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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 32 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. Today, we will continue our study on application backlogs and processing times.

I would like to welcome our witnesses for this panel today. In our first panel, we are joined by Rabea Allos, director, Catholic Refugee Sponsors' Council; Vikram Khurana, chairman, Toronto Business Development Centre; and Oliver Thorne from the Veterans Transition Network.

All witnesses will have five minutes for their opening remarks. Then we will go into rounds of questioning.

I would request that Rabea Allos, director of the Catholic Refugee Sponsors Council, please begin.

You will have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Mr. Rabea Allos (Director, Catholic Refugee Sponsors' Council): Good afternoon to you all.

I would like to thank you for the kind invitation. I am honoured to be here today to speak on behalf of the Catholic Refugee Sponsors' Council.

In the time I have today, I would like to talk about retention, immigration applications and lessons to learn with respect to the PSR program backlogs.

Immigration is one of the most important sectors of the Canadian economy. Immigrants are needed to keep our economy growing and keep the Canadian pension fund afloat. IRCC recently proposed immigration targets of 500,000 immigrants per year to achieve this growth. The immigration targets have been increasing over the years, and this increase influences the backlog levels. Immigration targets are directly related to the number of Canadians and permanent residents leaving Canada on an annual basis. The higher this number is, the lower the retention rate of the Canada immigration intake is. Studies have suggested that retention levels are as high as 50% of the immigration levels.

IRCC never discloses retention numbers, and we do not know how effective and efficient immigration policies are. Retentions are very important to audit, first, to optimize the effectiveness of IRCC programs, and second, to know which immigration stream is more

efficient. Knowing which stream has higher retention would give government direction on where to direct immigration policies. Low retention rates lead directly to higher backlogs. IRCC is obligated to inflate the annual landing targets to 500,000 to cover the economic loss of about 200,000 immigrants or Canadians leaving Canada annually. If that many are leaving, what good are the rules and administrations? Optimizing immigration retentions is very important in order to have a successful and efficient immigration program and hence reduce the load on IRCC processing.

The other issue that could be affecting the backlogs is how many applications are being submitted annually by the immigration industry to IRCC. If application numbers are exceeding the immigration targets by large numbers, those backlogs will keep growing. This issue was a big problem in the private sponsorship program until 2010. The refugee sponsorship applications exceeded the refugee targets by multiple times. Sponsors were flooding the system with applications, and waiting times in some visa offices exceeded 10 years.

Back then, IRCC introduced the quota system for sponsorship agreement holders, SAHs, to limit the application intake and make it closer to the refugee intake. This forced SAHs to sponsor vulnerable refugees who passed the IRCC standards and ensured that the applications were completed properly. This could be a solution if IRCC is being flooded with applications far beyond the capacity of the intake target. Other solutions could be to have a moratorium on applications until the backlog is cleared or to follow other countries' practice of limiting how long the application would be in the backlog before closing the file and requiring a new application.

In some cases, backlogs are influenced by political interference, particularly in the case of refugee application backlogs. Political interference in the priorities of the selection process cause delays in the processing of vulnerable refugees around the world. For example, the recent prioritizing of Afghan and Ukrainian refugees limited the processing of refugees across the world.

Backlogs are troublesome to the sponsors because the sponsors do depend on volunteers. Those volunteers are involved with the refugees even before the application process. When those volunteers see that the process is taking too long, they lose interest and they're not interested in working on this. In many cases they're working with the refugee family, and after a couple of years the refugee family ends up accepting refugee status in Sweden, Australia or New Zealand and abandons their application and the whole effort of the refugee is lost.

- (1540)

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Allos.

We will now proceed to Mr. Vikram Khurana, chairman of the Toronto Business Development Centre.

Mr. Khurana, you have the floor. You will have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Mr. Vikram Khurana (Chairman, Toronto Business Development Centre): Thank you, Madam Chair. It's an honour to join you today.

As a first-generation immigrant who came to Canada as an international student, I am thankful to Canada and the opportunities afforded me to establish a successful global businesses as an entrepreneur and for being able to be in a position to help create thousands of jobs for Canadians.

Today, I speak to you as the chair of the Toronto Business Development Centre, also known as TBDC, a not-for-profit Toronto incubator that was established 32 years ago. Since our founding, we have helped over 9,000 entrepreneurs establish or scale their businesses. We have established with the City of Brampton a partnership called BHive, which is the city's premier international incubator intended to attract global entrepreneurs. We've also been chosen by the Government of Ontario to help promote, recruit and match-make a hundred immigrant entrepreneurs with economic opportunities throughout Ontario under the Ontario immigrant nominee program.

As someone who believes in the potential of newcomer entrepreneurs, I want to use this time to speak to the challenges facing our economic immigration program and zero in on the start-up visa program, also known as the SUV program.

The objective of the start-up visa program was to help international entrepreneurs with innovative or disruptive business ideas come to Canada to establish and scale their start-ups in Canada. Through these start-ups, Canada would benefit from well-paid jobs, growing exports and rapidly scaling companies. Canada was the first country to establish this creative program and has indeed benefited from a number of successes in attracting international entrepreneurs to Canada. It has demonstrably contributed to creating jobs and exports and to growing our ecosystem in Canada.

Due to the current backlog, the program does have challenges. It has been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Permanent residency applications under the SUV program, as per the IRCC website, are currently at 31 months, while that was intended to be around 12 months. There's a big backlog.

Many applicants have applied for work permits now, but the processing is longer than even a year for some of the countries, and many quality applicants are being refused. To put this in simple perspective, if a future Shopify founder is a South American, an Indian or a Nigerian and is waiting for multiple years to come to Canada, how long could we realistically expect them to wait before they go somewhere else? There are now 5,000 applications in the queue for the SUV program, and there are many designated entities that have a lower standard of care when approving nominations, which adds to the waiting times for legitimate entrepreneurs nominated by entities that exercise a higher degree of care in the nomination.

Those founders who arrived on work permits have been waiting years for permanent residence and have had to renew their work permits in order to continue their business operations in Canada. This was not the intent. Those remaining are still in the bottleneck. Many of these founders have raised their concerns of leaving the program entirely due to the lengthy process, with no light foreseeable at the end of the tunnel.

I have a few recommendations.

First, under the minister's authorities, IRCC should establish a SWAT team to tackle a percentage of the growing backlog by a set date: for example, 50% of SUV applicants by December 2022.

Next, to bring down the start-up visa program backlog, IRCC can implement strategies to check if applicants are adhering to arriving in Canada in the spirit of the legislation. A good example of that would be a pre-screening strategy that would allow IRCC to ask applicants to declare if they are investors of the same fund that they received capital from.

A temporary public policy to facilitate a limited number of work permits for foreign nationals outside Canada under the SUV program, submitted via each designated entity, would allow for permanent residency applications to be processed from within Canada.

A milestone process to expedite applications to the top would ensure that bad players aren't provided the opportunity to misuse the SUV program and would further ensure that the most prosperous companies get to come to Canada and help our economy.

An enhanced dedicated service channel, or a concierge line, to help designated entities troubleshoot process issues on behalf of the entrepreneurs could also serve as a knowledge hub for frontline visa officers due to the unique nature of each of these applications.

• (1545)

We should also focus on governance and enforcement. We should review designated entities and ensure that program objectives are being met to assist innovative companies, that integrity measures are in place and that IRCC de-designates those who are breaching their privileges.

Finally, it's time to get rid of paper SUV applications and go digital. We must process electronically.

In closing, Madam Chair and esteemed members of this committee, I do not need to underscore the value of immigration to our pandemic recovery and future economic growth. We need transparency and accountability immediately. It is a failure of our public-facing institutions to provide little or no information to our future Canadians or to partners of governments who stand ready to help.

If we speak with a newcomer in a queue, it is not always the length of waiting that is harmful; it is often the lack of information and a road map that is more frustrating. We all recognize the hard work of staff—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Mr. Khurana, but your time is up.

You will get an opportunity to talk further when we go into our round of questioning.

We will now proceed to Mr. Oliver Thorne, representing the Veterans Transition Network.

Mr. Thorne, the floor is yours. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

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

Thank you for the opportunity to be here and speak with you today. My name is Oliver Thorne. I currently serve as executive director of the Veterans Transition Network, a registered Canadian charity headquartered here in Vancouver. It operates counselling programs for Canadian Forces veterans across the country. We have been pursuing that mission for 10 years.

In July and August of 2021, we were approached by a group of veterans who are assisting Afghan interpreters in their attempts to come to Canada with the impending fall of the Afghan government and takeover by the Taliban. For the past year, we have been assisting with those efforts, directly providing financial supports, safe housing supports and evacuations for applicants to the special immigration measures program. My comments today around the immigration backlog will specifically focus on those Afghan applicants to the special immigration measures program.

My points today are really centred around the idea that there is a real and significant cost to the backlog and processing times for applications within IRCC. We have seen the direct cost at three levels—to future Afghan Canadians, to Canadian veterans and to the charitable organizations that support both of those groups.

First, application backlogs are traumatizing future Canadians and ensuring that their transition into Canadian life is more difficult. To give a sense of why this is the case, we know from working with

Canadian veterans for over 20 years that navigating a significant life transition is very difficult in the face of trauma and uncertainty. For Afghans who have applied to the special immigration measures program, they are living with trauma and uncertainty on a daily basis. Many of these individuals served with the Canadian Forces in Kandahar, Afghanistan.

In August of last year, many of them moved from Kandahar to Kabul in an attempt to get on evacuation flights out of the country. In order to do that, many of them left behind their jobs. They left their homes and their support networks. They moved from Kandahar to Kabul, and in doing so, they sent a very clear message to these small and tight-knit communities they left behind about the fact that they worked with the Canadian Forces. Because of that, many of them are now regularly moving locations in an attempt to stay undetected. They are unable to engage with the community and with opportunities around them for fear of reprisals by the Taliban.

For many of them, their children are not in school. They are unable to work. They are unable to access what limited services the Government of Afghanistan may have to offer them. Things like the justice system, medical care and other services they cannot access for fear of their detection by the Taliban. This means that every day is stressful, traumatic and uncertain for them.

These are future Canadians who will be coming to Canada. Those impacts will be felt by our systems once they arrive here. Our medical system will have to deal with chronic, untreated physical injuries and post-traumatic psychological injuries. Our education system will have to help thousands of Afghan children who have been out of education for a year to catch up on their schooling. Our social services will be strained by the effects of family trauma that could span across multiple generations. For each day that these folks stay in Afghanistan, uncertain about their future, this problem compounds and compounds. It will be felt once they arrive here in Canada. Their transition to being Canadian citizens will be much more difficult as a result.

First and foremost, it is the morally right thing to do to expedite the applications of these Afghans who supported our Canadian Forces during our mission there from 2001 to 2014. Failing that, it is the sensible thing to do for our government to expedite these applications.

I'll move on to my second point. The application backlog is also damaging to the mental health of Canadian veterans. Throughout our programs last year and in 2020, we have seen the impact of the fall of Afghanistan on the mental health and well-being of Canada's veterans, to the point that our clinical network has held special consultations to prepare to deal with this issue. We've notified our peer support network across Canada that this issue may arise in veterans' communities. We've sent many, many messages to veterans in our network across multiple platforms, letting them know that help is available if they are dealing with challenging feelings and emotions as a result of the fall of Afghanistan.

• (1550)

Beyond that, for the past year, many veterans have been the primary advocate and support for their Afghan interpreter colleagues whom they worked with overseas. They have been providing emotional support, and paperwork and administrative support. In many cases, they have been providing financial support. This is coming at a—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Mr. Thorne, but your time is up. You will get an opportunity to talk further when we go into our round of questioning.

With that, I want to thank all the witnesses for their opening remarks.

Now we will go to our round of questioning. We will begin with Mr. Genuis.

You have six minutes.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for appearing before us on this very important study.

I'm going to start with some questions for Mr. Allos, and they may take up all of my time.

Could you share a bit about the impact of backlogs on private sponsoring organizations? We've heard about delays of three years or more. I would imagine that when you have a community group that establishes a relationship with a family, that family is in a fragile or dangerous situation, and then they have to wait years, trying to maintain contact while they wait for the application to be processed. I imagine that can be a very difficult and stressful experience on both sides.

Could you share a bit more about what you've been hearing from different organizations that are involved in sponsorship?

• (1555)

Mr. Rabea Allos: Most organizations, including the Catholic and non-Catholic sponsors, are going through the same thing. Most of the work on the ground is being done by volunteers. Those volunteers are doing it because they feel good about it, but dealing with the backlogs is stressing them out.

You work with a family for a few years, and then you find out that they're not coming in. In one case, there was a family in Africa, a single mother with three kids. She has cancer. They are in a refugee camp, and she cannot get treatment locally. If IRCC does

not expedite the case, she'll end up dying and there will be three orphans in the camp.

The volunteers just can't deal with it anymore. Eventually, they leave. If you have fewer volunteers, you cannot sponsor as many refugees as you would hope to.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: To put a very fine point on that, and it's a very useful point, is it fair to say that you're seeing declining engagement from volunteers who would potentially be involved in the area of sponsoring refugees, and that it's driven by frustration in dealing with the delays and the bureaucratic nature of the process that they are coming up against? These volunteers are trying to help, but they're encountering roadblocks from the government in the process.

Mr. Rabea Allos: Certainly. Processing times are only one thing, but there are other issues with the regulations that are being imposed on sponsors. Volunteers are just not interested anymore.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you. That's important testimony for us to take note of.

You spoke about how the prioritization of some groups displaces other groups. Sometimes politicians would like to pretend that there isn't scarcity when there is.

The government often says when they're putting in a new priority in response to a new crisis that it won't affect any other existing applications. That has been the talking point from the government.

Do you find that believable? What are your reflections when you hear the government say that they can respond to crises in Afghanistan and Ukraine without them impacting other situations?

Mr. Rabea Allos: No, of course not. We can see the delays are there.

I've checked back. In 2015 and 2016, when the Syrian refugees became a priority, resources were pulled from different visa offices across the world and moved over to Syria and Turkey so that they could get the 25,000 Syrians within a few months. Refugees across the rest of the world were left hanging.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Right. When the government puts resources into one place, then often, despite saying otherwise, they are pulling those resources from somewhere else. It seems that one proposal for dealing with this would be to simply increase the overall level of resources that are in processing and take those resources from somewhere else. One possible route might be reducing the amount of money spent on direct public sponsorship and putting more into the processing of private sponsorships. That would probably increase the number of people who could be sponsored overall, because you'd be leveraging more in the way of private dollars.

Another proposal that Conservatives put forward in the last election was to allow people to pay a little bit extra for expedited processing just to put more money into the system for expanded processing.

What are your thoughts on measures to increase the amount of resources that are available for processing?

• (1600)

Mr. Rabea Allos: Well, from the past, whenever you increase resources, you're going to load the system again. It's better to optimize our system. There are about 200,000 to 250,000 Canadians or permanent residents who are leaving Canada on an annual basis, so—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting. The time is up for Mr. Genuis.

We will now proceed to Mr. Ali.

You have six minutes, Mr. Ali, for your round of questioning.

Mr. Shafqat Ali (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for providing us with the benefit of their knowledge and experience today as we study application backlogs and processing times.

First of all, Mr. Khurana, I would like to thank you and the Toronto Business Development Centre for your initiative with the City of Brampton and its economic development department's BHive incubator program. Using our government's start-up visa program, you are helping newcomer entrepreneurs to grow and scale in the Canadian ecosystem.

I want to ask you about your experience with the start-up visa program. I understand that this program is implemented by IRCC with the National Angel Capital Organization. Could you elaborate further on what steps could be taken to help expedite bringing good companies here faster? How can we best assist programs like Brampton's BHive become leading incubators for international start-ups and attracting international entrepreneurs?

Mr. Vikram Khurana: Thank you, Member Ali. I really appreciate your question, sir.

First and foremost, we are very, very bullish about foreign entrepreneurs coming to Canada and setting up the next Google, the next Facebook, the next YouTube and all these kinds of very well-known companies right from inception in Canada. That's what this program was supposed to do.

Since this is a program that supports job creation, economic activity, and a number of fringe benefits for the economy, this should be addressed as a priority stream. The reason it should be addressed as a priority stream is that this is the only economic immigration program federally. The prior version of the owner-operator program was sunsetted by IRCC. Quite a few of the applications have ended up in the start-up visa program, which was originally intended to bring innovative and disruptive companies to Canada.

Some of the steps, obviously, are that NACO, the National Angel Capital Organization, should help IRCC weed out the bad actors and de-designate incubators or angel organizations or VCs that are using this program as an immigration program.

The second step we could do is ask the designated entities which companies are their top companies and which companies they feel

will be able to make a quick impact and a positive impact in Canada and have a high potential of succeeding.

Finally, even if permanent residence applications cannot be processed on a priority basis, perhaps the work permits can be done on a priority basis. This will help people come to Canada and immediately start as opposed to waiting for first the work permit and then the PR.

We think these are some quick fixes to the problem of the backlogs.

• (1605)

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you, Mr. Khurana.

You just mentioned some bad actors and you also mentioned earlier that there are 5,000 applications and that the waiting time is about 32 months. Can you elaborate further on the bad actors? Also, do you think this could be a reason it's taking more time for IRCC to verify whether these are genuine applications from these actors? Could you elaborate on that, please?

Mr. Vikram Khurana: Thank you for that question.

That definitely is the case. The program originally when it was in its pilot stage had only 500 spots. Since the owner-operator program was sunset, many of the applicants, because of the lack of clarity as to what a start-up actually means, have been shuffled into this category, which has resulted in the 5,000 applications. In the grand scheme of things, when you are talking 400,000 or 500,000 as an annual quota, that's still not very large, but if there are problematic applications in the system that require a fair amount of due diligence on the part of the immigration officer, that slows the system down. Hence, it's important to stop the bad actors.

These bad actors can be of two types. One is applicants who are lying and who maybe don't have an innovative or disruptive business and maybe just want to come to Canada. The other includes some of the designated entities that are using their relationship and privilege with the IRCC to facilitate such bad actors by embellishing their business plans and by issuing letters of support, which basically means nomination, to individuals who don't deserve them and who don't have the right skills, the right money or the right supports in place to be able to make a successful business in Canada.

Those are some of the things that could be done.

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Mr. Khurana, but the time is up for Mr. Ali.

We will now proceed to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you will have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I would like to start by thanking the witnesses here with us today who have taken the time in order to have their say on this extremely important study. We hope that the study will change the opinion of many persons who are seeking to obtain a visa, whether temporary or permanent.

Mr. Allos, you indicated that it is not easy to deal with IRCC.

In all the studies that our committee has undertaken in recent times, we have been hearing that there is a huge lack of transparency when dealing with IRCC. We are hearing a lot about IRCC, whether it is the fact that the department stopped giving an indication of processing times to applicants during the pandemic or the lack of transparency of the Chinook system, which is used to streamline file processing.

Do you think there's a lack of transparency?

If that is indeed the case, what would be the solution if we wished to change things?

[*English*]

Mr. Rabea Allos: I agree that there is no transparency. A lot of data that the IRCC is sitting on could be used to optimize the system and make it more efficient and increase the efficiency of the process. I believe a parliamentary immigration officer similar to the budget office in Parliament should be set up. It could be an independent body to oversee IRCC, have full access to their numbers, be able to mine their data, ask questions and get answers.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you very much, Mr. Allos.

Mr. Thorne, in the wake of various international crises, we have accepted refugees on an emergency basis. Obviously, I am thinking of Afghanistan, but there is also the current situation in Ukraine and the aftermath of the earthquakes in Haiti.

Do you think a possible solution would be to have an emergency mechanism within IRCC that would be used when there is an international crisis, whether it be a natural catastrophe or an armed conflict, so that we can quickly take in people in times of crisis?

Do you think that Canada has learned any lessons from past experience?

• (1610)

[*English*]

Mr. Oliver Thorne: Yes, that makes a great deal of sense to me. I have to give these comments with a caveat that my interaction with the immigration process has been solely with a focus on the Afghan special immigration measures program. My experience with immigration policy and processes as a whole is somewhat limited.

I can say that the immigration process for applicants in the special immigration measures program has been very slow, very challenging at times, uncertain and confusing. I believe that this is a direct result of the fact that the government was not prepared for the collapse of the Afghan government and the resulting humanitarian crisis.

It seems to me that having a task force for a team that is dedicated to responding to such emergencies would be to the benefit of IRCC, first and foremost, because they seem to have happened with relative consistency over the years. If we look at Syria, Afghanistan and now Ukraine, it seems from hearing the comments from other witnesses that those crises directly impacted the wait times and the viability of the applicants that they were supporting.

It seems to me that a dedicated team that can be spun up to react to such crises would be a big benefit to IRCC.

[*Translation*]

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

I have a final question for Mr. Khurana. I am pleased to have been able to put questions to all three witnesses.

A lot of businesses are complaining about processing times for temporary foreign workers. It is obviously a problem. In fact, you mentioned it earlier today.

I am not for or against the proposal that is on the table; I would simply like to know what your opinion is. Some people are saying that if we collected biometric data when the persons arrive in Canada, we could save a significant amount of time and reduce processing times.

Do you believe that this is a viable and intelligent solution that we should implement?

[*English*]

Mr. Vikram Khurana: The biometrics are already in place. Today, when a person applies either for a work permit or for permanent residence, there are biometrics that need to be taken. That has become a bit of a problem in itself, because now the applicant has to go to a third party to get the biometrics taken.

Having said that, the other tangible methods that I talked about earlier, such as expediting the work permit, provide that temporary relief that IRCC could offer the system in order to get people creating employment, moving to the country and getting set up in their businesses in Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I have a short final question for Mr. Allos.

Mr. Allos, given your experience in this area, do you think the processing times indicated on IRCC's site reflect reality?

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry. Your time is up. Maybe you'll get an opportunity in the second round.

We will now proceed to Ms. Kwan.

You have six minutes for your round of questioning. Please begin.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thanks very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for their presentations.

I would like to follow up on the question around special immigration measures and the crises that are going on. I support having a dedicated team to deal with special situations so that they don't impact other immigration streams. That being said, it's a staffing resource question. The other component to that, which is absolutely critical, is the immigration levels numbers. Without these, every time the government adds a new stream, if it doesn't put in increased immigration levels numbers to go with that stream, it does nothing. It creates chaos in the system.

Mr. Thorne, to that point, would you also support the call for the government to increase immigration levels numbers as a companion piece to special measures?

• (1615)

Mr. Oliver Thorne: Again, I would focus my response to that specifically around those for the special immigration measures program. I think we've seen recently in the news the announcement that the cap has been reached on the special immigration measures program.

We know from veterans and from Afghan interpreters who we're speaking with that there are still interpreters and locally employed civilians who have not received an invitation to apply. They've expressed interest. Some have not yet received an invitation. Perhaps some have received an invitation and they've applied, but they have not received a confirmation. From our perspective as an organization supporting veterans and supporting these folks, it is unthinkable that we would not create a space for every Afghan who worked alongside a Canadian Forces member in Afghanistan. Their work and their knowledge helped our mission and saved Canadian lives, at a great risk to themselves and their families, and without it our mission would have been impossible.

If the answer to that question is raising the immigration numbers, then yes, I would support that.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much. You answered that beautifully, and I absolutely agree with you.

I'd like to ask you the same question, Mr. Allos, because you also mentioned the issue around levels numbers.

Whatever immigration measure it is—it could even be in the economic stream, for that matter—if the government brings in these measures, for it to actually work, we need to ensure that the immigration levels number is available to accommodate it. Would you say that is an essential component to address the processing of applications and to address the critical issue of backlogs?

Mr. Rabea Allos: Absolutely, and for the case of the Afghani interpreters, I believe the government should have negotiated with friendly countries like the UAE or Kuwait, moved the interpreters to a safe country and processed their applications before bringing them over here. Keeping them in Afghanistan was a big mistake.

For each situation, there are solutions the government can look at, and the government should be flexible on it.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

We've seen with the government that from time to time the minister will make an announcement to say that they're addressing the

backlog, they're putting resources here and starting on a certain day they're going to get back to processing standards.

Of course when they do that, they're forgetting about the backlog that existed before and all of those people who did not apply at the date when they say they are now going to abide by processing standards. It's to the point where, for some applicants, when they inquire about the status of their situation, the officers and the agents from IRCC actually advise them to abandon their application and make a new one, because with a new deadline they'll be able to be processed within the timeline. Isn't this absurd? I mean, Jesus, talk about actually walking around in a circle and abandoning people.

Should the government, if they're going to truly address the backlog, make sure that those who are in the backlog also are processed expeditiously then, as well as the new ones who are coming on stream? Otherwise, the new ones will just become new backlogs, or, alternatively, they're abandoning the old ones in order to make sure the new ones are met with a standard processing timeline.

Mr. Allos, could you comment?

Mr. Rabea Allos: Yes, I absolutely agree. We were accepting 500,000 refugees every year. How many applications are coming in? If we're getting 600,000 or 700,000, of course we're going to have backlogs. We need to control that.

Back in 2011 or 2010, we used to have backlogs of eight years in Africa at the Nairobi visa office. There were 30,000 applications or 30,000 applicants who were waiting, most of them for eight years. The government back then introduced the caps on the SAHs and reduced the backlog to about a year and a half, and in some cases, one year, for the refugees. Yes, the government has to deal with it.

• (1620)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: To that point as well, shouldn't the government be completely transparent with what's going on? You can't just say that we're—

The Chair: Your time is up, Ms. Kwan.

We will now proceed to our second round. We will start with Mr. Hallan.

Mr. Hallan, you will have four minutes for your round of questions.

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

Thank you to all the witnesses. Thank you for all the work that you are doing to help people come here, especially the persecuted ones.

My first question is for both Mr. Allos and Mr. Thorne.

I'll continue with the line of some of the questions.

We've seen with the SIM, the special immigration measures, a lot of bureaucracy, a lot of red tape involved in some of these programs. We know the longer the delay it could cost lives, and it's a matter of life and death. In both of your experiences with your organizations, can you give us some of the bureaucratic hurdles you guys are facing and some solutions to those so that while the government is trying to address this horrific backlog in the meantime these things can be done to help speed up some of these special immigration measures and some of these programs on sponsorships?

Mr. Rabea Allos: The current guideline to fill the application for a refugee is 80 pages. This is the guideline to fill the application, so certainly we need to make the process simpler. The application should be simpler. Of course, the more complicated the application is, it's going to take more time to process it. I do believe the whole system needs to be looked at again and changed for the better, simplified basically.

Mr. Oliver Thorne: I'll speak from our experience. We have seen a great deal of variability in terms of how quickly applicants in the special immigration measures program are processed. That is somewhat of a black box. We are unsure as to what is holding those applications up in many cases. That information is not passed to us; it's passed directly back and forth to the applicants, so we don't always know. Often I would say we do not know.

I can tell you certainly that one of the challenges that is hampering the evacuation effort to get people out of Afghanistan is the fact that they are required to go to a third location to perform a biometric verification before they can come to Canada. This means they need to go to Pakistan, to the UAE, to any neighbouring country that is accessible, and that introduces the requirements for passports and visas in order to get into that country.

We're talking about a family that may be applying, which may be 20 individuals. The going rate for a passport now in Afghanistan, according to what people are telling us, is anywhere between \$1,000 and \$2,000 U.S., and \$500 U.S. for a Pakistan visa, for a family of 20 people. That is both an enormous administrative and financial burden that is placed upon applicants and makes that process very difficult to get them out of Afghanistan for the final step of processing.

In July and August we saw an agreement that the Pakistan government put forth to allow a fixed period of border facilitation where individuals could cross without passports and without visas. IRCC approached us to help move people through that facilitation agreement. We were hoping to move many people. In the end there were 77 names that we received to move, who did get across the border, but—

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Mr. Thorne, thank you. I'm sorry to cut you off. I want to ask you one more thing, and we only have about 30 seconds.

I want to get your thoughts on this. You were at the special committee on Afghanistan. Many recommendations were passed there. Could you please give this committee, out of those recommendations, the ones that should be priorities that could help the people in Afghanistan or any other sponsorships? What can they do to speed them up?

Mr. Oliver Thorne: First and foremost, ensure that anybody who served with the Canadian Forces is offered a place and offered an application to come to Canada.

Second, anything the Canadian government can continue to do to facilitate movement to third country locations, like Pakistan and the UAE, will help tremendously, and—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting. The time is up for Mr. Hallan.

We will now proceed to Mr. El-Khoury.

Mr. El-Khoury, you will have four minutes. Please begin.

• (1625)

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

I would like to welcome our witnesses.

My first question is addressed to Mr. Allos.

Mr. Allos, with all due respect, I totally disagree with what you said in your presentation about Syrians having better treatment than others, while those others are left hanging. I believe you lack some understanding of what happened in every country in each situation. I will explain it to you.

For Syrians there was no problem, no obstacle leaving Syria for either Lebanon or Jordan, and no problem getting a travel document. They are registered in the United Nations.

The opposite is true in Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, with the presence of the Taliban, it was completely dangerous to the lives of all those who wanted to cross if they were co-operating with the Canadian army. If they crossed into Pakistan.... In order to leave Pakistan, if they didn't have travel documents, passports or others documents, they were not allowed to leave. I believe that if you take those things into consideration, you must change your opinion.

As for Ukraine, I believe we did a great job. For your information, we have another two planes full of Ukrainians coming this coming week. We will welcome them nicely here in Canada.

I would like to hear from you, after hearing this from me. Also, what ideas are you going to propose for the future amelioration in this particular case?

Mr. Rabea Allos: Thank you, sir.

I think you misunderstood me. I wasn't complaining about Syrians coming over here getting special treatment. What I said was, when we had to bring in the 25,000 refugees from Syria, the resources of visa offices across the world were moved over to the Middle East to process those applications. Some of those visa offices were closed completely, so other refugees, or even applications, were not getting processed.

I am not saying in any way that Syrian refugees should not be sponsored.

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: I didn't say that. That's no problem.

My second question is addressed to Mr. Khurana.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Khurana, what do you think of the current manpower shortage, given the problems with processing times?

Do you have a solution that would help to rectify the situation?

[*English*]

Mr. Vikram Khurana: Could the member clarify the question?

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

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: How do you evaluate the present workforce shortage here, in light of the delay in treatment? Do you have an idea or solution to propose in order to make the situation better? What are your suggestions for better treatment or a better solution?

Mr. Vikram Khurana: I will answer based on my knowledge of IRCC and labour shortages.

The solution is to create a pilot project or a set number of spots—let's say 5,000. A past example lies with the Canadian Labour Congress. There were a fixed number of spots allocated to tradespeople, to the skilled trades, to come to Canada. Similarly, this can be done for health care, given the current shortages of nurses and doctors. Those kinds of categories can then be used to expedite what is in the national interest of Canada.

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Khurana.

The time is up for Mr. El-Khoury.

We will now proceed to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for two minutes.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you can begin.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Thorne, in light of your experience, do processing times increase when there is a humanitarian crisis? Earlier, someone suggested an emergency mechanism that could be set up.

When crises happen, such as the situation in Afghanistan or in Ukraine, IRCC officers are called upon to help. That means that all the other files can't be processed, due to a shortage of employees. During the Afghan crisis, I believe that between 15 and 25% of IRCC officers were redeployed to work on the Afghan files.

What do you think of this?

• (1630)

[*English*]

Mr. Oliver Thorne: Thank you very much for the question.

Again, I can only answer with my knowledge specifically about the special immigration measures program. Our involvement in this special project to assist Afghan interpreters is the only interaction that our organization has had with IRCC to date.

Yes, I believe IRCC was struggling and continues to struggle with insufficient resources to cover the backlog of applications and the additional flow of applications that came in from the special immigration measures program. We've been in touch with IRCC for a year now, communicating with them on a regular basis. We know

they're working hard. We're receiving messages from them after hours. We know that they are working at their limit, but it seems to me that there are insufficient staffing resources to cover this influx of applications.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Mr. Thorne, the federal government is talking about bringing 40,000 Afghan refugees to Canada.

Do you think that this target will be met?

[*English*]

Mr. Oliver Thorne: I think we will reach that target, but the question is when.

I spoke earlier in my statement about the cost to Canadian veterans and the cost to organizations supporting the Afghans. Every day that these individuals remain in Afghanistan, they are living in uncertainty and in a state of trauma that will make their transition more difficult—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Mr. Thorne, but the time is up for Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

We will now end our panel with two minutes for Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, you may please begin.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

What I'm hearing from all the witnesses is that there is little transparency within IRCC. In fact, there is little accountability within IRCC. The only way to really get at it is for an independent office to look into this.

My question is for all three witnesses.

Would you support the call for an independent ombudsperson on immigration so that we can ensure accountability and transparency within IRCC? Perhaps you could even make recommendations on how to enhance immigration policies in Canada.

Mr. Rabea Allos: Yes, absolutely.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Thorne.

Mr. Oliver Thorne: I would be supportive, I think, insofar as it does not further hamper the efforts of IRCC to do their job and process these applications. Certainly, for the folks we are helping that is where the rubber meets the road.

Yes, I would be supportive in a review that would provide helpful recommendations provided that it does not hamper their efforts.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

Mr. Khurana.

Mr. Vikram Khurana: Yes, I would be supportive. I definitely think there's merit to that suggestion.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

If you had an opportunity to tell the government to address the backlog, what is your number one priority that they need to take action on?

I'll start with Mr. Allos.

Mr. Rabea Allos: We need to look at the retention numbers. Every year 200,000 Canadians are leaving Canada, and we have to bring in more immigrants to cover for those. We need to find out why Canadians are leaving the country.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Okay.

Mr. Thorne.

Mr. Oliver Thorne: I would close by saying expedited applications are an upstream intervention to prevent traumatic social and other detrimental costs to our society and to new Canadians coming to Canada.

I implore the government to provide IRCC with the resources it needs to expedite these applications as much as possible.

Thank you.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Can we quickly let Mr. Khurana answer that question?

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: A point of order, please, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Your time is up, Ms. Kwan.

Yes, Mr. El-Khoury.

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: Just for the record, there is a small mistake I would like to correct. I said there were two planes from Ukraine. In reality, they were from Afghanistan.

Thank you.

The Chair: This panel will now come to an end.

Mr. Khurana, were you trying to say something?

• (1635)

Mr. Vikram Khurana: Yes. Very quickly, we need to modernize our processing systems. That will help the backlogs as well.

The Chair: With that, on behalf of all the members of this committee I want to thank all the witnesses for appearing before the committee and providing important information as we continue our study on the processing times.

You can stay on if you want to for the second panel, or you can leave.

Thank you.

• (1635)

(Pause)

• (1635)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

Before we begin our second panel, I want to ask for members' approval for two motions.

The first one is:

That the clerk of the committee make the necessary hospitality arrangements for an informal luncheon meeting with the Parliamentary Committee for Labour and Social Affairs of the German Bundestag from 12:30 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. on Wednesday, October 5, 2022 in Room 430 Wellington Building.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The second motion is:

That the clerk of the committee be authorized to purchase an appropriate gift to be presented to the visiting delegation from the Bundestag.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Now we can begin our second panel. I would like to welcome our witnesses for this panel.

Today, we are joined by Adrienne Foster, vice-president of policy and public affairs at the Hotel Association of Canada. We are also joined by Claire Launay, president of Le Québec c'est nous aussi. The third witness for this panel is Dr. Janet Bigland-Pritchard, coordinator of the migration office at the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon.

On behalf of all of the members, I would like to welcome all of you. You will have five minutes for your opening remarks, and then we will go into a round of questioning.

We will begin with Madam Foster.

You have five minutes for your opening remarks. The floor is yours.

• (1640)

Ms. Adrienne Foster (Vice-President, Policy and Public Affairs, Hotel Association of Canada): Thank you, Madam Chair.

[Translation]

Thank you for inviting me here today.

[English]

My name is Adrienne Foster and I'm the vice-president of policy and public affairs with the Hotel Association of Canada.

Hotels are critical to the Canadian economy. More than just keystones of the tourism sector, hotel event spaces are the heart of many communities.

Many people assume hotels are owned by the major international brands we are all familiar with. In fact, these hotels are mostly owned and operated by Canadian small and medium-sized businesses, many of which are family run.

Hotels employ people in all regions of the country during all seasons. We hire a greater proportion of women, new Canadians and indigenous people than other industries. People are the lifeblood of this industry.

As you can imagine, COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on Canada's travel and hospitality sector. When COVID hit, the tourism sector lost one million employees. We welcomed back many this summer, but frequent lockdowns and instability forced some to leave permanently for other sectors. As of today, the tourism sector is still short about 200,000 employees. That's more than other industries, like retail at 110,000, or construction and manufacturing at 90,000 each.

I'd like to be clear. Our members want to hire Canadians. Hotels have adapted to the changing work environment by offering more flexible hours, higher wages, signing bonuses and workplace programs, but the reality is that with record-low births and unemployment rates, and with boomers retiring en masse, there are simply not enough people in Canada to fill these vacancies. An August survey of our members found that 69% were forced to limit room availability to maintain service standards and 75% had to deploy staff to jobs they were not hired for. The situation on the ground for hotels is not sustainable.

As demand for travel continues to surge, immigration will be key to our industry's recovery. The hotel sector is an excellent employer for new Canadians. We have opportunities for those with limited language skills. We offer training, support and positions at all levels. Our core message is that Canada's immigration system must be reformed to reflect actual labour challenges.

We will provide the clerk with a detailed submission, so today I'll focus just on two key recommendations.

First, we need to open Canada's permanent immigration stream to those who can fill in-demand occupations in our industry. We recommend the government include tourism workers in their express entry criteria for permanent residency, just as it is planning to do for agricultural workers. The criteria could be based on measures like previous work experience in Canada—either as a TFW or international student—or an offer of employment for a tourism job.

The government can also raise immigration levels and target key regions and sectors by working with provinces to expand the in-demand occupation streams in their provincial nominee programs.

Second, while we don't want to rely on temporary solutions, we know that changes to the immigration system will take time. In the meantime, we are recommending reforms to the temporary foreign worker program. We thank the government for improvements, such as extending LMIA and increasing caps for TFWs, but red tape and slow response times continue to discourage many from even applying.

Perhaps more concerning is the low rate of success for our applications. From our members survey, 44% of those who applied for TFWs haven't had a single application approved since January. We recommend that tourism jobs are prioritized within the TFW program. This can be done by expediting tourism sector NOCs, removing the LMIA requirement and application fee, and waiving the 30-day job posting requirement.

Madam Chair, travel has resumed with a vengeance and this is the perfect opportunity for our sector to get back on its feet and thrive. We just need the people to help us get there.

• (1645)

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Foster. You're exactly on time.

We will now proceed to Ms. Launay. She is here in person.

Ms. Launay, you will have five minutes for your opening remarks. Please begin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Claire Launay (President, Le Québec c'est nous aussi): Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: On a point of order, Madam Chair, I'm sorry, but there's no translation.

The Chair: Would you please read to us, Ms. Launay, and we'll check.

You can begin, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Claire Launay: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank all the committee members for allowing me to speak before you today. I am especially happy to be here in person.

My name is Claire Launay and I am the president of an organization called Le Québec c'est nous aussi. We are a non-profit organization involved in promoting the rights and living conditions of immigrants in Quebec. We work in a non-partisan fashion by expressing the voices within our community and by making known the advantages of immigration to Quebec society.

I would firstly like to talk about what we think are the causes of the increased processing times and backlogs. Obviously, the pandemic has had a major effect on IRCC operations. However, we believe that the problem goes deeper than this and is linked to the way the department is managed.

During the Afghanistan and Ukraine crises, of which we have just spoken, IRCC became a crisis management department whose resources were systematically redeployed from one file to the next in order to handle the crises. This lengthened processing times for permanent residency, working permit and study visa applications and basically gummed up IRCC's normal operations, really.

We were obviously pleased to hear that the Government of Canada intends to take in a large number of refugees in the wake of humanitarian crises. That should not, however, be done at the expense of everyday IRCC operations. We believe that the fact that these emergency situations slow down IRCC operations means that there is obviously a need to change the way the department is managed, because the processing delays are having a tremendous impact on over two million people who are waiting for their files to be dealt with. I will give you some examples of those impacts.

Thousands of students have had to push back the start of their studies by a semester and sometimes by a year, depending on the program, because they are waiting for a student visa. Thousands of people are currently in Canada and are not able to work, despite the lack of manpower that we all know about, because they're still waiting for their work permit. At the same time, employers are forced to temporarily shut down their operations or turn down contracts because they are unable to find workers.

Refugee claimants are telling us that they are having to wait much longer for their Refugee Protection Claimant Document, their "Brown Paper," that would allow them to file a request for a work permit, have access to health insurance and even find housing. All those persons are currently waiting for months for their Brown Paper, which stops them from making progress in any aspect of their lives in Canada.

We have all heard of issues surrounding family reunification, whereby families are separated and women give birth to their child without their husbands at their side. It is heart-wrenching.

Permanent residency applications are a problem that is slowing down the entire system. Many people are waiting for their permanent residency card and have to file requests for work visas, which is bogging down the system.

In a broader sense, this is hurting Canada's reputation internationally. Over the past few months, Canada's reputation abroad has been tarnished at some international conferences and events when participants were not able to attend as they couldn't get a visa.

In conclusion, I would like to give you some of our recommendations. I would invite you to read the document that we will send you in the next few days that sets out our complete list of recommendations. I will just mention a few of them now.

Firstly, we believe that the Government of Canada and especially IRCC should invest in a program that would better prepare the department for humanitarian crises, so that resources could be systematically used in these situations, which would avoid having to redeploy resources in crisis mode which are essential to normal operations within IRCC.

On a more general note, we have many ideas that would improve transparency and accountability at IRCC. A lack of transparency is the one thing that keeps coming back in testimony. We need an ombudsman for immigration who would make sure that IRCC reaches its targets and does so in a way that is fair and just. Moreover, on the subject of processing times, we need a regulatory framework to establish what Canada's responsibilities are if the department exceeds normal processing times.

We have lots of other ideas and we would relish the chance to talk about them with committee members. I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today.

• (1650)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Launay, for your opening remarks.

We will now proceed to Madam Bigland-Pritchard, coordinator, migration office, Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon.

You will have five minutes for your opening remarks. The floor is yours.

Dr. Janet M. Bigland-Pritchard (Coordinator, Migration Office, Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I speak as a lay employee of the Roman Catholic Diocese. I'm competent to talk about our past and present practices in refugee resettlement, but my opinions are mine alone and do not represent the policies of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon.

I have been involved with refugee resettlement in some way or another as a volunteer since the 1990s and professionally since 2017.

IRCC is to be commended for the progress it has made in improving the PSR application process. Bear in mind that the refugee caseload for them has quadrupled since 2014. We saw good changes prior to COVID. We saw email submission of applications with immediate auto-confirmation of receipt, the development of the refugee sponsorship training program, the creation of the e-CAS system that allows sponsors to check online about a case's progress, and processing times were coming down nicely. Then came COVID, and everything, as you know, changed.

I was pleasantly surprised that IRCC kept the doors open for new refugee applications all the way through 2020 and 2021. Arrivals began to happen, and then came Afghanistan, and then came Ukraine.

As a result of all three crises, the improvements in processing times that had been made were, of course, damaged and reversed. Sponsorship agreement holders were not allowed to submit any new PSR applications this year before May. That puts pressure on our whole system and increases wait times for the refugees in our queues.

Once again, it is taking months, not weeks, for ROC-O to do their initial processing on new applications. There's lots of uncertainty there.

We really miss the mission-specific reports that gave current information about conditions and average processing times for each visa office. It continues to be hard to get timely decisions on less straightforward applications such as those involving de facto dependents and one-year windows.

There are some bright spots, though. Some overseas visa offices seem to be working very hard to clear their backlog of older, stuck cases. The record for us is somebody who started out in 2013, and she will be with us by October 7.

Communication with ROC-O is now often coming with an officer identifier. That sounds small, but it's big because it means that we can be sure that our communications are getting to the right person rather than a faceless inbox. IRCC staff have become more responsive to the SAH community, and senior staff seem more willing to intervene when we hit a brick wall.

How can the system and processing times be improved? Everybody hates the backlog. My first point is that we need to scrap the judicial review system. This is causing endless problems. The judicial review process doesn't work well; it only responds to procedure. It ties up applications for years, and it's very expensive. All you get if you win is another trip back to the same visa office.

I would like to see it replaced with a proper appeal system, streamlined and effective, to get over the heartache that is caused to so many families by being bogged down in judicial review forever.

My other suggestions are that the increased staffing levels, which are already functioning at ROC-O, need to be continued, maybe for some years to come, in order to cope with all the people who want to be processed. There needs to be an increase in both the numbers and staffing of overseas visa offices, particularly in Africa, where the highest demand is and where the most crises happen.

Finally, we need to roll out the promised digital application system, which would greatly improve the cybersecurity of our application process.

Thank you.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now proceed to our round of questioning. We will begin our first round with Mr. Redekopp.

Mr. Redekopp, you will have six minutes for your round of questioning.

Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Dr. Bigland-Pritchard, thanks for all the good work that you're doing in Saskatoon with the Roman Catholic Diocese. We've worked on some cases together, and I know that you've developed a great working relationship with my staff, Daniel, Lisa, Jared and Carol, so that's a great thing.

You spoke to my staff about an Iranian Christian woman and her child who were stuck in refugee limbo in Turkey, as she keeps getting rejected by the IRCC. This is after nine years of indentured

slavery by her father to the Iranian revolutionary guard, and finally being raped before she could escape to Turkey.

More generally, we know that minority Christians throughout certain parts of the world are persecuted and live under threat every day. Unfortunately, the Liberals under Trudeau have made their disdain for Christians pretty clear and have basically put up the "do not enter" sign if you are one.

For private refugee sponsorship, which is what you specialize in, can you tell the committee what barriers you see are in place preventing minority Christians from getting fair hearings and getting refugee status in Canada?

Dr. Janet M. Bigland-Pritchard: I think that religious minorities often face barriers right at the beginning. They're not maybe even allowed to register with UNHCR, because of pressures within the countries of asylum that they've gone to. I think of the Hazaras in Afghanistan. I think of the Pakistani Ahmadis, and Ismailis as well as the many Christians in Pakistan and other places who face barriers.

Barriers come in all kinds of ways. They're at the start of the process. Occasionally, we hear rumours of interpreters who are maybe not accurately representing what their clients are saying to the visa officers. Certainly, at the Singapore visa office, it appears we have a substantially higher rejection rate for Pakistani Christians than we do for other immigration refugee streams. However, it's very hard to pin down. That's as much as I think I can say at the moment.

A couple of my Christian cases are actually bogged down over what I consider to be pretty minor inadmissibility issues, because of small connections with groups considered to be terrorists. This is something that needs addressing. I think sometimes Canada uses a sledgehammer to crack a nut.

Of course, we do want Canada to do its due diligence, and security is very important, but sometimes it seems to me it's the small fish that get caught in our net and the big fish swim free.

• (1700)

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Madam Chair, based on that, I would like to make a notice of motion as follows:

That the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration report the following to the House: that the committee condemns the persecution of minority Christians in all countries; and urges the Canadian government to provide assistance wherever possible to facilitate immigration of such individuals and families into Canada.

We'll distribute the French version of that as well.

You mentioned some systemic problems with immigration and backlogs. When the minister was here a while ago, we asked him about backlogs, and he didn't talk about that. He talked about inventory, business as usual.

In your opinion, what other systemic changes need to be made at the department to clear the ever-growing backlog?

Dr. Janet M. Bigland-Pritchard: We have to remember that the work they are doing is incredibly complicated. There are so many moving pieces. Lots of the problems that impact backlogs are not of Canada's making. They're always responding to a new situation. It's like people rolling logs on the river.

I already said what I think would help, but I don't have any grand solutions. Increase staffing levels, yes. I love the idea of having an ombudsperson who could deal with very difficult cases. I'd mentioned that the reform of the judicial review process and the digital application process should help.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Thank you. That's good.

I'd like to switch over to Madam Foster with the Hotel Association of Canada.

I know that temporary foreign workers are key to your sector. When you're looking at hoteliers, clerks, housekeepers, etc., these are the back-end jobs at the hotel. Last November, the IRCC told me that the average wait times for all categories of TFWs stretched many months. This can be a whole tourist season in your industry.

Can you tell me if the situation for temporary foreign workers has improved, or has it become worse in the last 12 months?

Ms. Adrienne Foster: You raise an important point.

For us, temporary foreign workers really are that short-term solution for this major labour crunch we're facing. Indeed, the wait times are definitely months. I referenced a survey that we recently did with our members. We knew that the backlog was long, so we asked them how many applications they had approved since January, and 45% of them had zero applications approved. That gives you a sense of the timelines we're facing. The point about seasonality is an important one.

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Ms. Foster, but the time is up for Mr. Redekopp.

We will now to proceed to Ms. Lalonde.

Ms. Lalonde, you will have six minutes for your round of questioning. Please begin.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for being here with us today.

My first question is for Ms. Launay, from Le Québec c'est nous aussi.

Ms. Launay, I believe that you are aware of this, but we have learned that immigration levels are often an important factor in processing times, given that the federal government has to abide by the caps set by Quebec when processing requests for permanent residency.

What do you think should be the ideal immigration levels that would allow for an improvement in processing times for the various immigration categories in Quebec?

Ms. Claire Launay: Thank you for the question.

Quebec is holding an election right now. Immigration is a very sensitive subject. Because we are talking about an area of provincial responsibility, I will not answer your question. We have, however, noticed over the last two years that IRCC did not process all the files under the immigration levels set by Quebec. For starters, IRCC would have to process the number of applications set by Quebec. Then we can start talking about efficiency.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much.

It is a shame that we are not in camera. We could have talked about this issue. I encourage you to forward your ideas after the provincial election.

In your opinion, in which ways could we improve the system so that applications for temporary or permanent residency could be processed more efficiently?

Do you see an overlap between the processes set up by the provinces and the federal government? If so, what can be done to improve things?

● (1705)

Ms. Claire Launay: We believe that you could start by giving a substantial boost to IRCC's budget. The annual budget for IRCC is not at all in keeping with the important role the department plays in the Canadian economy. We have seen some efforts and we have noticed that the department will get over 1,000 more employees. That is excellent news. We are not sure, however, that will be enough, given the size of the backlog.

We also need to better manage file processing. We see a lack of efficiency in many aspects. For example, if just one document is incorrect, the entire file is returned to the applicant. Sometimes, the applicants have to start the process all over again. In the meantime, the documents have expired. There has to be a better way of doing things.

The problem is so big now that we are all seeing it. It is an opportunity for IRCC to review its processes.

As for the issue of overlapping, it is relatively well known. It does indeed prolong the process, but mostly on the IRCC side, that is to say once the file has been sent to IRCC. For now, this is not an issue that we would raise.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

I would like to now go to Ms. Foster from the Hotel Association of Canada.

Thank you for everything you're doing. I know how challenging it has been for your sector. I was wondering if you've heard about the proposal being put forward for some regions and industries. It is what we call the trusted employers designation or program wherein certain business owners would have fewer requirements to bring in foreign workers. How would such a program possibly help you and impact your industry?

[Translation]

Ms. Adrienne Foster: Thank you for the question.

[English]

I have heard about the trusted employer proposal and it is one that our industry would support wholeheartedly.

The hotel sector is an excellent employer. We are incredibly proud of how we treat our employees and every single one of our members would be very willing participants in a program like that. It's definitely something that we're interested in.

Again, on the temporary foreign workers, a lot of our hotels apply year after year, so having anything that expedites that process would definitely be helpful. On the temporary foreign worker program, we also need to have some special attention paid to the tourism NOC codes so that as the applications come in they get expedited. That's another important piece of the puzzle.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much.

Just to let you know, as you were reflecting on the hotel and the ownership, in my community of Orléans I do have a small family-owned hotel. Certainly in Orléans we were challenged for many years not having a hotel in our region, so I certainly appreciate the efforts of that industry. You're absolutely right.

I think what I'm hearing from you, we're looking at temporary foreign workers as a short-term measure.

You did reflect that your survey found that 44% were not successful. Do you think that working in collaboration with your industry and helping the trusted employer designation would help possibilities for your sector?

The Chair: Please, be quick. You have 10 seconds.

Ms. Adrienne Foster: It would absolutely be helpful. The complexity of the applications is another issue that our members are facing. Again, the expedited—

The Chair: Maybe we can go further when we come back.

Now we will go to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

You will have six minutes for your round of questioning.

● (1710)

[Translation]

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

I would like to thank all the witnesses who are helping us with our extremely important study.

I have a few questions for Ms. Launay.

I would like to start out by congratulating you and your organization for the work that you do with very little resources.

What are the biggest challenges that you face as an organization when you are dealing with IRCC?

What are the biggest challenges when you don't have a lot of resources?

Ms. Claire Launay: We face the same challenges that immigrants do. All the members of our organization, Le Québec c'est nous, are also immigrants. It's difficult to communicate with someone at IRCC in general. That is our reality. It's hard to get any answers given the lack of transparency at the department.

That is why we are asking that IRCC be more transparent with regard to the directives given to its officers, so that we can better understand how decisions are made. We do not have this information. This means that we don't know what is causing the problem.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Would it help reduce the lack of transparency at IRCC if the position of ombudsman were created?

Ms. Claire Launay: Absolutely.

We think that is a necessary step. There are many systemic problems with IRCC that should be studied by an independent party, such as an ombudsman, so that concrete solutions can be proposed.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: In your presentation, you said that IRCC should put in place an emergency mechanism. Could you tell us more about this?

We have made a similar suggestion to the government, but we are still waiting for a response from the Minister of Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship.

Ms. Claire Launay: Basically, it would be a unit within IRCC that would be exclusively responsible for managing humanitarian crises, and it would have full-time resources dedicated to these crises. Each time that such a crisis arises, such as the ones in Afghanistan or in Ukraine, resources would not be taken away from other units. It would be up to IRCC to decide how such a unit would be set up.

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

I now have a series of questions.

Given your experience, what are the most contradictory aspects you have observed?

Have you or have immigrants been witness to absurd situations when dealing with IRCC?

Ms. Claire Launay: On many occasions. In fact, the absurd has become the norm. I mentioned earlier the need to repeatedly file applications for a work permit while waiting for decision on a permanent residency application. That is particularly absurd. We are talking about people who, by definition, have been selected, and in our case, by Quebec. We know we need these people right now. The majority already live here in Canada. These applications create an excess workload for IRCC simply because the department is unable to process files within normal timeframes.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Do you think that the delays in processing occur in all categories, such as study visas for foreign students as well as temporary and permanent visas?

In January and August of this year, the minister made some announcements, actually, it was basically the same announcement, stating that additional funds were forthcoming.

Do you think that these funds will help processing times return to a more normal length?

Ms. Claire Launay: We see delays in all categories of immigration applications, whether it's permanent or temporary visas.

That said, because new programs have been launched, as Ms. Kwan stated earlier, we also see some files being pushed through extremely rapidly, whereas two million applications are gathering dust. So we are seeing delays in all immigration categories as well as huge differences in file processing times.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I believe you often deal with people from francophone countries in Africa and therefore with the offices located in Rabat and Dakar.

Have you encountered problems in dealing with these offices that issue visas compared to the offices which are located in Europe?

Ms. Claire Launay: Yes, we receive numerous messages from the office in Dakar, which is experiencing a real problem in processing volumes. Their volumes are much lower than the average.

We are talking today about efficiency and processing times. I would also like to say that we do not want any improvements that would undermine a fair approach to processing. Our organization testified in February about the problems of prejudice and discrimination toward francophone students, especially those from Africa. We wish to ensure, whatever decisions are made by IRCC to improve processing times, that the methods used do not replicate discriminatory practices or even make it worse.

• (1715)

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: The Chinook system was set up to process as many applications as possible.

In fact, has it not have had the opposite effect, given that less time is spent on each file so that as many files as possible can be processed?

Ms. Claire Launay: That is indeed the risk.

It is precisely because of this risk that we seek more transparency, so that we could know exactly what algorithm Chinook uses, how the system works and what directives are given to the officers. We also need an independent party who would be charged with overseeing these operations and making recommendations.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Madam Chair, do I have any time left?

[English]

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I have 30 seconds. As I do not think we will have another opportunity to talk, Ms. Launay, do you have one last message for the committee?

Ms. Claire Launay: I just want to say that we are in dire straits. Two million files are waiting to be processed in a country that has fewer than 40 million inhabitants. That's really embarrassing. I see it as an opportunity for you to look at our problems and find solutions. I encourage you to be creative and to think outside the box to solve the problems.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you very much, Ms. Launay.

[English]

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

We will now proceed to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, you will have six minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I want to carry on with Ms. Launay with the question.

On the issue around backlog, it is significant. It's pretty well in every single stream, although the government says they've put in resources and starting from this date they'll now abide by processing standards.

For the people who have been in the backlog who are not applying after the date, what do you think the government should do? Should we ignore those people and let them wait and wait? At some point in time, I suppose their application would be processed.

Ms. Claire Launay: No. I think we should absolutely prioritize files that have been the longest in the backlog. These people have chosen Canada for a reason, and we definitely need them. We need to address those files first.

We were talking about absurdities earlier, and that's one of them. If you have to submit your file several times over to have a chance, to almost get picked up by the lottery of the backlog, that's not a system that works. Absolutely, pick the files that have been there the longest.

Also, I think we need a framework to determine Canada's responsibility. Once the standards of processing have been surpassed, let's say 12 or 18 months after processing, maybe we lift some criteria.

We need to decide what Canada can do for those people, because they've been waiting. Sometimes people have put their lives on hold with their immigration process. We can't let them just stay in the dark like we do right now.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

I think you just answered my next question; that is to say, for people who are stuck in the system year after year after year, at some point in time a decision has to be made. With regard to your point then, I guess, the government needs to expedite the application or even waive the requirements. Short of criminality issues, for example, they should actually get their application processed.

Is that the kind of thing that you're talking about?

Ms. Claire Launay: Yes, for sure.

I mean, I'm not going to decide what criteria should be lifted, but I think this is something that we should definitely be looking at.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

I want to turn to this question around migrant workers. Ms. Foster raised the issue around the need for the tourism sector. Canada also has over half a million people who are already here, and these are individuals whose work permits have expired. Much of it has to do with the COVID period. Some of them are actually from the restaurant sector and from the tourism sector.

Should the government be regularizing those individuals and giving them the opportunity to fill these openings and labour skill shortages in Canada?

Ms. Foster.

Ms. Adrienne Foster: I think the biggest focus for our industry, really, is to ensure that.... Tourism does, right now, have a real opportunity to recover and thrive, but we do need people. We're in the people business; we need people for that.

We want a system that really responds to high-demand occupations and sectors with growth potential, so your point about some of these migrant workers who are already in the country is an excellent one. We fully support creating a path to permanent residency for existing temporary foreign workers. They've already established relationships with their employers. They have networks in Canada, and they have a proven track record of being excellent community members and economic contributors, so I one hundred per cent support this idea of a path to permanent residency.

• (1720)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: That means regularizing them now because some of their work permits have actually expired because of COVID. During the COVID period, they actually lost their jobs because the restaurants and hotels didn't have tourists. Those individuals are here without status, so we should regularize them—just so that I'm clear in understanding your answer to that.

Ms. Adrienne Foster: Yes.

One of our recommendations is to open up permanent residency for people who have work experience here. Short of any issues and if the work permits just expired, I think they would be excellent candidates for long-term immigration.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much for that clarification.

With regard to another area, the impact of processing delays, we heard that there are discriminatory practices in certain countries and certain regions. For example, for Quebec, for francophone African applicants, oftentimes they actually get rejected.

Ms. Launay, in your experience through your work, do you have specific regions that you're concerned about with regard to processing delays?

Ms. Claire Launay: Yes.

Western Africa in general has seen worrying levels of rejections. I think IRCC has the numbers, but between 70% to above 80% are

rejections, specifically for study permit applications. Obviously, because these are francophone countries, most of the students were bound to go to Quebec.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: To address that issue and these specific regional issues—although I could name other countries, too—what is your recommendation for the government to address that situation, specifically for Quebec?

Ms. Claire Launay: I think it all comes to allocation of resources. Again, we don't have enough visa offices and processing centres—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, but the time is up for Ms. Kwan.

We will now proceed to Mr. Redekopp.

Oh, it's Mr. Hallan.

Mr. Hallan, you will have four minutes.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My first question is for Ms. Launay.

First of all, thank you for all that you do, and the advocacy with the limited resources as my friend, Alexis, mentioned.

We were talking about systemic challenges. We saw over the summer a number of conferences and events. We saw the negative effect that these Liberal-made immigration backlogs had on some of those conferences, like the one in Toronto where visas weren't approved. There were African elite runners who were to run the Ottawa marathon who didn't make it here, as well as a Nigerian pop star. Even at the AIDS conference in Montreal we saw these images of empty stages that were all due to backlogs that were created by the government. In most cases, these were applications from racialized people. In some cases, they were applied for months in advance, but because of the bureaucratic mess, they weren't able to come here.

You spoke of having faster processing, but fair processing. What kinds of changes do you think need to be made? Can you highlight some of the damage that has been done on the world stage when you see these conferences where racialized applicants are the ones being rejected?

Ms. Claire Launay: When it comes to visas, we get to the root of how immigration works in Canada, because not everybody needs a visa to get here. The nature of who needs a visa and who doesn't is bigger than I think what we're tackling today, and it affects disproportionately people of colour.

When it comes to the impact it has, it has been interesting for us to see it just in our own networks. We're very active on social media, and we post about all sorts of issues. You talked about the Nigerian pop star who was supposed to come to Festival International Nuits d'Afrique in Montreal. When we posted about that, our page exploded. People noticed that abroad.

That's one point I want to get across today. People are watching. Canada is an immigration destination for many people, and they see very well what's happening. When they see one of the biggest African pop stars being denied a visa, or experts on AIDS not being able to get to their conference, it sends a message that Canada is not a welcoming place for immigrants and experts. I think it runs contrary to what Canada is trying to do. Let's just put it that way.

• (1725)

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: My next question is for Ms. Foster.

We've seen major labour shortages that are affecting the tourism industry. We have also seen a number of very divisive and unscientific policies by the government, for example, the ArriveCAN app.

Can you give some more examples of red tape or bureaucracy that's getting in the way of the tourism industry being able to either survive or thrive?

Ms. Adrienne Foster: We were very happy to see those restrictions lifted. It's going to go a really long way for our industry to have a strong fall. That's generally a bit of a quieter season, so being able to have business events and international visitation come through is really important. International visitation to Canada is down 43%, so anything we can do to help that is very welcome.

Really, the biggest red tape that our members are facing right now is with the temporary foreign worker program. With the labour shortages, we have general managers who are taking on other tasks. They are doing food and beverage or front desk, and they simply don't have the time—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, but the time is up for Mr. Hallan.

We will now go to Ms. Kayabaga for four minutes.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair, and a quick thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Launay, the family reunification category makes up almost 16% of Quebec's immigration plan for 2022, whereas the same category represents 24% of immigration levels in the rest of Canada.

Do you believe that this difference will have an impact on waiting times that Quebec families are undergoing in order to be united with their loved ones?

Ms. Claire Launay: I would rather not hazard an opinion.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Why not?

Ms. Claire Launay: I don't have the answer.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Do you believe that the family reunification category should represent a bigger proportion of annual immigration Levels? You have spoken about the issue here.

Ms. Claire Launay: Those levels are set by Quebec.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Precisely. Do you believe that the family reunification category, of which you have spoken freely today, which is a very good thing, should take up a bigger chunk of immigration levels for Quebec?

Ms. Claire Launay: If it allows us to improve processing times, yes.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Were you aware that we went over and above the annual levels set by Quebec last year?

Ms. Claire Launay: Is that due to the efforts to catch up for the year 2020? I know that Quebec had increased its cap to 70,000 immigrants.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: You know therefore that Quebec sets a cap and we nonetheless went over that cap last year.

Ms. Claire Launay: Well, that's good.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Were you aware of this?

Ms. Claire Launay: I am now.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Okay.

[*English*]

I'll go to Ms. Foster.

In budget 2022, the federal government committed \$385 million to increase processing capacity for various immigration streams, including the worker stream. Could you comment on what changes you're expecting to see in your industry with regard to this commitment?

Ms. Adrienne Foster: Sure.

We were really happy to see some movement in the right direction in the last budget. Specifically, there was a commitment to increase the cap for TFWs for hotels from 10% to 30%, which was a fantastic thing to see. Again, additional resources for processing are always helpful.

At the end of the day, we're really looking at whatever we can do to amend this system to really allow some sectors that have really high growth potential to fill some of those high-demand occupations. Any additional funding and resources absolutely would be a step in the right direction.

• (1730)

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Thank you.

To address the wait times and processing delays, IRCC has also introduced various measures, such as exempting permanent and temporary residence applicants who are already in Canada from the immigration medical examination requirements, which will help about 180,000 people to save time and money. What's the impact for your industry with regard to this?

Ms. Adrienne Foster: Obviously, it's a positive impact. I would suggest that we could go a step further, especially in the tourism sector, by lifting requirements for things like LMIA's and job postings. Our sector has such a major shortage that the LMIA process and job posting process are—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting.

Your time is up, Ms. Kayabaga.

We will now proceed to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for 90 seconds, and then we will end with Ms. Kwan for 90 seconds.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: We don't have a lot of time, Ms. Launay.

You represent an association that, amongst other things, promotes the rights of immigrants and refugees. Currently, people have to use the Roxham Road entry point rather than going to the border crossing, as people did before the Safe Third Country Agreement came into effect. Traffickers are exploiting these people and are lining their pockets. I would like to know what you think about this.

Do you think that the Bloc Québécois' and the NDP's suggestion to suspend the Safe Third Country Agreement, which is within the government's power, should be applied in order to protect these people? Yes or no?

Ms. Claire Launay: Rather than talking about Roxham Road, we should actually be discussing the Safe Third Country Agreement. We have to review the agreement that forces people to go to unofficial crossing points in order to enter into Canada. We think that the agreement should be reviewed or cancelled.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Do you believe that this would also solve the problem of criminals who are lining their pockets by exploiting migrants?

Ms. Claire Launay: It would indeed be harder for them to do business if migrants could enter the country at official border crossings.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I'm happy to hear you say that the Bloc Québécois and the NDP are right.

Thank you very much, Ms. Launay.

[*English*]

The Chair: You have 15 seconds.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Do you have something to add, Ms. Launay?

Ms. Claire Launay: I did not get the chance to say it earlier, but I think that it would be possible to use part of the budget to eliminate the backlog as a one-time measure before making systemic changes.

[*English*]

The Chair: Your time is up.

We will now end our panel with Ms. Kwan, who has 90 seconds.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

Speaking of IRCC backlogs and exceptional situations, there are situations in which individuals send in their applications and have missed a signature or missed a document and IRCC sends the whole thing back. They then have to restart the whole process all over again. Does that make sense to you? Or should the government actually do a better job of reaching the applicants, fixing the missing document or that situation and then continue to process the application?

Ms. Claire Launay: I think that's a perfect example of the dysfunctional system that is IRCC. Maybe it worked when the volume of applications was lower, but now with the volume we have, that kind of back-and-forth takes so much time.

Yes, that does contribute to the backlog. That creates more time, more trouble and more precarity for people, who then, let's say, see their current status expire. That's why IRCC needs to take a look at its own practices and revise them. I don't think that's an impossible task.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Yes.

I have a situation where people have postgrad work permits actually hanging in the balance and, because of that situation, they have been waiting for over a year to get their permit renewed. In the meantime, they have zero income and are on the verge of homelessness. Of course, with having to make a new application, IRCC has to go through the entire process right from the beginning. I think none of that makes sense. Would you say to the government that they should stop with this nonsense and actually get on with doing an appropriate job?

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Ms. Kwan. Your time is up.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Just a yes or a no....

Ms. Claire Launay: I would give it a bit more nuance, but generally, yes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: You're more diplomatic than I am.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Thank you.

With that, our second panel comes to an end.

On behalf of all the members of this committee, I want to thank all three witnesses for taking the time to provide important testimony for this study. If you think you need to bring any further issues to the notice of all the members, you can always send a written submission and we will take it into consideration as we come to the consideration of the draft report.

With that, I would like to thank you again.

For the information of all members, there is no meeting this Friday. We will be meeting this coming Tuesday.

Thank you. The meeting is adjourned.

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