



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

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# Special Committee on Afghanistan

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 009**

Monday, April 11, 2022

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Chair: Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal





## Special Committee on Afghanistan

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• (1535)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.)):** We have a quorum. Welcome, everybody, from beautiful British Columbia. It's particularly nice to see that the Honourable Erin O'Toole is with us on this committee.

Welcome, Mr. O'Toole.

I am going to call this meeting to order now. Welcome to meeting number nine of the House of Commons Special Committee on Afghanistan, pursuant to the House order of December 8, 2021. Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of November 25, 2021.

I would like to remind all those present in the room to please follow the recommendations from the public health authorities as well as the directive of the Board of Internal Economy of October 19, 2021, to remain healthy and safe.

Should any technical challenges arise, please advise me as we may need to suspend for a few minutes to ensure that all members are able to participate fully.

The witnesses should also be aware that translation is available through the globe icon at the bottom of the screen, where they can select their language of choice. Because of bilingualism, French and English are available simultaneously.

Now on behalf of the committee members, I would like to welcome our witnesses today.

For the first panel we have former interpreters for the Canadian Armed Forces: Mr. Ghulam Faizi, Mr. Hameed Khan and Mr. Ahmad Shoaib. I hope I pronounced those right.

For the witnesses, you will have exactly five minutes to speak. Please be respectful of the time so members can have as much time as possible to ask you questions.

Now we will proceed with Mr. Faizi, for five minutes.

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi (Former Interpreter, Canadian Armed Forces, As an Individual):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, honourable members and guests for giving me the chance to appear in front of the special committee on Afghanistan.

The federal government, and particularly IRCC, should stop playing politics with us because it is a matter of life and death for our parents and siblings.

We represent a large group of former interpreters who helped keep Canadian soldiers safe for so many years in Afghanistan.

Let me give you a sense of how hard it is to live in Afghanistan for an interpreter's family who supported the Canadian mission there. In this month of Ramadan, our families are fasting and hiding from the Taliban government and its supporters. This is what our families are going through in Afghanistan. For example, the Taliban raided the house of one of our former interpreters. His brother burned all the documents, and he was only able to send one of his brothers to Pakistan. He tells me he cannot afford all of his family members travelling to Pakistan at the same time and arranging for them to live there. His family is still living in Afghanistan, and they do not know what will happen to them tomorrow. They constantly change their location.

We have had dozens of meetings with IRCC. We have wanted positive results from one week to the next. Why not assign 10 or more case numbers a week to our families' cases? Why not ship 15 cases a week for a final decision to the Abu Dhabi office? We seem to be getting the opposite. We ask the same questions every week, and either the answers we get back are negative, or they tell us they are still chasing these questions.

I will give an example of some of those questions.

We want the IRCC to include four or five family members who left Afghanistan before July 22, 2021. In this current public policy that is made for extended families, the status of those four to five family members in their country is temporary, and they could be deported back to Afghanistan, but the IRCC is not willing to do that.

Moreover, the IRCC must stop double-standard policies. Why do I call them double-standard? It is because IRCC provides a one-year RAP, resettlement assistance program, to SIM applicants, but they recently changed it for families. The website says that our extended families will not be covered under the RAP program for one year when they come to Canada.

How can I or another former Canadian interpreter support his parents and siblings to rent them a place for the first year or uphold them well? None of them will have a basic job when they arrive in Canada.

The Minister of Immigration made promises directly to us, and we want him to keep these promises. We want him to process the rest of the applications and assign case numbers to those applications that have been waiting in his office for more than three months. He personally told us, "We control paperwork, and I will make sure, and my team will make sure you guys will have case numbers for your applications within two weeks," but for more than 65 persons, our applications are still being ignored or not being assigned any case numbers.

Second, he also promised us that the first batch of our extended families would arrive in the first quarter of 2022. We want him to keep this promise. We have zero family members arriving under this current policy. We want him to include these four to five families. These are also our families in third countries. They are temporarily living there, and they will be deported.

• (1540)

We want him to do more and talk to the Pakistani delegation to provide our families with a single travel document or to provide passes so that our families can travel to Pakistan without passports, which we have a problem with.

We want him to talk with the Qatari government about securing chartered flights from Kabul airport to Doha or UAE, because Qatar controls airports in Afghanistan currently. We want to ask him to provide the same sort of services to our families as they arranged for the same program. We want him to keep his promises and do his moral obligation.

Thank you, everyone.

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

Now we will go to Mr. Khan.

Mr. Khan, you have five minutes. Please go ahead.

**Mr. Hameed Khan (Former Interpreter, Canadian Armed Forces, As an Individual):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman and the respective members of the Special Committee on Afghanistan, for giving us the opportunity to come here to discuss the problems we have with the IRCC and the Government of Canada.

I want to start with the fall of Kabul. The fall of Kabul was a devastating tragedy for all of us. That moment, watching it on TV, was the last hope that we were all losing. We lost. We failed to build a society where freedom and women's rights are respected, where everyone has an opportunity to be what they want, where the dreams of the young generation can be seen and where minorities have a voice. This pain will always be hunting us down, because we believed in it and we fought for it with the Canadian Forces, shoulder to shoulder. We were their eyes and ears on the ground. Many of our brethren and sisters died in these years, some on the front lines with the Canadian soldiers and some from assassination by the Taliban after their service.

The fall of Kabul was a devastating tragedy for all of us. It was a tragedy that puts all our families at risk. It was a risk that none of our families took part in, but they are there because of our enduring relationship with the Canadian Armed Forces and its civilian mission in Afghanistan.

Look at us now. We're here talking about a life-and-death situation. We're asking the Canadian public, we're asking lawmakers, we're asking parliamentarians and we're asking the government officials to listen to us. Listen to our concerns. Listen to our cries. We are in desperate need of saving our families. They are all hiding, one way or another, moving from one house to another house. People have been chased down. People's homes are being searched. It is a dire situation.

Most of the families are starving. We are all living in fear that this is the last day they will see. We are here because of our enduring relationship with Canada. None of our families deserved this.

The Taliban have done multiple killings of anyone considered a traitor. This knot is now getting tighter, as they enter and search houses of suspected family members of those who worked with NATO or ISAF forces. Many have burned the paperwork that connects our families to Canada. First-hand reports paint a sad situation. Valuables are being taken, leaving them no choice but to starve. Taliban are physically assaulting not only the men but also the women of the family members of the former interpreters.

These are true stories. I personally know two former interpreters in British Columbia. They are very close to me. The Taliban went to their houses and took their valuables, cars and motorcycles. They showed no mercy to the men and women, physically assaulting the latter, which is unheard of in Afghan society.

The Taliban justify the redistribution of wealth and valuables from former interpreters and the people who worked with NATO and ISAF forces, because they say that this money or property was earned through illegal means, and since they are fighting the jihad, that wealth can be taken by force.

We receive phone calls from former interpreters. They cry their hearts out to us as their members and their representatives. They ask us to save their families. The answer, of course, is, no, we can't save anyone; we don't have any power in our hands.

We ask our Prime Minister, we ask the Minister at IRCC, and we ask the honourable parliamentarians to help us in this matter. We're doing what we can with multiple protests. We organized two hunger strikes. We provided IRCC with consolidated lists with our families' names and information. We submitted the necessary paperwork when the government opened the web portal for our families on December 9, 2021.

We have had 29 meetings so far with IRCC officials. I'll talk about what we have received so far. This will take only one more minute, I promise, and then I will finish.

What did we receive? We received a promise of urgent processing; a promise to bring families to Canada, starting in the first quarter of 2022; a promise to get UCI numbers; and a promise to work with third countries to bring our families safely to Canada.

Promises are what we have gotten.

• (1545)

No families have arrived. Zero members of our family have arrived. Sixty-five per cent—

**The Chair:** Mr. Khan, your time is up.

I'm sorry to interrupt you.

If you can wrap it up in 15 seconds, then I'll go to the next member.

**Mr. Hameed Khan:** Okay.

Sounds good.

Thank you.

We have four demands that I've listed here:

One, issue all remaining UCI numbers within one month. Understandably, there may be exceptions.

Two, provide clear time frames for this process.

Three, provide a clear passage.

Four, provide assistance for people travelling to Pakistan or if they are already in Pakistan, including hiring accommodations and financial support.

Thank you so much.

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

We'll now go to Mr. Ahmad Shoaib.

Mr. Shoaib, you have five minutes. Go ahead, please.

**Mr. Ahmad Shoaib (Former Interpreter, Canadian Armed Forces, As an Individual):** Thank you so much.

Thanks for having us here today.

Thanks for giving us the time and listening to our sorrows, our grief and our struggles.

Thank you so much for the special Afghanistan committee with regard to interpreters' extended families and the misleading promises of the IRCC.

What brought us to this special Afghanistan committee is the matter of life and death of our loved ones, a matter of life and death of our siblings, the ones who supported us to be on the front line to support the Canadian mission, to work, to stay there and to stay strong. Today they are in Afghanistan, and we are helpless.

We, the former interpreters, were under contract to the Canadian Forces and the Canadian government while we were there on the front line supporting the Canadian mission in Afghanistan. Afghan interpreters who were once heroes to the Government of Canada are zero today because they are stressed, depressed, panicking and

mentally unstable due to the live threat to their families and their loved ones.

We have been going through the toughest times of our lives. We will bring up families suffering as an example. I will use my family as an example. How is my family doing as an example of the 300 other families?

My family has been exiled and expelled from our province, and all they had has been confiscated by the Taliban. Our house has been destroyed by the Taliban. The main problem we have is that we cannot go back to our province. Since the Taliban came into power, my family has been on the run to make sure they stay safe and alive. This is one of our main concerns. We have been talking about one specific thing with IRCC from day one, and it's been over seven months since we started this mission or this battle for our families.

This is a matter of life and death. It's not a matter of pay for work. We want them to be evacuated to a third country to make sure they are safe and to make sure they don't become the victim of our enduring relationship with the Canadian government.

It's been months that we have been in direct contact with IRCC to bring up our problems and our family's struggles to survive. We have been telling IRCC the grim realities and what our families are going through. They take notes, and their answer is "we'll get back to you." We still have dozens of unanswered questions. Sixty-five per cent of the extended families of our former interpreters are still waiting. Sixty-five per cent is big number to be still waiting to receive their UCI and G numbers, but the IRCC is pushing us to get passports. This means we have to disclose our portfolio to let the Taliban recognize who we are. We have to go there to get passports and other required documents, but taking such an action is not safe for our families.

• (1550)

We have a lot of problems. The main problem is that the summer is now here. We kindly told the IRCC months ago that the summer was arriving. We have experienced the struggles of all the people who have been supporting the government and NATO and ISAF forces in Afghanistan. Now that the summer is here, our families are struggling. We told them this months ago. Who is going to be responsible for that?

If being human matters, why are we pushing our families—

• (1555)

**The Chair:** Hello, can you hear me, Mr. Shoaib?

You have already gone to six minutes.

**Mr. Ahmad Shoaib:** Yes.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. I have to ask you to stop.

Once the members ask you questions, you can cover that.

I hate to cut you off. That's why I said we have to respect the five-minute time. I'm so sorry.

Thank you, though.

**Mr. Ahmad Shoaib:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Now, we'll start with a round of questions.

Before I start, I want to remind all honourable members that if you are not on camera, then you are not counted as present as you would be if you were in your chair in the room. We still have quorum, but I would request that every member pay attention to that. Thank you.

I will now go to the honourable member, Jasraj Singh Hallan, for six minutes.

Please, go ahead.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here.

First and foremost, thank you for your service to Canada and for your advocacy, not just on behalf of your family but on behalf of other families who are stuck in this loophole and this bureaucratic mess that they are caught up in today.

I also want to say how much of a pleasure it was to meet all of you on Parliament Hill when you were all on a hunger strike. You were on strike because of the absolute failure by this Liberal government to address your concerns.

Mr. Faizi, when we were speaking on the Hill, you spoke about and showed me that the Minister of Immigration had made some insensitive comments towards your family members and those of others, in the sense that he implied that they were security threats, according to what we talked about on the Hill. I did ask the minister to apologize for that twice. He refused to do that. Has the minister reached out to you in any way?

I also mentioned that he met with your families plenty of times, and they still haven't had any response. Has he reached out at all to apologize for these insensitive comments?

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi:** Thank you, Mr. Hallan.

No, he did not reach out to us, and we are still waiting to meet with him because we requested a meeting. The department told us he would try to find a place in mid June. We are still waiting on this.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** I hope he hears your concerns and apologizes for those insensitive comments that he made.

Even in my office, we hear lots of concerns about not getting reference numbers after applying to this special program.

Are there any families that you are aware of, Mr. Faizi or Mr. Shoaib, that have their UCI or any type of reference numbers now?

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi:** We haven't received any UCI or G numbers after the application arrived at the IRCC office as of January 10. They stopped completely, and we got zero UCI or G numbers after that. Before that, we got about 34 to 35 persons ahead of them.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** Because you don't have any reference numbers, I am sure that a lot of them have not even received any biometrics.

Have you heard of their getting biometrics letters or anything like that?

**Mr. Ahmad Shoaib:** Actually, our main problem is getting UCI and G numbers. If we do not get UCI and G numbers, that means we are not in the system, so we cannot go further than that.

Our first demand is our UCI and G numbers.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** Has long has it taken in your eyes to get these UCI numbers? When did they apply?

**Mr. Ahmad Shoaib:** I'm an example of the rest of the interpreters. I've been waiting for 129 days to receive my UCI or G number, and my family is going through the toughest time of their lives.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** We heard through the testimony that you guys have met with the minister's office 28 or 29 times since October 2021. I have been meeting with interpreters here in Calgary since before this selfish election was called.

Have any of you seen any action on some of the promises that were made at some of these meetings or on some of your requests?

**Mr. Ahmad Shoaib:** The promises that were made with regard to our families' evacuation were misleading promises. None of those promises was given—

• (1600)

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** What were some of those promises?

**Mr. Ahmad Shoaib:** Go ahead.

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi:** For example, at the beginning we explained to the IRCC that some of our families have Afghan passports, but some don't; and some have birth certificates, but some don't, because we didn't think that the Government of Afghanistan would fall.

They said, "You guys do not need passports," and then at the last meeting, after the hunger strike we had at Parliament Hill, they told us, "If you guys can, you guys should get passports. Without a passport to travel to Pakistan or any other country, it will be difficult for us to get you out of there."

We told them that you, the IRCC, promised us and promised the public that if a case number or an applicant made it to a third country, they should then contact IRCC, which would then help to take them out of that country. If you go to the Taliban and ask for a family passport, the first question they ask you is, “Why do you need a passport for every single member of your family? Who did you work for? Did you have a relationship with any foreign NATO members?” They start targeting and investigating you.

This is one of the examples.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** Mr. Shoaib, you mentioned that there have been a lot of unanswered questions. Could you elaborate a little bit more on what those unanswered questions were?

**Mr. Ahmad Shoaib:** First of all, we keep asking for UCI numbers, and they are saying, “We'll get back to you.” At the last meeting, they told us before the end of May that we would receive our answers or UCIs, or the applications would be returned, whatever the case may be—

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Hallan. Your six minutes is up.

I just want to remind the honourable members and the witnesses that I would appreciate it if you could talk through the chair, but I'm a bit lenient this way. I don't mind as long as the person who is asked the question is the only one who answers. I appreciate that.

Now, I will go to honourable member Pam Damoff, please, for six minutes.

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

To our witnesses here today, I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your service to Canada. We could not have done what we did in Afghanistan without your service, and so I want to recognize that.

I was born and raised in Canada. All my family is here with me. I cannot imagine the heartbreak and uncertainty you're going through right now. I'm not even going to pretend to understand that because I can't begin to know the heartbreak you are feeling.

Mr. Faizi, you mentioned that not all of your family could afford to get to Pakistan. I had a question about that because we've had previous witnesses talk about the challenges of actually leaving Afghanistan and getting into Pakistan. I wonder if you could clarify this. Is it strictly a financial issue, or are there issues with the Pakistani government and requirements to actually get into Pakistan? I'm trying to clarify what we can do to support those people to get to Pakistan.

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi:** Thank you.

There are three sides to this question. I can explain. First of all, yes it is a financial problem, as well as the documents required by Pakistan. For example, to go to Pakistan, you need to get a Pakistani visa in Afghanistan.

First of all, you have to have an Afghan passport, which is required if you want to apply for a Pakistani visa. If you want to apply for a Pakistani visa, it's not a usual or a normal procedure anymore. You have to hire somebody, a third person, to buy you a Pak-

istani visa. One Pakistani visa can cost you from \$300 to \$900 per person, which is a lot of money.

The third problem is when we cross into Pakistan. We've been asking IRCC about 10 to 12 families already there in Islamabad. We provided a total list to the IRCC, whom we speak to weekly. Those family members are already in Pakistan. Their Pakistani visas are about to expire, and they have to return to Afghanistan.

IRCC's answer is, “No, you don't have to return to Afghanistan, but we will try to get you accommodation with IOM.” It's been almost two to three months, and they did not provide our families with a single accommodation. There are multiple problems in going to Pakistan.

• (1605)

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** I believe Mr. Khan was talking about the passport issue. The passport is actually needed to get into Pakistan. The Canadian government doesn't require a passport to come to Canada. If you were able to come directly here, you wouldn't need it. It's to get into the third country, right?

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi:** That is where we asked the IRCC to provide borrowed passes, or talk to the Pakistani delegation. They provided borrowed passes in the past, and in that case we do not need a passport. We can travel to Pakistan with borrowed passes.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** That's out of our hands though, right? We can try talking to Pakistan, but if they choose not to offer that documentation, we're relying on other governments to get your families to Canada, which I think is what we all want to do. I'm trying to narrow in on what Canada can do directly that doesn't involve getting other countries....

Do you know if any of your family has been able to get to any countries other than Canada?

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi:** Only a couple in my family were able to travel to Pakistan. They're still stuck in Afghanistan, constantly changing their location.

You mentioned that this is out of your hands. IRCC also kept making this point. How about the UCI and G numbers that are in the hands of IRCC?

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** One hundred per cent.

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi:** If they only assigned one case number per day, at least we would have five case numbers at the end of the week.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Yes.

Mr. Khan, you said zero family members have arrived in Canada. Is that your family, or is that for all of the Afghan interpreters? I just want to clarify that.

**Mr. Hameed Khan:** Thank you.

No, the zero is out of the 5,000 spaces that are reserved for the foreign interpreters' families. Zero is the number of families who have made it to Canada so far, as well as people who received visas or anything like that.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** These are extended family members, correct? We've broadened the program, I believe, so that it's extended the family; it's not just immediate family.

**Mr. Hameed Khan:** In some cases, there are also the spouses as well as the kids who are included, but IRCC asked us to keep it strictly to the siblings and the parents only.

**Ms. Pam Damoff:** Okay, but that's not always the case if you're trying to bring family into Canada.

Well, we certainly have some work to do.

My time is almost up, Chair. I have 15 seconds left.

I will just end by saying to the witnesses, we hear you. We'll be doing a report at this committee, and again I thank you profusely for your service to the country.

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

Now, we will proceed to my friend from the Bloc, honourable member Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe. Please go ahead for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Faizi, Mr. Khan and Mr. Shoaib, thank you for your service to Canada. As my colleague said earlier, we can't imagine what you have been through. However, we can stand in solidarity. That is exactly why you are here today at this important meeting. I'm going to ask you some sensitive questions and I will try to do it quickly. You may answer in any order you wish.

We have seen IRCC's response to the current crisis in Ukraine. Some were exempted from providing biometrics because they were considered to be in low-risk groups. Minister Alghabra is developing an air gateway of chartered flights to pick up Ukrainian refugees fleeing the war.

I don't want to downplay the importance of what the Ukrainians are going through, because my heart goes out to them.

However, I'd like to hear what the three of you have to say about this. How do you think IRCC's response to the current crisis in Ukraine compares to its response to the crisis in Afghanistan?

• (1610)

[*English*]

**Mr. Hameed Khan:** This is one of the great questions that we have answered, and we have told IRCC the same thing. As Afghans, as victims of the Soviet invasion, we feel for the Ukrainian people, but at the same time, our expectation from the Canadian government is that we are not some people who are coming from outside of Canada.

We're taxpaying Canadian citizens. We're voting Canadian citizens. We're contributing to all parts of the society. We're allies. We worked on the front lines with the Canadian soldiers. We lost peo-

ple. We have people who lost their limbs. We have people who suffer from lifelong trauma.

When you think of our families and compare that to how Canada responded to other countries and other immigration evacuation plans, it's shameful the way we have been treated. We're very disappointed. The whole group of former Canadian interpreters and their families is very disappointed by the way we have been dealt with, especially by the IRCC, especially with the fake promises, especially with the lack of substance, as well as not walking the talk with all of the promises.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Do you feel that some of the measures put in place for the Ukrainian refugees have also been taken for Afghans who are still stuck in Afghanistan?

[*English*]

**Mr. Hameed Khan:** Thank you.

Indeed, it should have been. That's also what we requested from IRCC in the beginning as well, that these are some of the facilitations, some of the...including bringing people into Pakistan or another third country, as well as bringing people into Canada right away as they have done with Ukrainians.

One thing that the IRCC claims, which I want to refute right here, is that because of national security, because of us... Mr. Hallan mentioned earlier how the comments the minister made were despicable because we have some of the highest security backgrounds. We shared compounds, compartments, rooms and dining tables with the Canadian soldiers, as well as with the Canadian civilian mission, senators and members of Parliament who were in Kandahar, Afghanistan.

All our data has been with the Department of National Defence for the last 10 years. All of our families who are in Canada came in through the 2009 to 2012 process, so there's no way to say that they don't have information on our families or they don't trust our families. Imagine giving your life, fighting for the same values that Canada believes in. We fought for the same values, and now to told that our families are a risk and they can't do the same thing for our families.... There are 14 or 15 different forms of requirements. For the Ukrainians they avoided most of the paperwork, which makes travelling into Canada way easier. In the last seven months, only 10,000 Afghans have made it to Canada, and not from Afghanistan. The majority came from other spots, but in the case of the Ukrainians so far, you know better than I do the number of Ukrainians who have been brought to Canada in only the last six to eight weeks.

Our demand from IRCC, from the Canadian government, is to treat us fairly. We're also human. We also bleed. We fought with you. We were your allies.



• (1615)

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** What you're saying is that it would be a good idea to introduce an emergency immigration mechanism outright in the event of a conflict like the one in Ukraine or the one in Afghanistan. This mechanism should be multistage, it should treat everyone fairly and it should not be conflict-specific. That's what you are telling us, basically, and it's important that the committee take note of that so we can include it in our report.

I'd now like to give Mr. Faizi a chance to speak.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe. Your time is up, but I'll give 15 seconds to Mr. Faizi so he can say something.

[Translation]

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

[English]

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi:** Since the time is limited, IRCC can accommodate our families in a third country and then provide them charter flights from a third country, which is very clear. We share the pathway with them, but they just need to take action on this one.

Thank you.

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

Now we will move on to the honourable member from the NDP, Madam Jenny Kwan, for six minutes.

Please go ahead.

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

Thank you to all of the former interpreters from Afghanistan for presenting today. I actually consider you part of the Canadian military. There is no question that we need to thank you for your service. Now it is the Canadian government's responsibility to make sure that your loved ones are brought here to Canada safely.

I just want to follow up on the question with respect to documentation. If the Canadian government issued your family members what is officially called a "single journey travel document", and they had that document, would they be able to utilize that document to go to Pakistan and then get on a flight to come to Canada safely?

I'd like to ask that question to each of you. I'll ask you to give me a brief answer because I have a follow-up question following that. I'll start with Mr. Faizi.

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi:** Yes, it will be easy for our families. They will not go to the Taliban to ask for a passport or a third party to get Pakistan visas. They can travel to Pakistan, and after the process they can travel to Canada with the single journey travel document.

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

Is it the same answer from Mr. Shoaib?

Then I will go to Mr. Khan.

**Mr. Ahmad Shoaib:** Yes. If we get the single journey travel document, we will have hope because we will know it's been confirmed that we're going to Canada, and we will do our 100 per cent to make our way to a third country because now we know we are going to Canada and we are being reunited with our family members.

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

Mr. Khan.

**Mr. Hameed Khan:** Yes, it's a very important question. I think the single document to cross into Pakistan is the main focal point because, as far as documentation goes, we have provided all of the information that IRCC wanted. Now where we're stuck is moving families from Afghanistan into Pakistan. Once they're in Pakistan... Canada has brought people in under the same program with no passports and no ID cards, the families of staff who worked with the Canadian embassy. If you can do it there, you can do it for our families.

• (1620)

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** This is the essence of the question. The Canadian government has made that option available for Ukrainian nationals. Are you asking the Canadian government to treat you with the same special immigration measures they have given to Ukrainian nationals? I'd like just a quick yes or no answer from the three of you, in the reverse order.

Mr. Khan.

**Mr. Hameed Khan:** Yes, definitely.

**The Chair:** Mr. Shoaib.

**Mr. Ahmad Shoaib:** If being human matters for Canada, yes, for sure.

**The Chair:** Mr. Faizi.

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi:** Yes.

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

Now your problem also is this. There are over 300 families for which applications have been made, and only 35% of them have received a file number, a UCI number, or a G number, and those were for the applications that were submitted prior to January 12. For applications submitted after January 12, 65% of the 300 applications, none of those has even received a response. There have been no file numbers, no G numbers. Is that correct?

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi:** That is correct.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Your problem is this. When you bring this up with IRCC, or at least when I bring these kinds of issues up with IRCC, they say that they can't help those families because they don't have a file number. Without a file number you cannot get a single journey travel document. Is that correct?

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi:** That is correct.

Also, if they're not going to assign or open our applications, who will assign this PIN number to our application? They should do their job and put some officers on our applications, which they promised would be done within two weeks. It's been more than 100 days now.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** The immigration committee actually passed a motion calling on the government to treat others in regions of conflict with the same measures that have been afforded to Ukrainian nationals, and also for the government to waive the refugee determination requirement. Is this what you're asking for from the Minister of Immigration?

Mr. Faizi.

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi:** Yes, we are asking for this. Also, they have made a new obstacle, as I mentioned in my speech. They say that the RAP program will not be available to families or extended families. My question is, when they come to Canada if they want to rent a house, they are asked for income support or income proof. Our families will have zero income support. Where will they live? They should support our families with the RAP program as they do for the rest of the refugee programs.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** In other words, you're basically just asking the Canadian government to treat you equally, the way it does with others.

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi:** We're asking them to treat us equally and fairly, and to do their moral obligation. We supported the Canadian soldier missions. We put our families at risk from the Taliban because of our relationship with the Canadian soldiers.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Madam Kwan. I appreciate your time.

Now we will go to the second round of questioning. I would like to welcome Mr. O'Toole to the committee.

I welcome you, the honourable Mr. O'Toole, to take your spot for five minutes.

Please go ahead.

**Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to start off with two things.

I'd like to speak directly to you, Mr. Faizi, Mr. Khan and Mr. Shoaib, and say two things.

First, thank you for your service alongside our men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces, our aid workers, our diplomats and our presence in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2014, the largest mission Canada has ever engaged in beyond our shores. You were part of that mission and, as Ms. Kwan said, you were part of our Canadian Armed Forces to make sure that we could have interpretation and cultural outreach and do the work we did.

The second thing I want to say is this. I want to apologize on behalf of Canada. We have failed interpreters and many contractors going back many years. It's been horrible watching the fall of Kabul, the scramble and, in your words, Mr. Khan, to listen to your "cries" and to see inaction. It's unacceptable, I think, to all parties and all parliamentarians, past and present, so I offer my apologies.

The intention of this committee is to find out how we failed, where we dropped the ball and how we can remedy the situation and quickly provide as much help as possible to the people who have been left behind.

My question to you, Mr. Faizi, is this. You would have come in under the 2009 program. You arrived in 2011. That program required only 12 months of cumulative service as an employee or contractor, an injury or individualized risk and some sort of positive recommendation or documentation. Many interpreters left service with commendations, certificates, thank yous and pay confirmations. Those documents obviously were used by you. Are those still readily available—a certificate of thanks, for example—with many of the interpreters and their families still on the ground in Afghanistan?

• (1625)

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi:** Thank you, Mr. O'Toole.

Some are available with the families and some we brought with us as records we still have here. However, some have been burned by the families, as you may be aware.

Can you hear me?

**Hon. Erin O'Toole:** Yes. You're saying some documents have been—

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi:** Yes. As you may be aware, the Taliban keeps searching house by house. This started in Kabul and widened to the provinces, so some of our friends are burning their certificates back home.

**Hon. Erin O'Toole:** At the top, sir, you asked us to stop playing politics—

**The Chair:** Mr. O'Toole, can you hear me?

**Hon. Erin O'Toole:** I can.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, but I have the time scheduled as three minutes for each of the Liberals and Conservatives, then one and a half minutes each for Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe and Madam Jenny Kwan, so I have to come back to you in the next turn.

Thank you.

**Hon. Erin O'Toole:** It's not five minutes for the second round, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** This is the way we are doing it. That was the agreement we came up with. I did not want to, but if I go the other way, I'll be way over time.

Thank you very much.

I'm going to now go to Mr. El-Khoury for three minutes.

Go ahead, please.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to welcome the witnesses to our committee.

Mr. Faizi, Mr. Khan and Mr. Shoaib, I can tell you that our hearts go out to you. Thank you so much for your good work and the sacrifices you have made to help the Canadian military.

I would like you to clarify one important point. In your remarks, you always refer to the situation in Ukraine. Ukrainians can leave Ukraine without travel documents, such as passports, but the exact opposite is true when it comes to the situation in Afghanistan.

[English]

The problem is that Afghans cannot leave Afghanistan without documents.

[Translation]

In addition, travel documents issued by the Government of Canada can be used within Canada. The government of Pakistan will not accept these travel documents, not even for a single day.

Do you think there are any flights to the United States or Great Britain from the Kabul airport?

My question is for all witnesses.

[English]

**Mr. Hameed Khan:** Yes, there are flights available from Kabul, from five major airports of Afghanistan. There are flights happening to UAE, Qatar, India and Pakistan.

[Translation]

**Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury:** I'm sorry, but I asked if there were any flights to the United States or Great Britain.

[English]

**Mr. Hameed Khan:** As for flights from Afghanistan to Britain, I have no data or information, but I'm pretty sure if international airlines can come to Afghanistan and they can go to any regional country then they can go anywhere in Europe.

• (1630)

**The Chair:** Mr. Faizi, do you want to add something?

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi:** As Canada and the United States are the best allies with the countries that are controlling the airport in Kabul, they can create flights through countries to Qatar and then they could process and bring the applicants to Canada.

**The Chair:** Mr. El-Khoury.

[Translation]

**Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury:** I understand that you came to Canada under the special immigration measures for Afghan interpreters in 2007 and 2011.

How long did it take from the time you applied for immigration until you arrived in Canada?

[English]

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi:** My personal application took six months. Also we had the Canadian Forces available in Kandahar, so we had zero problems like the ones our families are having now.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. El-Khoury. Your three minutes is up.

Now we're going to go to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for 90 seconds.

Please go ahead.

[Translation]

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

I believe Mr. El-Khoury was trying to differentiate between the situation in Afghanistan and the situation in Ukraine. I have a great deal of respect for Mr. El-Khoury, by the way. He's one of my favourite colleagues.

Earlier, I talked about different criteria being used for Afghans than for Ukrainians. I mentioned the biometrics issue.

Mr. Khan, you said that you had already obtained security clearance and that you had worked for the Canadian military. Do you not see a dichotomy, discrepancy or issue there?

I agree that some Ukrainian groups are low-risk groups, and I understand that they have been exempted from providing their biometrics. However, why would you, the Afghan interpreters, and your family members be required to provide this data?

That's one of the things I want to address today.

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Khan.

**Mr. Hameed Khan:** That's a great question. Thank you for pointing that out. That's one of our main debates and arguments with IRCC, that we are the people with the highest background checks and security clearances. We were sleeping in the same quarters with the Canadian higher-ups, including Canadian generals, and were attending the meetings with Canadian senators. We have no criminal problems or shady matters in our past or our present, and you have all of our information, so why are you demanding such high restrictions?

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe. Your time is up.

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi:** Can I have 15 seconds?

**The Chair:** Take it later, please.

I'm going to go to Madam Jenny Kwan for 90 seconds.

Please go ahead.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I just want to follow up on the documentation question. You're all been vetted to an extreme level. Will you all vouch for your family members?

**Mr. Hameed Khan:** We will 100%.

**The Chair:** Who do you want that to go to, Madam Kwan?

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** That's for all of them, please.

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi:** We will 100%.

**The Chair:** Mr. Shoaib.

**Mr. Ahmad Shoaib:** Yes, for sure we will on that.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** That's the case for all 300 applicants in terms of the families. Is that what you understand it to be?

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi:** Yes.

**Mr. Ahmad Shoaib:** That's correct.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** On this basis, because people are forced to burn their documentation and they will no longer have the certifications and the various documents, should the Canadian government not then bring your family members here to Canada safely and then go through all of the paper work as is being done for some others?

**The Chair:** Mr. Faizi.

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi:** Yes, that is absolutely our hope.

**The Chair:** Mr. Khan.

**Mr. Hameed Khan:** Yes, indeed, that's our top request.

**The Chair:** Mr. Shoaib.

**Mr. Ahmad Shoaib:** Yes, we do want that, and that's our demand.

**The Chair:** Madam Kwan.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** If that were being done, if the government waived documentation requirements, if they issued your single journey travel document, you'd be able to get to a third country. The last thing is that Canada's Prime Minister just announced this week-end that they will be bringing evacuation flights for Ukrainian nationals.

If they brought evacuation flights into third countries, then we would be able to bring your family members here to Canada safely. Is this all you are asking for?

Could I have just a quick answer?

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi:** Yes.

**Mr. Hameed Khan:** Yes.

**Mr. Ahmad Shoaib:** Yes.

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

On behalf of all of the members of Parliament, even the ones who I know didn't get a spot to speak, we appreciate your service, Mr. Faizi, Mr. Khan and Mr. Shoaib. We thank you for appearing today and bringing the information forward to this committee. Our very best to you and your families.

• (1635)

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi:** Thank you so much.

**The Chair:** I am going to suspend the meeting for a few minutes.

Mr. O'Toole, I am sure I was just carried away and I wanted to give you five minutes.

**Mr. Ghulam Faizi:** Can I say one thing?

Can Mr. O'Toole send or email the question he was trying to ask us? That was very important, I believe.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Sure.

Mr. O'Toole, I really apologize because this is the way we set it up so we give time to every member.

The meeting is suspended for two minutes.

**Hon. Erin O'Toole:** Mr. Faizi, my office will reach out as well.

**The Chair:** The meeting is suspended.

• (1635)

(Pause)

•

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

We will now continue with our second panel today.

On behalf of the committee members, I would like to welcome our witnesses, former interpreters for the Canadian Armed Forces, Mr. Safiullah Mohammad Zahed and Mr. Ahmad Shah Sayed. From the Calgary Catholic Immigration Society, we welcome Ms. Reddy, the manager of their Afghan operations secretariat.

Welcome to all of you. You have five minutes to speak.

Please make sure that you have your timer. Also, if you are only English speaking, on the bottom right-hand side of your screen there is a language selection for either English or French because we want to make sure that when a French speaker speaks, you are able to pick it up in English. Your button should be on English or French.

I am asking the witnesses if they have that.

• (1640)

**Mr. Safiullah Mohammad Zahed (Former Interpreter, Canadian Armed Forces, As an Individual):** Yes, I have it.

**The Chair:** Mr. Sayed, do you have it?

**Mr. Ahmad Shah Sayed (Former Interpreter, Canadian Armed Forces, As an Individual):** I have it now.

**The Chair:** Good. Thank you.

Ms. Reddy, do you have it?

**Ms. Umashanie Reddy (National Director, Government-Assisted Refugee Resettlement and the National Afghan Refugee Resettlement Programs, Calgary Catholic Immigration Society):** Thank you. I have it.

**The Chair:** Now everything is working well. We can now start with Mr. Zahed for five minutes.

Please go ahead.

**Mr. Safiullah Mohammad Zahed:** Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and all members of the Afghan committee. My name is Safiullah Mohammad Zahed. I worked as an interpreter for the Canadian Armed Forces in Afghanistan, in Kandahar, from 2006 to May of 2012. I would like to thank you all for the opportunity to speak here about the situation in Afghanistan for our families.

When the unthinkable happened in Afghanistan, it was the worst nightmare for all of us. Everyone was anxious about their family members' lives. I personally had no idea what to do or what door to knock on for help. I could not stop thinking about what could happen to my family as I had already lost my best friend, my dad, in 2013 due to being employed by the Canadian Armed Forces. He was brutally shot in the heart. I was and still am scared that the same could happen to whatever family I have left. Since then I have been moving them around Afghanistan.

I have four brothers, and two of them went missing when the Taliban took over. One made it to Turkey. He was smuggled and almost died on the way. The other one is still missing, and we have no idea where he is. Their children and the rest of their families and my family are on the move from one house to another, from one city to another, from one province to another. It has been seven months, and we have moved to four or five provinces. It's been six or seven weeks since I have spoken to them. Because of the media and because of all of the contacts we cannot get in touch with them. That's not just my story. It's the same for most of the interpreters. Personally I know two people here, two of my best friends. One lost his sister, who was killed in school. I hadn't talked to the other one for a long time, but the other day I called him. As a friend, I asked him how he was doing, and he started crying. I said, "Why are you crying?" and he said, "I have lost 11 family members since the Taliban took over." I said, "Why don't you come forward and talk to the government and email IRCC?" He said, "What's the benefit? You have been having meetings every week with IRCC. Have you gained anything? Seventy-five per cent of people's files have not been seen by IRCC members."

After we talked to the government every Monday for three or four weeks, finally the government started a pathway for us. It opened last December. It's been five months since we submitted all of our applications. The big problem we have right now is that the initial application was 33 pages long—I have all of the form numbers—for every family member. I have four brothers and in total 13 to 15 members. For each one there are 33 pages of applications we handed to the members. Then we got more emails. We have been contacted by three different offices asking for similar information, the same kinds of forms.

Last week, most of our friends got emails from three different offices asking for 16 more forms. I don't know how or who we cry to. In one way we're running from the Taliban government and on the other hand we have our government which is making more obstacles, which is making it harder for us to fill in or complete our applications. If they cannot give us a G number or a UCI number in five months or complete our applications because we have so much more to come, how can they bring our families? This was supposed to be an emergency evacuation, but instead it's being treated as a family sponsorship program in which we have to pay for everything. We have to file hundreds of forms. I think they're just making excuses.

• (1645)

There will be a problem in a form where they're asking about my dad's history from 40 years ago and about what he was doing when the Russians were there. When the Russians were in my country,

they killed two of my uncles and two of my aunts. They bombed them like animals—

**The Chair:** Mr. Zahed, your time is up. I'm sorry to interrupt. We're way over time. I will come back to you.

Thank you.

**Mr. Safiullah Mohammad Zahed:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Mr. Sayed, we come to you now for five minutes. Please go ahead.

**Mr. Ahmad Shah Sayed:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to the honourable members of the committee on the special situation in Afghanistan. Thanks for the opportunity given to me, my friends and my colleagues to bring forward to the committee our concerns and problems. I have two or three different conversations.

The first thing is that most of the points were covered by my friends, but I'm calling on the government, I'm calling on the federal government, I'm calling on the honourable Justin Trudeau and the honourable Minister of Immigration Sean Fraser to find safe passage for our families to leave Afghanistan. The government has to work with its international allies. It has to find safe passage for our families to leave Afghanistan as soon as possible. We have been going through this problem for more than seven months and we have problems with IRCC; we have problems with the immigration office; we have problems with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and we have problems especially with the federal government. I call on the government, the IRCC and Sean Fraser, the honourable minister. We are tired of your wrong politics. We are tired of these politics in which our innocent families are being sacrificed. This needs to be a political stick, and the government and the honourable Minister of Immigration need to lead us with the right politics and in the right direction. This is not the right direction we are facing right now. They have to find us safe pathways. They have to put pressure on the Taliban, work with Qataris and put more resources in the country and the region to find safe pathways for our families' evacuation from Afghanistan.

The second thing is this. I again call on the honourable Minister of Immigration to accept, to admit, that he failed in this process. If he doesn't admit that he has failed in this process and this policy, how long will we have to wait to see our families? How long should we expect to have to wait to have the process? When will we witness one single family being en route to Canada? Why is this not happening? What exactly is going on that we don't know about? Where is the sensitive information? We are asking the Minister of Immigration to please be faithful to us, be truthful with us, be respectful with us, to treat us without fear and treat us with respect. We are veterans, we worked with the Canadian Forces shoulder to shoulder. We worked alongside the Canadian Forces. We were there with the Canadian missions, so don't leave us hopeless right now.

Also, I am calling on committee members to please ask the government and the IRCC why they are delaying this process. Why are the packages not getting approved even when there is not enough information? If there are missing documents, why are they not contacting the principal applicants and sending them information and asking for extra information? Why are they not getting back to our friends?

We went through hunger strikes, two hunger strikes, right in front of Parliament. Nobody came to us except for Mr. Holland and Jenny Kwan. We don't deserve to stay in that cold weather and rain and to raise our voices and have nobody pay attention to us. That is unfair.

I'm asking the government and the members of this committee to please talk with the IRCC office, talk with the IRCC representatives, ask them, question them in the government House about why they are delaying this process. What exactly is going on with this government? What exactly is going on with this government that it has the power and it does nothing? Why is it not finding another safe passage for our families? Why is it not bringing our families from Pakistan, who have been waiting more than three months? Why is it not assigning file numbers when we sent the packages more than six months ago? It has to accept and the honourable minister needs to accept and admit that he failed in this policy, that he dropped the ball, so we have to find a solution. We have to find the safe pathways and we have to work together. I'm calling on the honourable committee members here to work together for us and to find the safe pathways for our families and to pick up the ball where they dropped it.

This is all politics, and we are tired of the two-faced politics of this government. We are tired of the politics of the honourable Minister of Immigration. They don't require any single document from us. They're asking for extra documents. They're asking for extra emails. They're asking for extra information. They're sending email after email. They are bombarding us with paperwork.

● (1650)

Why are you not worried about our families' lives? You are worried about the paperwork. Move our families to the safe zone, and then do the paperwork.

Thank you.

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

On behalf of all members, I do appreciate your time here and your service to Canada. Today you are asking for safe passage, and I'm sure the members will be able to come back to you on this.

Mr. Zahed and Mr. Sayed, thank you again on behalf of the members.

Now we're going to Ms. Reddy for five minutes.

Please go ahead.

**Ms. Umashanie Reddy:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Honourable members of Parliament, good afternoon, and thank you for inviting me. I am speaking to you from the traditional territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy, home of the Treaty 7 first nations and home to the people of Métis Region 3.

Events that happened in Afghanistan in August were unbeknownst to all of us. This segment of humanity was displaced beyond all expectations from their national way of living and forced to seek refuge in safer havens. In August of 2021, Canada evacuated 3,700 Afghan nationals, brought them into the Toronto port of entry and housed them in four hotels.

We had literally eight days as a sector to organize ourselves to provide settlement, resettlement and implementation support to our newfound families. We were very strategic. Even though we had six to eight days, we wanted to have a fully fledged strategic governance structure that spoke notably to roles and responsibilities: one that was nationally coordinated and locally implemented, one that was equitable, one that was socially just and one that every single RAP service provider could take part in.

We wanted to engage all resettlement sector partners so that they all had an equal and equitable voice at the table. We wanted to assign roles and responsibilities so that everybody became part of this national collaboration. Communication between IRCC and the sector was seamless during this time. Once we designed the fully fledged governance structure, we actioned it into a national steering committee meeting. We met every Wednesday to ensure that we were all on board and all supportive of our new Afghan families that arrived in Canada.

Leadership was at its absolute ultimate: It was transformative. It was distributive leadership. Everybody took a stance. It went beyond the single-agency leadership domain into a fully fledged and collaborative collective impact. The sector undertook a trauma-informed practice because we had to address trauma-informed individuals who went through atrocities that you and I would never be able to understand. We also had to ensure that our staff were actually available and able to support these individuals. We wanted to ensure that they had the correct health and wellness to also support the individuals.

Today, we have received 10,050 Afghan nationals who have arrived. What have we done in seven and a half months? Corporate Canada came to the forefront to support the Afghan nationals. They attended our national steering committee meetings. Canadian Tire, Airbnb, Amazon.com and Air Canada came to provide supports in the way of employment, donations and any possible goodwill to the newfound families. Also, Veterans Affairs Canada sent us a list of 3,000 interpreters and their families who wanted to support the Afghan families.

In line with the UNHCR, we developed a needs assessment tool to ensure we learned as much as we could about the Afghan population so that we could better serve them: to not pre-empt what they needed, but to ask them what they needed. We wanted to start at that point and to meet them halfway, not start from point zero.

Airbnb came in and offered us \$500,000 to ensure we had temporary accommodations in place ready for the Afghan families. Uber provided us \$100,000 to ensure we had transportation for the Afghan families.

We created a generic email account. To date, the centre has received 34,000 emails from individuals who wanted to support the families. We also created an Afghan resettlement website.

Of course, there were challenges: COVID-19. We had received large-scale movements in the years before; however, Afghan nationals were evacuated during COVID-19, and we had to quarantine them in hotels. We had to ensure that their health was checked and that COVID vaccinations were provided to them.

• (1655)

Housing was another challenge they encountered. Of course, the RAP income support was not sufficient to provide for their housing needs. So what we did was to engage 345 housing partners across Canada in a National Event on Refugee Housing and Partnerships—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry to interrupt. Thank you very much, Madam Reddy.

**Ms. Umashanie Reddy:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** We appreciate your service to humanity.

Now we can start with the rounds of questioning.

Honourable member O'Toole, I am sorry that I got carried away emotionally a bit in the first round, so now you have your six minutes. Please go ahead.

**Hon. Erin O'Toole:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. You can always give me some bonus time at your discretion too. That would be great.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Hon. Erin O'Toole:** First off, Ms. Reddy, thank you to you and your countless volunteers. The response from organized groups, faith organizations and military and veterans' families—I've heard from many of them—is astounding, so thank you.

I have a quick question for Mr. Sayed and Mr. Zahed.

Thank you for your service.

We are sorry that we are in this process. How long was the process between your applying to your getting on the ground? Could I have just a short answer from you both, please, and from Mr. Zahed first?

**Mr. Safiullah Mohammad Zahed:** For me, it was three months in 2012.

**Hon. Erin O'Toole:** Okay. It was three months.

Mr. Sayed...?

**Mr. Ahmad Shah Sayed:** For me, it was two months in 2012.

**Hon. Erin O'Toole:** Two months and three months.... It was four months for James Akam back in 2015-16 when there was no politics, when I spoke to Minister McCallum about an interpreter who had been left behind and who had the military vouching for him. He was here in four months because there was no politics.

After that, under Minister Hussen, for Karim Amiri, it was no; Rohuddin Zia, no; Alam Kham, no; Niaz Mohammed, no; Mohammed Wardak, no.

Before the fall of Afghanistan in August, James Bezan and several other members of Parliament—on all sides—and I had been trying for seven years to bring in people.

Do you know how many are eligible based on the criteria from 2009-11, that one year of service and some sort of recommendation? I'm just talking about the interpreters or contractors. Their families should come with them. I told Mr. McCallum that there were several hundred a few years ago. That would make several thousand with families and extended....

We've had seven years to do this. How many do you know who are eligible right now and who we could bring to Canada?

**Mr. Safiullah Mohammad Zahed:** There are so many. Personally, I know of five of my friends who were interpreters. Some of them have their documents. One who I know of burned his documents. We burned my personal documents. There are five people I know who have applied to this process but they have received nothing from the government. It's now been seven or eight months that they have applied....

• (1700)

**The Chair:** Mr. Sayed, do you want to say something?

**Mr. Ahmad Shah Sayed:** Yes. I know dozens of people who are calling me every day. I have direct contact with them on the ground. They worked with the Canadian Forces for more than four or five years. They worked under my own supervision and they are eligible, but they still cannot make it to come to Canada.

**Hon. Erin O'Toole:** Thank you, both of you.

Offhand, both of you know dozens of people like Mr. Akam, who came here in a few months with documentation. I'll be tabling these documents for the record: letters from many years, with certificates that show the military officers who signed them can vouch for these people. This is not rocket science. The fact that you're here and in some cases going on hunger strikes for people to show some leadership....

I want to thank you. I want you to continue to work with this committee, because we—the military and public affairs, Veterans Affairs and Foreign Affairs—have the documentation to confirm this. It was a lack of political action, and we've made it more complicated by waiting. I would like to see an end to the politics.

In your case, Mr. Zahed, what type of documentation did you show? Was it a certificate of approval or appreciation from the military?

**Mr. Safiullah Mohammad Zahed:** I had more than 20 certificates because I had been working for a long time for the Canadian Forces and other countries. I had to show my certificates, my appreciation letters and a recommendation letter from a colonel, who is currently a retired general, and that was it.

**Hon. Erin O'Toole:** One of the letters I sent to Minister Hussen is from the interpreter who served alongside Minister Sajjan in Afghanistan, and we couldn't get them to move.

How many do you know who have stayed in touch with members of the Canadian Armed Forces through social media or through Facebook, when they were able to get to those services over the last few years?

**Mr. Safiullah Mohammad Zahed:** There are many.

There are many people in contact with what they used to call their "mentors", and they still are. Their mentors are doing their best from this side, but all the problems are coming from IRCC and immigration. It's not being coordinated correctly, and it's not being followed up on correctly.

As we said earlier, it has been seven months. If the minister or the IRCC cannot do something in Afghanistan, the least they could do here in Canada is assign a G number and a UCI number for the people who have submitted their applications, but they have not even done that yet.

As was mentioned earlier, when my friend Mr. Faizi mentioned that if the IRCC had worked on one case per day, I think we would have most of our cases and everything. When it comes to the paperwork and certification, earlier I mentioned that the initial application was 33 pages long—I have all the phone numbers—and, of that, we had to reply to a few emails saying "more documents". As of last week, we received another 16 pages of forms, and they are giving us 30 days to submit them. It's been six weeks that I haven't talked to them, so how can I fill in those forms?

**The Chair:** I'm sorry to interrupt you, Mr. Zahed.

Mr. O'Toole, your time is up.

**Hon. Erin O'Toole:** Thanks very much, both of you.

Mr. Chair, for the record, I'll be tabling the letters I referenced.

**The Chair:** We will now go to Mr. Sidhu for six minutes.

Please go ahead.

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

I'd like to thank all of our witnesses for taking the time to be with us today. I want to thank you for your service as well.

I don't have the words to say in listening to you here today and hearing about what you're going through. It's very unfortunate that the Taliban is in charge now and making things incredibly difficult for so many in the country, including so many women and girls. We hear these horrific stories coming out of Afghanistan.

I've heard about the Taliban preventing Afghans from leaving Afghanistan if they don't have travel documents. I'd like to know more from Mr. Sayed and Mr. Zahed about how many individuals from your group of friends or how many people who you know have a valid travel document and are able to leave and how many there are that the Taliban have prevented from leaving.

• (1705)

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

**Mr. Maninder Sidhu:** It doesn't have to be an exact number. I just want to get an understanding.

**Mr. Safiullah Mohammad Zahed:** At the beginning, we had zero travel documents, so out of those 5,000 family members, we have gotten nothing. That's what we are trying to get: a single travel document from the government so that we can go to.... When it comes to stopping...most of us or all of us have our families hidden, right? Sometimes I don't know where they are until I hear from them.

Literally, we do not dare to go to any office or even to come forward. We even try to avoid our relatives. We just do not want to be seen. We go to a completely different province or a completely different city. We have zero travel documents or anything that can facilitate our travel.

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

**Mr. Ahmad Shah Sayed:** Thank you.

This is a very important question. Since the Taliban is running the government and they have control of the institutions, our families will not try to get a travel document or an Afghan passport to cross the border. That's why we are calling on the government and asking the IRCC to issue a single travel document through the high commission in Qatar or the high commission in Islamabad and send it to our families. That way, we would have a travel document with an electronic pass or a national ID, so our families could cross the border to go to a third country, either in Qatar or Islamabad, and then they will start the process.

At this moment, we don't have any documents like that.

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

I'd like to ask Ms. Reddy a question as well.

First of all, thank you for everything you're doing on the humanitarian front in helping to resettle Afghan nations.

Can you shed some light on roughly how many Afghan nationals are accessing your settlement services?

**Ms. Umashanie Reddy:** We have 34 resettlement agencies across the country. If they are destined for a resettlement location, then all of them have access to the RAP income support and all of the services. They come in, and within a few days they are assessed. They are asked about their education and about their language. They have language assessments and they transfer over to settlement services. If it's a more intricate case, it goes into case management and then into settlement services. Every single person who has come in as a government-assisted refugee will definitely get resettlement assistance program services. They've all come in as government-assisted refugees. They've been evacuated. They will all have resettlement services.

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



In your opening remarks you mentioned how corporate Canada has shown goodwill and stepped up to support resettlement of Afghan nationals and supported the many needs. You mentioned the generosity of corporate Canada. What are your greatest settlement needs at the current moment?

**Ms. Umashanie Reddy:** Basically what they've been offering thus far has been employment. A lot of them want to employ the Afghan nationals. We've also asked them to look at other refugees, because we don't want the other refugees to feel that the optics aren't good. When it comes to settlement, they definitely want to employ them immediately. They have various positions across the country. All that the resettlement agencies need to do is to connect with their clients, speak to them, look at their education and connect with corporate Canada. There are over 35 corporate Canada vendors who have provided their support and their information to us. It's been really amazing, because we've filled quite a few positions in many of the big vendors.

**Mr. Maninder Sidhu:** Thank you, Ms. Reddy.

Mr. Zahed, I come to you now. We know that many countries are operating in Afghanistan, helping out with humanitarian assistance or on the ground. Do you know of other countries that are able to help some of your colleagues and their families out of Afghanistan right now on a consistent basis, so we can get an understanding?

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds.

**Mr. Safiullah Mohammad Zahed:** I have heard that Germany has evacuated a few families. Holland is trying to get some of the families out. It's all up to the government. What we have been told is that the government does not have any authority over Pakistan, or it does not accept the Taliban government. Then there are alternative ways, such as talking to Qatar, as my colleague mentioned. That's what other countries have been doing—getting in contact with Qataris because Qataris have good connections with the Taliban.

• (1710)

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

Mr. Sidhu, your time is up. Thank you.

We will go to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for six minutes.

Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

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

First, I want to thank Mr. Zahed and Mr. Sayed for their incredible service to Canada. I also want to thank Ms. Reddy for the work she does on the ground.

I asked the previous panel's witnesses about the double standard we are currently seeing in response to humanitarian crises around the world. I'm grateful to Mr. O'Toole for asking questions about this earlier, reminding us of what was done in the past. It was very important that he point that out.

I'm interested in what's being done now compared to what's been done in response to other humanitarian crises. IRCC is responding differently to the crisis in Ukraine than it has to the crisis in Afghanistan. Similarly, IRCC's response to the crisis in

Afghanistan differs from its response to the crisis in Syria in 2015. I recall that IRCC had allowed Syrians to provide their biometric data upon arrival in Canada, which saved a lot of time for people who were fleeing Syria. This data was collected by border services officers, and their union actually mentioned that these officers could help out with the current crisis in Ukraine.

Is there a double standard when it comes to the crisis in Afghanistan compared to other humanitarian crises around the world?

I'd like Mr. Sayed to respond first. Then I will go to the other two witnesses.

[*English*]

**Mr. Safiullah Mohammad Zahed:** Sayed, go ahead.

**Mr. Ahmad Shah Sayed:** I put this question back to the government. I ask exactly what you asked. I asked the government, I asked the IRCC, if our blood is different from the Ukrainians' or our lives are different from the Ukrainians'. Partially we do appreciate what the government is doing with the Ukrainians to save their lives. They are being human. We do appreciate that, but in the meantime do not lose track of us. We hope it will not lose track of us. Don't forget Afghanistan. Don't forget our families. Don't forget the families of those Afghan interpreters who worked with you side by side when you successfully did your mission. Don't forget about the Afghan families who the Taliban are now looking for. They are searching for our families, going door to door, and if they find any evidence that we worked with the Canadian Forces, they will destroy our lives. They will kidnap our families. One way or another, they will get our families out of the houses and we will disappear.

We do appreciate what exactly the government is doing with the Ukrainians, but we ask the government to at least do some facilitation for our families. The same thing goes for facilitation letters for our families to cross the border. Send those single journey travel documents to our families to cross the border, and the very important point is stop the politics. Don't play politics with us.

We are suffering from these politics. Our families are the victims of these politics, and we are tired of these wrong politics and we are tired of this wrong leadership.

[*Translation*]

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

Please note that I'm a young lawmaker. I have not been in Parliament for very long. I'm personally moved by everything you are telling me. Perhaps I'm still a little naive, but I feel it's possible to cut and paste what is being done in Ukraine and what was done for the Syrians and try to help our friends who, in addition, were by our side throughout the entire conflict in Afghanistan.

Mr. Zahed, I didn't hear your opinion on this issue. Would you like to make any comments?

[English]

**Mr. Safiullah Mohammad Zahed:** We never compare ourselves with other countries, and we appreciate what the government is doing for other countries, as with the Ukrainians. As I mentioned earlier, my own family has been affected, as well as being victims of the Russian war. My two uncles and two aunts were killed. I can feel their pain. We appreciate what's being done for Ukrainians.

The only thing is that every one of us is mentioning the same thing, that we want to be treated the same as those from other countries. Why was our process stopped immediately as the one for the Ukrainians' was started? There is no backup plan. There is no plan B or anything for us. Since January nothing has been done on our applications. In a matter of weeks thousands of Ukrainians with very minimal requirements were brought here to Canada and resettled. We have appreciated that and we do appreciate that, but at the same time, Afghanistan should not be forgotten as it has been.

For two or three weeks we have been meeting with the media and having hunger strikes, and still it hasn't worked. It hasn't touched the IRCC or Immigration yet. We were expecting them to at least show us that they are doing something, at least show us in one way or another, but instead they are updating their website, making it harder and harder for us to sponsor our families.

As of this morning when I was reading the website, they said that interpreters will have to pay their expenses when they arrive here, or for their travel, which has never been free, but we understand that. They can get a loan.

• (1715)

**The Chair:** I'm sorry to interrupt you, Mr. Zahed, and I'm sorry, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, but the time is up.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** I'm sorry, Ms. Reddy. I will give you a chance to speak later.

[English]

**The Chair:** Madam Kwan, for six minutes, please go ahead.

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

I want to thank our witnesses for their presentations and particularly thank the former Afghan interpreters for their service.

As I said to the previous panel, you are part of the Canadian military. There is no question about that, and at this juncture, the Canadian government needs to do what is right for you and your families by bringing them here to Canada expeditiously.

To that point, people have been stuck for more than six months. Over 300 families' applications have not been properly processed. Thirty-five per cent of those have received a file number but are still not here. Not one of them is here, and 65% of them have not even gotten a G number.

On the question of differential treatment, one of the measures the Canadian government has given to Ukrainian nationals is what is called a "single journey travel document".

If your family members and others like them were to receive this single journey travel document from the Canadian government,

would they be able to use that document to travel to a third country and then fly to Canada safely?

**Mr. Ahmad Shah Sayed:** Yes. If the government and the IRCC and the high commissions of Canada issued a single journey travel document with a facilitation letter that would facilitate our families, yes, that is possible. That's exactly what they did with the humanitarian program. That's exactly what they did for those in the Afghan nation that they are bringing right now. There are people coming out of Afghanistan with that single travel document.

That single travel document works as a temporary visa. If our families have that document, they can leave the airport and cross the border or board the airplane and go to other countries.

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

Mr. Zahed, because of the delay in processing by the Canadian government, family members have been stuck hiding from house to house and street to street. They are on the run. People's lives are in jeopardy. One of your brothers is now missing. Other families have also lost their loved ones.

Is it the case that the longer the Canadian government delays this process, the more family members will be lost? How big is the risk for them?

**Mr. Safiullah Mohammad Zahed:** It's huge. It's unthinkable. That's what we have been mentioning. The IRCC is keeping us busy with forms and all the screening and everything. We have no objection to any of the screening. The problem we have is that we do not have the time. Time is very limited for us. The more time that the IRCC spends on our applications, the closer the Taliban gets to our families. With their intelligence, their information and their sources, they're going to get to our families. In the meantime, our families....

Personally, I have 15 members living in one room because of the lack of money. I cannot send them money from here. I cannot even afford that much money. The government is asking for forms. They have to come back to their house at some point, if they 100% run out of money, and then it will be very easy for the Taliban to catch them. They're on the list. I mentioned earlier that my dad was shot by Taliban in 2013. I have had to move my family around since then, but not as much as these days. At that time we had government and we had national forces all over the country, but right now we have nothing over there.

So yes, we think the IRCC is wasting time. They're keeping us busy with filling out all those forms and it's giving more time to Taliban to get to our families.

• (1720)

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** We talked about waiving documentation requirements because it is impossible for people to produce those, especially for families who are worried that they might be caught by the Taliban with documents and absolutely be punished, and so are burning their documents. Are you calling for the Canadian government to waive the documentation requirements? Would your family members who have been supporting the Canadian military on our missions abroad be willing to vouch for your family members? Should that be sufficient for the government to accept, given the high-level security screening that you have already gone through? Once those family members of yours are safely here on Canadian soil, we can then go through the process of the paperwork.

Go ahead, Mr. Sayed, and then Mr. Zahed.

**Mr. Ahmad Shah Sayed:** Yes. We have all the documentation and all of the screenings from the national defence ministry. I have spoken with them. I have had a couple of meetings with the national defence ministry. They sent all the documents to the IRCC. If the IRCC and the government and the foreign affairs ministry are making excuses about the documentation, then that's why we're asking them not to bring our families directly to Canada but send them to a third country. Send them somewhere where they will be safe. At least send them somewhere where the Taliban will not kill them. Then start the process.

All this documentation, all the screening, all the security problems and whatever they are coming up with, the nonsense information they are sending to us, is just wasting our time. It's because of the game of politics. They are trying to take the credit based on our families. We are tired of these politics. We are tired of the extra information and the extra forms. They could have sent these forms six months ago. They are sending the forms now, and we have to wait another three months.

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

We will now go to the second round. Without wasting any more time, I will go to my own member, the honourable Madam Findlay, for 150 seconds—two and a half minutes.

Please go ahead.

**Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I won't waste too much time except to say that I'm honoured to hear your testimony today and I thank you for being here and for your service to our nation.

Mr. Zahed, you said, "We were there with the Canadian missions, so don't leave us hopeless." You also say that your expectations are that the government will be "faithful", "truthful" and "respectful", all of which I agree with.

I would add another word: "realistic". When I hear the testimony of both you and Mr. Sayed, that's what I think is in part lacking here, which means, as you've said, that there must be other political reasons or reasons unknown to the Canadian public as to why there are delays and why the volume of process.

Mr. Zahed, I think you were talking about 33 pages of documents and now another 16 more. You haven't spoken to people in six weeks and yet you and your family have 30 days. What kind of access on the ground does your family have to computers, Internet and cellphones? How realistic is this to be asking them to fill out all this kind of paperwork where they are now?

**Mr. Safiullah Mohammad Zahed:** At the moment, I have no idea where they are. At the time of the initial application, I had to arrange that they had to go to a café and then use public Internet. In those days, the Taliban were not as mixed into the society as they are now. Now, most of the stores, cafés and everything are mostly controlled by them, so I can't imagine now how to get hold of my brother or my mom or whomever. Mostly, my brother is helping me with these forms. I have to find ways when they call me. Then I have to fill out the forms here when asking them, because we have filled out some forms so that we can represent them and help them with filling out their forms.

• (1725)

**Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay:** Would you agree with me that it's almost impossible for your family members, far away from you, to access what they would need to do all this themselves?

**Mr. Safiullah Mohammad Zahed:** Definitely, a hundred per cent.

**Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay:** Thank you.

Mr. Sayed—

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Madam Findlay. The time is up.

**Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay:** That's not very much time.

**The Chair:** I'm so sorry.

**Hon. Kerry-Lynne Findlay:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Now we are going to Salma Zahid for two and a half minutes.

Please go ahead.

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

Thanks to all the witnesses. I know it's not easy to be talking about the issues you are facing.

I don't have much time, but my first question is for Ms. Reddy.

Ms. Reddy, as more Afghan nationals are arriving, what would you say about how they are settling into their new life in Canada? Are there any special needs the women or the youth have, or is there anything that you have seen in particular?

**Ms. Umashanie Reddy:** Yes. Basically, it's language assessment for some of the individuals.

However, having said that, I will say that a lot of them are very well educated. I find that some of the employment that has been offered is not suitable for them, because they are way above that in terms of education.

When it comes to the children and youth, a lot of them do speak English, but Dari and Pashto, of course, are what some of them speak as home languages. We do have school support in that respect, where the schools have a multicultural language support system for the children. We also have youth organizations that support them. We have settlement workers in schools who are immigrants and refugees themselves, and they will stay with the families and the children to ensure they are settled and integrated in the school system from a cultural and social integration perspective.

With the women, we're finding that they are very learned, and they want to go back to school. They want to continue studying here, especially the robotics students. They are superbly brilliant, and we're finding that a lot of private schools are definitely sponsoring a lot of the young girls who come in with special skills.

When it comes to supports, I think the children are very well taken care of, because we have a program when it comes to the English-language learning and support. We have an ESL program. They take their assessments and then we send them to language classes if it's needed. When it comes to the resources, the resources are fully developed for every stage in their settlement and integration journey, and we ensure that these resources are available to them, especially for the first year.

Thank you very much.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Thank you very much.

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

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Okay.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** I'm going to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for 75 seconds.

Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

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

Ms. Reddy, we have to write a report and issue recommendations. With that in mind, do you feel Canada should have an emergency mechanism in place, especially at IRCC, to respond to humanitarian crises and react quickly?

This mechanism doesn't exist yet, and I believe it would allow us to help refugees from around the world during a crisis like the one in Afghanistan.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Ms. Reddy.

**Ms. Umashanie Reddy:** I totally agree.

When the Afghan situation unfolded in August, we created a generic email account from the ground. These were the settlement and service providers across the country. We received 2,500 emails from Afghan nationals who found our website link on the IRCC page, and they were emailing us. The IRCC created an account, and

we forwarded these emails. That account is no longer operational, and they are continuing to email us.

Thank you.

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

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Mr. Chair, if I may, I'd like to thank all the witnesses.

To all the witnesses, you have done a wonderful job. Please know that our hearts go out to you.

[*English*]

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

We will now go to Madam Kwan for 90 seconds.

Please go ahead.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** My question is for Mr. Sayed.

You mentioned that the IRCC is now asking you to fill in an additional 16 pages of forms.

Is that request coming after you held your second hunger strike in Ottawa?

**Mr. Ahmad Shah Sayed:** Yes, it is.

All of these documents and all of these emails will not end once we end the hunger strikes. I want to let the government know that we will not stop. That was not the first one and it won't be the last one.

**Mr. Safiullah Mohammad Zahed:** Yes.

**Mr. Ahmad Shah Sayed:** If there is no response and if they will not bring over our families, soon I will organize another bigger hunger strike, and we will continue unless someone gets in touch with us and finds a solution for our families.

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

Mr. Zahed, why do think that is? Do you think it's actually a way of the government sending out this pleasurable response to your hunger strike? It's weird that they are asking for additional forms to be filled after six months.

**Mr. Safiullah Mohammad Zahed:** That's what we think when we have the Monday meetings with the IRCC. As soon as we started talking, we had to give them...not a warning, but we had to let them know that their officers are not doing their job. That's why they are losing track of our cases and we have decided to organize a hunger strike. As soon as we started talking about that, then the next day we got those emails. Everyone got six to seven emails.

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

It's been a minute and a half.

I appreciate all your time.

On behalf of the members of the committee, even the ones who were not able to speak, thank you.

Ms. Reddy, I want to thank you and the Calgary Catholic Immigration Society, on behalf of the members, for all of the humanitarian work that you do.

Mr. Sayed and Mr. Zahed, thank you for your service to Canada. Your concerns are well heard by the members.

**Mr. Ahmad Shah Sayed:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you for appearing, and all the best to you.

Today I'm wearing green because I'm going to a Ramadan Iftar party tonight, and I will remember you and your families in the prayers.

**Mr. Ahmad Shah Sayed:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**Mr. Safiullah Mohammad Zahed:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to everyone for listening to us and giving us the time to present our problems here.

Thank you so much.

I really appreciate it.

**Ms. Umashanie Reddy:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. All the best.

The meeting is adjourned.

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