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# Special Committee on Afghanistan

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Chair: Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal





## Special Committee on Afghanistan

Monday, February 14, 2022

• (1835)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number four of the House of Commons Special Committee on Afghanistan.

Pursuant to the motion from the House adopted on December 8, 2021, and the motion adopted by the committee on December 13, 2021, the committee is meeting to study the humanitarian assistance measures in place to bring relief to the Afghan people.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of November 25, 2021. Members are attending in person and remotely, using the Zoom application. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website. So you are aware, the webcast will always show the person speaking, rather than the entirety of the committee. To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules to follow.

Please note that screenshots or taking photographs of your screen are not permitted.

Members and witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of floor, English or French. If interpretation is lost, please inform me immediately and we will ensure that interpretation is properly restored before resuming the proceedings.

For members participating in person, please keep in mind that the Board of Internal Economy guidelines for mask use and health protocols are in place. As chair, I will be enforcing these measures for the duration of this meeting. I thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, please ensure that your microphone is on mute.

I would remind members and witnesses that comments should be addressed through the chair. I would prefer that, even though I am very lenient on this, as you have probably noticed in the last meetings.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses and express our appreciation for them being with us today. Please note that witnesses have five minutes per organization for their opening remarks.

From the Afghan Women's Organization Refugee and Immigrant Services, we have Asma Faizi. From the Canada Afghanistan Business Council, we have Aziz Amiri. From the Canadian Red Cross, we have Amy Avis and Erica See.

On behalf of the committee, welcome again, witnesses.

I will start with Asma Faizi for five minutes, please.

**Ms. Asma Faizi (President, Afghan Women's Organization Refugee and Immigrant Services):** Thank you, Mr. Chair and the committee, for the opportunity to appear before you.

For over 30 years the Afghan Women's Organization, AWO for short, has been providing settlement services to newcomers to Canada with a special focus on women, their families, refugees and people who have experienced war and persecution. AWO is also a sponsorship agreement holder and has successfully resettled over 5,000 refugees from around the world.

AWO is founded and led by Afghan women and is a staunch advocate for the human rights of Afghan women and girls. AWO has led several projects inside Afghanistan, including home-based and underground schools for Afghan girls as well as educational and income generation projects for women. Currently, AWO runs an all-girls orphanage in Kabul.

Since last summer AWO has supported Afghan refugees who have been evacuated to Canada, has sponsored vulnerable Afghan refugees to Canada, has provided support to vulnerable Afghans in Afghanistan and has also been engaged in many advocacy efforts.

We thank the Canadian government for its commitment to resettle 40,000 Afghan refugees and provide \$50 million in humanitarian aid. This pledge reflects Canada's long-standing and continuous bipartisan support to ensure stability and respect for human rights in Afghanistan. Canada's investments have advanced tangible progress in the areas of health, education and women's and girls' rights. However, we are concerned that Canada's investments in Afghanistan are severely threatened due to the country's dire humanitarian crisis, which is fuelled by both a lack of response on the part of the international community and the Taliban's inability to be an inclusive and representative government for all its people.

The crisis inside Afghanistan is intensifying at an unprecedented rate. More than three and a half million Afghans are internally displaced, of which 80% are women and children, 23 million people are in desperate need of food and at least one million children are at risk of dying due to severe, acute malnutrition. Human rights are threatened with shrinking civic space. Women have been barred from working in certain sectors, their movement restricted, and higher education for women is uncertain. We are also concerned for women civil society activists who are being abducted and about gender-based persecution of women.

What is needed now is urgent action to protect those at risk and help address basic needs. Canada's humanitarian assistance objectives should ensure that aid gets to the most vulnerable by easing restrictions on getting funds to independent, trusted NGOs and multilateral organizations. They should have a long view that aid should be given in a way that opens up a pathway for reviving the economy and addressing development needs beyond preventing economic collapse. In line with Canada's feminist foreign affairs practices and international assistance policy, Canada should work with Afghans in the diaspora to centre the voices of Afghan women and local communities in the decisions about how resources will be disbursed.

Many donors have generously donated to emergency relief efforts to deliver food and other basic necessities; however, these short-term measures are not enough since this is not a natural disaster. Afghans find themselves at the intersection of four decades of war imposed on them, political and economic instability, corruption, widespread human rights abuses, a global pandemic, back-to-back droughts in the past four years and a harsh winter. Women and children have been at the front line and are disproportionately affected.

Afghanistan is also facing economic isolation and many Afghans have not been paid for months and lack essential services. The World Bank's Afghanistan reconstruction trust fund, a pool of aid to which Canada and other donors contributed, has unspent money that could be allocated immediately to health, education and other social services.

Some funding should be delivered to the public sector in areas such as agricultural support and village-level development programs. We should be empowering the local communities by providing them with the tools and resources they need to help themselves. They should be involved in the decisions about their needs and how the resources should be disbursed as well as community-based monitoring. To ensure that Afghans have the tools and resources they need, it is imperative that Canada increase its financial commitment to at least \$100 million for 2022.

In addition to supporting the public sector, we need to alleviate the pressure on the private sector. Afghanistan needs a viable economy, because humanitarian assistance will never be sufficient or sustainable. A collapsing economy and extreme poverty will lead to another migration crisis as well as provide an opportunity for groups such as Daesh or ISIS-K to recruit people.

- (1840)

At-risk Afghans, particularly women, children and minorities, are in dire need of protection. Canada should remove the caps on

the number of Afghan refugees that sponsorship agreement holders can sponsor, similar to what was done with the Syrian initiative.

Last, in parallel to these other efforts, there's a need for continued political pressure on the Taliban to ensure there's an inclusive and representative government that respects human rights and allows the people to define what they want for the future of Afghanistan.

Thank you again for the opportunity. I welcome any questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. I appreciate your staying almost within the time limit.

Now, from the Canada Afghanistan Business Council, I welcome Aziz Amiri.

Please go ahead with your opening remarks for five minutes.

Madam Clerk, do we have the Canada Afghanistan Business Council?

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Miriam Burke):** I believe they're still connecting. Could you go to the next witness, please?

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you kindly.

Canadian Red Cross, please go ahead.

Between the two of you, you have five minutes for your opening remarks.

**Ms. Amy Avis (General Counsel, Canadian Red Cross):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for the invitation to address the distinguished members of the committee today. We welcome your attention to this critical humanitarian issue.

My name is Amy Avis. I'm the general counsel for the Canadian Red Cross. I'm joined today by my colleague Erica See, senior legal adviser.

The Canadian Red Cross is deeply concerned about the ongoing crisis in Afghanistan and the continued barriers to the provision of neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian assistance.

As has been well discussed in this forum, and as was previously highlighted to the committee by the ICRC, the situation in Afghanistan is extremely dire. Afghanistan is currently in the midst of collapse, with communities facing a breakdown of health services and widespread hunger. Acute food shortages fuelled by serious draught, lack of cash, internal displacement and the COVID-19 pandemic have converged on the people in Afghanistan, with some 18 million Afghans in urgent need of humanitarian assistance.

While we recognize and echo the need to take measures to prevent and respond to terrorist activities and other fund diversions, it's also imperative that neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian assistance not be impeded.

The Canadian Red Cross's knowledge and understanding of the complex context and operating environment have been developed with over a decade of work in Afghanistan, in partnership with the Afghan Red Crescent Society, in providing emergency response and health services to vulnerable populations.

Due to the barriers in aid, the Canadian Red Cross operations in Afghanistan are substantially on hold, and we've had to cease all operations. This includes the humanitarian operation for people in emergencies, the HOPE program, which provides critical primary health care services, such as child health, immunization and child-birth and postnatal care, to name just a few. These services are provided across the country through mobile health teams to some of the more remote and difficult areas to access .

The Canadian Red Cross and the Afghan Red Crescent Society are both part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, comprised of 192 national societies, the ICRC and the IFRC.

Although we're certainly aware that it is not the Government of Canada's intention, it's our understanding that the current legal framework, inclusive of sanctions and anti-terrorism legislation and other regulations, can pose an obstacle to providing humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan. We recognize that solutions can come in a number of forms, so we'll focus our testimony on the principles of what successful solutions can include.

Our recommendations are as follows.

Mindful of the UN Security Council Resolution 2615 in 2021, issue clarification on the scope and focus of the sanctions and expressly state that humanitarian activities or financial transactions in support of these activities would not be a violation of Canadian law, like the U.S. and Australia have done. Action is needed to give force of law in Canada to institute its intent for the resolutions.

Remove further barriers within the sanctions regime. It could also include an express carve-out and that the regimes do not apply to humanitarian aid. This makes the solution applicable beyond Afghanistan.

Provide clarity to the humanitarian sector on permissible action within the current anti-terrorism legislation to combat the chilling effect on non-governmental organizations of the counterterrorism regime.

Various models for actioning this have been discussed at the committee and beyond, such as an MOU or a pre-budget submission. Putting form aside, a successful solution would include direction on permissibility. If it is determined to be appropriate and required, we would finally put forward to undertake a longer-term update of the Criminal Code to expressly and explicitly recognize the carve-outs for providing life-saving activities of neutral and impartial humanitarian assistance.

The complexity of the current situation in Afghanistan presents immense challenges to the Government of Canada and to humanitarian organizations wishing to resume activities to provide life-saving aid. It's our belief that these recommendations could address urgent needs in Afghanistan and set a solid foundation for continued humanitarian action.

Mr. Chair, thank you very much. We look forward to any questions the committee may have.

• (1845)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Avis. I appreciate that you kept very well within the time frame.

It's my understanding that we do not have Mr. Aziz Amiri from the Canada Afghanistan Business Council yet.

**Mr. Aziz Amiri (President, Canada Afghanistan Business Council):** I'm here.

**The Chair:** It's great to have you here.

**Mr. Aziz Amiri:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Without any further ado, you have five minutes. Please start your watch and stay within the time frame for your opening remarks. We would appreciate that.

**Mr. Aziz Amiri:** No problem. You have just said the time, so I will not miss it.

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I truly appreciate the opportunity to share my thoughts here.

I would like to bring everyone's attention to a few points.

The first one is that we would like to see in the community that the number of newcomers to increase from 40,000 to 100,000, at least.

During the Vietnam War, we received 20,000 Vietnamese from [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] but now we have the capacity to receive more people.

The second one—

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ):** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Hold on, Mr. Amiri. It seems we are not getting you very clearly. Please turn your picture off and see if that works better, because your Internet connection is not as good.

**Mr. Aziz Amiri:** Okay.

• (1850)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Mr. Chair, I'd like to speak to the clerk. I'm not sure whether he's allowed to keep his camera off. We must be careful about that.

I think that the camera must be on. Is that right, Madam Clerk?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Madam Clerk, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

**The Clerk:** The camera must be turned on during the voting process. However, I think that the technicians are working on the issue.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I would love to see his picture, Monsieur Brunelle-Duceppe, but I would like to see it crisp and clear. He's a witness, so he's not voting, as the clerk said.

Do you want to say a few things, Mr. Amiri, to see if the interpretation comes through clearly?

**Mr. Aziz Amiri:** Yes. Maybe I will start by saying thank you very much for the opportunity I have received today.

**The Chair:** Mr. Amiri, it's not coming up.

Could you please try it without the picture? We'll see if we can hear you clearly.

Go ahead, please, Mr. Amiri.

**Mr. Aziz Amiri:** I'm grateful to have the opportunity to present a few points from the Business Council's point of view and that of the community of Afghan Canadians in Canada. I would like to discuss and present ideas—

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Madam Clerk, could you see if the interpreters are okay with it?

**The Clerk:** Yes, Mr. Chair. They seem to be okay.

**The Chair:** Good.

Do I have the members' consent to have Mr. Amiri speak without the picture?

Thank you.

Mr. Amiri, I'm going to restart, because that was only 30 seconds or so. We can reset.

We would really appreciate it if you would start again, please.

**Mr. Aziz Amiri:** Okay.

Once again, thank you very much for the opportunity to be here.

Number one, we would like the number of Afghan refugees coming to Canada to be increased from 40,000 to 100,000. Back in 1975 to 1982, Canada received over 120,000 Vietnamese during their war, and I'm sure we have the capacity to receive a whole lot more than 40,000 people. We know their lives are in danger.

Number two, the business council would like to see an allocation or quota for Afghan businesses and corporations that would like to come to Canada from Afghanistan. We will be benefiting from their talents and investments.

Number three, the third country requirement is fine. As we all know, the refugees need to be registered with UNHCR, which is very problematic. We would like that recognition of UNHCR waived for Afghan refugees in order for us to sponsor them.

Number four, the Canadian government sent a substantial number of medical supplies to Syria during their war. We would like the Canadian government to do the same for Afghanistan. Also, we would like the Canadian government to charter one, two, three or

more airplanes so we can collect donations from our community and other communities to send.

Number five, for employees of Canadian companies in Afghanistan, we would like to have a quota for them to come here.

Number six, on the PR for extended family members of the translators program, which was there from 2009 to 2012, we would like to request the inclusion of their extended family in the program.

Number seven, the pre-removal risk assessment for Afghanistan was announced in October 2021. However, no refugee claimant who has received a negative decision has yet been accepted. We therefore request that all Afghan refugee claimants whose claims were formally refused be accepted.

Number eight, due to the unstable political situation in Afghanistan, we request that all refugee claimants waiting for their protected person status here in Canada and those under PR applications with H and C, humanitarian and compassionate grounds, be accepted.

Number nine, considering the crisis in Afghanistan, Afghans would like to be able to sponsor their parents. The current lottery program is lengthy. We would therefore request a new stream of programs to create and allow Afghans to sponsor their parents.

Number 10, we would like to see more funding for the settlement offices or organizations to be able to settle the newcomers. However, the newcomers who are coming or have been coming have been greatly supported by our community.

The last item is that the Canada Afghanistan Business Council is working on a portal where we could match the newcomers with Afghan businesses in Canada.

I will cease my talk here, and I hope [*Inaudible—Editor*]. I will be open for any questions.

Thank you.

• (1855)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Amiri. You were very well within the time frame.

Now I will go to the honourable members. The first round is six minutes. Members, would you have your stopwatch going as well so we can stay within the time limits.

First I will go to the Conservative member, Mr. Hallan, for six minutes, please.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses.

My questions are for Ms. Faizi.

Your organization has helped settle many refugees, including refugees from Syria as well.

Before Kabul fell in August 2021, was your organization ever in contact with IRCC or the Canadian government in any way, whether it was to tell them about Kabul falling, or about any urgency or urgent situations?

**Ms. Asma Faizi:** We started to get involved in the summer, in June, when we were approached by women parliamentarians and activists from inside Afghanistan. They had written a letter asking us to bring to the attention of the Canadian government the dire situation they were in. We wrote to the government and then there were some subsequent meetings throughout the summer.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** What happened in those meetings? What were they about?

**Ms. Asma Faizi:** Those meetings were more generally debriefing meetings with a group of ministers, including ministers from Immigration, International Development and GAC.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** At any point in meeting with them was anything brought up about fast-tracking any applications, or were they just about describing the crisis that was happening in Afghanistan?

**Ms. Asma Faizi:** Certainly, as a women's group, we were getting calls daily from women who were inside Afghanistan. They were fearing for their lives. We were trying to bring attention to those women and the risks and were trying to get the Canadian government to help them, whether through resettlement or through some temporary program so we could get them outside of Afghanistan.

We also had a couple of calls with some senior policy folks at IRCC.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** Did they promise any kind of action, and if so, what kind of action?

**Ms. Asma Faizi:** Because the situation unfolded so quickly, I think they were actually caught off guard in terms of the magnitude of what was going on and the fast manner in which the foreign troops, including Canada's, evacuated. Some of the people we tried to help were able to get out through other manners, through U.S. mechanisms and others. Unfortunately, we were not able to help some of the people we were trying to help.

● (1900)

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** Between August and October, were you ever in contact with those departments again?

**Ms. Asma Faizi:** We have been writing letters. Since the fall, we've had a meeting with Minister Fraser. We had a meeting with him in December. We've requested meetings with Minister Sajjan and Minister Joly, but we haven't received any meetings yet, but we met with the Minister of Immigration in December and we have a follow-up meeting with his staff later this week.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** What was that meeting about? Did your organization ask for anything, and have you seen any changes with regard to that?

**Ms. Asma Faizi:** We raised the issue about the timeline, because there are a lot of Afghans who are in immediate need, and the timeline that has been set to bring these 40,000 Afghans is 2023. We urged him to find a way to expedite the process and make it sooner. With the Syrian refugees, we brought in 25,000 in 100 days, and

we're hoping that something could be done in that manner. That was one of our asks.

The other ask was around the criteria the government has set to bring the Afghans here. The criteria are quite narrow. A lot of the women we were trying to help didn't meet the criteria under the special immigration program. For example, gender-based persecution is not captured, so we were trying to ask the minister to revisit those criteria to ensure they are broader so that those additional people we're trying to help can be brought to Canada. So far we haven't received anything. We're hoping at the follow-up this week that they're going to be able to tell us whether they've made any movement on these asks and also on removing the cap on sponsorship agreement holders to be able to bring in Afghan refugees. That's a big barrier to private sponsorship holders such as us. We've only been—

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** I'm sorry to cut you off but I have only a little bit of time left.

I would just point to the Liberal-made backlog in immigration as probably being one of the reasons these applications are not moving very quickly. That's a complaint we keep hearing over and over again.

Do you know the number of applications you had before August 15, 2021, and how many more applications you have as of today's date? What kind of processing times are you seeing for those and what kind of delay? Could you table those with the committee, please?

**Ms. Asma Faizi:** Sure.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** Mr. Chair, how much time do I have left?

**The Chair:** Your time is almost up now.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** Could I just ask her to also table where those applications are from? Are they from inside Afghanistan, outside Afghanistan, and the numbers of them, please?

**The Chair:** Thank you kindly. Your time is up.

We'll now go to Ms. Zahid for six minutes.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I thank all the witnesses for appearing before the committee.

My first question is for Mr. Amiri.

Thanks for coming today. I'm very well aware of the good work you do under the organization, Canada Afghanistan Business Council, and thanks for your leadership on that.

Thank you for helping me better understand what is happening in Afghanistan, especially since the return of the Taliban. I know you and your members have a lot of connection and insight into what is happening on the ground there.

From the humanitarian aid perspective, is the aid getting through to the people actually in Afghanistan, especially the medical aid? What are the aid gaps in terms of the needs and the resources? Where should Canada be focusing its humanitarian aid efforts?

• (1905)

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Amiri.

**Mr. Aziz Amiri:** Thank you very much, Madam Zahid. I appreciate your leadership in the community here. A lot of Afghan refugees and new immigrants are benefiting from your support and your hard work.

No doubt in Afghanistan right now we need a lot of help. Afghanistan is going through a very difficult time in history. People are starving. As we know, people are selling their kids and their organs for food.

We need a lot of help.

We want the government to be able to organize and help through the United Nations, because many local NGOs unfortunately, and unfortunately some of the neighbours, haven't been delivering the assistance properly. Our hope is that the United Nations will give them an active role in delivering that help.

There is no doubt that medical supplies are needed, but in this wintertime, food and other supplies are much needed. We are requesting that Canada and other countries help.

As far as channels go, I believe the United Nations would be the proper channel to help, aside from some other international NGOs.

Thank you.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Thank you, Mr. Amiri.

My next question is for Ms. Faizi.

I know the Afghan Women's Organization well and I thank you and sister Adeena Niazi and all your team for the important work you are doing.

I would like to ask you about the situation for women and girls today in Afghanistan. Particularly, I am concerned about the households with no male members, which can make it difficult or at times impossible for that household to go out and access the humanitarian aid.

Could you please speak to the situation for women and girls and the situation for households without male members of the family? What specific recommendations do you have for what Canada can do to make sure that humanitarian aid gets to those households?

**The Chair:** Ms. Faizi, go ahead, please.

**Ms. Asma Faizi:** Thank you so much for your support of our organization.

In terms of women, as Mr. Amiri has indicated, food scarcity is one of the biggest problems. It's imperative to get aid inside Afghanistan through independent trusted NGOs and multilateral organizations. There are a lot of issues in terms of access to health. Many hospitals or health care facilities have shut down. Many doctors have left. It's difficult for people to access, particularly women, health care and education.

In terms of education, it's unclear whether or not higher education will be available, and what types of restrictions might be put on women in those terms. You pointed out rightly that for women who do not have a male in their household, given the restrictions the Taliban have put on the movement of women who do not have a male, somebody to escort them, it is significantly more challenging for them.

In terms of being able to meet those needs, we need to provide women with health care, even with mobile units. We need to put some pressure on the Taliban to ensure that women who do not have a male counterpart can have access to much needed resources.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mrs. Zahid and Ms. Faizi.

We're now going to our next honourable member, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, for six minutes, please.

• (1910)

[*Translation*]

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

I want to thank all the witnesses for joining us for this extremely important study.

As we said, this study focuses on the humanitarian crisis and on how to help people in the short term and in the very near future.

Mr. Amiri, I was a bit overwhelmed by your remarks. I'd like to ask you the first question. Last week, I asked the witnesses to identify the priority for the recommendation in the committee's report.

Several priorities were identified. These included waiving red tape, such as the need to fill out forms on the Internet while people are in mortal danger; suspending the requirement to have refugee status in order to sponsor someone from within Canada; and maintaining a diplomatic presence on the ground, such as in Pakistan, to help Afghans come to Canada.

Do you support all these recommendations?

If there were a priority, what should it be?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Amiri.

**Mr. Aziz Amiri:** My sincere apologies. When the honourable member started, I did not turn on the English. I did not get half of the question.

**The Chair:** I will give you 20 extra seconds, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, to quickly repeat it again.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Certainly. I hope that I can get my time back, Mr. Chair. Is that right? We'll start my six minutes now. Okay.

I want Mr. Amiri to hear me thank all the witnesses with us today.

Mr. Amiri, this study is extremely important because we want to focus on the humanitarian crisis in order to determine how to help people immediately and in the short term.

I was overwhelmed by your remarks. I'll go back to the question that I wanted to ask you last week. I asked the witnesses to identify the priority for the recommendations in the committee's report.

Several priorities were identified. These included waiving red tape, such as the need to fill out forms on the Internet while people are in mortal danger, which makes no sense; suspending the requirement to have refugee status in order to sponsor someone from within Canada; and maintaining a diplomatic presence on the ground, such as in Pakistan, to help Afghans come to Canada.

I'd like to hear your thoughts on these recommendations. I'd also like to know your priority with respect to the committee's recommendations in its report.

[English]

**Mr. Aziz Amiri:** Thank you very much for your question.

First of all, in our view the top priority is that Canada should have a special envoy for Afghanistan to coordinate humanitarian or refugee cases. This is very important because right now the focus is all over and one hand doesn't know what's happening with the other hand. That's number one.

In our view, number two is transferring funds to Afghanistan. Unfortunately, we heard that the Biden administration is getting half of the money, which are deposits that belong to actual people. We don't want to make this a political statement, but what they are doing is nonsense.

We need funds to go through reliable sources, such as the United Nations and big NGOs, to Afghanistan. That could be distributed as cash or as food. It wouldn't go through the current government there.

That is on the humanitarian side.

As for the refugees, one thing we've been asking for the last six months now is about the requirement of the recognition of the United Nations or UNHCR. This is really tough. This is very difficult. We would like this to be abolished or waived for now. As long as any Afghan is outside, we know that he is in danger. To require him to go and get a United Nations card is very difficult.

That's another requirement that the previous witnesses suggested. We strongly believe it is the case and that should be waived.

Thank you.

• (1915)

[Translation]

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

I'd now like to turn to our friends at the Canadian Red Cross.

In recent weeks, several witnesses suggested that we make changes to the Criminal Code so that NGOs could operate in Afghanistan without fear of being accused of funding terrorism.

Some suggested that the Canadian government commit, through a motion, to not prosecuting NGOs. As a result, we wouldn't need to make any changes to the Criminal Code. However, I think that this is getting in your way.

What's your opinion on this?

[English]

**The Chair:** We'll go to Ms. Avis and Ms. See for the answer, please.

**Ms. Amy Avis:** Thank you.

I'll start and then I'll turn it over to my colleague, Erica.

You're exactly right. The fear of the legislation and how it will be interpreted is having a chilling effect. Although we don't really read in any expressed impermissibility in the legislation, I think what we're looking for is the confidence that we can take it forward and not be reprimanded for providing humanitarian assistance.

In the interim, pre-budget submissions and MOUs have been floated. There's a multitude of solutions, but the thing that would be the most helpful for us is some sort of expressed permissibility with regard to the ability to take humanitarian action.

I'll turn it over to my colleague, Erica, if she'd like to complement that.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Members from all parties sit on the committee.

Given what you just said, tomorrow morning, I could table a motion in the House of Commons asking for unanimous consent so that the government promises not to prosecute NGOs in relation to their work on the ground. I know that a court of justice wouldn't necessarily consider this evidence. However, if this were done quickly, you could take action on the ground.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[Translation]

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

[English]

**The Chair:** The time is up. I was very generous.

We will move to the next honourable member.

Madam Kwan, you have six minutes.

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

Thank you to all of the witnesses for their presentations. As well, thank you for the ongoing advocacy and work that you do.

I'd like to first ask Ms. Faizi a question.

With respect to resettlement support and getting people to safety, the reality is that the current streams cannot be applied to many people. Many people are still within Afghanistan. The stream that the government has provided is that they need to be in a third country.

In the face of this situation, what specific recommendation do you have for the government so that we can ensure that people who are in Afghanistan would be able to access resettlement supports?

**Ms. Asma Faizi:** We've been asking for this to ensure that they open up the ability of Afghans from inside Afghanistan to seek resettlement. There was a short window where they had opened it, and then it was unclear as to why, but they shut it out. It's very important, and I can give an example.

Just in the last couple of weeks, I've had a number of Canadian organizations that want to help some women who are trapped inside Afghanistan and are in hiding. They were calling me to ask what were their options. Unfortunately, for the pathways that are open for those kinds of cases, they need to be outside of the country.

Canada needs to enable that once again, to allow those from inside Afghanistan to be able to apply for the resettlement program.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** You said there was a short window. Do you recall when that window was?

**Ms. Asma Faizi:** I believe it was in October. There was a two-week window when we were informed they were going to allow the vulnerable Afghans to seek resettlement, and then a couple of weeks later, we found out that it was no longer available.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I see. Did you have any information as to how, even in that two-week window, people were able to access that initiative?

• (1920)

**Ms. Asma Faizi:** My understanding was that the government had partnered with some organizations on the ground that were going to be referral organizations. I believe one was Front Line Defenders, and I believe there was another organization. They were designated as referral agencies that would identify those in need and then enable them to be resettled in Canada.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** One of the issues raised by Mr. Amiri was that the requirement of the UNHCR refugee determination is an impossible thing for people to attain. Have you called on the government to waive this requirement?

**Ms. Asma Faizi:** Yes. All of our recommendations to the government so far have asked for the waiver of that recognition status. It is a huge barrier. There are other examples. We get calls every day because of our connections, the fact that we've been working in this area for a long time and the fact that we're an Afghan organization.

We get multiple calls from people who want to be able to sponsor somebody through the G5, the groups of five, and you need to be recognized by the UNHCR or the host country. While we understand that the UN is operating in some of these third countries, they have a huge backlog, and they're not processing, so it's a huge barrier for a lot of people.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Would you be able to table with the committee all of the recommendations you've made to the government so that we have a record of that and their responses to you to date?

**Ms. Asma Faizi:** Yes.

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

There's another question I'd like to ask.

For many people, the requirement of having to fill out all these forms, even if in a third country, within 14 days, is an almost impossible task for people. People can't access computers. There are language barriers and so on.

Would you support the call for the government to waive all of these application process requirements and to pause them, so to speak? Once people get to safety on Canadian soil, then they can always go back and fill out these forms and go through that process.

**Ms. Asma Faizi:** Certainly, any administrative barriers that have been put in place need to be alleviated. As I said, we were able to bring in 25,000 Syrians in 100 days.

As far as we know, there are about 7,000 people who have come to Canada so far. There is a dire humanitarian catastrophe. There are people at risk. Even for those who are able to get out of Afghanistan and go to third countries, with the horrific conditions under which they get to the countries and the horrific conditions in those third countries, the fear of being deported and the fear of being persecuted because they're going to be returned to Afghanistan, human dignity requires the world to see what's going on and to alleviate these administrative burdens on people who are at risk.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** One of the issues is about sponsorship. Aside from the private sponsorships, should the Canadian government be opening up family sponsorship for extended families? There are many Afghans who have Canadian family members here, but the sponsorship requirement is only for parents and grandparents or spouses and dependent children. Should the Canadian government open that up to extended family members?

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Kwan. Your time is up.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Mr. Chair, could I get a quick response?

**The Chair:** Yes. Please, go ahead.

**Ms. Asma Faizi:** Yes, definitely. They did it for the interpreters who came and their families. They expanded the definition of extended family. If it could be extended, it would be great, but we understand that the Canadian government has been expediting some of these family reunification cases. We thank them for doing that, but to expand the criteria would be very helpful.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

**Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.):** You are on mute, Chair.

**Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC):** I think he said it's my turn.

**The Chair:** No, it's not. [*Inaudible—Editor*]

There are six minutes left. We'll do two minutes, two minutes, one minute and one minute. That will be the round.

I'll go ahead with—

**Hon. Michael Chong:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

As I understand it, the next round is a Conservative round for five minutes.

• (1925)

**The Chair:** I understand, but I was going to be fair—

**Hon. Michael Chong:** What's fair is that all members on the committee get equal time proportionate to their standings in the House of Commons and according to the routine motions adopted by this special committee at its first meeting, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** That's why, Mr. Chong, I was giving two minutes to Conservatives, two minutes to Liberals, one minute and one minute.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** With respect, Mr. Chair, both the New Democratic and Bloc Québécois members on this committee have had a full round. I've not yet had a full round.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Mr. Chong, go ahead for five minutes.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The motion establishing this committee was both forward looking and backward looking.

The forward-looking element of the motion was to examine the humanitarian assistance that's required on the ground. To that end, I'd like to ask about United Nations Security Council Resolution 2615, which was sponsored by the United States and calls for a carve-out to the sanctions against the Taliban for humanitarian assistance.

My question is twofold. First, has the resolution been implemented in Canada; if not, what is the expected timeline for implementation? What other countries have implemented Resolution 2615 to date?

This is for any of the witnesses.

**Ms. Erica See (Senior Legal Counsel, Canadian Red Cross):** I don't think I can answer your question as to the current status in Canada. I could speak to the second part of your question regarding the implementation of UN Resolution 2615 in Canada.

As the honourable member is undoubtedly aware, that resolution was passed in the very closing days of 2021. I believe that member states are in the process of implementing the measure in alignment with their own domestic implementation—

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Can you tell us which other countries have implemented Resolution 2615 in their national policies?

**Ms. Erica See:** It's a very good question. The implementation methodology has varied by jurisdiction. In some jurisdictions, there were preliminary statements that were offered to clarify the implementation.

For example, in Australia, they made a government statement in the lead-up to and in recognition of the fact that regulations tend to take time to be revised.

As you mentioned, the United States was involved in the proposal of the resolution itself. They took the time immediately thereafter to partially implement a finance-oriented, what they call the general licence of the U.S. Department of the Treasury.

It really varies by jurisdiction.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** Sure. I appreciate that.

If you have any more information on that, could you transmit it to the clerk of the committee for all members? I would appreciate that.

**Ms. Erica See:** Of course.

**Hon. Michael Chong:** I'd like to ask a more backward-looking question, since the motion adopted by the House ordering this committee to be set up asked us to study what went wrong in the evacuation of people from Kabul by Canada before and during the fall of Kabul.

NATO evacuated some 70,000 people leading up to August 25. For example, the United Kingdom, one of the NATO members, evacuated over 11,000 people in the weeks leading up to August 25. The Government of Canada appears to have been slow and disorganized in evacuating people from Kabul in the period leading up to the end of August. It looks like some 2,000 to 3,000 people were evacuated in the weeks leading up to the end of August.

My question is twofold. Can any of the witnesses here tell us if they brought this issue to the attention of the government before the fall of Kabul, and when they did that? Can you provide a general comment on the government's evacuation efforts in the period ending at the end of August of last year?

• (1930)

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds to provide an answer, please.

Go ahead, anyone. Raise your hand and I will acknowledge you.

Mr. Chong, did you have a particular witness you wanted to answer the question?

**Hon. Michael Chong:** No. It's okay, Mr. Chair. If they don't have any comment to provide, that's fine.

Thank you.

• (1945)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

On behalf of all the committee members, I would like to thank the witnesses for their time and effort, and for the knowledge they brought to this committee. We really appreciate it. Thank you kindly.

Madam Clerk, once the witnesses leave, I have a question for you.

Now, I gave five minutes to Mr. Chong. When I start the next round, I will start with the Liberals for five minutes. Is that right?

**An hon. member:** It's a new panel, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Just a minute.

Madam Kwan, please go ahead.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Mr. Chair, this is a new panel, so we should be starting with a first round of six minutes for each of the parties.

I know that you gave a special provision in the proceedings for the previous panel to give the Conservatives' Mr. Chong the full five minutes, whereas before, you normally would split that time. That's how we've been proceeding. I would say that this is a new panel, and so we need to start with six minutes for each party.

**Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. El-Khoury.

**Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury:** Mr. Chair, I believe it is up to you and the clerk to set up the timing as you see fit.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

As Madam Kwan mentioned, I was always very fair in the last meeting. You have seen me give proportional time. This time, since he's a senior member, I didn't want to confront Mr. Chong.

Going forward, if there's time left between the first panel, I would split it the way I said: the Conservatives with whatever time, the Liberals the same, and the NDP and Bloc with half of that allocation. I think that's equitable, and that's the way I would like to proceed. I hope you're in agreement.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Mr. Chair—

**The Chair:** Madam Zahid, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe is first.

Go ahead, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Sorry, Ms. Zahid. I didn't want to go before you, but I had raised my hand.

Mr. Chair, I think that you have done a very good job from the beginning.

When Mr. Chong stated his complaint, unfortunately for us, he was right. The motion says so. I don't blame you. I want to ask my Conservative friends to be aware that we all want the best for everyone and that we must focus on the current humanitarian crisis. A little wisdom on both sides would be welcome.

That said, I know that they're right. However, I think that splitting the time as much as possible among all parties would open the door to a variety of opinions and issues that may not have been considered otherwise.

[English]

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

Go ahead, Madam Zahid.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Chair, in the last panel, we had a first round and everyone had six minutes. Usually in the second round, if there is time, it's five minutes for the Conservatives, five minutes for the Liberals, and then two and a half minutes each for the Bloc and the NDP.

In the first round, everyone had their full six minutes. In the second round, I think it is fair that if lesser time is left, if we don't

have enough time, that is, 15 minutes to do the whole second round, everyone should have equal time. If six minutes are left after the first round, then that time should be divided among all parties. That's what I wanted to bring to all the members' notice.

**The Chair:** That is exactly what I wanted to do, if I have the consensus of the committee—

**Hon. Michael Chong:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The parliamentary principle at play here is that the recognized political parties on this committee are not the primary organizing entity to determine whether or not members get to speak on this committee and what time they get to speak. The primary principle at play here is that there are 10 members on this committee, and they should all be accorded, relatively speaking, the same amount of time for their questions and comments. It should not be divided up equally amongst the parties here. It should be divided up equally amongst the members on this committee.

With respect, Mr. Chair, what you've proposed would actually give a disproportionate amount of time to certain members of this committee, to the detriment of other members of this committee. That's not fair, nor is it in accordance with the principles on which this and other committees are constructed. It's supposed to be relative to the standings in the House of Commons and relative and proportionate to the members on this committee. That's the principle at play here, and so I fear that if we go down the path you've proposed, some members of this committee are more equal than others because they'll get a disproportionate amount of time.

**Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Hold on, I have—

**An hon. member:** There's a speaking order.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** The point of order takes priority. Who has the point of order?

Mr. El-Khoury, go ahead.

**Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury:** Mr. Chair, I would like to hear from the clerk. What is her opinion about this situation?

**The Chair:** I'm going to suspend the meeting to take a minute with the clerk.

● (1945) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

● (1945)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I just wanted to take advice from the clerk. The advice is very clear. Mr. Chong was right, and I was right as the chair as I have that discretion. When a member does not accept that then I certainly like to see that the member takes precedence.

Madam Clerk, do you want to speak to this?

**The Clerk:** No.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Madam Damoff, please—

**Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC):** I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** Madam Findlay, do you have a point of order?

**Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay:** Yes, I've been trying to make it for about 10 minutes, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** I'm so sorry. Go ahead, Ms. Findlay.

**Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay:** I appreciate that it's difficult when some of us are in person and some by Zoom.

We voted as a committee on how this committee would proceed. Yes, of course the chair has some discretion, but we all agreed to this in routine motions at the very beginning of this committee. As Mr. Chong has said, there is a reason why, representative of our numbers in the House, some parties have more people on this committee than others and certain members are given more time than others to ask questions.

I've been on a lot of these committees in different forms, and when a second hour begins, you start again. That's always the way it's been. If the timing is such that not everyone gets time in the first round, that's just the way it is. It doesn't carry over to the next round. Sometimes Conservatives are left behind, sometimes Liberals, sometimes NDP and sometimes Bloc. That's just the way it goes, and that is the way, with respect, Mr. Chair, I think we should proceed.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I'll go to Madam Damoff and then Madam Kwan.

Please go ahead.

**Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

First I want to apologize to our witnesses who are being very patient waiting through this.

My understanding is that you are starting again so that each party gets six minutes. Is that not correct, Chair?

**The Chair:** We're going to leave it there today, and I can talk to you offline at some point in time.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Okay, but the routine motions are quite clear. You gave the time to Mr. Chong, but it was unfair to the Liberals, the NDP and the Bloc because then no one got time.

We can talk about the number of members in the House, but everybody got six minutes on the first round.

In every other committee I've been on since I was elected, the chair would then split the remaining time between all the parties when we need to cut it short, which you were trying to do.

I'm a little confused why this has become so contentious when it's been like this since I got elected in 2015, and people have always been quite respectful when the chair makes those decisions around time.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Damoff.

I've been very fair and generous with the time, but I'm going to go to Madam Kwan.

You have something to add.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Suffice to say, Mr. Chair, that I think the clerk has indicated to the committee that both procedures are correct. I think we should just leave it at that and move on. We have panelists. The more we talk about this, the less time we have to hear from them and to question them. I'd like for us to move on, please.

**The Chair:** Thank you kindly. I'm shortly going to call the meeting back to order.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** Madam Zahid, if you have a point of order, then you can speak. I can't deny the point of order.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** I would like to read the routine motion so that everyone is clear and we don't have this issue again at our next meeting. The routine motions reads:

That witnesses be given five minutes to make their opening statement; that whenever possible, witnesses provide the committee with their opening statement 72 hours in advance; that at the discretion of the Chair, during the questioning of witnesses, there be allocated six minutes for the first questioner of each party as follows for the first round:

Conservative Party

Liberal Party

Bloc Québécois

New Democratic Party

For the second and subsequent rounds of questioning, the order and time for questioning be as follows:

Conservative Party, five minutes Liberal Party, five minutes

Bloc Québécois, two and a half minutes

New Democratic Party, two and a half minutes

Conservative Party, five minutes

Liberal Party, five minutes.

We had our first round. Based on the routine motion, members can split the time they have for their own party. This routine motion doesn't state that each member will have time. It is based on the party and based on the seats.

We had our first round. We were left with less time. We would not have been able to complete our second round, so usually—this is what I have seen since 2015—that time is allocated to all the parties based on their original time so that it is fair to everyone.

I totally understand that now when we start the second panel we will start with our first round, but in the first panel, Mr. Chong got five additional minutes, so that's not fair to the other parties. They didn't get their time. I just want to put it on the record so that we don't come up with this issue again next time.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Sidhu, did you want to say something?

**Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Brampton East, Lib.):** Yes. I agree with my colleague, Chair. In every committee that I've been on, it's always proportionate to representation, and at the discretion of the chair.

I suggest we move on. I'm looking forward to hearing what witnesses have to say, but I hope this clarifies everything for the committee.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

I'm going to call the meeting back to order and start with the second panel.

Madam Clerk, are all the witnesses here? Thank you.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the new witnesses.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. When you are ready to speak, you can click on the microphone icon to activate your microphone.

I remind everyone that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

Members and witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of floor, English or French. Please choose whichever choice you want.

If interpretation is lost, please inform me immediately, and we will ensure that interpretation is properly restored before resuming the proceedings.

When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, your microphone should be on mute.

On behalf of the committee members, I would like to welcome our witnesses and express our appreciation for all of you being with us today.

Please note that the witnesses have five minutes each for their opening remarks; that is per organization.

As individuals, we have with us, retired Major-General David Fraser. Also with us is retired Major-General Dean Milner.

From Veterans Transition Network we have Mr. Oliver Thorne, and also people to assist the Veterans Transition Network.

I welcome all of you. I will start with opening remarks from retired Major-General Fraser.

Please, go ahead for five minutes.

**Major-General (Retired) David Fraser (Major General (Retired), Afghan Strategic Evacuation Team, As an Individual):** Mr. Chair, ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for the opportunity to talk to you this evening.

I am retired Major-General Fraser. I spent 32 years in the Canadian Armed Forces and participated in numerous missions, including as commander, regional command south under the U.S.-led coalition Operation Enduring Freedom, and the NATO coalition ISAF in 2006.

Before I go on, can everyone hear me? Am I coming across? I would hate to do this twice.

**The Chair:** Excellent.

**MGen (Ret'd) David Fraser:** Throughout my experience, operating in any mission was difficult because of a number of factors. The security threat is always paramount; however, it is compounded by language and culture. Afghanistan was one of the most complex missions Canada has ever engaged in. Nowhere were we more dependent on interpreters and cultural advisers than we were in Afghanistan.

I only have to remind you about what is going on in Ukraine today in terms of the need we have to be able to communicate and the need for interpreters.

Afghanistan is a complex society with many different ethnic groups and tribes. Add to that the regional players, none of whom have English as their first language. Canada went into Afghanistan to fight an insurgency and rebuild a nation to meet Afghan desires. Doing so necessitated the use of interpreters to communicate both what the Afghans wanted and what we could do for them. Dialogue was key over what most people saw on their TV screens, which was an inordinate amount of combat. This combat was, tragically, the desire of the Taliban who wanted to overthrow the democratically elected Afghan leadership.

I want to emphasize that over and above having the language challenge, which we had at my level right down to the soldier level, was trying to understand a culture, which took up most of our time. As commander of a nine-nation coalition, I needed an interpreter, but more importantly I needed cultural advisers who could tell me more than just which words were being spoken.

Commanders at all levels and soldiers on the ground needed to be nuanced in the culture, which is very different from what we have here in Canada. Offending somebody was easily done, and the damage took a long time to repair. Without these interpreters and cultural advisers, Canada simply could not have done what we did. We did much, but that is not the purpose of the commentary today.

Canada's contribution, which was significant, could not have been effective without these people. While we started with interpreters, the groups of affected Afghans goes beyond this group. We provided opportunities that you and I take for granted in this nation: education, freedom of elections, and freedom of who can access them. Women, LGBTQ people and ethnic groups, to name just a few, gained new liberties and freedoms. We assisted Afghans to build a more inclusive society. Twenty years after the international community involved itself, the Taliban cannot do what they did in 1999, which is making it harder for them to turn the clock back. This is a result of our work with Afghans. We provided them with hope; we created a moral contract with them about what it means to be free, and in their hour of need, we as Canadians need to stand by them.

In July, two other generals, Dean Milner and Denis Thompson saw the potential for what could happen. We penned a letter to the implicated ministers asking them to create a pipeline to evacuate vulnerable Afghans. I hope that you've had time to talk to Major-General Denis Thompson, in addition to Dean and me, because he has a lot to say on this subject.

Tragically, our assessment in that letter came true, and today there is a humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan as the Taliban regime has taken it over. As a consequence of these actions, we need to provide a pathway out of that country for these adversely affected people and their families.

When we started, we were tracking just over 100 interpreters. Once we got going and once we joined forces with Aman Lara, which means “sheltered path” in Pashto, as well as journalists for human rights, building markets, the Afghan interpreters and the Veterans Transition Network, our numbers grew.

• (1950)

**The Chair:** Mr. Fraser—

**MGen (Ret'd) David Fraser:** Please, Mr. Chair, if I could, I would like to continue. I've listened to you people talk for this long, and I will ask if you can just allow me as a witness to provide you the information that this committee has asked me and my fellow people to give you so that we can inform Canadians about a humanitarian crisis that this country is not picking up and lifting its weight on.

**The Chair:** Mr. Fraser, you had five minutes. We did not take your time. You will have time to say things when you are asked questions, and you can submit in writing.

Mr. Fraser, thank you very much for your time. I'm going to go to our next witness, Mr. Milner, for five minutes.

Go ahead, please.

We can't hear you, Mr. Milner. It seems that there is some technical difficulty.

**MGen (Ret'd) David Fraser:** Mr. Chair, since Dean Milner and I wrote the letter together and we have prepared the written statement, which you have, I could finish my statement if that is acceptable to you and the rest of the members.

• (1955)

**The Chair:** I don't have consent on that. Sorry, Mr. Fraser. I gave you five minutes. I have to look to Mr. Milner, because he has five minutes to speak as well, as an individual.

It seems we have some difficulty hearing Mr. Milner. We can go to the next witness and then come back to Mr. Milner when the technical team finishes.

I will go to Mr. Oliver Thorne for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Oliver Thorne (Executive Director, Veterans Transition Network):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

General Milner, there might be a mute button on the headset as well, if you received one from the Government of Canada. Even if you unmute in the program, there may be a little remote along the wire that might be the issue.

Mr. Chair, and ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Oliver Thorne. I'm the executive director with the Veterans Transition Network, which is a registered Canadian charity. Until very recently, our entire focus was delivering mental health programs, counselling programs, for veterans of the Canadian Forces and RCMP.

I'll try to keep my statement brief, to the background of our involvement in the Afghan campaign and the key takeaways that we've learned working on this over the previous six months.

First and foremost, as I said, our organization typically runs counselling programs for Canadian veterans. We have a network of veterans and graduates across Canada that we are in close contact with.

In July, we were approached by General Fraser, General Milner and General Thompson who were forming a group of concerned veterans and organizations known as ASET, the Afghan Strategic Evacuation Team. They were working to help prepare and support the government evacuation that was going to take place after the fall of Kabul and asked if the Veterans Transition Network could become involved as the financial arm to raise funds and issue tax receipts to support that effort.

We joined that effort early in August. Initially, our goal was to raise \$500,000 Canadian to support a small number of safe houses for the 100 individuals whom General Fraser spoke about earlier.

Over the course of the middle of August, Afghanistan entirely fell to the Taliban much faster than anticipated, so all of our efforts were kicked into very high gear.

Throughout that time, through our fundraising efforts, we funded an individual who you might know as “Canadian Dave”. He is a former special forces operator with the Canadian Forces who took a team to the Hamid Karzai International Airport and assisted the evacuation efforts there and also operated a number of safe houses, providing shelter for people who had come from outlying areas within Afghanistan into Kabul in preparation for the evacuation.

After the government airlift ended, there were very limited options for individuals to get out of the country. Again, with Dave and with the rest of the ASET team, we also continued to fund our own evacuation efforts.

To date, the fundraising campaign has raised \$4.5 million. Almost \$3.5 million has gone directly to the safe houses and to the evacuation efforts that I mentioned just now.

To date, our best estimate is that we've supported the evacuation of 892 individuals through the funding we've raised and through the organizations that General Fraser talked about in his statement.

The takeaways that I think we have from this effort are, first, that the Canadian Forces veterans are deeply invested in helping their Afghan interpreters. As General Fraser spoke about, these individuals worked alongside Canadian Forces personnel, in the same vehicles, wearing the same uniforms. They were not just interpreters; they were cultural advisers, and in many cases, their local information and knowledge helped save Canadian lives.

In addition to that, Canadians are supportive of Canadian veterans, so by extension, they are very supportive of the Afghans who we are trying to help. This is evident through the incredible response to this fundraising campaign and this evacuation campaign across Canada.

The third point is that the Canadian government was not prepared for the collapse of the Afghan government and the resulting humanitarian crisis. The result was a hasty announcement of an immigration program that IRCC was not sufficiently prepared for or staffed to execute.

The fourth point is that risk aversion on the part of the Canadian government has resulted in policy that has tied the hands of hard-working government employees who are doing their best to execute and assist this evacuation effort, but policy has hog-tied them.

Finally, the result is that Canadian veterans, the public and charities have stepped in to fill this void at their own risk, financially and otherwise, in order to support this effort.

Thank you. I welcome your questions.

● (2000)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Thorne. You are well within the time frame.

I am going to check one more time before I go to the honourable members to see if Mr. Milner—

**Major-General (Retired) Dean Milner (Major General (Retired), Afghan Strategic Evacuation Team, As an Individual):** Can you hear me?

**The Chair:** Yes. We can hear you now.

**MGen (Ret'd) Dean Milner:** That's great.

**The Chair:** You have five minutes. Please go ahead.

**MGen (Ret'd) Dean Milner:** It must be the fact that I'm in Mexico, or something like that, but anyway, Mr. Chair and ladies and gentlemen, I am retired Major-General Dean Milner. Thanks for this opportunity to provide some feedback. I will try to be brief, as I've heard some great points from both David and Oliver.

The bottom line is that I'm very passionate about what happened in Afghanistan. I was the last commander in Kandahar. I commanded our war-fighting mission. I was also the last commander to leave Afghanistan in 2014, when I sadly had to give the Canadian flag to our ambassador when we left with all of our forces from the training mission in 2014.

I joined the team along with the other two generals, Dave Fraser and Denis Thompson, and a number of others, mostly former military personnel, to assist with the evacuation of our interpreters and those who had so graciously worked for us over in Afghanistan.

During my couple of years, I could not have done the mission and couldn't have completed the mission without these tremendous Afghans who served alongside us, who fought alongside us. We lost many of those great Afghans. The bottom line is that I dearly support those great Afghans, and I really wanted to make sure this this government moved ahead and tried to evacuate them.

We didn't do that well. I'll be very honest. I think we managed to evacuate 3,000 before the air bridge was closed, but due to bureaucracy at Immigration Canada and the fact that really there was not clear leadership and there was not a clear plan, it was very difficult for us to support and assist the mission. Really, we only managed to pull out maybe about 15% to 17% of those critical interpreters who soldiered alongside us.

After that, we continued to push for some kind of leadership. We really wanted somebody to take the ball. That did not happen. We really continued to seek the efforts of the government, and we were prepared to assist, but again, it has been a very slow and arduous process. We've moved out maybe 200 here or 150 there. It is very difficult. The bureaucratic paperwork process is far too slow. We keep hearing that there's going to be leadership, that somebody is going to take charge, but there's really nobody taking charge.

Canada can do a lot better than this. We have 10,000.... The Prime Minister said that we're going to move out 40,000. Forty thousand—we have moved out maybe 4,500. It's not enough. It's inexcusable. We need to move out more Afghans, those who soldiered alongside us. It's a moral obligation. We need to do better. Other countries have done a lot better than we have, so I really am asking for more support and more leadership. I'm prepared to answer any questions that you'd like.

We have done okay, but it's not good enough. We will continue to work with our team, the Afghan Strategic Evacuation Team, along with a number of other key networks, the Veterans Transition Network, the Afghan-Canadian Interpreters, and a number of other key organizations. We want to team up with people to help bring these Afghans out.

I'm open to questions. Again, I'm very passionate about this situation. I just feel that as Canadians we can do that much better.

**The Chair:** Thank you very Major-General Milner. We appreciate that.

Are the bells ringing, Madam Clerk? How many minutes do we have right now?

Do I have consent to go until 5:30 p.m. with this and then stop?

● (2005)

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Do you mean 5:30 p.m. your time?

**The Chair:** Yes, 8:30 p.m., so Madam Kwan gets six minutes as well.

Is it okay? Yes? That's great. Thank you.

Without wasting any more time, I'm going to our first round.

Mr. Ruff, you have six minutes. Please be sensitive to the time.

**Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

First off, my thanks to General Milner, General Fraser and Oliver Thorne for being here. Thanks especially to the generals, although I believe all of you had time in uniform. Your service is greatly appreciated, especially in Afghanistan and in everything you have done over the last, well, it's coming on a number of months, anyway, since last summer to help get these Afghans out.

I want to focus on these issues that General Milner was getting to about how foreseeable this situation was. I know that the generals penned that letter, but I mean, we had intelligence information. We knew when President Trump had indicated that this was going to happen. The intelligence and all the sources were indicating that this was quite a possibility. Do you think the Government of Canada should have taken action sooner?

**MGen (Ret'd) David Fraser:** Is that open to any one of us?

**Mr. Alex Ruff:** It is. Go ahead, General.

**MGen (Ret'd) David Fraser:** The short answer is, yes, we saw this coming. If three retired generals without access to intelligence saw this coming in July, there could have been a lot more people evacuated out of Afghanistan before Kandahar fell and before Kabul fell. This is, again, on the shoulders of Canadians, and I don't mean just the military. We could have actually done more.

Since the fall of Afghanistan and since the closure of the air bridge, there is certainly a lot more we could have done to bring out...I think it's about 7,000 in total, maybe about 5,000 in this country, to actually meet that 40,000 target. We can do better than this.

**Mr. Alex Ruff:** Thanks, General.

Can you or General Milner elaborate on the impact of closing the embassy? How did that add to the confusion and the chaos of trying to do the coordination of this mission and the lack of support from the diplomatic side of the house?

**MGen (Ret'd) Dean Milner:** I can jump in there. Thanks. That's a great question.

That was a huge challenge. We moved our embassy out way too fast, there's no doubt in my mind. As a matter of fact, we were the first embassy to depart. That was very embarrassing for a lot of us on the ground. They could have been a lot of help. I [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] was working with a number of them in the embassy, and all of a sudden, boom, they were gone. I think we could have reacted quicker.

There are comparisons with the Syrian mission, because I was involved in that one, where we pulled 25,000 out. We put an aggressive whole-of-government team on the ground with the military, with IRCC, and we threw them a whole bunch of money. We pulled people out. There was no bureaucracy. There wasn't all this paperwork to pull out the critical people. We could have pulled people [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] third party location. There's no doubt in my mind that we would have managed to get a lot more people out.

Yes, a number of things could have been done a lot better than they were. Absolutely, moving the embassy out was embarrassingly way too fast.

**Mr. Alex Ruff:** Thanks, General Milner.

I'll come back to you or General Fraser on the comments about the lack of leadership and not one department; not one minister. You know my background, and I know that you guys were well tied into the Canadian Armed Forces capabilities. To my understanding, they could have done more, sooner. We've had testimony that there were forces prepared to go in and start to get Afghans out sooner.

Would you attribute it to a lack of political will or just a lack of one minister sort of taking the bull by the horns and actually doing the coordination function that needed to happen, considering we had Immigration, Foreign Affairs, Defence and everybody involved?

● (2010)

**MGen (Ret'd) David Fraser:** To put it simply, it's all of the above. Canada was a world leader during the combat mission when we were there. We created a super deputy minister and we had an interdepartmental task force that actually harnessed the power of a whole-of-government team. It actually brought tremendous strategic credit to this nation.

When this crisis was unfolding right in front of our eyes, we then urged the government, as we do now, to create an interdepartmental task force with one leader. There has to be one minister that has the pre-eminent authority and responsibility to manage across the different departments the needs of IRCC, Global Affairs Canada, Safety, and Defence and the resources necessary to pull these Afghans out of the country and back to this country safely so that we have the right people.

We need to repeat what we've already done in the past. Over.

**Mr. Alex Ruff:** Thanks, General.

**MGen (Ret'd) Dean Milner:** Those are great points. I would add really quickly that there has to be a plan, and we've offered a plan, but we have not seen that plan. We have not seen a government plan with the leadership to execute. We've seen bits and pieces from a number of people. We wrote a plan and offered that plan, but again, we did not see that plan taken. We never did see a plan from the government; we were really hoping to see that.

I would add that. Thank you.

**Mr. Alex Ruff:** Thanks, Generals, and witnesses.

Chair, I understand my time is up. My last request would be for the generals to table their letters with the clerk. I know General Fraser indicated he sent it, but the clerk seems to indicate she doesn't have it.

General Fraser, General Milner and Mr. Thorne, could you table your opening remarks with the committee, please?

**The Chair:** I'm going to ask a quick question of the members present in the committee room or anyone. Is there any will for them to go vote personally in the House of Commons? I would have to adjust the time. If not, I'm going to carry on. Thank you.

The next honourable member is Mr. Baker for six minutes.

**Mr. Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.):** Thanks very much, Chair.

I want to thank our witnesses for being here today. Generals Fraser and Milner, thank you for your service in Afghanistan and throughout your careers for this country.

Mr. Thorne, thank you for being here as well and for all that you've been doing.

Gentlemen, what I'm really interested in is how we help folks now as much as possible.

General Fraser, I think you've articulated quite clearly, especially in your opening remarks, why folks need help. What I'm interested in is how we do that going forward, so if you don't mind, I would like to focus my questions on that.

I'd like to start by asking, what are the greatest challenges to helping folks now and how do we overcome them?

Anyone can take that question.

**MGen (Ret'd) Dean Milner:** I'd like to jump in.

General Fraser has outlined the fact that it's a horrible situation over there. It continues to get worse. We can't trust the Taliban. We know that for a fact. The bottom line is that we do need a plan. We need a whole-of-government plan. This is big. We need GAC. We need IRCC. We need the whole team, the forces, to get together.

The Prime Minister said 40,000 people. We have 10,000 who are still over there in these horrible conditions. The bottom line is that we do need a plan. We need to lead. We need to get people on the ground. We need to get people into Pakistan. There are a number of things that can be done, but they need to be done quickly. We hear it's a priority. We hear from cabinet meetings that it's a priority, but we just do not feel that it's a priority.

We're willing to help. We have great people who are willing to help. It's very difficult for us to see things happening in Immigration Canada and across the government. We have great people who are willing to help. We have people we can put on the ground to help the situation. We did that, and that's how we pulled out some of these tremendous Afghans.

All that being said, we've written another letter to Minister Fraser asking to speak to him to offer assistance. There has been no response, zero response. It's embarrassing. We'd like to help, and I'm sure that both Oliver and General Fraser would say the same thing. We want to help more, and we would like to see some leadership, a team and a plan. We love plans. Plans will help us execute and get things done.

• (2015)

**Mr. Yvan Baker:** General, I appreciate that.

I have about three minutes left, so I will ask the next question. I hear you, General, and I appreciate that. You're speaking to me now, and I want to learn and be able to raise the right points with the minister as well.

If you were developing that plan—and I know we don't have a lot of time—what are some of the key things? I'm hearing about challenges like getting folks out of Afghanistan into Pakistan, for example. Is that correct? Is that a challenge? How do we overcome that? I understand that IRCC has been trying to help folks once they reach Pakistan. Is that working? What more do we need to do? These are some of my questions. What are the elements of that plan? What I really want to know is how we help folks now that we are where we are.

**Mr. Oliver Thorne:** I have a few suggestions along that line. These are in order of preference, if you will.

I talked earlier about risk aversion. I think that's one of the big challenges that's getting in the way of bringing people to Canada. The way that challenge manifests is in biometric verification for applicants to the special immigration measures program. Without the ability to deliver biometrics in country, which we cannot do without a Canadian consular presence, they have to go to a third country before they can come to Canada. That means we have to deal with all the paperwork requirements to get them into that third country. Remember, most of the individuals we're talking to do not have passports. Without a passport they can't get a visa and without a visa they can't go into the country.

Again, these are some pieces that the government seems reticent to implement because of risk aversion. The ideal solution would be the ability to bring people to Canada without biometric verification and do the verification in Canada. That's the best solution.

If that's not possible, a solution to biometrics in country, in Afghanistan, is the second-best solution. If not, enhance communication at least with neighbouring countries, so that we can get people into those countries and do biometrics as quickly as possible. Things like a *laissez-passer* or a single use travel document that Canada could issue to Afghans to move into Pakistan, UAE, Tajikistan or anywhere where we have the ability to then provide biometric identification.

The last thing I will put in a plug for is for the Canadian government, through Global Affairs, to continue funding organizations within ASET, like Aman Lara, that are doing this evacuation work, and expanding what those funds can be used for as much as possible. At the moment they cannot be used for temporary accommodations, which are desperately needed, because of government policy. Anything the government can do to relax those constraints on the funding they're providing to organizations will be enormously helpful.

**Mr. Yvan Baker:** Thank you.

My time is up.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Baker.

Now we will go to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for six minutes.

Please be sharp and on time.

[*Translation*]

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

I want to thank the witnesses for being here. I also want to thank them for their service and for their work on the ground since the start of the crisis. We're very grateful to them.

Major-General Milner, you said that you didn't get a response from IRCC or Minister Fraser. The same goes for Mr. Thorne and Major-General Fraser.

Mr. Baker said that he would speak to the minister. With all due respect to Mr. Baker, I have some good news for you. Tomorrow, at the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, we'll be meeting with Minister Fraser. I'm giving you the opportunity this evening to send me the questions that you want me to ask him tomorrow at the meeting. You can send them to me. I guarantee that at least one of those three questions will be asked.

I'd like to hear from the three witnesses.

[*English*]

**MGen (Ret'd) David Fraser:** The first thing I would ask is what the plan is.

What is the plan to get the 40,000 Afghans to this country? When is that plan going to be executed? What are the monthly metrics of how many people you want to have coming out of Afghanistan to come to this country?

If biometrics is such a hard thing, we have some of the greatest technology companies in the world in this country. We can actually have secure technology such that the data never goes into the country. It is a dumb machine that transmits the data with telecommunications back to a safe location where it never goes out and never gets exposed. Use technology to get across the biometric issues.

What is the plan? What is the milestone?

Stop sending emails. Be transparent with the Afghan applicants and start talking to them person to person. Great Britain, the United States, France and Ukraine sent people into Kabul to grab people out of the country. Canada sent an email. That's not good enough.

Let's open up the lines and talk to real people and start giving them hope and opportunity.

• (2020)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Mr. Thorne, do you have a question for the minister?

I could ask it for you at the meeting tomorrow.

[*English*]

**Mr. Oliver Thorne:** Thank you, sir.

I think General Fraser summed it up admirably.

The only piece I would add is to really hammer that question of biometrics. What is the solution to biometrics? What is on the table?

Again the ideal solution is to bring people to Canada without biometrics and do that after the fact. If not, a biometric solution in country would be better.

[*Translation*]

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

This committee is so important. As we said, we want to help people now and as quickly as possible.

Could you tell me, Mr. Thorne, given your responsibilities, how Canadian veterans who gave their word to their Afghan collaborators are responding? How do the veterans feel about their collaborators?

It's important to ask the question.

[*English*]

**Mr. Oliver Thorne:** Thank you very much for the question. It's absolutely one that's important to be asked.

With a great deal of frustration, in some cases desperation, our day-to-day job for the last six months has been helping veterans with mental health issues. Already throughout the process and the fall of Afghanistan we saw the impact of that on their mental health, on their well-being, to the point where we brought together our clinical network from across Canada to do some additional training and consultation on this, because the topic was coming up again and again in the programs that we continue to run.

How specifically does the issue of interpreters impact veterans? It impacts them right at home, because the interpreters are reaching out to Canadian Forces veterans asking them for help, asking them to help them with their applications, to help provide letters of reference so that they can be vetted and approved to come to Canada.

In many cases they are also providing them with funding. They're helping them to book travel plans. They're giving them their own money to pay for their temporary accommodations whether that's in Kabul or Pakistan, or somewhere else on their journey to Canada. This is impacting them enormously.

I'll give one example. We have a veteran who's been a long-time supporter of our organization. His name is Trevor Street. He lives in British Columbia. He spent tens of thousands of dollars of his own money in July to take out ad campaigns in newspapers in Ottawa with a photo of his interpreter, who was killed by the Taliban, asking why a program has not been announced. That was in July.

We see examples like that all across Canada. We have spoken to dozens of veterans over the previous months who have had some deep level of involvement helping their personal interpreters.

It is incredibly detrimental to the mental health of Canada's veterans to not be able to help them and to see them still waiting to come here when the veterans are getting messages daily talking about how dangerous it is.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** I gather that it directly affects the people who helped us in Afghanistan and who are trying to leave the country, obviously. However, it also affects the mental health of our veterans. It creates anxiety. They feel indebted to these people and they can't help them because their government isn't taking action.

What are you most disappointed about in terms of this government and the current crisis?

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. Your time is up.

[Translation]

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

[English]

**The Chair:** Madam Kwan, we'll go to you for six minutes, please.

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

I want to thank all the witnesses for their service, their incredible work and their ongoing advocacy.

You are absolutely correct. I think the government dropped the ball. I still remember when the former minister of immigration was asked the question about resettlement. The response was to say that they could use the existing immigration measures, which we know was not going to be possible.

With that being said, moving forward on what can be done and what needs to be done, have you proposed to the government waiving the biometrics? It is absolutely paramount to waive the administrative and paperwork requirement. If so, what was their response?

Mr. Thorne.

● (2025)

**Mr. Oliver Thorne:** I would actually defer to my colleagues, General Fraser and General Milner, as they have had more direct communication with the government on this.

**MGen (Ret'd) David Fraser:** I can jump in quickly.

**The Chair:** General Fraser, go ahead.

**MGen (Ret'd) David Fraser:** We've made all those recommendations. We said we would work with the government on options

on how to do that. Fundamentally we agreed that nobody should come into this country who shouldn't be here. You waive it at that end and you isolate them and then you do all the necessary biometrics and due diligence so we get the right people here. If they don't meet the requirements, you send them home. You send them back to Afghanistan.

The thing is to take them out of harm's way, do the vetting, bring them here or to a third party. We made all those recommendations, but the risk aversion is it's in the "too hard to do" column.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Would you be able to table with the committee the recommendations you've made to the government, so that we have them on the public record of the committee?

**MGen (Ret'd) David Fraser:** Yes. We can come up with all the letters and recommendations, because we still talk to IRCC and Global Affairs on a weekly basis, when we make all these recommendations. When the interdepartmental task force was up and running, we gave them the same recommendations.

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

**MGen (Ret'd) Dean Milner:** I would just add that it's an opportunity for the government to be aggressive. We've talked biometrics. They can put a big team on the ground over in somewhere like Pakistan, very similar to what we did with Syria. We put in a whole-of-government team. You can actually do a lot of it right there on the ground. We'll continue to pull people out. Pakistan isn't the perfect spot, but there's a place that we continue to move people to.

Yes, we can table recommendations. We continue to push our recommendations through the lower levels of Immigration Canada, because we cannot really get the right people in Immigration to speak to us. We don't know how far our recommendations are going up the chain of command, but we're absolutely key to give you anything that we can to assist.

We can recommend plans. We've done this before, so we're prepared to do that.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I was going to say, given your experience, that you have done that before, with the Syrian initiative most recently. Because of that mobilization, we were able to bring people to safety.

If the government supported that effort right now and took the same approach as they did under the Syrian refugee initiative, would you be able to do that work with Afghanistan?

**MGen (Ret'd) Dean Milner:** I would say, absolutely, yes.

We've had people who did the exact same thing in Syria make recommendations and offer their services. I could call up somebody who led the operations for Syria who would go in there in a heartbeat. There are people out on the ground who will help.

Again, yes, we can assist. We've recommended plans, so, yes, we are 100% on standby to continue to assist.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** With respect to the evacuation—sorry, I shouldn't say evacuation—the bringing of people to safety, some of the collaborators, interpreters and so on may have served in a different frame or a different realm; however, not all of them are being recognized by the government in terms of their resettlement support.

From that perspective, how many people do you think fall into that bracket, and what should the government do about it? Should there be policy changes with respect to that?

**MGen (Ret'd) David Fraser:** We've recommended to the government to be as inclusive as possible. The criteria that the IRCC and the policy have right now are fairly broad. It gets kind of iffy when you talk about human rights. However, for journalists, women, ethnic minorities, LGBTQ, cultural advisers, interpreters and cooks, there are enough conditions there that we can probably get them here. We should be more inclusive than exclusive, but, again, it goes back to the comment earlier that was made that we're too risk-averse.

• (2030)

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Do you think the government should, for example, allow for Canadians to sponsor loved ones who are there?

They're the extended families. I've had people tell me that their cousin, for example—

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** I have a point of order, Chair.

I'm sorry to interrupt, Ms. Kwan, but there's only a minute and 50 seconds left until the vote.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Madam Kwan. You almost got your six minutes.

On behalf of the committee members, I would love to thank both generals, General Fraser and General Milner, and Mr. Thorne for appearing on the committee and for their input to the committee. Thank you kindly.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Mr. Chair, before you wrap it up, could I ask the witnesses to send their written answers to that last question about sponsorship and extending it beyond parents, grandparents, spouses, independent children, the collaborators and the interpreters?

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Kwan.

The meeting is adjourned.

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