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Chair: Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal



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• (1425)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order. Welcome to meeting number 13 of the House of Commons Special Committee on Afghanistan, created pursuant to the order of the House of December 8, 2021.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of November 25, 2021.

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

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

Witnesses should be aware that interpretation is available through the globe icon at the bottom of your screen. Could you please take a moment to select the channel of your choice, either the floor, English or French, so that as members ask questions, time is not taken to fix that issue. I hope we are good with this.

I would like to welcome our witnesses here with us for this panel, and thank you all for coming on short notice.

I see there are four independent witnesses. They will have five minutes each for remarks, and please do respect the time. We are very short timewise because it's Friday, and many of the members have noted that they have constituency work lined up at their door, so we want to make sure that we are able to get the maximum output out of this.

First, we'll have five minutes for each of the witnesses, and then we'll go with one round of six minutes each. Please, members, also respect the time as well.

With us as individuals we have former interpreters with the Canadian Armed Forces, Masood Matin Hotak and Mohammed Zarif Mayar. Here supporting Mr. Hotak and Mr. Mayar is Tara Sawchuk. Thank you for coming.

Also with us today from Landings LLP is Warda Shazadi Meighen, partner, and from the Rainbow Railroad, Dr. Kimahli Powell, executive director.

You have five minutes each, so let me start with the former interpreter, Masood Matin Hotak.

Please go ahead.

Mr. Hotak, are you there?

Can everyone hear me? We're waiting for Mr. Hotak.

Let me move on then. If he's not responding, we will go to Mr. Mohammed Zarif Mayar.

Please go ahead for five minutes.

Mr. Mohammed Zarif Mayar (Former Interpreter, Canadian Armed Forces, As an Individual): Good afternoon to all of you.

Everybody is aware of the situation and of what's going on right now in Afghanistan. There are a lot of people left behind right now. They are seeking a safe way to get out of there. Day by day, their extraction is being tightened by the Taliban and life is getting very tough for those people, especially those who worked with the coalition forces and NGOs.

I don't know. Hopefully, the government will hear this. The government is aware of the situation right now and what's happening. They know better than everybody else.

I'm in contact with a lot of people. They are calling me and sending me emails of their documents and stuff. They just want to get out of there, but nobody is hearing that right now.

I don't know. The Canadian government did this just for... Sorry to say this, but was it just for elections? They took 12,000 people out of Afghanistan. Was it just for the elections, or what? What about the rest of the people who have been waiting at least a year now?

The Afghan government collapsed on August 16. There are a lot of interpreters. Their families and their kids are waiting on a list. There's no hope left for them. They just want a way out, and they want somebody to hear them.

The Chair: Mr. Mayar, are you done?

Mr. Mohammed Zarif Mayar: Yes, I'm done.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Mayar.

We'll move to Ms. Meighen.

Go ahead for five minutes, please.

Ms. Warda Meighen (Partner, Landings LLP): Thank you, Mr. Chair and honourable committee members, for the invitation to speak with you today on Afghanistan. I am an immigration and refugee law partner at Landings LLP, a law firm in Toronto.

Last July, before the fall of Kabul, I began receiving desperate messages about individuals needing urgent assistance. To respond to this demand, Landings partnered with a Canadian national firm on a pro bono basis. We filed approximately 400 individuals under the special immigration program. In August I began working with a judicial organization to troubleshoot the processing of resettlement for female judges and their family members. I now belong to a task force that meets regularly to discern next steps for these individuals as the situation evolves.

Officials are working extremely hard. There's also no lack of political will in terms of the Canadians and what they want to see happen in Afghanistan, but nine months later issues continue to linger. Afghanistan poses some structural challenges—all refugee situations do—but some solutions are outside of our control. Others are in our control. I make four recommendations to you today centred on factors that are within our control.

Number one, we need a standing interdepartmental cabinet committee that reports to Parliament and that harnesses both institutional memory of what we do in refugee situations and a proactive emergency framework. We have to be prepared before the moment requires it. This committee would be crucial in terms of bringing together all the key decision-makers at a moment's notice. We know that situations in Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan and Ukraine are occurring and that refugee situations are not going to disappear. This standing committee would allow us to respond in a more timely fashion.

Number two is a recommendation to explore more aggressively flexible non-refugee streams to get individuals outside of Afghanistan where refugee options are not feasible. This would include things like study permits, work permits and authorization for emergency travel.

Number three—and I know the committee has heard this before—is widespread prima facie refugee designations for at-risk Afghans. It is crucial that we not waste invaluable time with redundant exercises, but instead have the officers focus on inadmissibility and security. Those are key considerations. We already know that at-risk Afghans are refugees. We don't need a partner organization that has different mandates to tell us that. The fall of Kabul really showed us why we cannot rely primarily on partner organizations for this designation. We know that the government has recently permitted the waiver of UNHCR designation for a number of select Afghans through the private resettlement stream. We need to do this in a more widespread manner.

Finally, we need a more reasoned approach to security with respect to both biometrics and our concerns regarding Criminal Code terrorism provisions. That doesn't presuppose a zero level of risk. No government action is zero risk. We have to manage the risk.

Mr. Chair, I look forward to your questions. Thank you for this opportunity.

• (1430)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Meighen. That was well under time.

Mr. Powell, please go ahead. You have five minutes.

Dr. Kimahli Powell (Executive Director, Rainbow Railroad): Mr. Chair and honourable committee members, thank you for the invitation to speak. My name is Kimahli Powell, and I am the executive director of Rainbow Railroad, an international organization based in Canada and the United States that supports LGBTQI+ people facing persecution based on their sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics.

I am pleased to be invited to speak today, given the urgent nature of our work in crisis in Afghanistan as well as other parts of the world and given that this is the last of the committee meetings. I personally went to Ottawa to deliver my remarks only to have it cancelled, so I really appreciate having this opportunity, because this really is a life-and-death situation. I would also like to concur with my colleague Ms. Meighen on her four recommendations.

Rainbow Railroad provides direct support to individuals in need and partners with organizations and human rights defenders worldwide. We facilitate emergency evacuations for individuals facing persecution and violence. To date we have helped nearly 1,200 people resettle in countries all around the world, but that is not enough in terms of the need. This year alone we anticipate 10,000 requests for help, many of them in Afghanistan.

Part of what causes displacement for our communities is that in 70 countries around the world, LGBTQI+ persons are criminalized by laws that criminalize same-sex intimacy. Afghanistan is one of those countries.

On August 13 the government announced “a special program to focus on particularly vulnerable groups that are already welcomed to Canada through existing resettlement streams, including women leaders, human rights defenders, journalists, persecuted religious minorities [and] LGBTI individuals”. After that statement, requests for help from LGBTQI+ Afghans spiked dramatically. Understanding that statement to mean that Canada would evacuate LGBTQI+ persons, over 4,500 Afghans have reached out to us for urgent assistance. Because we are a leader in evacuating this population and have worked with the Canadian government before, many assumed that we would be working with the government to refer individuals for resettlement. That has not happened, despite our demonstrated expertise and international presence.

We worked with OutRight Action International and Human Rights Watch, two partners of the Canadian government, to detail a report describing the persecution that this community faces, including beatings, surveillance, having their identity documents burned, having their families threatened, and being imprisoned over their identities. I went to the region twice and witnessed first-hand the trauma faced by those who managed to flee. We were among the first NGOs to facilitate safe passage out of Afghanistan in a partnership that brought LGBTQI+ Afghans to the United Kingdom. We also facilitated the creation of emergency safe houses in neighbouring countries—countries that, it should be noted, also criminalize same-sex intimacy.

I will put my remarks in short. Too many Afghans remain at risk and need resettlement. LGBTQI+ Afghans need a direct safe way out, and Canada must provide it. Globally we have seen a rise in geopolitical crises. The situation in Ukraine demonstrates that, when needed, Canada has the tools available to help people at risk. A similar program in Ukraine could directly benefit Afghans right now. We actually have a direct referral partnership with the United States that would result in 200 LGBTQI+ Afghans resettling in Canada. As a Canadian organization, we believe there's an opportunity to partner directly with the Canadian government to provide a pathway to safety for these individuals.

It is in that spirit that I want to conclude with two crucial policies that would make an immediate difference in the lives of thousands of LGBTQI+ Afghans.

First, I encourage the committee to urge the Minister of Immigration and Refugee Protection Act to create a public policy to urgently resettle at least 300 pre-identified LGBTQI+ Afghans as government-assisted refugees. There are at least 300 ready-to-travel Afghans in our queue who are ready and in need of help.

Second, I ask the committee to urge the Government of Canada to make Rainbow Railroad a direct referring partner to allow us to pursue targeted responses for the most vulnerable cases of LGBTQI+ persons of Afghanistan, Ukraine and beyond for resettlement. This was recently asked of the minister in this committee, and that is what I am calling for today. Partner with civil society organizations that have expertise to help Afghans resettle in Canada.

Right now there are too many people waiting. With this committee's support, we could bring more people to Canada.

Thank you.

• (1435)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Powell. You were right on the clock.

We will now have one round of questions, beginning with Mr. Hallan.

Mr. Hallan, please go ahead. You have six minutes.

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

I want to thank all the witnesses for your patience in having to wait another week or a few days to come here.

My first question is for Mr. Mayar.

Mr. Mayar, you must have been dealing with a lot of interpreters and their family members even before Kabul fell. Can you give us some information on your experience with the people you were dealing with? How was the communication with IRCC before Kabul fell?

Mr. Mohammed Zarif Mayar: Regarding your question, I'm still in touch with the people and they are sending me emails. Before Kabul fell, before August 15 and 16, IRCC was working pretty good. They were checking documents and stuff. I was in touch. I was working with a group, an organization called Aman Lara, so I was working very closely with them. There were a lot of people coming and we were trying to get them safe passage to Kabul from Kandahar and Helmand and from other provinces.

• (1440)

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: What's different now since Kabul fell? Do you see a difference in communication?

Mr. Mohammed Zarif Mayar: Yes, there's a big difference right now. Everybody's complaining right now, and they are not even looking at... They are saying "We are stuck now and we're not receiving any response from IRCC". There should be somebody hearing this, and they have to do something for the people. And it's not just about the interpreters: It's their families, their kids, but it's especially the women. Right now, they don't have rights. Everybody can see that.

You guys can see the news. Everybody knows that women are just...the circle is getting tighter for women. Every day, there's a new issue for women.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: I agree with you. We've heard a lot of testimony, and the people I've been talking to either are left on reply, auto-reply, or there's been no response from IRCC whatsoever. Have you or has anyone you know been in touch with IRCC to bring your cases forward? If you have, what was communicated?

Mr. Mohammed Zarif Mayar: People are sending emails and their documents. They have a specific Google form to fill out. After that, you will receive a confirmation email saying that "We got your email and we will reply to you soon". That's it. But they are not replying.

They are not receiving any emails back. They are still on hold. People are still on hold.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Definitely.

I'm just changing gears here.

Mr. Powell, your organization recently released a statement about those 300 LGBTQ Afghans you spoke about, and your organization is quoted as saying that they're "ready for imminent travel and resettlement in a safer country. But they're stuck and waiting for a way out."

In one of the recommendations you just made about resettling them, you said that it should come under the government-assisted refugees program. To the best of your knowledge, for any of those applications or any previous to this situation, has any one of them been resettled through the government-assisted program or any other special immigration measures?

Dr. Kimahli Powell: No. The individuals I am referring to are still stuck in neighbouring countries. They've managed to make it outside of Afghanistan, but we're imploring the government to allow us to refer them for resettlement.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: What do you see are some of the roadblocks?

Dr. Kimahli Powell: It's not clear to us where the commitment to the vulnerable population stream begins and ends. That's what we've been asking for clarity on, and when the cap of that population ends.

In particular, as a population mentioned specifically, I believe that there should be a commitment to track and identify how many of those persons we'll be able to resettle. Now of course that's difficult because of privacy issues, which is why referral is an important part of our ask.

The Chair: You have one minute left.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: I cede my time to Mr. Ruff.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Thanks, Chair.

First off, my thanks to all the witnesses, especially to the former interpreters. Having spent time—two tours—in Afghanistan, I couldn't have done my job, and none of the Canadian Armed Forces could have done their jobs, without you.

Chair, I have a motion to move, but I do suggest that we push off any discussion of it till after the first round, if you'll commit to that. The motion has now been sent by the clerk to everybody, but I'll read it quickly into the record:

That the Privy Council Office, Global Affairs Canada, and the Canadian Armed Forces and any other government department provide the Special Committee on Afghanistan the already completed or draft after action review reports with respect to the evacuation of Kabul in August of 2021 from the respective departments to the Afghanistan committee for inclusion in the report due back to the House by the 8th of June, 2022.

Thanks, Chair. Will you agree to that?

The Chair: Yes, I do agree, Mr. Ruff, and we'll definitely be discussing that at the end.

We will now proceed to the honourable member Mr. El-Khoury for six minutes.

Please, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

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

I welcome the witnesses.

We appreciate you joining us.

My first question is for Mr. Powell.

Mr. Powell, in your report, you often bring up the strengthening of the partnership between Rainbow Railroad and the government in Afghanistan, and elsewhere.

Can you tell us about the terms and conditions of this partnership and what you have in mind more specifically to help us improve it?

• (1445)

[*English*]

Dr. Kimahli Powell: Absolutely. Thank you for the question. I'd love to respond to you in French, but then I think my address would be too long, so I'll speak in English.

There are two specific ways we work with the government.

First, there's a rainbow refugee assistance partnership, which the government has often mentioned. That allows community partners across the country to identify people for private sponsorship into the country. It's a good model. It's a model for the world. I actually sat with the minister in a meeting yesterday in New York to describe the benefits of that program.

As well, and to the point that I'm about to address, we've worked with the government on public policies in the past to identify people at risk in various circumstances, and to allow them to use ministerial authority to get into the country. That is why we're specifically mentioning the use of section 25. There's ample precedent for this, and this is a really easy win for the government to help a vulnerable population that they have identified as being of concern.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: Can you tell us a bit more about the well-being of LGBTQ community members during the period from 2001 to 2021?

What do you think what will happen to them now that the Canadian special forces withdrew from Afghanistan in 2021?

What kind of a situation are those people in right now?

[*English*]

Dr. Kimahli Powell: I'll go even a step further. From 1996 to 2001 when the Taliban had control, we saw already that under sharia law LGBTQ+ persons often faced severe attacks by the Taliban. During the period of the conflict, there was an easing of those direct persecution acts and there was a small civil society that was able to function.

Again, in the report that we participated in with OutRight Action International and Human Rights Watch, many people reported an easing and the ability to live quietly, still in a country that criminalizes same-sex intimacy, but without being actively targeted.

Immediately after the takeover by the Taliban, there was sharp shift. The sense of pervasive lawlessness that presided in Afghanistan has meant that individuals were subject to raids, and if you were not dressed in traditional Afghan wear, you were often targeted further. Anyone who was perceived to be a member of the community was subject to beatings. Usually they would be targeted through beatings and then told that the attackers would return to harm them further. That's when most people fled. People were being turned over by family members, community members and former sexual partners. There was a really pervasive sense of violence towards the community.

[Translation]

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: Ms. Meighen, would you say that the humanitarian component created in 2021 to help vulnerable individuals has reached its objectives? Should the program have been expanded to enable it to reach its objectives, despite the limited flexibility of the forces on site?

[English]

Ms. Warda Meighen: I would suggest that there has certainly been room for streamlining. Officials have worked very hard, and a number of people have arrived, of course. We see those numbers. Absolutely, we should continue those programs. I understand that currently the 2,000 or so spots left in the special immigration measures are spoken for. That program should continue because individuals who have a connection to Canada are still not processed, and we can continue these programs to allow for them to also come through.

In terms of whether the programs have achieved their purpose, I think it's a continuing purpose, and as long as we have individuals who still require safety and who fit within the mandate of the programs we have set out, we should continue the programs.

• (1450)

[Translation]

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: Ms. Meighen, you know that women in Afghanistan are living in terrible conditions.

Can you tell us more about the plight of women in Afghanistan during the period from 2001 to 2021?

What can be done to help the girls and women who have been stuck over there since last fall?

As a lawyer and a consultant, what do you think about the role Canada has played to help the people of Afghanistan compared with other countries around the world?

[English]

The Chair: Be very brief, please. Time is almost up.

Ms. Warda Meighen: We can create a special program, much like the one Mr. Powell is mentioning, under section 25.2 to allow at-risk women and children to come through on special measures if the mandate under the humanitarian program hasn't been able to do that because of the different obstacles that have been outlined in front of this committee.

We can also prioritize using biometric facilities for this demographic where they've been offered to us by the allies.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. El-Khoury.

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

Please go ahead.

[Translation]

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

I thank all the witnesses for joining us today for this important study.

Your backgrounds are different, but your expertise will help us produce this report and make our recommendations.

Ms. Meighen, you are an immigration lawyer. We are increasingly noting, following the Afghan, Ukrainian and Syrian crises, and even following certain crises like the one in Haiti, involving natural disasters, that the IRCC's response is always very slow. So some people are wondering whether we should implement an emergency mechanism at the IRCC, with various criteria that could apply differently depending on the context of a crisis that may occur tomorrow morning, in two years or in seven years.

Would you be in favour of the IRCC implementing that kind of a mechanism to respond much faster to future crises?

[English]

Ms. Warda Meighen: Thank you for the question.

Absolutely, we should have a standing body that has the authority from the central government to respond very rapidly.

One of the challenges we found in this crisis and a number of the other ones you mentioned is that IRCC also has to rely on its partners within Global Affairs and within Public Safety, so it's really an interdepartmental effort, which is why I proposed the standing cabinet committee so that every minister who is needed to make a very quick political decision is at the table. This committee should also have working groups with experts, regional experts, immigration experts and national security experts who can advise on a moment's notice on any tricky issue so there isn't that coordination issue that we've seen in the past.

This committee should also be given earmarked resources so that it's not straining IRCC officers and staff, on whom there are already currently many demands. It should have separate staff and it should have separate resources that are earmarked.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: It would be sort of a reserve force.

I know that border services officers have immigration training and can use biometrics. Those people could be used to reduce the backlog in the work of IRCC employees and help them do their job normally.

Isn't what you are suggesting some sort of an immigration reserve force?

[English]

Ms. Warda Meighen: I'm proposing a body that would exist within Canada and have all of the key decision-makers needed to put forward any decision on a refugee crisis.

With respect to the biometrics piece, I think it will depend on which country we're looking at. With Afghanistan specifically, you're right that there are Veterans Affairs, CSIS and CBSA. Other parties have offered biometric capabilities that we can leverage. We also want to explore this with our foreign allies within Afghanistan to see if we can leverage their biometric capabilities as well. That should be a standing approach that is embedded within this body that I'm referring to.

• (1455)

[Translation]

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

Mr. Mayar, I heard you speak earlier. You seem to be really upset about this, which is understandable in the current context. The Canadian government told interpreters that it could bring over their family members quickly.

In light of what has been done in concrete terms and the outcome, do you feel that you were ultimately lied to?

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Mayar.

Mr. Mohammed Zarif Mayar: I didn't get the question. It's not clear to me. Could you repeat that question, please?

The Chair: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, please go ahead again. I'll stop the watch.

[Translation]

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

The Canadian government told interpreters that it could bring over their family members quickly. In light of what has been done in concrete terms, do you feel that you were deceived, that you were lied to?

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Mayar.

Mr. Mohammed Zarif Mayar: Thanks for your question, first of all.

Regarding your question, the Canadian government did something for the people, as I said before. I don't know if it was a political thing or what. They brought just 12,000—they have the numbers. They'd know better than I. They have the numbers. It was 12,500 people from Afghanistan, new refugees, but there should be, since the Prime Minister said we will be looking for people coming from Afghanistan to Canada, almost 40,000, so there are a lot of people remaining right now.

With regard to me, I wasn't able to get to the airport with the chaos, so I stayed over there. I was hiding from the Taliban for at least 40 days and after that there was an organization called Aman

Lara that called me, and I went to Islamabad. From there I came to Canada.

The process was very long, and right now there are a lot of families—I don't know the numbers but there are a lot of people still on hold and still waiting.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe. I'm sorry but time is up.

Mr. Hotak, could you please follow the instructions on your screen and accept it?

Now we'll go to Madam Kwan for six minutes.

Please go ahead, Madam Kwan.

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for their presentations.

I had to give a speech in the House, so I missed the presentations, but I think I heard, as I was coming in, Ms. Meighen commenting that there should be a special sort of operation within government to continue the operation of bringing Afghans to safety. To that end, I wonder if you can comment on this. Do you think the government should request that the Department of National Defence lead a mission to help bring more Afghans to safety and to work in collaboration with allied countries to address the biometrics issues and other issues in an effort to bring more Afghans to safety?

• (1500)

Ms. Warda Meighen: We would very much welcome that. Yes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

In the instance where biometrics could not be obtained for obvious reasons.... The government is saying that people have to go to the Taliban office to get a passport. You can imagine what that will be like. There will absolutely be a bull's eye put on them. They will not be able to get those passports, and without those passports, they cannot get to a third country. Without getting to a third country, they cannot get to safety.

From that perspective, if we've exhausted all of these options, given that people's lives hang in the balance, should the government then waive the biometrics and other documentation requirements until the Afghans are safely here in Canada? Once they're safe on Canadian soil, we can then go through the process and do all of that work.

Ms. Warda Meighen: Yes. I think that's something we've done in other contexts. We've done that in the context of Kosovo, for example, with onshore processing. Absolutely we should look at that if biometrics in Afghanistan is just not working.

To the extent that we have inadmissible individuals who are found on Canadian soil, we have the provisions in our immigration regime to deal with that. We shouldn't look at that as a failure of the system. It's actually the system working. We have mechanisms in the immigration regime to take care of inadmissible persons when they're found within the biometrics process, I'm sure.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

Dr. Powell, right now the referral agencies that the government is accepting for Afghans are very limited. Why do you think it is important for the minister to expand the referral organizations for resettlement to other qualified and established civil society organizations that are connected to vulnerable refugees such as members from the LGBTQ2+ communities?

Dr. Kimahli Powell: Thank you for the question.

You know, as I said in my remarks, the government clearly identified vulnerable populations. For the LGBTQI+ community, there are specific vulnerabilities and barriers to adequately identifying those persons. There was a clear expectation set on August 13 when those vulnerable populations were announced. We have a rare ability, having demonstrated expertise in evacuating persons, to provide assistance to fulfill the government's promise to resettle those persons. A referring partnership is the tool to allow us to do that.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: You are also calling on the government to immediately resettle 300 at-risk LGBTQ2+ Afghan refugees. Should the government do this as a special immigration measure in addition to the 40,000 Afghan refugees they have already announced as their measure?

The reason I ask this is that those numbers are actually filling up really fast now, and there aren't that many spots left. I fear that people will be left behind.

Dr. Kimahli Powell: This is a specific ask in addition to the 40,000 committed, because at this stage we do not know if they're going to meet that target. So the answer is yes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

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

This concludes our panel today. I want to thank the witnesses for being here on short notice.

We will now turn to committee business.

Mr. Ruff, you have a motion on the floor right now.

• (1505)

Mr. Alex Ruff: Yes. Thanks, Chair.

Everybody should have received the motion in both official languages. The clerk did clarify that, even before today's meeting, we're still waiting on the majority of these reports that we already asked witnesses to provide during previous testimony. I think it's pretty straightforward, but considering that the government has already conducted these reviews, it would make the job of the analysts a lot easier, especially on part one of our report back, if we got that information.

I think the rest speaks for itself.

The Chair: Okay.

Go ahead, Madam Damoff, and then Mr. Baker.

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

I wish we had taken more time, quite honestly, to hear from our witnesses, rather than doing this. We've just spent time doing committee drafting. Our analysts are about to start writing a report. We've given the analysts instructions. I won't go into what those instructions were because that was all done in camera, obviously.

We need to be cognizant of time. We need to be cognizant of this being a motion on when we report back to the House. I think it is inappropriate to be bringing forward a motion like this now, which could potentially delay the analysts' work. We have probably two or three, or however many we have, of the best analysts in Parliament at this committee. They are doing incredible work, trying to siphon through a huge amount of information.

I'm not quite sure why the honourable member, for whom I have a great deal of respect, feels that we need to pass this motion at this time.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Damoff.

Now we will go to Mr. Baker and then Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, and then we will go to Mr. El-Khoury.

Mr. Baker, go ahead.

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

I'm trying to process this a bit and understand better why Mr. Ruff has brought this particular motion forward.

I will ask him if he can explain it a little bit to me. It's maybe just a technical word or something I haven't encountered, but as I read the motion, he says that we "provide the Special Committee on Afghanistan the already completed or draft after action review reports with the respect to the evacuation of Kabul in August 2021..".

I'm wondering, what is an after-action review report? What is the scope of that? What sorts of information does that typically include? I'm not clear about what that is.

That's my first question. I need a bit of clarification about what the motion is actually asking for before I could proceed.

With regard to the second....

Do you mind, Chair, or do you want me to keep going?

The Chair: Keep going. You have the floor.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Okay, so that's the first point. If Mr. Ruff would clarify that, I would appreciate it.

The second thing is a question for Mr. Ruff as well. I am trying to envisage what an "after-action review" report is and how it would fit into our study. Obviously, I can't go into the discussion that we had earlier in confidence, in camera, but I would ask for his rationale for asking for this and how it would fit in with what we're trying to accomplish at committee.

I thought that our focus in this committee was about trying to understand how we move forward, and it sounds a little bit like this is about looking back to what happened before August 2021. I'm not clear on how that's relevant.

The first question is: what's the scope of this? I am not clear on that. The second one is: how does it help us achieve our goal as a committee? That would be question two. I am perhaps asking Mr. Ruff if he could clarify that.

I'll keep going, Chair, and then I'll let you decide the order of speaking and stuff.

Those are my questions for Mr. Ruff. Then I want to echo a little bit of what Ms. Damoff said during her intervention a moment ago. In her intervention, Ms. Damoff spoke to the timing of witnesses being brought forward. Assuming we can get our heads around what it is that we mean by these after-action reports and, secondly, how they're relevant, I agree with Ms. Damoff that bringing it forward now, when we have very a limited number of meetings left—I think it's two—and a deadline to meet....

I guess I'm trying to figure out why, if these things are important to the writing of the report, this motion wasn't brought forward a little sooner. That would have allowed the committee to consider this, hear from witnesses and cross-reference whatever information these reports would have with what we're hearing from witness testimony and ensure that the analysts can incorporate these properly. I don't know how these would help us constructively advance the report if they're being requested at this particular juncture when we are in the process of getting this report done by the committee's required deadline.

Those are the three questions I have, and I am hopeful that Mr. Ruff could help answer those for me.

● (1510)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Baker.

We have a speaking list; Mr. El-Khoury, then Madam Kwan, and then Mr. Tony Van Bynen.

Mr. El-Khoury, go ahead, please. You have the floor.

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I believe we have only 19 working days left for Parliament to do its work. The most important thing is to finish the report, a report on the very important humanitarian suffering of a country. If we're going to go with the motion and start to delay and to eat time, it might jeopardize our effort to finish the report in proper time.

In reality, we don't want to put a horse in this race. Our horse now should go in order to complete the report, and I hope I won't be obliged to continue to speak and to take my proper time to show the difference between having those documents and describing in detail the situation in Afghanistan and how important it is for this community to finish the report within a proper time.

I would like to hear also from our colleague, Mr. Ruff. What can he say about this?

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. El-Khoury.

We'll go to Madam Kwan, and then to Mr. Tony Van Bynen.

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

I'll be very quick. With respect to the request for these reports, it should be noted that officials presented at the committee to say that

these reports have been completed, so they are available. All they have to do, really, is just make them available to the committee.

As well, I would point out that the committee members have made a number of undertakings for the officials in various departments, and many of those documents have not yet been presented to us, even though they are also ready. The reality is that officials can in fact table all of those undertakings, along with this report, for us to receive this. If they do that as soon as possible, we would then be able to utilize this work towards the completion of the report.

I would add that, without receiving that information, the truth is that they are already hampering the analysts in doing their work, because many of the undertakings were made prior to today and we still have not received them.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Kwan.

We'll go to Mr. Tony Van Bynen.

Go ahead, please, the floor is yours.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's refreshing for me to sit in on a committee like this, and perhaps the only benefit I might be able to add is that there's a fresh set of eyes on the discussion and the dialogue.

With respect to the motion in itself, the fact that the date of June 8 is part of the motion and the very broad-reaching description of the information that they're looking at here.... It says they want information from the Privy Council, Global Affairs, the Canadian Armed Forces and "any other government department".

How many departments do we have that would be engaged in this in the longer term, and specifically which other departments? I think this is such a far-reaching description that it would be very difficult to identify which departments would be engaged in the dialogue. By the 8th of June, would we even know how many of these other groups we should be engaging?

We ran into similar situations when we were in HESA. I do want to acknowledge that Mr. Ruff participated, as did Mr. Chong, in the HUMA committee, but the experience we had in the HESA committee in the earlier Parliament is that we should be very defined in terms of the information we're seeking. A broad-reaching motion like this serves no one, and it's virtually impossible to be able to meet the dateline that's being established here.

While I appreciate the member's interest in making sure that we have a thorough analysis of the issue and that we go forward and make meaningful recommendations, my concern is that we're trying to boil the ocean here. We're looking for way too much information, and it sounds to me, from the discussions I heard earlier, that this committee has been quite thorough.

When I heard some of the discussions earlier, people seem to be quite satisfied, generally, with the information that was available as they were going through the draft report. Why would we want to expand this and to a greater extent perhaps even dilute the effectiveness of this report when we're looking for some solutions that are actionable by the government and when we're looking for some good clean recommendations from this committee that can be initiated and be implemented by the government?

To me, it's somewhat self-defeating. It's trying to get too much information into a report that seems to be on the verge of being prepared. It seems to be on the verge of being ready and seems to be on the verge of going forward.

For me, the motion itself, if at all going forward, should be very much refined and should be amended to be more specific so that staff and the departments that have the information we're seeking have the ability to seek out that information and make it available.

Those are my thoughts. Again, as I say, it's only with the benefit of having some fresh eyes, as Mr. Chong and Mr. Ruff have contributed to the HUMA committee as well.... Those are my thoughts for the time being.

• (1515)

The Chair: Thank you.

We have Mr. Baker and then Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Mr. Baker, go ahead. The floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I already had an opportunity to speak. So I want to give Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe a chance to comment. I will speak after him.

In short, I do you want to comment, but I would like Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe to go first.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Baker, for your understanding and co-operation.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

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

This is extremely nice of my friend Mr. Baker. I appreciate it so much.

My dear friends, I know that we have the room until 4:30 p.m. We could go on like this indefinitely, discussing the benefits and disadvantages of the motion. We all have an opinion on it already. However, quite frankly, based on what I've heard over the past 15 minutes, it seems that the same argument keeps coming up.

Mr. Chair, I humbly suggest that we proceed immediately with the vote, and that we stop repeating the same argument on the motion that was moved today.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, for your suggestion, but as a chair, I have to be equitable and very fair.

If hands are up, I can't stop people from making their presentation unless I get clear direction from the clerk that there is a hard stop for the committee. I'm sorry, but I take your suggestion very carefully.

Now, Madam Damoff, please go ahead. The floor is yours.

I'll come back to Mr. Baker after Mr. Tony Van Bynen.

• (1520)

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Given the timing and the difficulties that we've had with presenting this report back to Parliament, which I think is something we all want to do, I've had conversations with some of the members here about the importance of being forward-looking in what we present to Parliament. I think that this particular information that Mr. Ruff has asked for is important, but I don't think it should be cause for us to hold back our report.

Therefore, I would suggest an amendment, Chair, that the motion end with a period after "from the respective departments to the Afghanistan committee." That means we would remove the words "for inclusion in the report back to the House by the 8th of June, 2022".

The reason I do that is simply so that we won't hold up the report and that we will be able to still table a report if those documents are not available—and I don't want to presume that they're not—but that way, I think we're honouring the spirit of Mr. Ruff's motion while at the same time being respectful of the tight timelines that we do have now. I'm just trying to incorporate what other speakers have said while at the same time honouring what Mr. Ruff is trying to do, so I would suggest that the motion be amended to end after the word "committee" by removing "for inclusion in the report due back in the House by the 8th of June, 2022", Chair.

You're on mute, Chair. I can't hear you.

The Chair: Thank you.

I will go to Mr. Ruff.

Mr. Ruff, will you accept the amendment by Madam Damoff?

Mr. Alex Ruff: Chair, respectfully, I can't, because the committee ceases to exist—as I just clarified with the clerk—on the 8th of June. There's no use in sending it to a non-existent body. We need this for inclusion in the report.

Thank you.

The Chair: Even though you don't accept it, Madam Damoff has an amendment to the motion, and now I will go to—

Mr. Alex Ruff: On a point of order, Chair, can you just clarify that the amendment is in order considering that, basically, as I just pointed out, the committee doesn't exist after the 8th of June?

The Chair: The committee ceases to exist after the 8th.

You don't need to accept this, but the amendment is on the floor, so we will be able to talk about the amendment to this one.

Let us speak to the amendment now, please.

Mr. Van Bynen, go ahead if you want to speak to the amendment to the motion.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Actually, this was a legacy hand, but since I'm in the lineup, and I don't see a lot of people lined up....

Could we circulate, I guess for my benefit, the orders that put the restrictions on the June 8 date? I don't have that information in front of me. I just want to clarify the statement being made that the committee no longer exists after June 8.

If that is the case, I'm wondering if it would be possible for that information to come forward through another avenue. Are there other committees that are engaged in these discussions? Are there other committees that could be using this information to help inform the government?

Perhaps I could get some clarification on that, Mr. Chair, particularly to clarify the date and whether there are any other options that would be available for this information to come forward or be considered, and also what committees those would be. If somebody could just clarify that for me, I would appreciate it.

• (1525)

The Chair: As for this committee, as I said earlier, the committee ceases to exist after June 8 or whenever it reports.

I would like to have some time here. I will suspend for a few minutes and then come back to you on this one.

Thank you.

• (1525)

(Pause)

• (1525)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

For the clarification of all the members, this committee ceases to exist after June 8. June 8 is the last day. If we present the report on June 6, then June 6 is the last day for this committee and we are done.

Another thing I checked is that the amendment by Madam Damoff is in order. We can have a discussion and then a vote, but I know it's Friday, and I wish that members could somehow come up with a consensus amongst you so that I could let you guys go. Otherwise, I'm here, sitting in the chair, and I'm going to carry on my duties as the chair. I have to continue to acknowledge members as long as we don't have a hard stop from the clerk.

Mr. Van Bynen, you have the floor. Please go ahead with your intervention.

• (1530)

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have the answer to the first part of my question. My concern is that if this information is critical and it's important, what other avenues or sources, or what other committees, are available? It may

not be specific to this situation, but isn't this study part of an overall study in terms of the government's responsiveness?

I heard on several occasions that some of the witnesses had indicated that the readiness should be for future potential crises of this nature. There were some comparisons made to the current conflict that we're seeing in Ukraine. There are other elements that the government should consider. There are elements here in the information that I believe Mr. Ruff is seeking that should be considered for other potential situations and that could be applied back to, for example, the situation in Ukraine.

So if the information is effective, valuable and meaningful for the government to develop some plans, actions and readiness programs, then there must be some other way that this information can come forward. That's my concern. Why would we restrict that information to only this committee?

The Chair: Mr. Van Bynen, we can't request documents on behalf of another committee. We have to deal with it here at this committee. This committee was specially constituted for a particular reason, and that's what we are here for. Even if the other committees wanted to order documents on behalf of our committee, they couldn't do it either.

I hope that answer clarifies it.

Mr. Baker, the floor is now yours.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thanks, Chair.

I'm glad to hear that you're staying in your chair. I'm going to have to stay in mine, because I asked some questions at the beginning of Mr. Ruff and I just haven't had an answer. I think the questions I asked are fair questions.

I respect Mr. Ruff very much. We've had a chance to chat over the course of our time on this committee together about some of his thoughts and ideas, and I very much respect his point of view, experience and his service to Canada as part of the forces in Afghanistan.

I need to understand better what's behind the motion. In other words, why is the information that would be provided in these reports relevant? What are these reports and the scope of these reports? I still don't understand what these reports include or don't include and how they would be relevant to our study. I'm at a point where I still haven't had the answers to those questions. I would really appreciate an explanation.

Ms. Damoff presented a thoughtful amendment. I think it allows us to make sure that the committee delivers this report on time. I don't even know what's in these reports, so I don't know how much information there is or how relevant it is. However, one can imagine a scenario where there's a lot of information that this committee won't have time to review, won't have time to ask witnesses about, and that puts us in a position where we can't meet our mandate as a committee, set down by the House, to have the report completed by June 8.

In not having answers to these questions, I'm concerned to begin with, but I'm really concerned, especially if we get a whole bunch of information that we then can't properly incorporate, or have to incorporate without proper background or context or witness testimony. To me, all of that raises a lot of flags. I think Ms. Damoff's amendment makes a lot of sense, to make sure that we can get the report done and move forward.

Also, Mr. Van Bynen raised a really important question, which is whether there are other sources for this information. Like I said earlier, since I don't really know what this information is, it's very difficult to answer that question. When I say "what this information is", I mean what this information is that's in these reports that supposedly exist.

In the absence of understanding what's in these reports, I dug through some documents and some publicly available sources of information. I thought it would be useful that I share some of the information, and maybe Mr. Ruff can comment. He can choose not to—it's up to him.

In his motion, he requested these after-action review reports with respect to the evacuation of Kabul in August 2021. Mr. Van Bynen was asking whether there might be sources of information that we could tap into that might allow us to answer some of the things or provide some of the information that would be in these reports. So I looked through some public sources that might have some of the information that Mr. Ruff is looking for, and I want to lay some of that out here. When I'm done, maybe Mr. Ruff can tell us whether this is some of what he was looking for.

I found a sort of timeline of some of the key events leading up to August 2021. For example we know that on February 29, 2020, the U.S. and the Taliban signed an agreement that set the terms for a U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan by May 1, 2021—but they didn't release the information that set the conditions for the U.S. withdrawal. At the time of the agreement, the U.S. had about 13,000 troops in Afghanistan, according to the U.S. Department of Defense Office of Inspector General. The withdrawal of U.S. troops was contingent on the Taliban's action against al Qaeda and other terrorists who could threaten us, President Trump is reported to have said in a speech at the Conservative Political Action Conference. The pact included the release of 5,000 Taliban fighters who were held prisoner by the Afghan government, which was not, of course, a party to that agreement. That was on February 29, 2020.

• (1535)

On March 1, 2020, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani objected to a provision in the agreement that would require his country to release 5,000 Taliban prisoners. He said: "Freeing Taliban prisoners is not [under] the authority of America but the authority of the Afghan government. There has been no commitment for the release of 5,000 prisoners." That was on March 1, 2020.

On March 4, 2020, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley, told the Senate armed services committee that the Taliban pledged, in a classified document, not to attack U.S. troops and coalition forces or launch what he called "high-profile attacks", including in Afghanistan's 34 provincial capitals. He went on to say that the Taliban had signed up to a whole series of conditions and that all of the members of Congress had all of the

documents associated with the agreement. Despite that agreement, the Taliban attacked Afghan forces in Helmand province and the U.S. responded with an air strike. That was on March 4, 2020.

On March 10, 2020, under pressure from the U.S., President Ghani ordered the release of 1,500 Taliban prisoners.

This is just for context. Originally the agreement between the U.S. and the Taliban was for 5,000. The Government of Afghanistan released 1,500, but they were also releasing them at a rate of about 100 per day.

On May 19, 2020, in releasing its quarterly report on Afghanistan, the Department of Defense inspector general's office said that the U.S. cut troop levels in Afghanistan by more than 4,000 "even though the Taliban escalated violence further after signing the agreement". It went on to say that "U.S. officials stated the Taliban must reduce violence as a necessary condition for continued U.S. reduction in forces and that remaining high levels of violence could jeopardize the U.S.-Taliban agreement."

That is according to the report, which covered the activity from January 1, 2020 to March 31, 2020. It went on to say, "Even still, the United States began to reduce its forces in Afghanistan from roughly 13,000 to 8,600." That was on May 19, 2020.

On August 18, 2020—

• (1540)

Mr. Alex Ruff: Chair, I have a point of order.

The Chair: We have a point of order.

Mr. Ruff, please go ahead with the point of order.

Mr. Alex Ruff: Thanks, Chair.

I would like you to make a ruling on relevance. The motion on the table has nothing to do with historical facts. It is asking for the submission of documents and reports by different government departments, which have already been mentioned in testimony. The amendment to the motion that is being debated right now mentions removing a date for reporting it back to the House.

I would appreciate it, Chair, if you could just keep any discussion or debate focused on what we're actually discussing, i.e. the motion, not historical information about everything, because the motion has nothing to do with that.

Thanks.

The Chair: Thank you—

Mr. Yvan Baker: I have a point of order, Chair, on this point of order.

The Chair: Hold on. One second, please.

First of all, I want to respond to Mr. Ruff.

Mr. Ruff brought up a valid point.

Mr. Baker, your discussion should be focused on the amendment that was brought by Ms. Damoff. As long as your discussion or intervention is in reference to that.... Because it is the motion as amended that is on the floor for discussion, please keep your comments limited to that.

Thank you.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order, please.

The Chair: Madam Kwan, on a point of order, please go ahead.

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

I want to get some clarity on the amendment that's been put forward by Ms. Damoff, and perhaps the clerk can provide this information for all committee members' understanding.

The amendment calls for the elimination of the June 8 date and for the after-action reports not to be included in the report by this committee. However, when Ms. Damoff made those comments, her perspective was that it is not to impede, necessarily, the after-action reports and the undertaking from being included in our report to the House. Rather, in the event the documents do not make it in time—that is, before the drafting of the report—that would not delay the work of this committee. That was my understanding of her intention with her amendment.

Let's say, for example, the undertaking is put in. Because this committee ceases to exist on June 8, the documents must be referred to this committee before June 8. Let's say it's June 7. That's after June 6, when we will have completed our draft report, so would committee members still be able to receive these documents on June 7?

Could I get clarification on the understanding of this amendment and how it would work procedurally and practically, for this committee, please?

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Kwan, for your intervention.

Madam Clerk, would you be able to respond? Please, go ahead.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Miriam Burke): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Special committees, of which we are one, cease to exist upon presentation of their report to the House.

The date stipulated in the motion creating this committee is six months after the adoption of the motion creating this committee, which brings us to June 8. Should the committee adopt and present the report in the House before that date, that is when the committee will cease to exist. Should you present in the House on June 8, that is when the committee will cease to exist.

• (1545)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Can I follow up with a further question, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Madam Kwan, please go ahead.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

In that vein, with respect to undertakings made to departmental officials already—independent of this one, but perhaps if it goes

through, it could be included as well—would the officials be required to provide the undertakings the committee has already requested before we complete our report? There is a whole bunch of undertakings that we still have not received. The one I was referring to earlier, which is pertinent to this report, is about the files that have been referred from GAC to IRCC and the files that have been referred from the Department of National Defence to IRCC. We still haven't received that information yet, which I think is pertinent to this report.

What will happen if the officials don't provide that information to this committee before we table our report? Are they obliged to do so? Could I get some understanding on that?

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Kwan.

I think Madam Kwan is talking about the information that we asked for about a week ago.

Madam Clerk, do you have anything to add in reference to the comments made by Madam Kwan? No. Okay, thank you.

Madam Kwan, as you know, we have a hard deadline of June 8. If we receive those documents by then, that's well and good, but after that we're not going to have the committee anymore. I hope that answers you.

Now the floor is back to Mr. Baker.

Mr.—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Sorry, Mr. Chair, but I have one more question, just so that I understand the entire process as well.

The officials are not required to provide those undertakings to this committee, even though it impedes our ability to complete our report. From that perspective, would that be a violation of our privilege as committee members?

The Chair: Madam Kwan, I will come back to you on your answers, because the point of order....

We're going into discussion. I gave you the floor to ask many questions out of your turn. I see Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe is shaking his head as well, because he is waiting for his turn to speak. I will get back to you on this one ASAP, Ms. Kwan.

Let me go to Mr. Baker.

Mr. Baker, please keep your discussion focused on the motion as amended.

Go ahead, please. The floor is yours.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I will, Chair, and I think I was....

Before I continue with what I was saying, I want to explain why I think it's relevant. Mr. Ruff moved a motion that requested certain documents or certain reports—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

[*English*]

The Chair: On a point of order, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Ms. Kwan had a point of order, and she was finally able to speak.

I have been waiting my turn for three and a half years. Do I have to rise on a point of order to be able to comment? Is that how it works?

[*English*]

The Chair: No, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe. You know that I am not one of those chairs. I try to be as fair as possible, We have only two more meetings left at this committee. I just want to finish this committee.

I understand. You know that I understand. I already mentioned—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Okay. It's great that you understand. You know that you are my favourite chair.

However, I hope that Mr. Baker will also understand that it has been a while—

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, I already mentioned to Ms. Kwan that I saw you were shaking your head and you were waiting for your turn.

I would love to give you your turn, as long as Mr. Baker stops speaking. He can raise his hand again, and he can always come back. It's up to Mr. Baker, because the floor is his. I hope you understand.

Mr. Baker, see how you want to proceed.

The floor is yours. If you want to give it to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, it's up to you, and then you can always come back.

Mr. Baker, the floor is yours.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Mr. Chair, I want to say something, and then in the spirit of collaboration, I'll stop speaking for the time being to allow Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe to jump in.

I think Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe knows, because we've served on the same committee over the past couple of years, that I have a lot to say from time to time. I have more to say on this topic. Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe also knows from about 20 minutes ago that I'm happy to offer my time so that he has a chance to say something.

Before I do that, I want to take this opportunity to explain why I think what I was saying is relevant. Mr. Ruff raised a point of order. I think it's important for the record and for my colleagues on the committee that they understand why I was speaking about what I was speaking about.

Mr. Ruff's motion requests certain reports. Ms. Damoff made an amendment suggesting that the deadline for that be amended or removed. Mr. Van Bynen suggested that perhaps the information that Mr. Ruff is seeking could be obtained from other sources. I was citing some information that is available in other sources as an example that could be provided to the analysts and that could perhaps address what Mr. Ruff was inquiring about. I was providing that information as an example.

That's why I was speaking to that.

I will now stop speaking and I will turn it over to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Baker, for your understanding and co-operation.

I'm very sorry, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe. I didn't mean to ignore you or any other member.

The floor is yours. Go ahead, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you.

As you know, Mr. Chair, I would never blame you. You are too nice.

We have worked together before in a few meetings, and I think we all know each other a little bit. Have you ever seen me filibuster before?

This is something else because—

[*English*]

The Chair: No.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Never, right?

This is something else because the only parties I have seen filibuster over the past two and a half years are the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party.

We know very well how members will vote. We know that. It's already done. However, people are using House resources—taxpayers' money—and making House employees work overtime because they don't want us to vote right away. Yet we already know full well how members will vote.

Members are filibustering right now. You will never see me filibuster like this, Mr. Chair, because I respect institutions, House employees, as well as taxpayers who pay our salaries and the salaries of all House employees, and pay for House resources.

We are seeing filibustering done with the goal of not having to vote, when we already all know how members will vote. I ask that we proceed with the vote. I ask that members respect taxpayers instead of wasting time and money—taxpayers' money.

I ask that we proceed with the vote right away.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe. I do commend your professionalism and your co-operation all the time. You have never been an issue or a troublemaker on the committee. I have very high regard for you.

With that, I will go to Madam Damoff.

Please go ahead. The floor is yours.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you, Chair.

I'm going to speak to my amendment. I just want to make sure that everyone is aware that I do respect this institution. I do respect the taxpayers who send us here. I also respect the integrity of this study and the testimony we heard from dozens of witnesses, much of it heartfelt.

I don't think I'm speaking out of turn by saying that all of us were deeply disturbed and touched by the testimony we heard. We all want to get to a place where we have a report that will actually move us forward and will make recommendations to the government on issues of humanitarian aid and on how we can do better when it comes to immigration.

I 100% want us to be able to present this report to Parliament. We have to present a report to Parliament. I don't want this committee to be bound by departments like the Privy Council Office, Global Affairs Canada, the Canadian Armed Forces and any other government department that may not provide the reports that Mr. Ruff is seeking on the evacuation in August 2021. It was a horrific thing to watch, but I think we all agreed, when we started this study, that what we wanted to do was honour the witnesses we heard from and make recommendations so that this didn't happen again.

The reason I put forward the amendment was so that, if we can get this information in time, all the better, but if we don't, we are not bound by this. We can still honour the testimony that we heard. We can honour the witnesses that we heard. We can actually make a difference for those who are living in Afghanistan and for those who want to flee.

I have a constituent whose brother is still in Afghanistan. I speak to him on a regular basis, as he is trying to get his brother out. His brother helped the Taliban. It's personal for me. But there are even the witnesses we heard from today about the LGBTQ people who are living there whose lives are in danger. We want to make sure we're presenting the best report we can to Parliament.

I did put my amendment forward in a show of good faith, honouring what Mr. Ruff wants to do while also honouring and respecting the integrity of our study and being able to present it on time.

Thank you, Chair.

● (1555)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to Mr. Baker and then Mr. Ruff.

Mr. Baker, the floor is yours—unless you want Mr. Ruff to go before you.

Mr. Yvan Baker: Sure. If Mr. Ruff wants to go ahead, I'm comfortable with that, if I can go after him. I'll just keep my hand raised.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Ruff, please go ahead.

Mr. Alex Ruff: Mr. Chair, I move that we adjourn.

The Chair: I could call a vote on the adjournment.

Madam Clerk, could you please call the vote on Mr. Ruff's motion to adjourn?

(Motion agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

The Chair: Thank you very much. I appreciate all of the members.

I also want to thank the analysts, the clerk, particularly the interpreters with my heavy accent, and also the support staff for staying overtime to accommodate us. I do really appreciate them from the bottom of my heart for the great effort the support staff, the clerk, the analysts, the interpreters and the translators have put in.

I wish you the very best. Enjoy the long weekend. We'll come back next week.

The meeting is adjourned.

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