:** Okay, we'll get started.

Welcome, colleagues, to meeting number 19 of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights.

Today we meet to hear from witnesses for briefings on the situations in Turkey and northern Syria, followed by Colombia.

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 30 seconds left in your questioning time, I'll signal you with this paper.

For our witnesses, interpretation in both official languages is available through a globe icon at the bottom of your screen. Please note that screen captures or photos are not permitted.

I would like to welcome our witnesses for the first panel on Turkey and northern Syria.

We have with us Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, special rapporteur, special procedures branch, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights at the United Nations; Lindsay Gladding, director for fragile and humanitarian programs at World Vision Canada; Farida Deif, Canada director at Human Rights Watch; Taryn Russell, head of policy and advocacy, and Amilcar Kraudie, humanitarian adviser, from Save the Children Canada; and Justin Mohammed, human rights law and policy campaigner at Amnesty International Canada.

We'll begin with opening statements.

I invite Professor Ní Aoláin to give your opening statement, for up to five minutes.

**Ms. Fionnuala Ní Aoláin (Special Rapporteur, Special Procedures Branch, United Nations, Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner):** Good afternoon.

I will just make the usual disclaimer that UN officials make at the beginning of such evidence, which is that my attendance before the standing committee is in my capacity as special rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism.

I'm here to provide an informal, unsworn, oral briefing to the foreign affairs committee in the framework of the discussion on Syria and Iraq. Nothing in my remarks should be construed as a waiver, express or implied, of the privileges or immunities of the United Nations officials or experts, pursuant to the 1946 Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations. Thank you.

Let me make some generic remarks.

As you know, the mandate I hold has been intimately engaged with the situation of civilians, particularly women and children, who find themselves in northeast Syria, including a significant number of Canadian nationals. The mandate I hold, along with 15 other special procedure mechanisms of the United Nations, has issued a letter to 57 states, of whom Canada is one, that have their nationals currently held—women and children—in camps and in detention sites in northeast Syria.

This list, in my view, is not a list that any state wants to be on, because it is a list that defines a set of obligations to individuals in this territory and defines the failure of states to live up to their international obligations.

We have made clear in this letter that there are multiple and serious human rights violations taking place for your nationals, Canadian nationals, in the situation in northeast Syria. They include torture and inhuman and degrading treatment, including for Canadian children. They include the danger of, and actual, sexual and reproductive harm to women and to minors. They include arbitrary detention, risks to the right to life, restrictions on freedom of movement, denial of the right to non-discrimination, and the abrogation of the rights to education, health, and clean and safe water.

I have consistently affirmed the obligations of states, including Canada, to urgently repatriate their third country nationals.

Let me be clear that other states are doing this. My mandate works closely with a large number of states that have, even throughout the COVID pandemic, worked to ensure the safe return of their nationals. With the exception of one minor child, an orphan, Canada has not been among those states making large-scale returns.

I want to stress that your nationals are being held by non-state actors who have no legitimate basis to hold them.

The situation is worsening in the camps. The mandate has, for example, been aware in the last two weeks of a significant military incursion in the camps, a clearing out, and another data and biometric data-collecting exercise on persons held there. We remain deeply concerned about the gathering of information on third country nationals and the question of with whom that data will be shared.

Let me make a couple of brief remarks about a group that has not had much attention in the camps: adolescent boys, young boys under the age 18.

It's particularly concerning to me that while our attention has been on females—girls and mothers—there are a sizable number of adolescent boys being held in prison facilities on what appears to me to be multiple spurious grounds. Some of these facilities, including for Canadian nationals, have been described as rehabilita-

tion camps. I would unreservedly voice my concern at the use of this nomenclature. There is no legal basis to justify the detention of any of the children being held in these so-called rehabilitation sites. None have been legally represented, no best-interest test has been applied to keep them there, and no child has meaningful exit from the camp unless Canada is prepared to take them back.

There is an obligation not just on human rights and moral grounds to return your women and children home, but also on security grounds.

● (1835)

The long-term security of this region and of all states will only be secured when all the individuals in the camps are returned or a safe process has been put in place for those who can't be returned on the basis of non-refoulement. Security and human rights are the basis for return, and both are imperatives.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Now we'll move to Ms. Lindsay Gladding.

● (1840)

**Ms. Lindsay Gladding (Director for Fragile and Humanitarian Programs, World Vision Canada):** Thank you so much, Chair and members of the committee, for inviting us to contribute to today's briefing on the situation in Turkey and northern Syria.

World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organization working to create lasting change in the lives of children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice. We work throughout the world in nearly 100 countries on the basis of need, with no strings attached. Here in Canada, we're supported by a network of 650,000 individuals and partners, including churches and university clubs.

The humanitarian consequences of a decade of fighting and displacement are clear: Humanitarian needs across Syria have risen by 20% since last year, with an estimated 13.4 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in 2021.

The rights of Syrian girls and boys to be healthy, educated, protected and empowered are being severely undermined. Cross-border humanitarian assistance is a vital lifeline in helping to ensure that at a minimum, the right to assistance for Syrian children and families is upheld.

Children can be astoundingly resilient, but in Syria they have faced more than 10 years of relentless injury, death and destruction. As a result of a decade of war, they have lost their education, safety and family income, and their hope in a peaceful future. Children and their families live in constant fear of violence that threatens death or sexual assault, particularly against women and girls. World Vision's most recent assessment in northwest Syria indicated that every single girl we spoke to lives with the fear of being sexually assaulted and raped.

At least 1,435 schools and hospitals have been attacked—grave violations—preventing children from having the most basic rights to health care and education. Children who survive the air strikes, barrel bombs, ground attacks and siege strategies consistently face an unsafe reality and an uncertain future.

Of course, it's key to situate our response, as well as the broader operational environment, within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The financial and health impacts of COVID-19 on communities already impacted by the decades-long conflict are devastating, particularly for those living in displacement and refugee camps and collective shelters in areas with limited health care.

An estimated 2.45 million girls and boys—or one in three—were already out of school by the end of 2019. The COVID-19 crisis has pushed an additional 50% out of education in the north of the country, resulting in two-thirds of children being out of school in northern Syria. Sadly, we know, of course, that girls are least likely to attend or return to school.

The Government of Canada is an important partner for our work in Syria, and we appreciate the financial commitments made to the Syria crisis in the recent budget. Our Canadian grants in northwestern Syria have focused on providing life-saving protection, health, water and sanitation, but I really want to stress the importance of dedicating sufficient funds to address the staggering humanitarian needs and ensuring the protection of children's rights.

I'd like to turn our attention to the important issue of cross-border humanitarian operations between Turkey and Syria.

The ability to provide cross-border assistance in Syria, initially through UN Security Council Resolution 2165 in 2014 and then its subsequent renewals, has been a vital lifeline to millions of people in Syria. It has allowed organizations like ours to reach people in spite of continued fighting and insecurity and in spite of severe access constraints, and has enabled humanitarian actors to ensure that those most in need are reached with assistance in a direct, safe, sustained and timely manner.

The scale of these operations is massive. Last year alone, the cross-border response allowed humanitarian actors to reach over 2.4 million people a month with life-saving food, nutrition assistance, education and critical medical supplies. Extended authorization of these operations by the UN Security Council is critical to support a pandemic response, including vaccinations in northwest Syria, where the first shipment of vaccines was received on April 22. It is deeply concerning that over the past years the number of border crossings available to humanitarian organizations has steadily decreased, placing additional constraints on humanitarian operations.

Let me conclude with two quick recommendations.

We urge the Government of Canada, through its permanent missions in New York and Geneva as well as through the ministerial level, to continue to strongly advocate a timely and unrestricted renewal of cross-border authorization.

We encourage Global Affairs Canada to make multi-year funding the expectation rather than the exception, providing the greatest flexibility for organizations like ours to have meaningful partnerships with local organizations.

• (1845)

Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak to you today.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Now we'll hear from Ms. Farida Deif for five minutes, please.

**Ms. Farida Deif (Canada Director, Human Rights Watch):** Thank you, Mr. Chair and honourable members of Parliament, for inviting me to appear before the subcommittee.

I will focus my remarks today on the humanitarian crisis in northeastern Syria, given the gravity of the human rights abuses on the ground and the urgent need for this government to address the plight of Canadians trapped there.

As you know, 10 years of conflict have decimated Syria's infrastructure and social services, resulting in massive humanitarian needs and making millions reliant on aid, including many of the roughly two million people living in northeastern Syria in areas under the control of the Kurdish-led autonomous administration, the region's de facto government.

While much of the population doesn't have sufficient access to services—including health care, water, sanitation and shelter—the UN Security Council has unfortunately failed to maintain critical cross-border aid systems for northeastern Syria, making a desperate situation worse. Lest we think that this is a problem thousands of miles away that doesn't acutely affect Canadians, it's important for the subcommittee to recognize that dozens of Canadians, mostly children, remain detained in these life-threatening conditions amid growing insecurity, shortages of vital aid and a deadly global pandemic. These Canadians were detained by the Kurdish-led authorities two years ago after the fall of the Islamic State's so-called caliphate. The detainees include roughly 45 Canadians: eight men, 13 women and 24 children, most of whom are under the age of six.

The indefinite detention of these Canadians without their being brought before a judge to review the legality and necessity of their detention is both arbitrary and unlawful. The detention of Canadian women and children solely because of their ties to male ISIS suspects amounts to guilt by association and collective punishment, which is prohibited under international law.

The conditions in the northeastern Syrian camps and prisons holding these Canadians are life-threatening. According to humanitarian groups, more than 700 detainees in the al-Hawl and al-Roj camps—at least half of them children—have died in the past two years. The illness, filth and overcrowding in these prisons and camps have created a prime environment for the spread of COVID-19, which is increasing the despair of detainees and their families.

To be clear, these Canadians have no hope of leaving the detention camps and prisons of northeastern Syria without this government's intervention. Canada holds the keys to their release, but thus far, this government has consistently turned a blind eye, recycling the same excuses again and again to justify an unwillingness to spend political capital to repatriate Canadians with suspected ISIS ties. There is no repatriation plan for this specific group of Canadians. Consular officials have had little to no direct contact with detainees, much less lifted a finger to improve the conditions of their detention, nor has Canada helped verify citizenship for any of the detained children born in Syria to Canadian parents, leaving them effectively stateless.

Despite the Kurdish authorities' pleading with states to repatriate their nationals, Canada has only brought home two Canadian children, a five-year-old orphan and another young child in March, whose Canadian mother remains detained. While Canada may have obtained the mother's consent to repatriate her child alone, Human Rights Watch questions whether consent can be informed and voluntary for women indefinitely detained with no access to redress or counsel.

For over two years, Canada has flouted its international legal obligations to intervene when citizens abroad face serious abuses, including risks to life, torture, and inhuman and degrading treatment. The growing humanitarian crisis and these Canadians' indefinite detention in appalling conditions make piecemeal returns untenable. All of these Canadians have the right to adequate food, water, clothing, shelter, mental and physical health, and fair trials. The children have the right to an education.

Repatriation also makes sense from a security standpoint. Orderly returns allow Canada to conduct individual assessments of each returnee, monitor them as appropriate and prosecute those who may have committed crimes, a critical step in redress for thousands of ISIS victims.

In closing, I appeal to members of the subcommittee to urge this government to repatriate, as a matter of urgency, all Canadians detained in northeastern Syria. Adult guardians should be brought home with their children, absent compelling evidence that separation is in the best interest of the child.

• (1850)

Pending repatriations, Canada should immediately increase consular assistance to—

**The Chair:** Thank you. You'll have an opportunity during questions.

We'll now move to Ms. Taryn Russell for five minutes.

**Ms. Taryn Russell (Head of Policy and Advocacy, Save the Children Canada):** Thank you.

My colleague will give our remarks.

**Mr. Amilcar Kraudie (Humanitarian Advisor, Save the Children Canada):** Thank you, and good evening.

I am Amilcar Kraudie, humanitarian adviser at Save the Children Canada. I am here with my colleague Taryn Russell, the head of policy and advocacy.

My comments today will be through the lens of Save the Children's experience working to address children's needs and rights in humanitarian development settings for more than 100 years.

Every year, Save the Children responds to close to 80 emergencies across 120 countries. We have been working to reach children affected by the war in Syria since 2012. We provide emergency and life-saving support, combined with early recovery activities that help restore basic services for children and their families. We welcome this opportunity to brief you on our key concerns for children in northern Syria and Turkey based on our work in this region.

The Syrian crisis for us is fundamentally first and foremost a protection crisis. More than 10 years of conflict continues to have a devastating impact on children inside Syria, as well as those displaced to neighbouring countries. Every child in Syria has been impacted by the ongoing violence and displacement. Violations of children's rights by all parties to the conflict continue, to varying degrees.

The convergence of conflict, COVID-19 and its control measures, and the seeming collapse of the Syrian currency are having profound effects on food security, education and other markers of well-being. Children's mental well-being is an increasing concern, as we are now seeing children resorting to taking their own lives. Almost one in five of all recorded suicide attempts and deaths in northwest Syria are children. The last three months of 2020 saw an 86% jump in suicide rates from the beginning of the year. These figures emerge among constantly deteriorating conditions for people in northwest Syria, including a substantial increase in the impact of COVID-19, poverty, a lack of education and employment, domestic violence, child marriages, broken relationships and bullying, all these in communities that have been reeling from a decade of conflict.

Mental health support is just one of the escalating needs we are seeing in northern Syria. It is estimated that 3.4 million people in northwest Syria alone are in need of humanitarian assistance and remain in areas outside of government control, only reachable with life-saving cross-border assistance. This cross-border assistance through the Bab al-Hawa crossing point in northern Idlib will only become more important, as it is needed to support COVID-19 vaccination efforts. First shipments of the vaccine were received a few weeks ago. Without cross-border access, vaccination efforts in northwest Syria will be all but impossible.

We are particularly concerned about the impact this latest increase and accompanying lockdown will have on children, including the thousands of children who are detained in northeast Syria in camps and other detention settings because of links to ISIS. In the largest camp, al-Hawl, 43,000 out of its 65,000 total population are children. Because of COVID-19 lockdowns and curfews, they are less likely able to access medical services and facilities affecting their health, education and mental well-being. This crisis is made much worse by the closure of the Al Yarubiyah border crossing point last year, cutting off all vital supplies, including medicine and food, from the most vulnerable people, including children. There is no justification for preventing life-saving supplies from reaching people in need, particularly during a global pandemic.

On top of all of that, we do want to highlight that there is also now an increased concern around water scarcity and how that is also impacting multiple needs across the board.

Recognizing the deteriorating situation in northern Syria and escalating humanitarian needs, we offer the following recommendations for the Government of Canada.

First, it is imperative that life-saving aid continues to reach millions in need in northwest Syria, and the UN Security Council should, at a minimum, renew cross-border access through Bab al-Hawa for at least 12 months. The Government of Canada should use any diplomatic influence to ensure this happens.

Second, the international community should also recognize the escalating humanitarian needs in the country and increase humanitarian funding accordingly. It is shameful that the pledging conference for Syria fell so short of its target. This gap needs to be rectified urgently. We are grateful that Canada stepped up and did not cut funding like other donors; however, additional funds could support some of the urgent mental health needs I discussed earlier.

The situations in the camps in northeast Syria are challenging, and the camps are no place for children to grow up. Putting even COVID-19 aside, we regularly see children die or being injured by accidents. It is estimated that 9,000 foreign children are in the region, including about 25 Canadian children, so for our third recommendation, we urge the Government of Canada to increase its efforts to identify the most appropriate routes for repatriation in line with the best interests of the child.

Thank you for your time today.

• (1855)

**The Chair:** Thank you. You were right on time.

Now we will move to Mr. Justin Mohammed for five minutes.

**Mr. Justin Mohammed (Human Rights Law and Policy Campaigner, Amnesty International Canada):** Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members, for inviting me to participate in this briefing. I'm joining you tonight from unceded Algonquin Anishinabe territory in Ottawa.

Before I begin my testimony, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the Library of Parliament analysts who serve this committee, a role that I once held and remember very fondly.

Mr. Chair, I intend for my testimony this evening to be an update to that which Amnesty International provided at the foreign affairs committee, exactly two months ago today, regarding detention camps in northeast Syria. This is an important international human rights issue that, as you know, directly implicates Canadian citizens.

Let me begin with the positive. In mid-March, a Canadian child was allowed to return to Canada from a camp in northeast Syria. After exiting that country, she is reported to have received consular services to facilitate her travel from Iraq to Canada, including the provision of travel documents.

Last week, Minister Garneau stated that he would be investigating how G7 countries have approached the question of repatriating their nationals from the prison camps in the northeast. This was also a very welcome development, and Canada could look to U.S. leadership in this regard. Not only has the U.S. repatriated its citizens, but it has also encouraged other countries to do the same, and has even offered to help with this task.

Regrettably, this is where the good news comes to an end. The humanitarian situation facing the people who are arbitrarily and indefinitely detained in the al-Hawl and al-Roj camps has not improved. Forty-five Canadian citizens, of whom roughly two dozen are children, remain in squalid camps that the UN experts have qualified as potentially amounting to torture or other cruel, inhumane, and degrading treatment or punishment under international law.

Such human rights violations are among the most serious, with these prohibitions contradicting peremptory norms of international law. In the case of children, such acts are downright unconscionable

Canadians continue to languish there, but it is not for want of a responsive policy framework. The consular manual boldly proclaims, “The torture or mistreatment of Canadian detainees is not tolerated.” Consular officials must “promptly advise the Minister...in writing if there is credible information indicating torture, and the Deputy Minister in cases indicating mistreatment.” Although “prompt” is undefined, a period of three months was deemed by the Auditor General to be unacceptable. This group of Canadians has been in detention for over two years.

The policies further provide that where such mistreatment concerns arise, a consular ad hoc working group on torture and mistreatment should assess whether the allegations are valid and advise on the management of these cases. Amnesty International has been informed that the minister has been advised of allegations of torture and mistreatment in Syria and that the ad hoc working group has been convened. Unfortunately, we do not know what advice the ad hoc working group has provided. A request to know when the minister was advised of the torture allegations and the outcome of those assessments has been refused. An access to information request about the provision of consular services to the detained Canadians remains unanswered one year after it was submitted.

Questions must be answered about the application of these policies to this group of Canadian citizens, who continue to be subject to daily human rights abuses with no end in sight.

One Canadian detainee's mother shared a recent message from her daughter: “*Salaam*, mom. How are you? They let out a bunch of sisters from the prisons throughout Ramadan, some at night with no tent to go to, the one who was locked in a toilet for three months, the ones who ate only tea and bread, the ones who got only five minutes of sun with their kids, the ones who had no change of clothes, the ones who were beat.”

Moreover, Canada's failure to resolve this situation presents a major credibility risk to many aspects of Canada's international human rights agenda. Consider, for example, Canada's recent initiative on state-to-state arbitrary detention or its efforts to pursue the Assad regime over crimes of torture committed since 2011. Such endeavours lack principle when Canada allows its own citizens to be held in arbitrary and indefinite detention in conditions that may constitute torture.

Similarly, Minister Garneau said that Canada's feminist foreign policy will be announced this spring. How can Canada promote a foreign policy based on gender equality when turning its back on vulnerable Canadians in Syria, many of whom report or have been threatened with gender-based violence?

Mr. Chair, in our previous testimony, Amnesty International offered four recommendations. I won't go over them for the sake of time, but I would conclude by offering one recommendation to this committee, which has admirably called out serious international human rights violations in so many contexts: Do not allow the violations in northeast Syria to escape your condemnation. It is rare that the mandate of this committee should overlap with human rights abuses suffered directly by a group of Canadian citizens.

• (1900)

Amnesty International encourages this committee to seize the moment to advocate on their behalf.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to your questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Mohammed. Welcome back home to committee. It was great to hear about your history here and your work on the Hill.

We're going to move now to questions from members. Members, looking at the time, we will only have one round of questions. It will be seven minutes per member from each of the parties.

We're going to begin with Ms. Vandenberg.

**Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I will split my time with Mr. Sidhu.

I thank all the witnesses for their incredible expertise and testimony today, much of it very startling.

I did have some questions, but I want to start by following up on something that Mr. Kraudie said in his testimony. I've been on this committee for a number of years. I've worked in international development all over the world in some of the most dangerous places, but I've never heard about children committing suicide, which is incredibly alarming to me. I think you mentioned something like.... I can't remember the statistic, but can you elaborate on that? That is something I don't think we have very often heard in situations like this. Could you tell us what is causing that and what we can do about it?

**Mr. Amilcar Kraudie:** Perhaps allow me to expand, going back to that issue, on how we recognize at Save the Children that the fact that Syria has been in conflict for 10 years reflects on the wider international community.

As you might imagine, that has a long-term and protracted impact on the well-being of children themselves. That's the first point, which is that there has been no end to the plight, and you can imagine how this happening day in and day out deepens their trauma.

The second point is a salient issue that we've picked up on. It is that Syrian children, even overseas in different locations, also voice that they simply don't want to return to Syria, because for them it evokes images of horror and further trauma.

The whole concept of post-traumatic stress disorder that these children are facing in the coming generations is fairly significant, and we at Save the Children want to put that at the forefront of the durable solutions this specific group needs. Especially when we're talking about durable solutions for the Syrian population, this angle or this element of mental health and psychosocial support is absolutely critical.



**Ms. Taryn Russell:** I can add that one of the reasons for the recent jump is the surge of COVID cases and the associated lockdowns, which means children are out of school, which is often a safe space. Mental health is really affected by that, as we see here in Canada. Lockdowns, as well as the impact of COVID, also limit the ability of organizations to deliver mental health supports. That's one of the reasons for the recent surge in the last few months.

Thank you.

**Ms. Anita Vandenberg:** Thank you.

That was my next question—the impact of COVID and some of the measures that may have been taken to try to curb COVID-19. I will go back to either one of you, and also to Ms. Gladding, to answer that. Be aware that I only have about a minute and a half for that answer, and then I want to give the floor to my colleague.

**Ms. Taryn Russell:** Sure, I can continue quickly, and Lindsay may want to add anything from World Vision.

Yes, I think the closing of schools is a huge thing. We run safe spaces programs in schools, which are a really great way to reach out to children who have had a lot of trauma. As well, the lockdowns make it so that when children need to access services, they cannot. That's making it harder to reach them and making us think of more innovative ways to do that, which is part of the reason for the surge.

Lindsay, please add.

**Ms. Lindsay Gladding:** I would add that the fear of COVID-19 infection is also hampering people's willingness to reach out for services when they need them. They have limited mobility and aren't able to reach out even when services are available.

• (1905)

**Ms. Anita Vandenberg:** Thanks.

I'll give the floor to Mr. Sidhu.

**Mr. Maninder Sidhu:** Thank you.

Thank you to all our witnesses for sharing your insights and taking time out of your busy schedules to be here with us this evening.

Ms. Gladding, as you know, the government is committed to helping make a real difference in Syria, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon, committing over \$4 billion since 2016. As you highlighted, in budget 2021 we provided roughly \$527 million in 2021-22 to extend Canada's Middle East strategy.

In line with our feminist policies, we are seeing strong results, especially for women and girls, and focusing on continuing to support vulnerable populations. Along those lines, Ms. Gladding, what are the major protection needs, particularly among women and girls, and how are they being addressed in this crisis?

**Ms. Lindsay Gladding:** Thanks very much for that question.

What we are definitely seeing is that there are very real threats and real incidents of sexual assault and rape. As I said in my opening remarks, every girl we spoke to in our assessment told us that she is living with the fear of sexual assault and rape, so ensuring that we have resources to be able to provide services and provide

prevention and protection for women and girls is certainly top of mind for us in the work we're doing.

Again, generally, access to basic services—to clean water, to food—are things that are certainly not unique to women and girls, but they are certainly incredibly vulnerable to a lack of resources and the impact that is having.

I would say again that while we are certainly encouraged by continued Canadian government support for our operations, the allocation to Global Affairs Canada is quite small when considering the overall support as part of our Middle East strategy, so the more resources we invest in ensuring that we can meet the needs of women and children.... As you said, we're making good progress, but the needs are continuing to far outstrip the resources available.

**Mr. Maninder Sidhu:** Thank you.

I have 30 seconds left, so I'll try to get this in there.

Ms. Gladding, are beneficiaries and local delivery partners, including local women's organizations, involved in decision-making related to the design, delivery and monitoring of some of these programs?

**Ms. Lindsay Gladding:** Yes, absolutely.

Everything we do in northwest Syria is done in partnership with global organizations. World Vision and organizations like us are very much committed to strengthening the capacity of local Syrian civil society, and all of our support is done in partnership.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Now we'll move to MP Chiu for seven minutes.

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

My first question is to Ms. Deif.

Ms. Deif, you mentioned that it is estimated that dozens of Canadians are being held and detained in northern Syria and that over 20 of them are children. It's almost like they're guilty by association. Later on, you also mentioned that their identities have not been able to be confirmed without consular access and assessment.

How do we estimate how many men, women and children are Canadian?

**Ms. Farida Deif:** Thank you for your question.

These are the figures that we have learned from humanitarian organizations on the ground. The Kurdish-led authorities as well have identified those individuals who.... We know that of the adults, there are eight Canadian men and roughly 13 Canadian women.

The government certainly knows of these Canadians and their whereabouts. They're Canadian citizens. Many of their children were born in Syria during the reign of ISIS and so have no birth certificates, but they're certainly eligible for Canadian citizenship based on their parents' Canadian nationality.

Those are the figures. There may actually be more than the number that I mentioned, simply because there may be dual nationals there who are not reported.

**Mr. Kenny Chiu:** You mentioned that consular access has not been provided.

Many of these places are actually controlled by non-state actors, as you also mentioned. Will Canadian consular staff be provided access to places like that in order to provide assistance or even to confirm their identities and even provide repatriation?

• (1910)

**Ms. Farida Deif:** The Kurdish-led authority, the non-state actor that is running these camps, has a line of communication with the Canadian government. We've been told repeatedly that the Canadian government does ask the Kurdish-led authorities about the well-being of Canadians there.

The Kurdish-led authority certainly want these Canadians repatriated. They would facilitate consular access through video, through phone and so on, but it really is a matter of political will as to whether Global Affairs Canada wants to provide direct assistance to these Canadians, provide them with travel documents and verify the citizenship of children who are now stateless.

Essentially, it's an issue of political will. There are means and creative solutions to providing consular assistance to this group of Canadians. We've seen dozens of countries, similarly with no consular presence in Syria, do exactly that: repatriate their nationals and provide them with consular assistance.

There is a Canadian consulate in Erbil that could certainly facilitate that. There is a special envoy to Syria that's based in our embassy in Beirut, so there really are a number of mechanisms in place to provide consular assistance without physically being present in Syria, as long as there is the political will to do so.

**Mr. Kenny Chiu:** Ms. Aoláin, I was wondering if you could share with the committee other countries' experiences that are more successful. I heard about the U.S. being one of the successful examples, and they are even offering services to Canada and other countries. What are the experiences of other countries that have been successful in repatriating their citizens?

**Ms. Fionnuala Ní Aoláin:** We have a significant number of countries making extraordinary efforts to ensure the return of their nationals, and I have first-hand, with my team—

**Mr. Kenny Chiu:** On a point of order, Mr. Chair, it looks as though the audio is quite weak. I don't know if it is just my head-phone.

**The Chair:** I can hear well, but I don't know if others are having some issues.

**Ms. Fionnuala Ní Aoláin:** Is that better? Can you hear me now? Do you want me to speak more or less loudly?

**The Chair:** Where is your microphone located?

**Ms. Fionnuala Ní Aoláin:** It's right here. It's in my—

Can you hear me, Chair, or is it just—

**The Chair:** Okay. I can hear you, but it sounds as though MP Chiu is having some issues.

**Mr. Kenny Chiu:** It seems that MP Sidhu also is having a problem.

I can hear, but I wonder if the translators are having some problems, Mr. Clerk. If so, then we probably need to fix that first.

**The Chair:** It looks as though the clerk is speaking to somebody.

**Ms. Fionnuala Ní Aoláin:** Chair, do you want me to proceed so at least you have a record of our country's efforts, or do you want me to hold?

**The Chair:** We will just hold if some of the members can't hear.

Clerk, how is the interpretation with the sound?

**Mr. Kenny Chiu:** He is not muted.

**The Chair:** Clerk, I don't know if you can hear me.

**The Clerk:** Mr. Chair, I apologize for that.

If I can't hear you, perhaps no one can hear anyone.

**Mr. Kenny Chiu:** I can hear the clerk, but we were wondering if the witness's audio is good enough for translation. If so, we could continue. I personally have no problem.

**The Clerk:** No, Alexis is also having issues.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Actually, Mr. Chair, I think this is the first time I've had no problems with interpretation, while you're all having sound problems. I can't tell you what the problem is, but the interpreter tells me that everything has been going well from the start.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Okay, MP Chiu, the interpreters are fine.

**Mr. Kenny Chiu:** Okay, then I'm okay. Sorry.

**Ms. Fionnuala Ní Aoláin:** Thank you, MP Chiu.

There are a number of countries—

**The Clerk:** Mr. Chair, I'm sorry, but I do have to interrupt.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** A point of order, Mr. Chair. The situation just changed: I've just been told that it's no longer possible to do the interpretation.

[English]

**The Clerk:** The interpreters are giving me the feedback that it is not adequate for them at present. My apologies. I'm not sure if something has changed with the professor's set-up.

• (1915)

**The Chair:** Okay, we'll have to move on to another witness for your questions, MP Chiu.

**Mr. Kenny Chiu:** Okay. My next question is for Mr. Mohammed.

Mr. Mohammed, Turkey, the country that borders on Syria's northern area, probably has the most influence in that area. It's been reported that Turkey unlawfully detains and transports captured proxy fighters from Syria to Turkey for prosecution. Many of them have been sentenced, including often to life without parole on top of abhorrent prison conditions.

Could you share with us the extent of this practice?

**Mr. Justin Mohammed:** Thank you, MP Chiu, for this question. I know that Amnesty International has some research with respect to the border region. Regrettably, I can't provide further context on that. I would be very happy to take on your question, consult with my regional colleagues who are experts in this area, and revert with a response if that would be helpful to you, but I do regret that I won't be able to provide further comment on that here.

**Mr. Kenny Chiu:** Thank you. Perhaps you could submit some information on that to the committee.

Media reports indicate that at least 25 innocent Canadian children are trapped in refugee camps not far from Turkey, and the country is launching a military offensive. Is any witness attending the meeting today familiar with the situation of Canadian children in Syria in that part of the world? I have 30 seconds left.

**Ms. Farida Deif:** I'm sorry, but I think you mean the same Canadian children we were speaking about earlier, because the number is exactly the same.

We know that a remaining 24 Canadian children whose family members have ties to ISIS are detained by the Kurdish-led authorities in northeast Syria, the de facto authority there.

**Mr. Kenny Chiu:** Their safety is being threatened by military operations.

**Ms. Farida Deif:** Yes, certainly.

**The Chair:** Thank you, MP Chiu. I did add over two minutes to your time for the time we lost.

**Mr. Kenny Chiu:** I appreciate it.

**The Chair:** Now we're moving to MP Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to begin by thanking the witnesses for being with us this evening. We're extremely grateful to them. We're greatly concerned about this issue.

My question is for Ms. Gladding, but if the other witnesses want to answer it afterwards, they're welcome to.

We know that a Canadian investigation revealed that Turkey used Canadian equipment, in this case drones, for surveillance and targeting purposes in Syria.

This may be a bit of a silly question, but did the fact that Canada stopped selling arms to Turkey last month change anything, or was it too little too late?

[English]

**Ms. Lindsay Gladding:** I don't feel best placed to answer that myself, but I would certainly open the floor to other witnesses who may be able to speak to that.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Does anyone have an opinion on this?

Okay, at least I tried. I feel like no one wants to comment on this somewhat sensitive issue. No problem.

Could someone explain to me how Turkey's military operations in Syria violate the rights protected by international humanitarian law and international human rights law?

[English]

**Ms. Fionnuala Ní Aoláin:** If you can hear me, I'm happy to—

• (1920)

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you, that's kind, Ms. Ní Aoláin. I'm listening.

[English]

**Ms. Fionnuala Ní Aoláin:** I want to make two remarks to the questions from the MP.

The first is about the uses of technology. The United Nations special procedures remain deeply concerned about the use of surveillance and data technology in northeast Syria, including its application to Canadian and other third country nationals. A formal letter has been sent to your excellency's government on that particular point with regard to the collection of biometric data from persons detained in northeast Syria, including Canadian nationals. That issue is live. It is prescient. We are deeply concerned over the sharing of that data, particularly on children, with other security forces and with other third party actors and states.

As regards international humanitarian law, it is profoundly clear that overlapping human rights and humanitarian law is applicable to Turkey also as a state party engaged in this conflict zone. That particularly includes the law of occupation in the parts of Syria in which Turkey exercises effective control, including detention sites. It also includes the full application of the fourth Geneva Convention to the detention of third country nationals, including Canadian nationals.

This issue is, to say the least, extremely sensitive. The mandate I hold is appraised of and deeply concerned about it, and specifically the detention of third country nationals by states in northeast Syria, and not only by non-state actors.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you very much for answering that extremely important question, Ms. Ní Aoláin.

Human rights organizations and observers report that the human rights situation in Turkey has deteriorated considerably since the passage of broad anti-terrorism legislation in 2018. This we know.

I'm going to follow up with you, Ms. Ní Aoláin. Could you describe the impact that anti-terrorism legislation has had on human rights in Turkey?

[*English*]

**Ms. Fionnuala Ní Aoláin:** Thank you for the opportunity.

I will briefly state that my mandate has been in direct public communication with the Turkish government on its terrorism legislation, but most recently, in the last four months, on its adoption of countering terrorism finance legislation. This legislation is being used to directly target civil society, human rights defenders and those who dissent from the government.

We have made clear that the use of terrorism measures against civil society is a breach of international law. It is, in fact, a distortion of why we have counterterrorism measures in the first place.

I am deeply concerned that we have a number of governments—and this has been explicitly stated by my office to Turkey—that are misusing counterterrorism legislation to undermine legitimately protected actions—freedom of expression, speech, assembly, family life, right to participate in public affairs—by invoking the terminology of terrorism in order to have legitimacy and cover for actions that are inconsistent with international law.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you very much.

How much time do I have left, Mr. Chair?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** You have approximately one minute.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Okay.

I'll continue with the anti-terrorism measures.

What were the main targets—I emphasize the word “targets”—of anti-terrorism legislation?

[*English*]

**Ms. Fionnuala Ní Aoláin:** Are you asking me?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Yes.

[*English*]

**Ms. Fionnuala Ní Aoláin:** Do you mean in Turkey or more broadly?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** I'm talking about Turkey.

[*English*]

**Ms. Fionnuala Ní Aoláin:** Specifically—and I'm happy to share the UN's communications on this issue, because the letter is public—the target is civil society. The targets are dissenters. The targets are those who disagree with the government.

We have raised these issues not only with Turkey but also with the FATF, the Financial Action Task Force.

Thank you.

• (1925)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We're moving to our last questioner.

MP McPherson, you have seven minutes.

**Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to deeply thank all of our witnesses for being with us today. This is harrowing testimony to be hearing. It's not the first time we've heard that at this committee, and I thank you for sharing it with us again. It's very important.

I want to start by looking at some of the testimony we've heard tonight. I thought I could start with you, Ms. Ní Aoláin. I'm sure I've not said your name correctly, and I apologize.

You spoke of the fact that Canadian nationals are being held by non-state actors, and that this is, in fact, against international law. It contravenes the law. I'm going to ask a few questions just to make sure we have it on the record and that it is clear. Is that accurate?

**Ms. Fionnuala Ní Aoláin:** Yes, because these individuals, Canadian nationals, have been subject to no legal process for their detention. They are being held arbitrarily in conditions that we believe meet the threshold for torture and inhuman and degrading treatment. That is not allowable. Whether it's a state or a non-state actor, that is not allowable under international humanitarian law, if we apply Protocol 2 or Common Article 3 of the four Geneva Conventions, and it's clearly inconsistent with international human rights law.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** In your opinion, is Canada, at this point, in contravention of, for example, the rights of the child?

**Ms. Fionnuala Ní Aoláin:** Canada and all of the other 57 states that have failed to repatriate their nationals are in clear breach of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Committee on the Rights of the Child has explicitly found on this issue, not specific to Canada but in relation to other nationals, that the continued arbitrary detention of children in these camps is a breach of the convention.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Thank you.

Ms. Deif, you spoke about the fact that currently Canada is, in effect, finding the Canadian nationals in Syria to be guilty by association. You say that this is against international human rights law.

Could you expand upon that? Is Canada breaking international law?

**Ms. Farida Deif:** Thank you for the question.

Detaining family members—the women and children—simply because of their familial ties with male ISIS suspects is collective punishment. Certainly the children are victims, first and foremost, and they should bear no responsibility for the actions of their parents. Many of the adults may themselves be victims as well. The women may have been trafficked into Syria. They may be victims of ISIS themselves, as is possible for the men.

Yes, certainly Canada is in breach of international law by continuously allowing Canadian nationals to be arbitrarily detained indefinitely without taking concrete steps to ensure their safety and well-being.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** One thing you spoke about, Mr. Mohammed, is the idea that when we see that we are very clearly in contravention of international acts and regulations and that we are very clearly not aligned with international humanitarian and human rights law, the Canadian government faces an enormous credibility risk.

Could you talk a little bit more about the risk to our reputation, our credibility and our ability to play a meaningful role in stopping similar atrocities around the world?

**Mr. Justin Mohammed:** Yes. Thank you.

I think the challenges raised by these international human rights violations—the ones that have been mentioned by the previous speakers—already set the context for that. Whenever Canada is going to be standing up about these international human rights obligations in the international community and demanding action and demanding that other countries take action on these questions, there will be a credibility deficit.

One of the things I mentioned in that context was the recent initiative around state-to-state arbitrary detention. How can Canada be speaking with a powerful international voice about the question of arbitrary detention when it has the capacity to end the arbitrary detention of Canadian citizens in northeast Syria and, unfortunately, is not taking action?

The same is true, of course, of the other example that I brought up, around a feminist foreign policy. We have a situation here in which some of the acts that Ms. Deif just mentioned could have taken place. We don't know entirely the context, but we do know that the violations they're undergoing right now are ones that include gender-based violence.

How can Canada be on the international stage promoting a feminist foreign policy when the gender-based violence that's being visited upon Canadian citizens in these camps has not been addressed? It is entirely possible for the Government of Canada to address them. This is a real credibility risk on our foreign policy, and it's something I think the subcommittee is squarely in the position to raise.

• (1930)

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** It's heartbreaking for me, because I see Canadians being justifiably proud of our past and the things we've done in the past to promote human rights around the world. To see our reputation be so damaged and so at risk is really heart-breaking.

I have one last thing I thought I would ask, Mr. Mohammed. This is the international human rights subcommittee. Do you have any concerns about the subcommittee's ability to call out international human rights abuses that are happening by our own government?

**Mr. Justin Mohammed:** Not at all. I think the mandate of this committee is to deal with international human rights violations, and yes, it is mentioned in the mandate that it is primarily focused outside of violations that take place in Canada, but of course these violations are taking place outside of Canada. It is very rare that we have a situation in which a group of Canadian citizens would be subject to international human rights violations outside of Canada. This is absolutely something that the committee should take up.

Looking again at the previous statements that have been made on so many human rights issues around the world, it would be a real shame, in the view of Amnesty International, for this to escape the same requisite attention. It would, quite frankly, show a lack of parallel in looking outside of Canada to ensure that those international rights are respected, but not for Canadian citizens.

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

That will conclude this session.

I want to thank the witnesses for appearing before us, answering our questions, and providing their statements.

Members, we are now going to suspend for five to 10 minutes as we get ready for the second panel.

• (1930)

(Pause)

• (1945)

**The Chair:** Welcome back, everyone.

Just to ensure an orderly meeting, I'm going to encourage all participants to mute their microphones when they're not speaking.

Please provide all comments through the chair. When you have 30 seconds in your question time left, I'll put up this sign to signal you. For those who require interpretation, English or French, it's available through the globe icon at the bottom of your screen. Please note, everyone, that screen captures and photos are not permitted.

I'd now like to welcome our witnesses, although we're not sure if it's plural. We have one witness anyway. We have with us tonight Juan Pappier, Americas senior researcher at Human Rights Watch.

Mr. Pappier, you will have six minutes for your opening statement.

**Mr. Juan Pappier (Americas Senior researcher, Human Rights Watch):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is an honour for me to be here before this committee on behalf of Human Rights Watch to discuss the situation in Colombia.

This meeting, I must say, could not have taken place at a more timely moment. Colombia is living with the highest levels of social unrest in recent decades. Since April 28, thousands of Colombians have taken to the streets in cities across the country to protest a proposed tax reform. The government withdrew the tax reform days later, but the demonstrations continue against other government policies.

While some demonstrators have engaged in serious events of violence, most have been peaceful. [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] Human Rights Watch has a team of researchers currently documenting the situation. We have received reports of 47 deaths since the protests began. In at least 10 cases, initial evidence suggests that police officers may be responsible. We have also documented several cases of beatings, arbitrary detention and even sexual violence against women protesters.

The situation in Colombia is of concern not only because of these demonstrations. Violence by armed groups, including guerillas, groups involved in drug trafficking, groups that emerged from the FARC guerillas, and others has intensified in recent years in Colombia. While the national homicide rate has decreased, some remote areas across the country have a serious risk of returning to the levels of violence that existed prior to the 2016 peace accord with the FARC guerillas.

The year 2020 had the highest number of human rights defenders killed in Colombia at least since the signing of the peace accord. According to our country's ombudsperson's office, 182 human rights defenders were killed last year. These figures show that Colombia had one of the highest numbers of human rights defenders killed globally. Additionally, according to UN figures, there were 76 massacres in 2020. That is the highest figure since 2014.

In a report released in February 2020, Human Rights Watch documented that most of the mechanisms to protect people in these vulnerable communities have serious shortcomings or are barely functioning. The protection by government entities of people at risk of facing abuses by armed groups is very limited. We presented the findings of our report to President Ivan Duque, the President of Colombia, and provided him with a list of concrete recommendations to address this issue. Unfortunately, however, we have seen no indication that he and his government are willing to change course.

Members of the committee, I welcome this important meeting at a critical time for Colombia. The situation in the country, both in cities where people are demonstrating and in rural areas, is worrying and needs international scrutiny, including from Canadian authorities.

I will leave my presentation here. I am happy to respond to any questions you may have.

• (1950)

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

I don't think our other witness is ready, Clerk, to make a statement.

Okay. Then we are going to move to questions.

Our first questions will be from MP Sidhu, for—

**The Clerk:** Actually, I'm sorry, Mr. Chair; in the seconds between my answer and now, he has rejoined us, so I'm going to bring him back into the meeting.

**The Chair:** Okay. Technology's a bumpy road.

You're saying that Mr. Guzman is coming on right now.

You have to unmute yourself, Mr. Guzman.

We cannot hear you, Mr. Guzman.

**The Clerk:** All right, Mr. Chair. We'll work on this again in the background.

**The Chair:** Sure.

We're moving to questions from members, and we'll begin with MP Sidhu for seven minutes.

**Mr. Maninder Sidhu:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses, Mr. Pappier and Mr. Guzman, for being here today.

Thank you for sharing those insights, Mr. Pappier. It's very important for us to hear from you.

My question to you is this: How can Canada best support the leadership efforts of women social leaders as defenders of human rights? Could you provide some insight into that?

**Mr. Juan Pappier:** Thank you. This is a very important question.

I think there are two important aspects. First, public diplomacy works in Colombia and is very important. When we released our report, we had a meeting with the President, but we also a response from high-level authorities who seemed to be interested in the issue. At the same time, we had phone calls from mid-level, well-intentioned officials who said, "This is very important because it empowers those of us who want to do things the right way."

I think my first message is that public diplomacy and speaking out about concerns in the human rights situation is very important.

Second, there are some government institutions that are doing a decent job in Colombia and are worth supporting through assistance from the Canadian government. For example, there is a unit in the Attorney General's office, the special investigations unit, that is doing a good and decent job. There's still room for improvement, but it's doing a decent job investigating cases of murder and killing of human rights defenders.

Finally, of course, there are lots of important women's rights group in Colombia that deserve support, that deserve recognition and that deserve funding. They do a very valuable, often very brave job and deserve to be supported by the Canadian government.

• (1955)

**Mr. Maninder Sidhu:** Thank you for that. It's very important. You mentioned that women-led organizations are doing tremendous work.

I know Canada is implementing roughly \$5.5 million into a project called Women's Voice and Leadership. It's providing financial and technical support to 16 rural indigenous and Afro-Colombian women's rights organization and networks for five years. It's definitely important that we continue supporting these women-led organizations.

Mr. Pappier, what are the unique challenges and risks for visible minority and indigenous community leaders? I mentioned the support there, but I'd like to hear more from you.

**Mr. Juan Pappier:** Indigenous communities are disproportionately affected by the violence in Colombia. If you compare the figures of human rights defenders killed in Colombia, you see that although 3% of the population in Colombia is indigenous, more than 15% of the human rights defenders killed in recent years were members of indigenous communities.

You can find similar figures when it comes to Afro-Colombian communities. They're disproportionately affected by the levels of poverty in the country, and they're disproportionately affected as well by the levels of violence from armed groups.

**Mr. Maninder Sidhu:** Thank you for that.

In the months and years ahead, what do you see as key opportunities for social leaders? What do you have to say on that?

**Mr. Juan Pappier:** Would you mind clarifying your question?

**Mr. Maninder Sidhu:** Yes. You see this turmoil and you see violence. Where do you see these visible minority groups or indigenous community leaders fit into this scenario? What can they do to help?

**Mr. Juan Pappier:** This is a very important question. The indigenous communities are doing invaluable work. They are essentially risking their lives to fight drug trafficking, to fight armed cartels and make sure that they are not operating in their territories. That's exactly the reason they are being killed.

Their leadership is fundamental for Colombia. These indigenous and Afro-Colombian leaders play the role that state authorities should be playing in their rural and remote communities. Without them, most people would have nowhere to turn when they have their rights violated or they would have nowhere to turn for protection.

Their role in these communities is indispensable. They are attacked precisely because they are doing this job. That is the reason that international pressure is needed on the Colombian government: to make sure that these indigenous and Afro-Colombian leaders are being protected.

**Mr. Maninder Sidhu:** Thank you for that.

I want to hear more about your views on the implementation of a peace agreement between the Government of Colombia and the FARC, if you can provide some insights into that as well.

**Mr. Juan Pappier:** The peace agreement is a 400-page agreement with different chapters and sections. It's probably the most complex peace agreement in recent history. Essentially, what is happening in Colombia is that the Duque administration is implementing the parts of the agreement it agrees with, while neglecting, ignoring or dragging its feet to implement the parts of the agreement it does not agree with.

The government is certainly committed to implementing parts of the agreement that concern the demobilization of the FARC and it is certainly committed to implementing parts of the agreement that have to do with reintegrating former FARC fighters into society. They are doing commendable efforts in that regard, but when it comes to other aspects of the agreement—for example, the mechanisms created under the accord to protect human rights defenders and to protect communities at risk—the efforts are completely weak and insufficient, and that's part of the reason we are seeing an increase in violence and we are seeing so little protection for communities at risk.

• (2000)

**Mr. Maninder Sidhu:** Thank you for sharing that with us. I think I only have 20 seconds left, but I want to say thank you. To the witnesses, I want to share appreciation from all the members here, and for your taking the time.

We want to hear from Mr. Guzman. I hope he's able to join soon as well.

Thanks so much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, MP Sidhu.

I believe Mr. Guzman is going to try again. He has a new mike.

Clerk, is that correct?

**The Clerk:** Yes, that's correct.

**The Chair:** Mr. Guzman, can you unmute, please? We can see if it works.

It is not working. I am moving to MP Reid for seven minutes.

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

In the event Mr. Guzman does come back online during the period—

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Mario Gil Guzman (Sociologist and Popular Educator, Assemblée populaire de colombiens et colombiennes à la Ville de Québec, Carrefour d'animation et de participation à un monde ouvert):** Can you hear me?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Okay, was that good enough, Clerk? I'm not sure.

It didn't sound great, but....

**The Clerk:** I'm not sure, but—

**The Chair:** Mr. Guzman, can you unmute and please speak?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Mario Gil Guzman:** Yes.

Can you hear me?

[English]

**The Chair:** Okay.

**The Chair:** Clerk, can you check with the interpreters?

**The Clerk:** Yes. Just a moment.

**Mr. Maninder Sidhu:** I heard the interpretation come through.

[Translation]

**The Clerk:** Mr. Guzman, you're a little too close to your microphone.

**Mr. Mario Gil Guzman:** Yes, I'm close to my microphone.

**The Clerk:** Can you try again?

**Mr. Mario Gil Guzman:** Okay.

I want to talk to you about Colombia and the human rights situation in Colombia.

[English]

**The Chair:** Okay, we're going to have his statement right now.

Mr. Guzman, you can make your opening statement of, we'll say, no more than four or five minutes.

You can start.

[Translation]

**Mr. Mario Gil Guzman:** Then I'll summarize the speech I had prepared, which was longer.

I'd like to begin by saying good evening to the hon. members of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights and thank them very much for inviting me to appear.

I'm here to represent Colombians living in Canada as well as several organizations that have been in solidarity with our cause: the fight against human rights violations in Colombia.

Since his election, Mr. Duque has been strongly opposed to the peace agreement reached with FARC. In the context of all this opposition, we've seen how thousands of social leaders have been murdered without the government really taking any action to correct the situation.

The people of Colombia had been protesting since 2019, but the pandemic sent people home, leaving them in quarantine. Colombians have lost their quality of life. According to the Colombian bureau of statistics, about 42% of Colombians are poor, meaning that they earn less than \$5 a day. That's one of the consequences of the mismanagement of the pandemic. No one had a guaranteed income during the pandemic; it lasted six months.

The government then proposed a tax reform that imposed a 19% tax on basic goods, including food such as coffee and eggs, and even funeral services. It also planned to tax pensioners by collecting up to 41% of their pensions. People were angry because the pandemic hit them very hard. I would like to point out that 72,000 people died during the pandemic. The current poverty rate of 42% is unsustainable for the population.

Even though the third wave of COVID-19 was at its peak, people decided to protest against this unfair tax reform. On April 28, there

was an unlimited general strike on tax reform. Even though the tax reform bill was ultimately withdrawn, people continued to protest against other reforms, such as the one to completely privatize health care. They also opposed the aerial spraying of glyphosate.

From the outset of the strike, the police have brutalized and abused protestors, even shooting at them. When the population refused to end the strike, the government deployed the military to cities.

According to human rights organizations Temblores and Indepaz, between April 28 and May 8, 12 women were sexually assaulted by police officers, revealing that they use captive women as spoils of war. In addition, law enforcement was responsible for 52% of homicidal violence, with most victims killed by police bullets. There were 36 homicides in Cali, a city bordered by the Pacific. In addition, 548 people have gone missing, which is a serious violation of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances. In addition, 489 people were injured, 33 people suffered eye injuries, 48 people were injured by firearms, and 69 human rights defenders were assaulted by police officers. Furthermore, people providing medical services to protesters were assaulted by police officers, and members of the UN verification mission have also been intimidated by the police in Cali.

On May 4, the Colombian ombudsman recorded 19 dead, 89 missing and 846 wounded. Since then, the ombudsman's website is no longer accessible.

The videos that people have shared on social media, which you may have already seen, show the severity of the repression of people, even those who demonstrate peacefully, such as at candlelight vigils, or who demonstrate through artistic performances. These videos also show how law enforcement waits until nightfall to cut off electricity and the Internet, and make protesters disappear. It's like a dictatorship. The police and the army act toward the protesters as if they were an armed group in a civil war.

• (2005)

Recently, police officers in civilian clothes have been seen shooting at protestors, and paramilitary groups have been seen walking around cities, threatening protestors. On May 9, indigenous people from Cauca, which another witness spoke about yesterday—

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Guzman. You're going to have a lot of opportunity during questions to be able to elaborate on what you've said in your statement.

Could you put your mike on mute, Mr. Guzman?

We're going to move to MP Reid for seven minutes.



**Mr. Scott Reid:** Why don't I give one minute of my time to Mr. Guzman to finish his intervention?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Mario Gil Guzman:** Thank you very much. That's very kind.

I would just like to finish up the part about Canada.

The European Parliament considered it important to stop the escalation of violence. The United States has spoken out against the widespread violence against protestors. Amnesty International called for an end to the repression of demonstrations and the militarization of cities.

Canada has a very strong trade relationship with Colombia. A bilateral economic agreement has been in place for 10 years. The impact of this agreement on the economy and on human rights has been quite difficult for Colombian society. Canada has supported the actions of a number of Canadian companies in Colombia through subsidies and political interventions.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Marc Garneau, issued a statement yesterday condemning the disproportionate use of force by law enforcement and defending the right to peaceful protest. In that statement, however, the minister focused on vandalism, attacks on public officials and the blocking of highways, and expressed his support for the Colombian government in investigating human rights violations. This statement demonstrates a misinterpretation of the situation in Colombia, which does not take into account the responsibility of the state and the government in the serious human rights violations that have been recorded, the fact that vandalism is in part promoted by dark forces linked to the state, nor the perpetual situation of impunity for crimes committed by the state for decades.

The Government of Canada, led by Prime Minister Trudeau must take its share of responsibility for this conflict and unequivocally condemn the current repression, while ensuring that the armed forces are withdrawn from the cities so that the repression will end and the rights of those participating in the protests will be respected. We would like to see an observer mission to protect the lives of those who remain on the street.

Thank you.

• (2010)

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Thank you, Mr. Guzman. Your testimony is very important.

[*English*]

I want to address my first question to Mr. Pappier, if I can.

You gave what I thought was what we would call a pregnant suggestion. Early in your testimony, you talked about the need for public diplomacy, or you said that the Colombian government is responsive to public diplomacy. That's the term you used.

That seems like an invitation to ask what you have in mind. How do you feel that Canada could best engage in public diplomacy with the Colombian government?

**Mr. Juan Pappier:** Thank you.

I think if there are statements from the Canadian government, statements from this congress, making reference to this concern, the Colombian government is sensitive to all of that. The Colombian government is very sensitive to its reputation globally, and it will take note of any statements that the Canadian government and the Canadian congress make on concerns about the human rights situation in the country.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** What does Colombia's government want its international reputation to be? What is its ideal of how it would like the world to see it? If we know that, I think we can better try to incentivize it properly.

**Mr. Juan Pappier:** The Duque administration wants to be seen globally as a government that is implementing the peace accord and is respectful of human rights and wants to be seen as a reliable partner for the United States, of course, and for Canada and for other countries in the European Union.

I think that's critical in the mindset of President Duque and in the mindset of his government. I think that's part of the reason they're so sensitive to diplomacy and to public statements of concern.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Scott Reid:** I see that Mr. Guzman has raised his hand and would also like to answer the question.

**Mr. Mario Gil Guzman:** Yes, thank you.

The Colombian government is in complete violation of the rights of the people. The government itself supported the armed forces after seeing videos that showed without a shadow of a doubt that the armed forces and the police were shooting at protestors. This attitude demonstrates its lack of respect for international human rights.

The Colombian government is completely hypocritical when it comes to its international relations with Canada and the United States. Everyone knows that Canada is a country that promotes democracy. Even in his last statement, the president said that he promotes the protection of human rights. A U.S. official who watched the videos said that the police were seen shooting at the protestors. Despite this, the president denies that the police shot at the protestors and denies that the protestors were peaceful. However, they did shoot at participants at candlelight vigils and cultural events organized by the communities.

More than 40 people have died at the hands of the police. This is not a show of political will to end the violence. If the government wanted to put an end to the violence, it would have already ordered the withdrawal of the military from the cities and talked to the protestors. However, they are being ignored. Yet, the protestors said that it was because of the solidarity of the people that they could now feed themselves, which they could not do before.

The Colombian government is not listening to its citizens and is imposing reforms. It has even bought weapons and airplanes instead of spending that money on the people who have suffered from the effects of the pandemic.

The Colombian government says it's a defender of human rights, but it is not. That is unfortunate.

• (2015)

[English]

**Mr. Scott Reid:** I have only 30 seconds, and I have one last question for Mr. Pappier.

There's a higher level of violence against indigenous human rights defenders than other defenders. I'm wondering what the reason is for that. Is it because they're less visible? Is it because they're in rural areas, where it's harder to keep track of abuses? Is it because the public tolerates it more? What's the reason for that group of people being particularly subject—

**The Chair:** MP Reid, I think Mr. Pappier will be able to send an answer in writing to the committee if he'd like to answer, but we have to move on.

We're moving to MP Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe now, for seven minutes.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Mr. Guzman and Mr. Pappier, thank you so much for being with us this evening.

I have a special fondness for Colombia. In fact, I've already filmed the documentary *À fleur de peau*, or *A Flor de Piel*, there.

[Member spoke in Spanish.]

[English]

Mr. Guzman, we have often heard the Colombian president say that the protestors were vandals. Is that the case?

**Mr. Mario Gil Guzman:** I just wanted to clarify this point.

Indeed, we have been called vandals. However, we've seen images showing police officers dressed in civilian clothes and carrying sticks in order to fight and destroy public places. Everyone can see these videos.

Even if there were vandals, it's important to remember that everyone deserves to be treated fairly before the courts, as is the case under international law. Why are the police shooting at people? It's a disproportionate response. Why are they shooting people en masse? If they know who the vandals are, they should search for them, find them and bring them to justice. Why do they have to murder people?

Vandalism is just an excuse that doesn't hold up.

In fact, the U.S. official who watched the videos said that the idea of vandalism was a fallacy and that it was a conspiracy theory to justify the murders that are taking place in Colombia.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** I'd like to ask you a question that may seem strange. In fact, I'd like to see the other side of the coin.

Why are the demonstrations continuing if the tax reform bill has been abandoned?

**Mr. Mario Gil Guzman:** It's because of an accumulation of planned reforms, including the one to further privatize the health care system. In addition, people are angry that the government has acted violently against the public. Imagine your entire government doing this to an unarmed population in a city under siege.

It isn't just the 40 people who were murdered, but also the 540 missing persons people who were abducted by the police. Can you imagine the suffering of the mothers of these children and these people? People are wondering what to do. Do they have to stand idly by and watch these 540 people disappear, while the government doesn't want to take responsibility, pull the military out of cities and shed light on the enforced disappearances? We have far exceeded the record of Ayotzinapa, in Mexico, where 44 students disappeared. Now we are talking about 540 people.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** I understand. It is completely legitimate. I would probably also be in the streets, if that happened here.

What are the demands of the protesters at this time?

**Mr. Mario Gil Guzman:** First, the protesters are asking the government to withdraw the army from the city.

Second, they are asking that the police be reformed. Right now, the police are part of the ministry of defence, so they are a military entity. That is why the police treat the protesters as if they were an armed group, by attacking them. People are calling for the anti-riot squad to be dismantled and for a police force that serves the people more.

Third, they are asking the government to cancel the health care reform and to talk to the protesters in the street, because they have not been invited to the dialogue. Instead, the government has engaged in a dialogue with its own political party and the judiciary. They all said that the government was acting properly and no criticism was expressed about the disappearances and deaths. The last meeting was with a committee of trade unionists, the National Strike Committee, but this committee does not represent the people in the streets, because their demands go beyond those of the National Strike Committee.

• (2020)

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you, Mr. Guzman.

Mr. Pappier, how do you think the government will react to the international pressure?

[English]

**Mr. Juan Pappier:** When it comes to the protests, the government has been sensitive to international pressure. Of course, the situation on the ground continues to be dire and troubling. We have at least begun to see a change in the discourse by the Colombian government. It's starting to raise the issue of police violence. What is needed is a more unequivocal condemnation of these instances of police violence, and serious steps need to be taken to end these instances of violence, of course.

If there is international scrutiny and pressure, it can help to make sure that President Duque will change course. Otherwise, we are likely to see more and more people being killed. At Human Rights Watch, we are getting reports that at least two or three people are getting killed every night. That is part of the reason that this international pressure is needed, and I would say urgently.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you, Mr. Pappier.

Mr. Guzman, I'm sensing that you are passionate, so I will give you the floor. Do you have a message to share?

**Mr. Mario Gil Guzman:** Yes, thank you very much.

I have a message for all the people mobilizing all over the world. Many Colombians and human rights organizations around the world are mobilizing to express their solidarity with Colombia. I would like to thank them and tell them that we must continue to increase the pressure, because this must stop. Open carnage is caught on everyone's cameras and no one is bothered. We have to keep the pressure on.

Thank you very much for your time. I speak not only for myself, but for the hundreds of Colombians who are protesting today in Canada and who are hoping for a clear response from the Canadian government to this particularly difficult situation.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** *Gracias a ustedes.*

Mr. Chair, I would like to advise you that I will be raising a point of order at the end, and I do not want the witnesses to see that.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will now move to MP McPherson for seven minutes.

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

To the witnesses, thank you very much for coming here and sharing this information with us. I have been speaking to a number of different people who are really quite concerned, people from Colombia and people who are concerned for the people of Colombia. Having your testimony and being able to put forward a report and share information with parliamentarians is vital for us to be able to support the people of Colombia at this time. Thank you very much.

I have a few questions. I'll start with Mr. Pappier.

First of all, from your understanding, does the Colombian government have an official list of people who have died or been injured or disappeared as a result of the violence experienced in the last few days?

**Mr. Juan Pappier:** Yes. From my experience, yes. We are in close communication with the prosecutors who are investigating the cases with the attorney general's office in Colombia and with the ombudsperson's office in Colombia. There is a list of people who have been reported as killed. There is a list of people who have disappeared or people who are missing. Fortunately, many missing people have recently been found.

There is certainly a list. It might be incomplete and it might have some shortcomings, but there is certainly a list.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Of that, do you know how many investigations are currently under way into the violence by the police and by the military?

• (2025)

**Mr. Juan Pappier:** The attorney general's office has opened investigations into the 47 people killed. According to their own investigations, only 13 of these deaths appear to be related to the protests. They have said publicly that they have evidence identifying the specific police officer involved in three cases. So far, two police officers have been arrested. Of course, we would hope for much more, given that there are videos showing specific cases where protestors were killed.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Thank you.

We heard earlier from my colleague from the Liberal Party about the impacts on women in Colombia. We know that when there are crises like this, women are disproportionately impacted. Can you share any data or any stories or any information that you might have with regard to the impact that this crisis has had on women?

**Mr. Juan Pappier:** Just to clarify, do you mean the protests?

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Yes, and the crackdown by the military and police forces.

**Mr. Juan Pappier:** We have documented several cases of sexual violence by police officers against women. That's certainly a risk for some women who are protesting. I think that's probably the most visible way in which the disproportionate impact on women is manifested in this crisis. There are probably other ways that reflect this effect. We have seen reports of women being threatened with being raped or other similar cases. Of course, women are afraid of being detained because of the risk of sexual violence that it might potentially entail.

That's the information I can share, based on our research so far.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Thank you.

Mr. Guzman, do you have something you'd like to add to that?

[Translation]

**Mr. Mario Gil Guzman:** Yes, if I may.

We are talking about research and data, but I would like to say that the justice system in Colombia cannot be trusted. The attorney general is a close friend of the president. It has been demonstrated that he is incapable of shedding any light on the false statements and the massacres. In this year so far, there have been 27 massacres in the country. In Colombia, the justice system has no credibility, because it is allied with the government.

As I told you, they have said that the government is making efforts to improve the situation. We know the government's response. The former leader of the party, Álvaro Uribe, wrote on Twitter that the police and the army should shoot people. After he wrote that, the police did indeed shoot people. I don't trust the Colombian government when it comes to justice, because there is no evidence that justice is being done.

The report of the Universidad de las Américas Puebla states that Colombia is the country with the highest rate of impunity. Human rights situations are not taken seriously. Let's take the situation of women as an example. In one instance, a woman teacher was abducted by police officers. The police raped her, impaled her and cut her into pieces. The police did this simply because she was opposed to the reform and had demonstrated with other teachers.

We know that the truth about cases like that will not be known. In Colombia, it can take 20 years. Only after the International Criminal Court or the Inter-American Court of Human Rights issues a verdict does the government recognize such crimes.

[*English*]

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** It's horrifying testimony. One of the things that is so sad about this is that we know the important role women played in the peace process in Colombia. The world saw the important role that women played. To know that this is the result is very heartbreaking.

I have one very quick question to ask, if I could—

• (2030)

**The Chair:** Thank you, MP McPherson. That's all the time.

On our collective behalf, I thank the witnesses for their courage, for their bravery in coming forward and sharing these stories and answering the many questions. We thank you so much for that.

Members, I would like to speak to you. I know a number of members have reached out to me.

As you just heard from our witnesses, we had some very courageous people come before us here today. I wanted to make sure that those witnesses had the time to be able to share their stories and be able to answer our questions through the time that we had set through our notice of meeting for today.

On that, I know that members have brought forward a sensitive issue that needs to be discussed. It is very sensitive. It concerns people, so we would prefer to do something like that in camera. We'd also want to be able to provide justice in it.

I know members would like to speak to the issue that has been brought to my attention by a couple of members; however, at this time also, a number of members—

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** A point of order, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** One moment, MP Brunelle-Duceppe.

A number of members have brought this forward, but a number of members have also explained to me and have reached out and have said that this is Ramadan time, that they have commitments for this evening that they need to get to. We are at 8:30. What I will say is that we will make time—

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** A point of order, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** We will make time—

MP Brunelle-Duceppe, please.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** A point of order.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** MP Brunelle-Duceppe, you do not have the floor.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Give me the floor.

[*Translation*]

A point of order.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** MP Brunelle-Duceppe, you do not have the floor.

MP Brunelle-Duceppe, can you please respectfully mute your microphone?

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Okay, then you can—

**The Chair:** MP Duceppe, please, respectfully, mute your microphone.

Actually, speaking about respect, it was respect for the witnesses who we had here today, respect for the members at this last minute to bring something like that forward that was very sensitive.

What I'm recommending to the members—and we'll see what the members have to say, because this committee works by consensus—is that in our next meeting we will carve out time in camera to be able to discuss this sensitive matter. That is what I am proposing to the members.

We have only a couple of minutes before we adjourn, and I'm asking the members for adjournment. It is 8:33 at this time.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Mr. Chair, will you recognize Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe? If not, I would like to—

**The Chair:** I am recognizing Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe right now, yes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** That's too kind. I stopped listening to the interpretation so that we could have a quick exchange.

Mr. Chair, we just lost three minutes. We need to have a 10-minute discussion in camera. We are in public session and I don't want to talk about the situation facing us now because it would compromise someone's safety. I don't want that to be the case. I want us to have this debate in camera now. It's only going to take 10 minutes and everybody will be pleased that we talked about it.

I cannot believe that a human life is not worth 10 minutes of in camera discussion. That's all I have to say. I hope that all members of this subcommittee will understand the seriousness of the situation that we are dealing with and that they will all agree to continue in camera right away.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** MP Brunelle-Duceppe—

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** It's the only thing to do.

Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** —I'm sorry for the interruption, but I'll let you know that it will take a while to go in camera. It will also take.... We have resources, we have interpreters, etc., who were not prepared for this, and we did have a consensus that we would not be doing this at the start of this meeting.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** We are talking about a human life.

[English]

**The Chair:** MP Brunelle-Duceppe, could you please respectfully mute your mike?

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** I cannot mute my microphone when we are talking about a human life.

[English]

**The Chair:** We did not have consensus. I will move to MP McPherson.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Mr. Chair, with all due respect, I did flag this with the committee earlier today. We did have time to organize this. You did have time to substitute somebody for any member who wasn't able to stay.

Someone's life is on the line, and you're suggesting that we will discuss this in two weeks. We don't even have a committee meeting next week. This is two weeks from now. That is absolutely unacceptable.

This is somebody who came before our committee, and the risk to them because they did so is the responsibility we have to take on. To say that the 10 minutes or the 30 minutes or the hour it would take, frankly, is not worth our time, yet we can wait two weeks and ask this person to wait two weeks....

We either need to do something tonight or we need to have an emergency meeting set up tomorrow. I think it is unbelievable that you would even suggest that we would wait two full weeks to deal with this important emergency issue.

• (2035)

**The Chair:** MP McPherson, I looked to the members for consensus and I reached out to the members. What I've heard from the members is that doing this in camera is paramount for safety and security and that members had commitments right after this meeting today.

I will go to MP Chiu.

**Mr. Kenny Chiu:** Thank you, Chair.

MP McPherson said exactly what I wanted to say. If necessary, I think we need to consider calling an emergency meeting to handle this situation. In fact, way back when we were talking about the witnesses attending the Hong Kong studies, I asked the committee whether we could have something special to accommodate witnesses' identity and also concern for security, etc.

This is not entirely new. I would definitely think that between the Conservatives, the Bloc and the NDP, we are establishing a quick

consensus, and I believe many of the members from the Liberals also are probably on side with us.

I'd like you to reconsider or maybe consider an alternative.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, MP Chiu.

It's not for me but for the members to decide if there is consensus and also to speak with the clerk and look at what infrastructure is available, if interpretation is available and if resources are available to be able to do that.

I will move now to MP Khalid.

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

I thank the members for raising this issue, which we've discussed a number of times in the past. It's not an issue in this instance that we can discuss by quickly going in camera for 10 minutes. It takes a while to get in camera, and I do understand that we have a lot of other issues to discuss as well. We would benefit from a time set aside for this discussion.

I would propose that we set aside that extra time. We can carve it out in the very near future so that we can have that important discussion about the issues that are raised by members and also the issues that have been emailed by members by way of motions.

**The Chair:** Thank you, MP Khalid. I know I have MP Reid. I will look to the clerk to find out if the resources are even available to be able to do this.

Go ahead, MP Reid.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll try to be very brief.

The first thing I wanted to say is I am aware of the timing of Iftar. In fact, on my other computer screen, I have it up. It says Iftar is 8:34 tonight, and we are past 8:34, so I am respectful of that, and I think we all should be.

Having said that, and recognizing the difficulties that you and the clerks have in terms of lining up time, could we ask that you try to set up a meeting as soon as possible, as in looking for a time tomorrow, and if not tomorrow, then Thursday? I, for one, would be willing to accept a meeting at any time, and if I can't make it, I'll make sure to get a replacement for myself. I hope others can commit to the same thing. Having the meeting is really critically important, but I have faith in you to find the earliest possible time, if we make that request to you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, MP Reid, for that.

Yes, I do know members have commitments tonight to Ramadan Iftar. I'm going to talk with the clerk. We'll look to see what is available in terms of slots, and then if members are open, there may be something, even in the break week, that we will be able to find. Maybe resources are available, but, again, I don't know. I will have to look to the clerk and see what is available. I do know that members are sending me notes that they have to conclude and we need to adjourn.

I have Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

• (2040)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Mr. Chair, don't worry, I took a deep breath and I will be calmer.

I am simply asking myself the question. You were aware of the situation and you knew that we wanted to talk about this today. Yesterday, we received communications from one particular organization. I talked to people who were concerned, who said they were afraid for one specific person—

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, to do this right now in public and not in camera, as was set....

We just heard from some very courageous witnesses who have come before our committee right now from Colombia.

MP Brunelle-Duceppe, we gave them respectfully the time that we should have given them. This came at the last minute, and members do have commitments they have to get to, so Monsieur Brunelle-Duceppe, I would ask that you respect the members of the committee.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Why are you cutting me off? You know full well what I am talking about. Ms. McPherson communicated with you today.

I said I would calm down, but don't—

[*English*]

**The Chair:** That's right. MP Brunelle-Duceppe, that's right. Heather sent something at the last minute. It was last minute. What I'm saying—

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** It was first thing this morning.

**The Chair:** What I'm saying is that it was not received this morning—

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** In your opinion, 12 hours in advance is last minute? I don't understand.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Members, the commitment will be to see what resources are available—

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Okay, that's fine. That's great.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** —to be able to provide the time that is necessary to discuss this sensitive issue.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Okay, that's fine. As you said, this is a sensitive issue. Mr. Chair, put yourself in the shoes of the person we are talking about. You know exactly who we are talking about. Tonight they are watching this and they are probably thinking that they are not getting much help.

[*English*]

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Yes, go ahead, MP Khalid.

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I really think the more we delve into this, the more we're bound to talk about and further risk the issues that we're trying to mitigate here. I would respectfully ask members to respect the decorum here in this meeting and to find a time to have that very important, very necessary meeting in camera so that we can maintain integrity and protection in what we're trying to do here.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** I totally agree. Let's go now.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I think we all agree on that 100%, so that's what we're going to do. We are going to ask the clerk to look for the resources as soon as possible so we can have that meeting. I have to look to the members. Is everybody available in break week, if the slot is not available this week?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** I am available now, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Mr. Scott Reid:** I'll make sure I'm available, or someone else can replace me.

**An hon. member:** It's life and death, yes.

**The Chair:** Are we going to adjourn this meeting today?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Mr. Chair, you are making a serious mistake.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I am urgently looking for resources to host an in camera meeting.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** You knew that from the start. You knew this morning and you should have—

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I did not, MP Brunelle-Duceppe, but that's okay.

Anyway, I'm asking for adjournment.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** I don't agree.

Let's go in camera right now. It's a matter of life and death.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I think the members are [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

The meeting is adjourned.

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