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• (1650)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.)): I call meeting number 55 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration to order.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Friday, October 7, 2022, today we continue our study of the government's response to the final report of the Special Committee on Afghanistan.

We welcome the Honourable Mélanie Joly, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the officials, to the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. Thank you, Minister, for joining us today. We really appreciate your time.

She's also joined by Global Affairs officials Weldon Epp, assistant deputy minister for Asia; Julie Sunday, assistant deputy minister, consular security and emergency management; Jennifer Loten, director general, international crime and terrorism; and Stephen Salewicz, director general, international humanitarian assistance.

I welcome you all in appearing before the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

Minister Joly, you will have five minutes for your opening remarks. Then we will go into rounds of questioning. You can please begin.

The Honourable Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs): Thank you, Madam Chair.

[Translation]

Good afternoon, colleagues. I am happy to see you today.

It has been nearly a year since I appeared before the Special Committee on Afghanistan and more than nine months since the committee submitted its report. Our government is very grateful for the work done by this committee. That is why we gave detailed responses to the recommendations in October, and also why I am pleased that your committee is going forward with a study on what we have done today.

This is a coordinated effort on the part of several ministers, including myself, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, the Minister of International Development, the Minister of Public Safety, the Minister of National Defence, and the Minister of Justice.

I'm here today to speak to the progress made by Global Affairs Canada with respect to implementing and acting on the foreign af-

fairs related recommendations made by the Special Committee on Afghanistan in its final report. I want to highlight areas where we have focused our efforts since the tabling of the government response.

My department continues to support Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada in its commitment to settle at least 40,000 Afghan refugees in Canada.

For the foreseeable future, securing safe passage out of Afghanistan remains challenging. There is a lack of safe, secure and reliable routes out of the country. Conditions are unstable. The requirements for entry and exit documentation are constantly changing. In spite of the unique and complex challenges, we are working at the diplomatic level with governments inclined to find solutions, such as Pakistan, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, in order to fulfil Canada's resettlement commitment.

In addition to our diplomatic efforts, we are also continuing to work with our non-governmental partners to address these challenges.

[English]

Our government, like all Canadians, remains deeply concerned over the worsening humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. Alongside the Afghan Canadian community, we have watched the heart-wrenching situation unfold in Afghanistan as the Afghan people endure continued hardship. I know that they are present in families' hearts as they celebrate Nowruz.

Many have undergone harrowing journeys to flee the country, and countless others are living in fear of persecution. Canadians have opened their hearts to help so many of these people rebuild their lives in Canada.

The hard-fought gains in democracy, education, human rights and women's rights have deteriorated in the aftermath of the fall of Afghanistan. The Taliban is increasingly restricting the rights and freedoms of Afghan women and girls to learn, to work and simply to participate in public life.

We all have a duty to stand up in support of the Afghan people and we call on the Taliban to honour their human rights obligations, but let me be clear: Canada has no intention of recognizing the Taliban as the government of Afghanistan and will continue to judge the Taliban by their actions and not by their words.

We are committed to supporting the urgent needs of Afghanistan's most vulnerable people, particularly women and girls, and we continue to advocate strongly for Afghan women and girls at every opportunity, both on our own and as part of a strong, coordinated effort by the international community.

Last month I convened, at the Munich Security Conference, my fellow women foreign ministers, and we strongly condemned the Taliban's restriction on women and girls. When the Taliban banned women from working for national and international NGOs and later from attending universities, we stood with international partners in opposition.

My G7 counterparts and I have kept this issue on the agenda and continue to discuss the ways in which we continue our support. I've raised women's rights in Afghanistan in bilateral discussions with many of my colleagues, including those from the U.K., France, New Zealand, Pakistan and the United States.

Our government has also provided more than \$143 million in funding to help provide emergency assistance in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries, and we know that Canadians want to help as well. That's why my colleague Marco Mendicino has introduced an amendment to the Criminal Code that would help Canadian organizations better deliver their vital humanitarian and human rights work in Afghanistan. I would also like to thank the many organizations that have provided input to make sure that this initiative moves forward.

• (1655)

The changes balance two important needs: strong anti-terrorism financing provisions and the ability to legally deliver international assistance to people in need in places under the de facto control of terrorist organizations such as Afghanistan.

[*Translation*]

In conclusion, the government is committed to implementing and acting on the recommendations made in the report of the Special Committee on Afghanistan. It also reiterates its support for the people of Afghanistan and remains determined to challenge the Taliban on their abuse of power.

Thank you for your attention.

I will be pleased to take questions.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We will now proceed with our first round of questioning, and we will begin with Mr. Chong.

Mr. Chong, you have six minutes. Please begin.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, thank you for appearing.

Two years ago, the government committed to bringing 40,000 Afghans to Canada. In addition, the government has always professed to view foreign policy through a feminist lens. Despite all of these things, the commitment was to bring 40,000 over, but only

27,000 have been brought over. The commitment was to view foreign policy through a feminist lens, but, in the passage of two years, many Afghans continue to languish in Afghanistan, particularly Afghans to whom we have a duty. Just several weeks ago, a former female Afghan lawmaker by the name of Mursal Nabizada was shot dead by gunmen in Kabul. Eight other women who are former Afghan lawmakers are still trapped in Afghanistan.

My question is simple. Will you commit to bringing these Afghan women here before they are killed?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: First and foremost, of course we remain extremely preoccupied by the security situation in Afghanistan, and we've been committing to making sure that we achieve the 40,000 Afghan refugees target. At this point, as you know, we're at nearly 30,000. Again last night, more than 360 Afghans landed in Canada from Pakistan.

We will continue to make sure that we are able to get these Afghan people to Canada. At the same time, I would say, dear colleague and dear Michael, that my job is to make sure that I can also work with third countries, in the sense that my job is to reach out to Pakistan, work with them and work with the UAE and Qatar to facilitate the arrival of these Afghan people to Canada.

• (1700)

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you. I have another question, and it relates to the evacuation of Kabul in 2021.

Your department is the lead entity. How would you assess your department's performance in the evacuation operation that took place in August 2021?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Listen, I can't turn back the clock. I commend the public servants who worked very hard at the time, 24-7. I think we learned a lot from what happened. Under my watch, we were able to get more funding for consular affairs—\$100 million over six years—and we also got funding to establish a very important crisis unit to deal with this issue.

Hon. Michael Chong: Well, Minister, that assessment is not.... The department's and the government's view seems to be that everything went really well during that evacuation. In fact, I quote will from the government's response to the Special Committee on Afghanistan's report:

With respect to the crisis in Afghanistan...the Department of National Defence/Canadian Armed Forces...established an effective and efficient working relationship with GAC and the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada...which allowed for the safe evacuation of nearly 3,700 evacuees from Kabul....

That assessment is troubling, because it is wrong. We heard from dozens of witnesses who said that the evacuation from Kabul was an uncoordinated mess.

Retired Major-General Dean Milner indicated that bureaucracy at Immigration Canada and leadership coordination issues made it very difficult for the Afghan strategic evacuation team to support and assist the mission.

Wendy Long, who is the director of Afghan-Canadian Interpreters, said the following in reference to the IRCC, Global Affairs Canada and the Department of National Defence:

All...have to work effectively [there], and that's not what was happening all along. There was no effective partnership. They were not looking at it as a mission that all three entities should have been taking part in for the end goal of getting our people to Canada.

It's troubling that the government views the evacuation and inter-departmental coordination as a success when the facts say otherwise. It's all not supported by the fact that we evacuated far fewer people proportionately than did our allies. We evacuated 3,700 people to the end of August of that year. The United States evacuated 122,000 people, and the United Kingdom evacuated 15,000 people. On a pro rata basis, by U.S. standards we should have evacuated 12,000 people. We evacuated 3,700. By U.K. standards we should have evacuated 10,000 people. We evacuated 3,700.

I guess my point is that if the department and the government are not willing to acknowledge that the evacuation from Kabul and from Afghanistan in general was a disaster, then in future crises nothing will change. We'll continue to repeat the same kinds of mistakes.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Thank you for your question. It's a very relevant question.

As I mentioned in regard to your earlier questions, I think we learned a lot from what happened at the time in Afghanistan. Based on that, we have been dealing also with very difficult situations since then. We've been able to draw some lessons from what happened to always react better. Nobody's perfect around this table, and I think we can always do a better job. That's what we've been committed to do. To get there, we need to have the right resources. That's why I am pleased that in the last budget we got more funding.

As well, I think we all have to remind ourselves that at the time, CAF members had left Kabul many years earlier, which was not necessarily the case for our allies, who had more military assets and resources on the ground at the time.

All of that is to say that I think your work is important, because that's what you're doing—you're shedding light on what happened and how we can make sure that things go better going forward.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Dhaliwal, the floor is yours for six minutes. Please begin.

• (1705)

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair, first of all, I would like to commend and thank the honourable minister for all the hard work she does and for her accessibility and willingness to have conversations on issues that matter most to Canadians.

Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Thank you. I appreciate it.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Minister, in your statement you mentioned Afghan women and girls, and of course Mr. Chong touched on that subject as well. I'm sure it's very near and dear to all of us as committee members. At the Special Committee on Afghanistan, we

heard the same troubling stories in testimony from witnesses about what was happening to women and girls in Afghanistan. At that time, there were reports that schools were being closed, that women could not travel without a male escort and that school curricula were all based on religion, with no academics.

I would like to hear from you, Minister, about some of the things Canada is doing to address this situation.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Thanks to you and your colleague for this important question.

Listen, to say the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan is dire is an understatement. I know all of you have been preoccupied with this. You've raised this situation, and it's been a top priority. Meanwhile, there have been so many crises in the world that we need to continue to shed light on what's going on in Afghanistan. If we don't continue to inform the Canadian public about this, we will not be able to make sure that people outside Afghanistan are aware of what's going on.

When I was at the UN in New York with Secretary-General Guterres recently, we talked about it. We invested nearly \$150 million to support women and girls in Afghanistan. Our colleague, Minister Sajjan, has been laser-focused on this. At the same time, we need to make sure we continue to help the organizations providing that help.

Because of our legislation and the Criminal Code dispositions, we've been working, as of now, through the UN and the Red Cross. We think that with Bill C-41 going through the House quickly—thank you all for your support on that—we can work with more organizations that may have even greater support on the ground in getting help to women and girls.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: You mentioned Bill C-41, which was recently introduced by the government and supported by all of us here. This legislation would alter some of the terrorism provisions that have blocked Canadian humanitarian agencies and people from going to help people in Afghanistan.

Could you please comment on why this legislation is required to address the challenges we are facing in getting aid to Afghanistan?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Yes. This section of the Criminal Code was voted on, I think, after we and NATO got involved in Afghanistan, back in that time. Never did we think a terrorist organization would become a government in Afghanistan, which, of course, we don't recognize and will never legitimize. That's why, on hearing what Alexis, Michelle, you and others—and many organizations—have done, we knew it was important to come up with these amendments, and it's why we were able to draw a good balance between, on the one hand, making sure we're taking a very strong approach when it comes to countering terrorism and not funding any terrorist organizations, and, on the other hand, providing the aid required on the ground, particularly to women and girls.

The more we're able to work together to get this right, the better a job we'll do.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: You have one minute on the mike. I'm going to keep my question short.

Would you like to comment on what the government is doing currently on the matters of food insecurity and poverty in Afghanistan? What have you done with other international partners?

• (1710)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: The situation in Afghanistan continues to deteriorate. Things are not going better. Food security is definitely an issue. The economy has collapsed. People are living in extreme poverty. Many of them are going to other countries to flee the situation, which is completely intolerable.

Our goal has been to work with the UN, and particularly with the World Food Programme, to help get funding through to people on the ground in Afghanistan. Canada is one of the biggest donors to the World Food Programme, and we'll continue to increase our support, as we did this year.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dhaliwal. Your time is up.

We will now proceed to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, the floor is yours. You will have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you for being here today, Minister. I know you have a full schedule, given the visit of the President of the United States and other matters. Your being here is very important to us.

I am going to talk a lot about Bill C-41, since the subject it deals with was my particular cause on the Special Committee on Afghanistan. All of the ministers who testified there agreed with me. In fact, you also testified publicly that the Criminal Code provisions limited Canadian humanitarian aid in Afghanistan.

One year ago, almost to the day, I introduced a motion in the House calling for unanimous consent, but the motion was rejected by the government, even though all the ministers were in favour of it when they appeared before the committee.

Non-governmental organizations, or NGOs, will have to obtain a recommendation from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration and, in some cases, from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, in addition to receiving authorization from the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness. Bill C-41 means that three departments are involved when it comes to the work done by NGOs.

Do you not think that it might take a long time for NGOs to get the necessary authorizations? If so, about how much time do you think it would take?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Thank you for your question.

It essentially comes back to the question my colleague asked me about how we can strike a balance. The goal was to continue taking an extremely strict approach, to combat any form of terrorist orga-

nization funding, while ensuring we were able to support organizations doing development aid work.

At present, our objective is to bring Bill C-41 forward in order for it to become law. I will also take this opportunity to thank everyone, because it seems that it has been introduced in the House of Commons. As well, the House has just adopted a unanimous motion, and that is good news.

My colleagues, the Minister of International Development and the Minister of Public Safety, will ensure that these organizations are given authorizations. We are prepared to hear comments from the organizations so that we can ensure, for example, that the authorization is continued. In other words, we have to make sure there isn't too much red tape.

I understand your concern, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, and, in fact, I share it. When the bureaucracy is too complicated, decisions sometimes can't be made quickly. I will be happy to hear your recommendations and the recommendations of the international organizations.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I have spoken to Doctors Without Borders, which made a statement quickly after learning the details of Bill C-41.

The organization is arguing in favour of a humanitarian exemption in the Criminal Code, to eliminate any risk of their staff or the organization being charged with a criminal offence. However, that organization believes that the changes to the Criminal Code do not eliminate that uncertainty. I would point out that it really is quite a credible organization.

I understand that the committee wants to do things quickly, but I want to be sure it is not wasting its time. The bill absolutely has to be passed as quickly as possible. As well, I want to be sure that all parties agree on amendments on which there will be no debate.

Can we count on the government's cooperation so we can agree on these amendments as quickly as possible, with no debate?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I will be pleased to work with the committee.

Regarding the various amendments, we will study them as they are proposed. In my opinion, the Minister of Justice is the most appropriate person to speak to the validity of the various amendments, since they relate more to legal issues.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Okay.

I would now like to come back to my initial questions.

You talked about organizations that have voiced criticisms of Bill C-41. As I mentioned, the departments have a tendency to work in isolation. Interdepartmental relations are sometimes difficult. I have only been here for four years, but I can still observe that—

• (1715)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: That has not been my experience. Sometimes, things work well.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: It is completely representative of mine.

As I said, you have to go through at least three departments to get authorizations, instead of having a single window. Three departments will have to be involved every time a request is made to do work in Afghanistan. That is probably not the goal we had in mind when we debated this proposal at the Special Committee on Afghanistan or in various democratic forums where this proposal was made.

You say that it will work well and your experience has been good. What makes you think that things are going to go faster this time? Applications for authorization will have to be made to three departments instead of having a single window.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: As I said, we are going to look into how to quickly put in place a fast, efficient and fair process that will strike a good balance—

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: As Minister of Foreign Affairs, would you agree to putting a single window in place?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you know I am always happy to work with you and other stakeholders to improve the systems. I am prepared to consider a number of good ideas.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: So that includes the idea of having a single window for organizations.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I am not the one who is responsible, myself—

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: No, but you have an opinion, I imagine, since—

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I always have a very informed opinion, but you must know that, ordinarily, I work with my colleagues and I want to hear their views as well.

We hear you on the issue of efficiency. We also know that a number of organizations already have expertise or have worked in Afghanistan in the past, and our goal is for them to be able to continue doing so regularly—

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: That is the actual idea behind this proposal. Canadian NGOs are familiar with the ground through our involvement in Afghanistan for many years.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: If you recommend it specifically in this study, I will be happy to respond to it.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: We could perhaps look to what was done at the UN Security Council in resolution 2615.

I have gone over my time, I think.

[English]

The Chair: You have six seconds.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I have six seconds.

[Translation]

Thank you for being here with us.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Ms. Zahid's French is improving every day.

[English]

The Chair: I will request all members of the committee who are asking questions to please allow the minister to answer. Give her the opportunity to answer the question.

We will now proceed to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, you will have six minutes. You can begin.

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

I thank the minister and her officials for being here today.

In the minister's introduction, she talked about the laws that need to be changed. The bill has been introduced. Recommendation 11 of the Afghanistan special committee calls for the government to “review the anti-terrorism financing provisions under the *Criminal Code* and urgently take any legislative steps necessary to ensure those provisions do not unduly restrict legitimate humanitarian action that complies with international humanitarian principles and law.”

Doctors Without Borders has raised a concern. They do not support the changes tabled by the government. They are instead encouraging the government to enact a full humanitarian exemption, as recommended by their committee. They say the idea that someone could be charged with a crime for providing medical care to a patient in a hospital during a conflict is ridiculous and out of step with the international humanitarian law that explicitly prohibits punishing a person for upholding medical ethics:

The legislation proposed by Canada today requires humanitarian organizations to seek permission from the Canadian government before we send medical staff to respond to some humanitarian crises—what happens if they say no? Do we walk away from maternity hospitals or primary health clinics? The Geneva Conventions and International Humanitarian Law clearly state that countries have an obligation to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance and a duty to not criminalize the work performed according to medical ethics, yet that's exactly what this legislation does.

That's a quote from Jason Nickerson, humanitarian representative to Canada, Doctors Without Borders.

My question to the minister is this: Why didn't the government put in the full humanitarian exemption?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: That is the question your colleague Alexis was asking me before, Jenny.

Our goal was to make sure we could balance the questions of having a strong stance and not funding any form of terrorist organization while making sure we support humanitarian aid in Afghanistan.

If you and this committee have good recommendations to make, we will obviously study them, as we did during the Afghanistan study. We want to work with humanitarian organizations because we want this to work. Of course, we value Doctors Without Borders. This is a well-known organization in my home province. We will continue to make sure that we can support them, that they can benefit from Canada's humanitarian aid, and, at the same time, that they can help the very Afghan people who need their support in dire circumstances.

While I am saying this to you, my colleague, the Minister of International Development, is the one who can go into much more detail on this aspect. He will obviously have my full support.

• (1720)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you, Minister.

The whole Afghanistan issue is a whole-of-government endeavour. I remember that at the Afghanistan committee, when we asked this question of the Minister of International Development, he said that it wasn't him and that we should go talk to the justice department. Everybody bounced the ball around and said, "Not me," so here we are.

We have a piece of legislation, and it falls short and is not consistent with the recommendations. I guess the takeaway here, which I think I'm happy to hear in part, is this: Maybe the government is open to amendments to see how we can adjust this, because Doctors Without Borders are clearly saying that this is not going to work. If it's not going to work, then we need to do better. We're already slow to the game, truth be told, and for many people who needed aid and help, Canada was not there, while other countries made it.

I'm going to park it there, but I do want to flag it, and I think that organizations and NGOs also flagged it to say that consultation was not done very well. With all this time that's passed, they also flagged that concern. We'll have more time to get to it when the legislation gets into the committee stage for debate, I am sure.

I want to turn for a minute to the issue around Afghans who have been left behind. There are many who have worked for GAC and there are many who have been supported by GAC, funded by the Canadian government. These are NGOs and particularly organizations that supported women and fought for women's rights and democracy, and they've been left behind. This arbitrary number of 40,000 came from I don't know where.

Will the minister support lifting that arbitrary number so more of the people who participated and worked with Canada can get to safety?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I'll say a couple things. To finish off the last point, we've been providing help to the Afghan people in the form of \$150 million, so it's not as if we didn't do anything. We have done things and we will do more, so that's one point.

On the question of amendments, Jenny, we're always open to see what can be done and we value your work. You can always count on me to have good discussions to improve legislation. I think the fact that the Minister of Justice, the Minister of International Development and the Minister of Public Safety made this announcement together shows how much coordination there has been among the three of them.

On the question of Afghans wanting to come to Canada, I think 40,000 is a big number and an ambitious target, but I think it's important that we achieve that target, and now we're at three-quarters of it. Nearly 30,000 Afghan people have come to Canada, and I think that Canadians have answered in a heartwarming way, as Canadians do, by opening their hearts and their homes to make sure Afghan people could come to Canada.

Thank you.

The Chair: Your time is up, Ms. Kwan. We will proceed to Ms. Rempel Garner for five minutes.

Ms. Rempel Garner, please begin.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Minister, my questions will relate to a letter I copied you on that has subsequently led to an investigation into potentially fraudulent visa facilitation letters.

In Senator McPhedran's recent Federal Court affidavit, she states that an email sent by Mr. George Young, who is the former chief of staff to your former colleague, stated that Mr. Young sent a facilitation letter to Senator McPhedran that was received from "a colleague at GAC". Do you know who in your department sent that letter to Mr. Young?

• (1725)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I'm sorry; I'm not privy to that information. Also, as you know, Michelle, this is under investigation, so I'm not able to answer this specific question.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: When you say that you're not privy to this information, has your department made any effort to look into who sent that email to Mr. Young?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: As I mentioned, because it's under investigation, I can't answer your question.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: In the minister's response to me, sent on July 26, he mentioned that IRCC had undertaken an internal investigation into the matter. Did your department undertake an internal investigation as well?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: We are definitely working on making sure that we participate in the investigation.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Did you take an internal investigation into the matter?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: All the steps linked to the investigation have been taken.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Have you attempted to find out who sent that letter to Mr. Young?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: As I said, I can't comment, because there's an investigation. You pretty much asked me that question three questions ago.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I'll read part of Senator McPhedran's affidavit in Federal Court. It's point 30. It says that it was clear to her from their exchanges that Mr. Young, with the approval of Mr. Jungic—I believe he's referring to Mr. Oz Jungic, a former policy adviser in GAC in the minister's office who is now an adviser in the PMO—"had delegated authority to myself and Ms. Robinson"—who was a consultant working on this—"to insert names of persons already discussed and to add new names to the visa facilitation letter template" and that this flexible and pragmatic approach made sense.

Would a minister's office policy adviser have the authority to delegate such authority to a sitting senator?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I won't get into the specific facts, but when it comes to facilitation letters, my ADM for consular services can answer to what we do and what we did in terms of facilitation.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: It's just a simple question. Would a minister's office policy adviser have the authority to delegate in the way that's described in the affidavit?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: As I mentioned, because you're referring to the affidavit, obviously I can't comment, because it's under investigation.

What I can tell you is that GAC indeed issued facilitation letters during the fall of Kabul to make sure that Afghans who had links to Canada—particularly Canadian Afghans—could get through checkpoints.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Did GAC delegate authority to anyone outside of GAC for the purpose of issuing these letters?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: As you know, I was not minister at the time, so I would not have that information.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Have you made any attempt to find out that information?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Because there is an investigation ongoing, of course we're participating with the investigation.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I will direct this to Ms. Sunday, then.

Did anyone in GAC delegate authority?

Ms. Julie Sunday (Assistant Deputy Minister, Consular, Security and Emergency Management, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Our authorities of course fall under the consular mandate. When we were issuing letters of facilitation, which are a tool that we would sometimes use in a crisis scenario, these would be for Canadian citizens, permanent residents and their family members only.

In terms of the individuals to whom we provided these letters, it was to resolve the very difficult situation at Taliban checkpoints.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Did you delegate authority to any other persons outside of GAC to do that?

Ms. Julie Sunday: No.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Thank you. That's all I wanted to hear.

With the time I have left, Minister, in your opening remarks you said you had “learned a lot” in this situation. Would you say that one of the learnings was to not call an unnecessary federal election at a time when a country was falling to a hostile terrorist group and we had thousands of Canadians for whom we didn't have a plan to evacuate? Would you characterize that as a learning?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I think when the fall of Kabul happened, all of us across the country were working to find ways to help Afghans come to Canada.

The Chair: I'm sorry. The time is up for Ms. Rempel Garner. We will now proceed to Mr. El-Khoury.

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

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you for being here, Minister, and for all the work you are doing at the international level as the head of Canadian diplomacy. We are well aware that this makes a huge contribution to promoting Canada's image on the international stage.

As you know, Minister, it is very difficult for people to leave Afghanistan and that is one of the main issues in this regard. Pakistan, which borders on Afghanistan, plays a key role in the delivery of aid to undocumented persons. Canada has very good relations with allied countries that are also friends of Pakistan, such as Qatar, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates.

Has multilateral work been done with those countries to improve the situation in order to help people who are leaving Afghanistan?

• (1730)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Thank you, my dear colleague.

Yes, we have worked with Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait and the United States on several occasions to find ways of reaching our target and admitting 40,000 Afghan refugees. Yesterday, again, as I said a little earlier in my testimony, we succeeded in admitting over 360 Afghans arriving from Pakistan.

Working on immigration and safe passage issues is one thing, but working with colleagues at the diplomatic level to make sure the issue of Afghanistan continues to be a priority among all of the very numerous international issues is another. Those issues include the illegal and unjustified invasion of Ukraine, tensions in the Indo-Pacific region, and the serious humanitarian crises we are seeing in Africa, Venezuela and Haiti, among others.

Our objective is to denounce the Taliban at every opportunity and to work with other colleagues. The forum I prefer is the Women Foreign Ministers group, because we can examine issues that concern us at the international level from a feminist perspective there.

Because these women foreign ministers come from Europe, the Americas, Asia and Africa, it provides us with a good international network.

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

Canada is very well respected by the United Nations and by the rest of the world. Can you tell us more to illustrate the role we have played in delivering international humanitarian aid to local people, as compared to other countries?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: We have been able to provide a lot of humanitarian aid. As I said a little earlier, it totals about \$150 million.

However, the challenge facing Canada was somewhat unique, given the provisions of the Criminal Code that prevented us from funding any terrorist organization whatsoever, both directly and especially indirectly, and in this case the Taliban. That meant that any humanitarian organization that paid rent, taxes or anything else in an area under their jurisdiction, thereby indirectly supporting the government in place, violated the Criminal Code. That is why all our humanitarian aid was sent to the UN or the Red Cross.

Now, the objective of Bill C-41 is to go further and help organizations that have a strong presence on the ground, like the one Ms. Kwan and Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe mentioned, Doctors Without Borders.

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: Minister, in the course of our study, a lot of people are asking us questions. They want to know why we are not able to do for the Afghans what we are doing for the Syrians. They are not aware that it is much easier in the case of the Syrian refugees, because they are registered with the United Nations and already have their documents. This all improves the situation and facilitates our process.

Can you address that subject, please?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Thank you for that very good question.

At the time, I was not yet Minister of Foreign Affairs, but I was part of the group of ministers who coordinated the response to bring 60,000 Syrian refugees to Canada.

I will be happy to say more about that subject later.

• (1735)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. Your time is up, Mr. El-Khoury.

We will now proceed with Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

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

Minister, I am going to ask you a question that may be a little out of context, but it is of considerable interest to me.

You rightly denounce human rights violations by the Taliban, and in fact I congratulate you and thank you for that. We have to stand up in the face of that and denounce it at every opportunity. That said, I am thinking of other human rights violations occurring in other jurisdictions. We know that the Qataris, for example, are helping the Government of Canada send its messages to the Taliban, this being diplomatic aid that they offer us.

Is that aid the reason why the Government of Canada has never, in any forum, publicly denounced human rights violations in Qatar, particularly when it had the opportunity to do so during the last World Cup?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I'm sorry, my dear colleague, but I am going to have to correct what you said.

We raise human rights issues all the time in all our international relations. That has been part of Canada's foreign policy for decades now, and it...

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: So you are prepared now to denounce human rights violations in Qatar.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Whenever I have conversations with my colleagues, whether bilateral or multilateral, I definitely raise human rights issues.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I am inviting you to do so publicly before the committee.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: It goes without saying that we raise human rights issues. It goes without saying that we work with the government of Qatar to ensure...

First, Qatar is a NATO partner. All NATO countries work with Qatar.

Second, Qatar is working with us to bring Afghan refugees here. I think we can do both.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Okay, but—

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Canada is capable of engaging diplomatically, because that is what it does to achieve its national objectives. At the same time, since our foreign policy is based on values such as defending human rights, certainly that is what we want.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: You have just done exactly what I said you would do: you are unable to publicly denounce human rights violations in Qatar, because it is a NATO ally and you have diplomatic relations with Qatar. You are unable to denounce the human rights violations by the governing regime in Doha that have taken place in Qatar.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I am telling you that we have concerns about that country—

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Do you denounce the human rights violations in Qatar?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: My answer is this: I am telling you now that we raise these issues all the time. Not only do we raise these issues, but the UN has a process in place for all countries. When Canada has concerns about a country relating to human rights, we raise those concerns in the periodic review by the Canadian Human Rights Commission—

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting—

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: You don't do it the same way with the Taliban and Qatar. They are two different things.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: We have raised these issues for Qatar and we also raise them for other countries.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: And yet you have not done that. You have done two different things with the Taliban and Qatar.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I have given you a clear answer to your question.

I think that comparing Qatar to the Taliban—

[English]

The Chair: The time is up for Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

We will now proceed to Ms. Kwan.

You have two and a half minutes. Please begin.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'd like to turn to the issue of helping get people out of Afghanistan. Many people are stuck.

I maintain that the government needs to lift the arbitrary quota. There are many people who were funded by GAC, the Canadian government, who have been left behind. I have, literally, spreadsheet upon spreadsheet of people who followed the government's instructions to try to get an application and to get a referral and could not do so, and they are in a dire situation right now. I'm going to set this aside for a minute.

One of the issues, of course, is getting people out of Afghanistan, as well as some who have made it to a third country, such as Pakistan. Pakistan issued an edict back in December of last year to say that if you have an expired visa, you will either be arrested and put in jail or sent back to Afghanistan.

From this perspective, with regard to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the work that the minister and her officials are doing, what are the minister and her department doing to work with these third countries to allow for people to get out?

If they don't have a valid visa, they're not going to get an exit visa either. What work is being done to alleviate that problem?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: There are two answers to your two questions.

Jenny, I'm a very pragmatic person. My goal is to get to 40,000, and I'm convinced that we can get there. If more work needs to be done, we will do more work. I will work with my colleague, the Minister of Immigration, to see what can be done. Indeed, to your point, the situation in Afghanistan will continue to be dire.

The second answer to your question is.... I think your question is very relevant. The issue right now is that Afghanistan is a really difficult country for us to operate in. We don't have an ambassador right now. There is nobody at our embassy. The issue we have is, indeed, safe passage.

That's exactly what I do when I deal with Pakistan, when I deal with Qatar, when I deal with the UAE and when I deal with Kuwait. How can we make sure that Afghans leaving Afghanistan who have an opportunity to come to Canada can come to Canada? That's my job, and that's what I do.

• (1740)

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

We will now proceed to MP Chong.

MP Chong, you will have five minutes. You can please begin.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to follow up on my colleague Madam Rempel Garner's question. In your answer to her, Minister, you indicated that you weren't able to respond to her questions because the matter was under investigation. Are you referring to the civil case in front of the Federal Court, or are you referring to another ongoing investigation?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I'm referring to the civil case, and I'm referring also to the fact that, internally, there is an investigation happening.

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay, so there is an internal investigation going on at Global Affairs Canada.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: In order to answer the civil case investigation, of course Immigration and Global Affairs are participating and doing their own investigation. You get my point.

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay. Thank you for clarifying that. When will the results of that investigation be complete?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: It's linked to the civil case.

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay, so it's not an investigation separate from the case in front of the Federal Court?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: It's part of what is happening right now. Your colleague shed light on the issue.

Hon. Michael Chong: Yes, it's tied to the Federal Court case. It's not a separate, independent investigation.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Maybe it's the lawyer in me, but it's not technically a "civil" case. It's much more an administrative law case.

Hon. Michael Chong: Yes, okay. Thank you for that answer.

I want to go back to the lessons learned, which is really what we're meeting about today—the lessons learned from the fall of Kabul and the evacuation of Afghanistan. I'm astonished that the government's view, in its response to recommendation 2 of our committee's report, which was a recommendation about better interdepartmental coordination to ensure a better response in future crises, is that that interdepartmental coordination through the interdepartmental task force was "an effective and efficient working relationship", when all the testimony in front of the Special Committee on Afghanistan said otherwise.

I'm wondering if you share the assessment that the interdepartmental coordination was effective and efficient during that time of the evacuation of Kabul.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: As I said, I can't turn back the clock—

Hon. Michael Chong: I know that.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: —and at the same time, I was not privy to what was happening, as you know, but my goal is to make sure that we're able to deal with issues as they come up in very difficult situations, in very dire times, in a way that—

Hon. Michael Chong: I understand that, Minister—

Hon. Mélanie Joly: —we can do a good job.

Hon. Michael Chong: —but if we're not willing to admit to our mistakes, then we cannot improve.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: No, Michael, I'm not seeing it in that sense.

Listen, it was a messy situation—on the ground it was—and it was the case for all NATO allies. We were working 24-7 on this. As an MP, I don't know if you are like me, but we were sending names and we wanted to make sure that these Afghan people could get out of Kabul.

• (1745)

Hon. Michael Chong: I appreciate your answer, but if we're not willing to admit to what went wrong, then we can't fix it.

I'd like to quickly ask you a question about some breaking news that relates to foreign interference.

Your department is actively involved in countering foreign interference from Beijing. Global News has reported that one of the members of the Liberal caucus secretly advised a Chinese diplomat in early 2021—

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.): On a point of order, Madam Chair—

Hon. Michael Chong: —to delay freeing the two Michaels.

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Mr. Chong. We have a point of order.

Go ahead, Ms. Kayabaga.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think the minister has taken her time to be here today to answer questions on Afghanistan and I think the conversation that we're having right now is not relevant. If we can get back to the matter of the day....

Hon. Michael Chong: We have broad latitude.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: We want to talk about Afghanistan—or take it outside.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kayabaga.

Mr. Chong, the floor is yours. I request that we deal with the issue that we're talking about now.

I'll start the clock. You have 45 seconds left.

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay. I'll frame this, then, in terms of....

My understanding is that we generally have broad latitude to ask questions. It's a question that pertains to foreign affairs. It's a question that pertains to the government's position in the Indo-Pacific region. The Indo-Pacific region concerns not just Afghanistan but the increasing presence of the PRC in Afghanistan, and it is in Afghanistan, frankly, because the western alliance vacated Afghanistan in such a disastrous way in August 2021.

Again I ask the question. Global News is reporting that Liberal MP Han Dong secretly advised—

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

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

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Thank you.

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Chair,—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I challenge your ruling on the last—

Hon. Michael Chong: —I haven't finished. I've been interrupted twice, Madam Chair.

The Chair: No, I stopped the clock at that time.

Hon. Michael Chong: I understand that, but I want to ask the minister the question. I was interrupted twice, which interrupted my train of thought, so I'd like to finish asking the question.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: The time is up for Mr. Chong. The minister is only here for one hour. We will end this round of questioning with Ms. Kayabaga.

Ms. Kayabaga, you will have five minutes for your round of questioning. Please begin, and then this panel will end.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*Translation*]

Good afternoon, Minister. Thank you for being here today.

I am going to focus my questions on your role as Minister of Foreign Affairs. One of the things your mandate letter refers to is the work you can do with the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship. What is your role, exactly? What have you done with the minister in this regard since you were appointed as Minister of Foreign Affairs?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: When I was appointed as Minister of Foreign Affairs in October 2021, I quickly adopted the objective of working with the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship to find ways of bringing more Afghans to Canada.

However, because we do not have diplomatic representation in Afghanistan, and so we have no ambassador in Kabul, and because few of our allies still had representatives in Afghanistan, I wanted to work with other countries that were receiving Afghan refugees and potentially had ties with Canada. That is why we have worked with Pakistan. In the first weeks of my mandate, I spoke to representatives of Pakistan, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar to find ways of bringing Afghans to Canada and ultimately reaching the target of admitting 40,000 refugees that we, as the government, had set.

Our colleague, Mr. El-Khoury, asked a very good question earlier. He asked what the difference was between Syria and Afghanistan. When we worked with Syria, we also worked with the UN, which had refugee camps in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. The UN was able to select refugees and implement measures to ensure a proper security assessment for each of the refugees. We were not able to work that way in the case of the Afghans, because the refugee camps were organized differently. That is one of the logistical problems that my colleague Minister Fraser faced, as did I, in fact.

That is also why I have worked with the Americans, who had a number of Afghans on their various military bases, and this enabled us to bring some of them here. Every week, every month, we continue to receive Afghan refugees from various countries with which I have been in contact since I took office in 2021.

• (1750)

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Thank you for that answer.

[English]

The Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan, which I have worked with closely, is from my riding. I've been watching—and I'm sure many people across the country have been seeing—your leadership in foreign policy and feminist policy with the G7 leaders.

This group of women is really focused on working to support Afghan girls in continuing their education. They have used every tool possible to support women in Afghanistan. They're talking about using technology to make sure that girls continue to educate themselves in a safe way. They're talking about creating spaces where Afghan women can continue to sort of digest what the Taliban regime has done to them.

In your conversations with other foreign affairs ministers, are you able to talk about some of the innovative ways we can continue to support Afghan women and girls who need to continue to have their education? Also, as we continue to see the erasure of women in Afghanistan, what kinds of conversations are you having with your counterparts on this specific subject?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: I've had many conversations with my counterparts, particularly my German counterpart, on finding ways to help the schooling of girls and impose conditions on our aid. We're also working with the EU on a better-coordinated approach when it comes to humanitarian assistance. That's supported, obviously, by Minister Sajjan.

Right now, at the end of the day, the best way for Canada to provide help right now is through Bill C-41. At the same time, the best way is making sure we work with the UN. Nobody has asked me a question on this, and I'm surprised: What is shocking about humanitarian aid in Afghanistan is the fact that women who are part of international NGOs cannot work there. We have pushed back heavily on this and will continue to do so—

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

With that, our first panel comes to an end. On behalf of all the members of this committee, Minister, I want to thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule.

I will suspend the meeting for two or three minutes so that we can allow one additional member to take a seat.

The meeting is suspended.

• (1750)

(Pause)

• (1755)

The Chair: I call the meeting to order.

We have the officials with us for the next 50 minutes. In addition to the officials from the previous panel, we are joined by Christopher Gibbins, executive director, Afghanistan-Pakistan.

Welcome, Mr. Gibbins.

We will go straight to our rounds of questions, beginning with MP Chong.

MP Chong, you will have six minutes. Please begin.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I hope I won't be interrupted this time. Having been here 19 years, I don't interrupt other members when they are using their time to intervene. My experience on committee has been that there has often been a wide latitude given to members questioning ministers in front of a committee, and I hope I will be accorded the same courtesy in the future.

I want to go back to this question I was asking the minister about Afghanistan. I believe, and I think many people who follow this file believe, that the way Canada left Afghanistan in August 2021 was a disaster that will harm our interests for years to come. To be fair, the way the western alliance, our allies, left Afghanistan was part of that disaster. They too failed to leave Afghanistan in a way that upheld our values and our interests.

I think we did particularly poorly in leaving Afghanistan. I highlighted, when the minister was in front of the committee, the testimony we heard at the Special Committee on Afghanistan about how uncoordinated the Government of Canada's response was, as is borne out by the fact that we evacuated disproportionately fewer people than did our closest allies.

The U.S. evacuated 122,000 persons in the period to the end of August 2021. The United Kingdom evacuated 15,000 persons. Proportionately, that would suggest that we should have evacuated somewhere between 10,000 and 12,000 people, yet we evacuated 3,700 people. It's part of a broader pattern, I believe, of an inability of the whole of government to execute when it comes to important files and important crises.

We received the government's response to the special report on Afghanistan. The response to recommendation 2, in saying that the interdepartmental task force “established an effective and efficient working relationship” among all the departments during the crisis, particularly seems completely at odds with what the special committee heard.

As my first question, what is your assessment of how the Government of Canada, and particularly the department, managed the evacuation during that time?

• (1800)

Mr. Weldon Epp (Assistant Deputy Minister, Asia, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Madam Chair, I'll start off and then turn to my colleague Julie Sunday to supplement.

Thank you for the very important question. It's a question that obviously partner departments and Global Affairs Canada have posed and, in after-action review, undertook to respond to, not only through internal review but also by responding to the recommendations that came forward from the really important work of this committee. I think, as the minister mentioned earlier, they carried forward new investments in capacity to do better and to have better capacity not only to respond but also to coordinate.

The fact is, as the minister mentioned—and to get to the premise of some of your earlier comments—the situation was messy. It had its own unique characteristics. Canada was in a position different from the positions of some of our allies with respect to assets on the ground.

Just to speak to the comparability of how we did, I think all of those are valid questions and all of those have factored into how we analyze, assess and look at how we will work going forward. At the same time, we hope that some of the specifics of the situation will never obtain in the same way.

It's about the capacity to be able to move more nimbly. I think the government's response to recommendation 2 was to agree with the premise but to look at the tool kit that the existing act already provides us to work with.

Hon. Michael Chong: Was part of our inability to respond at the time related to our underfunding of our armed forces? Is part of the problem that we don't have enough Globemasters, Royal Canadian Air Force personnel and other military personnel to have effected that evacuation in the same way that the United States and the United Kingdom did?

Mr. Weldon Epp: Madam Chair, with respect, I believe that question could competently be answered only by the Department of National Defence. I think that's an important question, but I don't feel we're in a position to—

Hon. Michael Chong: Yes, but you're the lead department, right? You're the lead department responsible for the evacuation. Surely, in the after-action reports, there would have been an analysis of where the gaps were, not just in Global Affairs but among the other departments.

Mr. Weldon Epp: Madame Chair, my comment from the lead department on this would be that we are prepared to respond to very diverse situations around the world, and Julie can speak to that, but that will always involve a combination of tools. It's next to impossible—very unlikely—that one will always have the tool kit one would want at a given point in time. In the evacuation from Lebanon a few years back, we saw a very active approach that was using charter planes and so on.

Hon. Michael Chong: You mentioned that additional resources have been put in place. What sorts of resources are they?

• (1805)

Mr. Weldon Epp: Julie, do you want to speak to that?

Ms. Julie Sunday: Every emergency is an opportunity to learn how to improve how we deal with emergencies, and Afghanistan was no exception. One of the key funding decisions in the fall economic update is that there are new resources for consular, and—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Ms. Sunday; time is up for Mr. Chong. You will get an opportunity in the second round.

We will proceed to MP Ali.

MP Ali, you have six minutes. You can please begin.

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

Thanks to the witnesses for being here to share their information and expertise with us today.

Could you tell the committee about the mechanism that is in place for coordination between Global Affairs Canada and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, both at the ministry level and locally on the ground, with respect to the Afghan situation?

Ms. Julie Sunday: I can speak to what's in place during a crisis, which is that Global Affairs Canada, as the lead department for international emergencies, will establish an interdepartmental task force that would have all the relevant departments at the table. In the case of Afghanistan, we met daily. This started in early July, and it went into November. It was a very, very long task force from an emergency management perspective.

During the crisis in August, we had IRCC, DND and others embedded in our emergency response team at Global Affairs Canada, so we had a whole room, a situation room, where everybody was working collaboratively.

One of the big challenges was the velocity with which the crisis hit. We had been, of course, in contingency planning for a long period of time, and at the peak, the intensity of the requests we were getting was really significant. For our part, we have an emergency watch response centre that operates 24-7. At the peak of the emergency, we were getting 70,000 emails a day. While we had 200 staff in our operations centre, it was very challenging that week.

That said, the linkages between IRCC, DND and Global Affairs were certainly forged in the lead-up to the crisis and remained in place afterward. In the phase right after the air bridge, we were focused on doing our best to get Canadian citizens out, working collaboratively with Qatar and with other partners to do that. Then it quickly moved into a phase that was very focused on the SIMs, the special immigration measures program, and Weldon's team was very actively engaged in bilateral discussions with key partners in Doha, the UAE and others to be able to facilitate ways to get out. Again, it was very challenging. Documentation was a huge issue and has been a huge issue throughout the crisis. We have all been working collaboratively to resolve these situations.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you.

How are Canadian consular services in countries neighbouring Afghanistan operating to help the large number of displaced Afghans?

Ms. Julie Sunday: This is an excellent question. We surged resources into Pakistan, Doha and Kuwait, across all of that region, to be able to support consular clients and to support our partner department, Immigration, which was working on the SIMs program, and to ensure that there was safe passage to Canada for those entitled to come.

We are able to do that. We have a standing rapid deployment team. We have individuals trained on visas for these countries, so we're able to move them very quickly into those places. They're trained in consular matters, and that was an effective way to be able to build up our capacity.

• (1810)

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Through you, Madam Chair, over two million Afghans are externally displaced in neighbouring countries. What collaboration with the host countries is Global Affairs Canada able to provide to support this vulnerable population?

Mr. Weldon Epp: Thank you for the question. It's an excellent question.

In fact, the most affected neighbouring country, Pakistan, has the largest population of refugees anywhere. Some of that is very long-standing, but there was a significant surge after the fall of Kabul. The Government of Canada has been working closely with the Government of Pakistan to move forward with safe passage and transition to Canada for those who are invited through the programs that have been discussed by this committee, and also to provide support to stabilize the situation and allow the Government of Pakistan to provide for the humanitarian needs of that large community.

Of course, there are other neighbouring countries to which Afghan refugees have fled. We've worked very closely with the governments of Qatar—as the minister mentioned earlier—and the United Arab Emirates, and of course with partners, to do what we can to move forward in meeting our own tool kit and our own targets and relieve pressure while meeting, as my colleague mentioned, the necessary requirements of ensuring, for example, the biometric data, etc., that is required to facilitate.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Are there other plans for—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, MP Ali. Your time is up.

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

You can please begin.

[*Translation*]

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

Thanks to everyone for being here with us today. We greatly appreciate it.

In the Bloc Québécois, we have identified two factors going forward. I understand that Kabul has fallen. What is of considerable interest to us in the Bloc Québécois is what we are doing now, what we can do in the future, and what lessons have been learned from what happened when Kabul fell.

You said that you have had a lot of bilateral discussions with the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. You had no choice; you were in the middle of the crisis. One of the recommendations made by the Special Committee on Afghanistan called on the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to create a standing emergency system, an emergency mechanism whose buttons could be pushed quickly when an international crisis arises, be it an armed conflict or a natural disaster like the earthquake in Haiti, for example. The Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship has appeared before this committee several times. He said he had instructed his

officials to create this kind of mechanism at IRCC eventually. I think you already have one at Global Affairs Canada.

Do you think it is a good idea to create this kind of mechanism?

[*English*]

Mr. Weldon Epp: I'll ask my colleague to supplement the answer in a moment.

That recommendation, in broad lines, is accepted by the government. The fact is that the existing division of labour is fairly clear. As you mentioned, Global Affairs Canada does have the lead for responding to and managing task forces for international crises. Public Safety is the lead for—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: A point of order, Madam Chair. I have no interpretation.

[*English*]

Mr. Weldon Epp: I can reprise.

The Chair: I'll stop the clock. We can please have a look.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: It's back.

[*English*]

The Chair: Can you hear it now?

Okay, can you repeat?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Weldon Epp: Or I can try to answer in French.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Can you start your answer over? You can answer in English.

[*English*]

Mr. Weldon Epp: To repeat what I said, absolutely the government recognized the recommendation and partially agreed with recommendation 2. As the member mentioned, Global Affairs Canada does have the lead for response to international crises, while it's Public Safety Canada for domestic crises.

Julie can explain a little bit about how that works across the Government of Canada, but that's a pre-existing division of labour that government works with.

Ms. Julie Sunday: We fully support the idea of IRCC establishing an emergency response function. Afghanistan was a really good example of an international emergency that had huge domestic components as well, in that there was a massive immigration program that was being implemented.

For us, as a federal group of departments that have emergency management structures, we've been spending a lot of time looking at how we can work more seamlessly with each other and how we build that capacity. In the past year we've had a few crises. We've also had Ukraine and others. It does work. It is working very well. Afghanistan was quite unique in many ways—in the intensity, the speed and the scale.

Certainly GAC, as the international emergency lead, works very closely with domestic departments and their emergency response centres.

• (1815)

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: If you think it is a good idea, that means it was missing when the crisis happened. We should have had this kind of emergency mechanism. We have learned the lesson and it is going to be created. That is why the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship has decided to go forward with this proposal.

Let's talk about Bill C-41 now, the Bloc Québécois' other cause. This is extremely important to us. We are trying to work with all parties to have it passed as quickly as possible. We want us to agree not to debate the amendments. You were there when I explained this earlier.

I imagine you have examined the bill. For the information of the public, what assurance do you have that this bill will not allow terrorist groups to have access to funding? After combing through the report of the Special Committee on Afghanistan, do you feel there are enough firewalls? Will those firewalls not be a kind of obstacle to NGOs getting speedy authorization to do their work on the ground?

[English]

Mr. Weldon Epp: I'm going to turn to my colleague, Jennifer Loten, who is our expert on the matter.

Ms. Jennifer Loten (Director General, International Crime and Terrorism, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): We're very committed to making sure that this amendment does two things at once. One is to protect the integrity of the Criminal Code. The intention of that is to prevent terrorist financing. The second thing is for it to have an enabling function. We don't want that first objective to overrule our capability to provide the humanitarian assistance that all Canadians want us to provide.

The protections that have been put in place are based on a couple of things, and you mentioned them earlier in your interaction. There's a public safety component of making sure we have a clear sense of what the terrorist threat on the ground is in a particular situation. The second thing is making sure that the organizations that are going to be administering Canadian funds are doing so with transparency and with the ability to manage those funds so that they're targeted toward the work they're intended to do and so that there are protections in place to make sure there is no slippage.

What the Criminal Code amendment does is protect you from violations of the Criminal Code in the event that you cannot avoid any financing of terrorist organizations through taxing or through service fees, the kinds of things that an organization cannot avoid in

a situation like the one with the Taliban, which has the ability to control the environment. Canadian organizations cannot avoid some benefits flowing, but the amendment minimizes what that amount will be.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: You mean checkpoints, for example.

[English]

Ms. Jennifer Loten: Yes.

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

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Already? That was a short discussion.

[English]

The Chair: Yes.

We will now proceed to Ms. Kwan. Ms. Kwan, you have six minutes. You can begin, please.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

With regard to special immigration for interpreters and collaborators, the government announced a new measure for cultural advisers after being sued by family members who had loved ones left behind. That special immigration measure only targets those who worked for the Department of National Defence in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2021. Those who worked for Canada in actuality but worked under NATO or ISAF are not qualified for this program.

Does the department know how many of our cultural advisers who worked for NATO or ISAF are in that category?

Mr. Weldon Epp: Madame Chair, I don't think we know the answer to that question.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Is that something that officials can find out and report back to the committee?

Mr. Weldon Epp: We'd be happy to endeavour to do so.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you so much. I think it would be important.

It doesn't make sense, right? These are people who are obviously a part of the important work they're doing, and Canada, of course, is a part of NATO, so I would appreciate that. Hopefully, there will be some changes to ensure that those families get to safety.

I want to get back to the question that I asked of the minister with respect to the legislation, and you've heard my comments about Doctors Without Borders. I'd like to get the officials' response to that.

• (1820)

Mr. Weldon Epp: Jennifer, do you want to take this one?

Ms. Jennifer Loten: Sure.

The legislation was presented in Parliament fairly recently. It'll go through the process, and I think we'll be looking at how it applies. Organizations that have been part of the process and that have been working with us to develop these solutions will obviously have reactions. We're very interested in hearing what those are so that we can get a look at how we can implement this amendment so that it does the work that we intend it to do. I used the word "enabling" a moment ago, and I'll use it again. Our intention is to make sure that these organizations can do the excellent work that we want them to do, and we've been working hand in hand with them over the course of the process of review to make sure that it does that.

However, I would say that the way it's set up at the moment, and the reason that it's not simply a humanitarian carve-out, is that it does enable a broader category of engagement than what would simply be envisioned in a humanitarian carve-out, so we can work, in this case, on education, on health care, on livelihood issues. It's all spelled out in the legislation at the moment. We look forward to hearing from stakeholder organizations what their reactions are to this, and we hope to continue to work in partnership with them so that it works the way it's intended to.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Would officials be able to table, for this committee, the list of stakeholder groups consulted on this bill?

Ms. Jennifer Loten: I think we can do that. We want to be a bit careful about the organizations, though. There are security issues. This is not the case at the moment, but it will become so when the legislation comes into play.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you. We will, of course, be mindful of that. It will be kept confidential.

I'd also like to canvass the officials with this question: What work is being done with third countries to help, for example, Afghans at risk—those being hunted by the Taliban—get to safety?

I understand that officials and the minister may not be able to say, "This is what we're doing", because if it's put out there, it might shut the system down. However, could officials advise that work under way—or done—is actually bringing people to safety? Is that still in operation, at the moment?

Mr. Weldon Epp: Could I clarify that we're referring to work that facilitates exit from Afghanistan, then safe passage onward?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: That's correct.

It's also about work for people who don't have a valid visa. For obvious reasons, they can't go to the Taliban and say, "Hey, give me a bunch of visas." Soldiers would put a bull's eye right on their forehead.

How are we helping those individuals ?

Mr. Weldon Epp: Madam Chair, the broad answer is this: Through the partnerships we have with Pakistan and the UAE, and working with the United States and others, we'll continue to provide screening we can't do on-site in Afghanistan. This allows us to address valid security and identification issues, knowing many people are fleeing without passports. They're not fleeing with proper identification. That's why we're positioned and are working with partners to do biometric screening in third countries, which allows us to then facilitate onward movement.

For example, a charter flight arrived earlier today in Vancouver—or was it late last night? Another 368 Afghan refugees have just come in. That work is ongoing, to answer your question.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Does that include people who don't have valid visas? Are any people arriving without valid visas?

Mr. Weldon Epp: Do you mean valid visas for Canada?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: No, I mean valid visas for the third country—Pakistan, or wherever they are.

Mr. Weldon Epp: I understand.

This includes working with our partners to facilitate, as smoothly as possible, the exit from third countries of individuals eligible for the programs we offer. We recognize, particularly in the case of Pakistan, and to the point the member raised earlier, that there are pressures in some of these communities because they may be overstaying the visas they have, and the Government of Pakistan has chosen, as is its right, to apply fines. We continue to have conversations with governments, including the Government of Pakistan, and we have no evidence to date that these individuals are being re-fouled or sent back to Afghanistan, so we will continue to work with Pakistan to provide the pathways to allow them to transition, even if they've overstayed or have to pay fines before they can come to Canada.

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

We will now proceed to Ms. Rempel Garner for five minutes.

Ms. Rempel Garner, please begin.

• (1825)

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm wondering whether Global Affairs can table with the committee the criteria list, or any sort of selection list, used to select people to receive facilitation letters during the initial evacuation in 2021.

Ms. Julie Sunday: Madam Chair, the letters of facilitation were exclusively sent to Canadian citizens, permanent residents and their family members. They were not—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Okay, so that was it.

What about the criteria list for evacuating Afghan nationals? Could you table with the committee the criteria your department used to select who would be evacuated on the flights that came out in August 2021?

Ms. Julie Sunday: Those individuals would have been selected by the immigration department, so—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: You didn't have any role in that.

Ms. Julie Sunday: No.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Okay.

Did your department have any role whatsoever in selecting or identifying any persons? Was it all IRCC?

Ms. Julie Sunday: Yes, exactly. Our mandate is for consular, so in this case it was exclusively focused on Canadian citizens, PRs and their family members.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Okay.

Ms. Julie Sunday: Canadian citizens, of course, were.... All of these individuals were vetted, and—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: There were no facilitation letters from your department that were not exclusively for Canadian citizens, correct?

Ms. Julie Sunday: Correct, and if I could just add something important about how we use these letters of facilitation—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I don't have time.

Ms. Julie Sunday: Okay.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Just so I understand, there is no possible way, given everything you've just said, that a letter of facilitation from your department could have been used to authorize.... There were no visa facilitation letters that were official from your department that were issued for Afghan nationals, correct? That's just to underscore that point.

Ms. Julie Sunday: Correct, and letters of facilitation don't provide new authorities. They—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Thank you.

Ms. Julie Sunday: It's established information being put in a letter that so-and-so is Canadian.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I just wanted to get that on the record.

If someone were to use a visa facilitation letter that was for Afghan nationals and it bore the GAC seal, it would not have originated from your department in any way, shape or form.

Ms. Julie Sunday: Again, our facilitation letters were exclusively for consular clients.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Thank you.

The last thing I wanted to ask about was, I guess, why you guys put up a plaque. Who decided to put up the plaque?

Mr. Weldon Epp: Madam Chair, I'll start and then pass it to my colleague Julie.

First of all, I understand the concern for the question. There is no closure to the tragedy that's unfolding in Afghanistan. Our department and the immigration department have teams that report to us and continue to work on this every day. The disaster, the tragedy, is not over.

I think there was a decision within our department to recognize that colleagues who had put their own careers, their own selves, into that situation, and had worked through a very traumatic and very difficult period, should get internal recognition for the risks they've taken and the work they've done—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Does the department regret putting that plaque up?

Mr. Weldon Epp: Madam Chair, I'm not going to presume to speak for the department to answer that question. I think we recognize the spirit in which it was done, which was to recognize individual and team efforts—best efforts—under very difficult situations—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Today, do you think that perhaps that sent a message that it was “job done” and that Afghan nationals and other NGO partners could have misconstrued it?

Mr. Weldon Epp: I don't think that was the spirit of it and I don't think a reasonable observer would conclude that either the Government of Canada or Global Affairs Canada as an institution in any way, shape or form feels that the response to the fall of Kabul is over. It's an ongoing operational piece of our work every day.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: The plaque's purpose was to commemorate Canada's evacuation of the Afghans. How can you put up a plaque when the job's not done?

• (1830)

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Ms. Rempel Garner. The time is up.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Thank you.

The Chair: We will now proceed to Ms. Lalonde.

Ms. Lalonde, you will have five minutes. Please begin.

[*Translation*]

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

I note that all your testimony today really is based on facts. It is also very compassionate, and I see a deep desire to continue to improve the situation, as well.

You alluded to the need to add new resources, particularly when it comes to consular personnel. In her testimony, the minister referred to funds associated with her primary role.

Can you tell us a bit about these new resources? I would like to get a few more details on that subject.

How is that going to improve matters in relation to everything we have learned and what we have to continue doing, not just for Afghanistan, but also for other countries?

[*English*]

Ms. Julie Sunday: Thanks for the question, Madam Chair.

Yes, we were very pleased to receive resources. A key part of these resources will be developed toward building our surge response capacity. Importantly, we will have a standing emergency response team that will focus on being primed to move quickly. They will be providing training across our network. We will continue to build our resources and consular emergency capacity at missions as well.

Importantly, we are also, as part of this, really working to modernize our tools. This is part of communicating better with Canadians, using new digital platforms to do that—we're already using WhatsApp in an emergency—and trying to become a bit more agile.

Of course, we provide our excellent travel advice. We have the ROCA list, the registration of Canadians abroad. We want to be able to access Canadians, particularly in crisis situations, so that we're able to provide them with the most relevant information.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you for that detailed answer.

I would like to come back to what we are feeling as a result of some of the decisions being made by this current terrorist regime, in terms of our Canadian values and especially the treatment of young women and girls. We believe the way women are treated by the Taliban is inconceivable and completely unacceptable.

I would like to know how Global Affairs Canada is reacting to the restrictions imposed by local authorities concerning women's involvement in humanitarian aid. We were talking earlier about Bill C-41 and we know now that there are restrictions.

I would like to hear your comments on this subject, if you would like to share them.

[*English*]

Mr. Weldon Epp: Thank you for the question.

I want to begin by stating what I think we all feel, which is that all Canadians strongly condemn the actions of the Taliban regime, most recently in December, to drastically restrict the rights of women and girls to participate and work. As the minister stated earlier, this has also dramatically impacted the way in which we work with such channels and partners, as we do already have, that we can work with under the circumstances.

To answer the question, we have done a number of things. Number one, the minister has led for Canada, joining with other governments and other ministers, in condemning these new laws, if you like, in terms of human rights abuses by the Taliban regime at every occasion. I think she spoke to that earlier.

As well, to complement what she said, we do have a special representative for Afghanistan, former ambassador Sproule. He is based in Doha and works tirelessly with other special representatives in coordinating with the UN agencies in communicating, as appropriate, with representatives of the Taliban under very difficult circumstances in order to understand, and to make sure they understand, the implications of these actions.

Finally, we've been in close contact with a range of non-governmental organizations that still have activity on the ground—for example, the Aga Khan Foundation.

What I would say is this: It's a terrible situation and it has gotten worse and more difficult, but at the same time, Afghanistan is not a unitary operating zone. There is some differentiation between how these new edicts are being implemented within Kabul and certain metropolitan centres, if you will, and in other parts of the country.

We're tracking closely with our partners to see the extent to which humanitarian assistance, health assistance and education assistance can continue to be delivered to and through women even while the Taliban's official position has changed.

We continue to monitor it closely and we look to work as we can with those partners.

• (1835)

The Chair: The time is up.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you for that.

The Chair: We will now proceed to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

You have two and a half minutes. Please begin.

[*Translation*]

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

I sometimes agree with my friend Ms. Rempel Garner, and I want to say that the commemorative plaque, in my opinion, is a nice gesture of recognition for the people who worked night and day and put all their heart and energy into trying to save as many people as possible. It has the support of the Bloc Québécois in that regard.

Under Bill C-41, your department, or Citizenship and Immigration, will have responsibility for determining whether the proposed activity responds to a real and important need in an area reported to be under the control of a terrorist group.

Since you are the one who will decide whether or not authorizations will be given, I would like to know whether you have already established the criteria that will be used to determine whether the objectives have been achieved.

I would ask that Ms. Loten answer, given her in-depth knowledge of Bill C-41.

[*English*]

Ms. Jennifer Loten: Thanks for the question.

The legislation has in it a set of criteria for the kinds of undertakings that will be given protection from criminal liability. The reason for that is to make sure that the central objective in the Criminal Code is protected, which is to prevent financing to terrorist organizations.

It's not a door wide open for any kind of activity to be undertaken. It's the kinds of things that are essential and that are humanitarian. We have widened it to include health care and education. Those are the kinds of criteria that we're looking for. Is it an essential activity in the sense that it fits within the scope of activities that the legislation is designed to address?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you.

We have talked a lot about the fact that several departments are involved and that we might end up wasting time.

Do you agree with me that, simply as a matter of practicality and speed, there should be a single window, a one-stop shop, so that non-governmental organizations, or NGOs, do not have to apply to three different departments?

[*English*]

Ms. Jennifer Loten: Yes, it's a great idea.

We're working on—once the legislation is completed and runs through its process in Parliament—being able to pick up and start applying them as quickly as possible.

Yes, there are three departments involved. I can assure you that we work very closely together. The idea is that the public-facing element will be a single face. From there, different departments will take control of the elements that relate to their mandates.

For example, Global Affairs will take a look in the first instance. Where we have a request that needs to be channelled towards IRCC, we'll do that. Then we will look at the piece that pertains to our work. Then we make a recommendation that will go over to Public Safety.

We're trying as much as possible to streamline. Where we can, we're also seeking to—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: NGOs will therefore have to submit their applications to just one place. That's perfect.

[*English*]

The Chair: Your time is up.

Ms. Jennifer Loten: Yes, that's our intention.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now go to Ms. Kwan.

You can please begin. You will have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

I want to go back to the last question I asked.

It was mentioned that the department is not aware of anybody having been sent back, but it knows that people have been fined. I'm aware of people who have disappeared. Whether they have been sent back or whatever happened to them, the families can't find them. They've lost contact. Not good things are happening from that perspective. I guess I want to come back to this.

Are there individuals for whom the departments have worked, perhaps collaboratively with IRCC, so that individuals without valid visas or expired visas have found a path to safety in Canada?

Mr. Weldon Epp: I'm going to ask Chris to respond to this.

Mr. Christopher Gibbins (Executive Director, Afghanistan-Pakistan, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

That question is really best placed for IRCC to respond.

As far as we are aware, yes, there will have been some individuals. That is part of the very extensive conversations we have with the Government of Pakistan to work collaboratively with them, be-

cause there are Afghans who make their way into Pakistan without the required documents. If they are part of the Canadian program, then we will work with the Government of Pakistan to get them out.

• (1840)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

I raise this question because the Minister of Immigration was on record as saying that if you don't have a valid visa, you would not be considered as having a valid application in Canada. I hope that position has changed, because by nature, people who are refugees and fleeing persecution are not going to necessarily have valid papers. That cannot be a reason that they can't be considered for an application to get to safety, so I hope the department will work with the ministry of immigration to work through this, because that does not make any sense.

Can I get the officials to provide to committee information on how many individuals, particularly women's organizations, received funding from GAC or the Canadian government in advancing rights? How many of those individuals are there?

Of those, how many received a referral from GAC towards the 40,000 special immigration measure?

Mr. Weldon Epp: Thank you for the question.

I'm going to try to answer. I have some data here, so bear with me. I'll provide what I can.

For the first part of the question, with respect, I don't think we'll be able to answer in the sense of.... Given the decades that Canada has worked in the country, a full list of all the beneficiaries of the programming we did would be an enormous list.

What we are working on in the role that GAC has played is that as referrals come forward, either through third parties or directly, we assess those criteria. Of those, Global Affairs has been able to refer thousands to IRCC—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting. Time is up for Ms. Kwan. Please wrap up.

Mr. Weldon Epp: I believe, Madam Chair, that we'd be happy to provide the data in terms of how many referrals have been made and for how many of those referrals IRCC has been able to offer invitations to apply.

We can provide that data. I'd be happy to do so not on your time.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I wonder if I can ask the officials, Madam Chair, if they can try to see if they can get the data, as much as they can—

The Chair: Mr. Epp has said that he will try to provide it.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: —on how many organizations received funding from GAC as far back as they can go and on how many people who worked for GAC received funding.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kwan.

We will now proceed to MP Chong. You will have five minutes. You can please begin.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to continue with the questions I was asking earlier about our future response to evacuation crises.

I remember well the 2006 emergency evacuation of Canadians from Lebanon and how chaotic it was. I obviously remember well the events of two years ago. We live in the age of migration. We're seeing millions of people being displaced, with Latin America approaching the U.S. southern border, people here in Canada crossing at Roxham Road, migration throughout the Middle East into Europe and migration from northern Africa into Europe. This issue is not going away. We're likely going to be dealing with this in the near future.

I want to understand: If this happens again, what will be different this time?

Madam Sunday mentioned that additional resources have been put in place, consular resources. Can you tell us what will be different next time? What have we changed so that we can better respond to emergency evacuations?

Ms. Julie Sunday: Every emergency scenario is unique. Every one is different. To manage these, we do a lot of planning. We do a lot of contingency planning ahead of time.

We watch the world. I have a 24-7 emergency watch centre, where we have teams following events as they're happening around the world so that we can be aware of what's going on. We are available to Canadians 24-7. They can call us. We can provide them with instructions, etc.

• (1845)

Hon. Michael Chong: That's a good example of what I'm talking about.

During the evacuation of Afghanistan, we were told that IRCC was overwhelmed with the volumes of emails that were coming in during the evacuation. There were only a handful of people. In fact, we were told that there were two people in IRCC processing emails coming in, massive volumes of emails. They couldn't keep up.

A call went out from IRCC requesting that Government of Canada employees volunteer to work at IRCC to help clear the backlog. I hope that in the future, the PCO would order Government of Canada employees in other departments to address the need to open up emails in IRCC.

I'm wondering what has changed so that we don't get into a situation in the future, whether it be evacuation from Hong Kong of some 300,000 citizens or evacuation from other hot spots around the world. I'm wondering how we have learned from our past mistakes.

Ms. Julie Sunday: This is a great question.

We have that capacity at Global Affairs. During the Afghanistan crisis, we had over 200 individuals in our operations centre working the phone lines and answering emails. The number of emails we started to receive in the middle of that crisis was extreme. There were 70,000 a day. That was a very exceptional situation. We

worked through the Russian invasion of Ukraine, where we also have consular interest and people, and we've never received that number of calls.

In terms of whether we're resourced for this, yes. Can I pull resources from a department—

Hon. Michael Chong: When you say “we”, you're referring to the department.

Ms. Julie Sunday: Our department has the capacity to handle very large-scale international emergencies—

Hon. Michael Chong: You're not speaking about the capacity of other departments.

Ms. Julie Sunday: I cannot speak to the capacity of other departments.

You've seen our department lead the COVID repatriation initiative—

Hon. Michael Chong: I guess the challenge is.... I believe what you're telling us about the department, and you're the lead department, but I'm worried that other departments may not have the capacity in an emergency situation to assist in an evacuation, and if IRCC isn't issuing the appropriate paperwork, then it doesn't matter what resources Global Affairs has: Nothing's going to happen.

There must be a way for the lead department to affect certain outcomes in emergencies through central agencies like the PCO so that we don't end up with other agencies and departments being the bottleneck, even though Global Affairs is properly resourced.

Ms. Julie Sunday: Madam Chair, again I think this is a very good question.

It's about ensuring that we are resourced and that crises that have domestic components have good support from the whole system.

In this case, I would say that there was a significant interdepartmental effort. The scale of the demand for immigration was exceptional. We are focused on consular responsibilities, but we receive calls, of course, for a lot of distressed individuals in Afghanistan.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Sunday.

We will now end this panel with five minutes for Mr. Dhaliwal. Mr. Dhaliwal, the floor is yours. You can begin.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair, I want to thank the officials from the department, not just for appearing but for doing great work behind the scenes. Thank you to all of you.

Anyone can respond, but I will certainly start with Mr. Gibbins.

There was a regime change in Pakistan. The Taliban have taken over Afghanistan. I would like to know about Canada's coordinated efforts with the international community.

Mr. Christopher Gibbins: Since the fall of Kabul in August 2021, Canada has been an integral part of the conversation within the international community in terms of how we respond, whether it's our diplomatic engagement, international assistance or humanitarian assistance. That's meant from the leadership level—the foreign minister and ministerial level—all the way through and down.

Part of that coordination, as Weldon referenced, is our special representative based in Doha. Doha became a hub for diplomatic engagement following the fall of Kabul. There are at least 18 other countries represented there. It's also a space and opportunity to engage directly with the Taliban, who are also there. Some of the messaging is coordinated amongst our allies in a very emphatic and consistent way.

In terms of our international coordination, the conversations continue. There were meetings recently in Dubai among the like-minded to look at how we can respond to the most recent egregious actions by the Taliban, whether it's the ban on women working in NGOs or the restrictions on education across the board. All of those are having a very serious impact on our capacity to deliver assistance.

That being said, as the minister pointed out, Canada has been able to contribute significantly and substantively, which is really quite remarkable under those conditions. We've been doing that alongside our partners. Conversations continue within the World Bank and so on and so forth.

Perhaps I'll stop there in case others wish to add.

• (1850)

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Is there anyone else?

Mr. Weldon Epp: Stephen, did you want to add a word about the humanitarian aspect?

Mr. Stephen Salewicz (Director General, International Humanitarian Assistance, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you for the question. I appreciate it.

To confirm what my colleagues have been saying, we have been part of a coordinated response, indeed. On the humanitarian side, which I'm responsible for, we work very closely with other donor countries to coordinate our response to the crisis.

Canada has been a significant donor in making meaningful contributions to that response. We were the fifth-largest donor to the humanitarian response appeal last year. We are a significant contributor.

Our focus has been on meeting the needs of the most vulnerable in Afghanistan. That's primarily through our support to food securi-

ty through the WFP and UNICEF. We're helping to reach millions of children with our response.

This is a coordinated effort. Going back to the premise of your question, we work closely with the UN and other countries to effect this support.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Thank you.

Is there anyone else? No.

I'm going back to Ms. Loten.

You mentioned keeping your balance when it comes to Bill C-41. I have met with many humanitarian organizations. Is there anything else that you want to add in reference to that bill, so that it gives peace of mind to those organizations that are willing to work and help the most vulnerable in Afghanistan?

Ms. Jennifer Loten: The purpose of the amendment is to enable that engagement. I think we share their commitment to engaging with the people of Afghanistan and making sure that Canada can play an important role in protecting their rights and improving the circumstances in which they find themselves.

The purpose of the amendment is to provide protection from criminal liability. We remain convinced—and I'm sure many Afghans are convinced as well—that we should seize any opportunity to reduce the benefit that the Taliban may derive from this. That's the way we've crafted the legislation. It is to make sure that these organizations have the right sort of financial accountability in place and that they qualify to be supported in their work while at the same time making sure that we are reducing the benefit that the Taliban may derive, because we wouldn't want to be in a position of enabling that organization in any way.

That is the way it's crafted and that's its intention. Along with the broader stakeholder group, we share those goals.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Thank you.

Thank you very much, again, for being here. I wish you the very best.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dhaliwal.

With that, this panel comes to an end.

On behalf of all members of this committee, I want to thank all the officials for appearing before the committee. Thank you for all that you do.

With that, do I have the will of the committee to adjourn the meeting?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay. The meeting is adjourned.

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