



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

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# Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 120**

Thursday, December 12, 2024

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Chair: Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal





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• (1105)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.)):**  
Good morning.

I call this meeting to order. We are meeting in public. Welcome to meeting number 120 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

Today's meeting will be the last meeting of 2024. I'm sure you will enjoy Christmas and New Year's with your family, friends and constituents.

On behalf of myself and the committee members, I would like to wish the staff—the support staff, the clerk, the analysts, the interpreters—a very merry Christmas, happy holidays and happy new year.

As well, honourable members, from myself and my family, I want to wish you a merry Christmas, happy new year and happy holidays.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. I would like to remind all participants of the following points.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. All comments should be addressed through the chair. Whether participating in person or via Zoom, please raise your hand if you wish to speak. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee at the meeting convened on October 21, 2024, the committee is resuming its study of the recent reforms to the international student program.

Two witnesses who had been scheduled for November 28 were not available to appear today. They are Professor David Green of UBC, and Career Colleges Ontario.

Professor Green submitted speaking notes before his scheduled appearance of November 28.

Do members agree to have the speaking notes added to the evidence of today?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

[See appendix—Remarks by Professor David Green]

**The Chair:** Regarding Career Colleges Ontario, although the deadline has passed, the clerk will offer them the option to submit a written brief.

Is that okay with the honourable members?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

[See appendix—Remarks by Career Colleges Ontario]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Clerk, please proceed with that.

On behalf of the committee members, I would now like to welcome our witnesses for the first hour.

From the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, we have Mr. Nelson Chukwuma.

Mr. Chukwuma, welcome to the meeting.

From the Fédération des cégeps, we have Ms. Annie-Claude Laflamme.

Welcome, Ms. Laflamme.

We also have Ms. Vanesa Casanovas, international recruitment and immigration adviser.

Ms. Casanovas, welcome to the meeting.

You have up to five minutes for your opening remarks, after which we will proceed with the rounds of questions. I would ask you to please manage the time, because I will cut you off at five minutes.

With that, Mr. Chukwuma, I would love to welcome you to take the floor. You have up to five minutes for your opening statement.

Please go ahead.

**Mr. Nelson Chukwuma (Chair, Canadian Alliance of Student Associations):** Thank you for the time, Honourable Chair.

Good morning, Honourable Chair, esteemed committee members and fellow witnesses. I would like to begin my statement by recognizing that we are meeting today on the territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin nation.

My name is Nelson Chukwuma, and I am the chair of the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, or CASA. CASA is a non-partisan, not-for-profit organization that represents students at colleges, polytechnics and universities from coast to coast. Through a formal partnership with the l'Union étudiante du Québec, we are a trusted national student voice. Together we represent 400,000 students across the country.

First, I'd like to thank the committee for the invitation for CASA to be a witness today. CASA recognizes that the immigration system has to work for Canada and that the government has committed to reducing total immigration levels. Our remarks today address how reforms to the international student program will impact post-secondary students in Canada, and our suggestions address how the reforms could better promote the nation's innovation and productivity.

Let me start by addressing the manner in which these reforms have been communicated. Changes have been announced sporadically, causing significant anxiety amongst international students, who are left uncertain about how to adapt or plan for their futures. Post-secondary institutions, too, are struggling to keep up, finding it difficult to provide students, both current and incoming, with accurate information about the new policies. We, therefore, urge the government to ensure that these reforms are communicated with greater clarity and precision and with adequate time for students and institutions to react.

In addition, we urge the federal government to lift restrictions on spousal work permits for undergraduate and master's students in short programs, and to avoid further restrictions on permits for spouses of Ph.D. and other graduate students. These limitations undermine Canada's commitment to family unification and have economic consequences. Spousal work restrictions risk deterring top talent and imposing unnecessary mental, economic and logistical challenges on international, mature students.

We are also concerned about the impacts of these changes on the educational experience of current students, both international and domestic. International tuition has become a vital funding component for Canada's post-secondary institutions. The abrupt reduction in international student enrolment has already resulted in job losses and program closures, particularly at colleges and polytechnics. We worry that these effects could escalate, potentially jeopardizing essential yet costly programs for domestic students, such as those in health and trades and those serving rural and remote populations.

Now, while the government continues to consider reforms to the international student program, we would also like to bring recommendations to the committee that could improve the program's economic impact and competitiveness.

First, recent changes are creating red tape around hands-on learning. International students should be able to participate in co-op terms and internships that are integrated into the curriculum of their program of study without the need to obtain a separate work permit. Work-integrated learning is a cornerstone of post-secondary education, equipping students with practical skills and real-world experience. By removing unnecessary barriers for international students to participate, we can not only enable them to succeed in their pro-

grams but also allow them to contribute specialized knowledge to Canadian employers as part of their studies.

Second, international Ph.D. students are exceptional contributors to Canada's academic and research landscape, often engaging in skilled employment, such as teaching and research assistantships, alongside their studies. However, under current policies, these employment hours do not count towards the Canadian experience class stream for permanent residency, creating unnecessary delays for international Ph.D. graduates seeking to settle in Canada. Recognizing the unique role of Ph.D. students as scholars and skilled workers, we recommend that formal employment hours worked during their studies be eligible for Canadian experience class requirements. This change would help retain top-tier talent, ensuring that these individuals contribute to Canada's innovation and economy in the long term.

Finally, given the fixed level for permanent immigration and the proven tendency of Canadian-trained foreign students to have long-term economic success in Canada, we recommend doubling the comprehensive ranking system points for Canadian post-secondary credentials to ensure that we retain top talent who are already in the country. We hope that our written submission is also insightful to the committee as you study the significant implications that the recent reforms to the international student program have on students and the post-secondary sector.

• (1110)

International students contribute substantially to Canada's innovation, productivity and cultural fabric. The government must, therefore, adopt measures to ensure that it continues to attract, support and retain world-class international students.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to your questions.

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

Now we will go to either Madame Laflamme or Madame Casanovas.

You have five minutes. Please go ahead.

[Translation]

**Ms. Annie-Claude Laflamme (Co-Chair of the International Affairs Committee, Fédération des cégeps):** Thank you.

On behalf of the Fédération des cégeps and its 48 members, I want to thank the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration for offering me this opportunity to appear. My name is Annie Claude Laflamme, and I am the assistant director of studies and student life at the Cégep de Jonquière. I am also the co-chair of the international affairs committee of the Fédération des cégeps, which is the voluntary association of the 48 public colleges in Quebec. The Fédération promotes those colleges and represents their interests, and offers services and advice to support the CEGEPs in developing and in achieving their mission. It is also the official spokesperson and coordinating body for the CEGEPs, which, I would note, are the first level of postsecondary education in Quebec, this being why we are here today.

Since the reform of the international students program was announced by IRCC, which is Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, the consequences, whether immediate or anticipated, have generated serious concerns. In one year, no fewer than five major announcements have been made, with no details or coordination, sending a series of shock waves through the institutions and among the international student population. The measures announced include imposing a national cap on new student permit applications, changing the eligibility criteria for post-graduation work permits, and bringing in closed study permits. These are the reasons why the Fédération wants to bring the real risks involved in this reform to the committee's attention and provide details about figures about which there may be some generalization.

The CEGEP system has experienced reasonable, controlled and ethical growth in its international student population over the years and does not present any risk to immigration programs or threaten the integrity of those programs. In 2023, that student population represented less than 5% of the total number of students in our system, accounting for about 9,000 students. That is the equivalent of 1.3% of study permit holders in Canada, a figure that is quite simply marginal. That constant growth has been achieved with a respectful eye to the regions' capacity to absorb newcomers and to labour market needs, and is in line with what the federal government and communities in Quebec have asked. The CEGEPs are therefore responsible actors and allies, and not the cause of the challenges IRCC must meet.

I also believe it is essential to add that the CEGEPs admit this student population with a view to the collective interest, not financial gain. Our system contributes to ameliorating labour market problems. This commitment can be seen in industries like forestry and early childhood education, and also healthcare. Since 2022, 467 graduates from outside Canada have entered and strengthened the healthcare system. In this case, what is striking is not the growth in the number of foreign students, but the growth in the significant contribution made to public services by CEGEPs. Mr. Miller has also repeatedly stated his objective of encouraging francophone immigration to Canada. I would note that the vast majority of our student population is francophone and attends francophone CEGEPs.

• (1115)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Madame Laflamme, could you please slow down a bit? I will give you extra time. It's hard on the interpreters. I'm sorry to interrupt you. You can start where you left off.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Annie-Claude Laflamme:** I will go slower, with pleasure.

Despite the positive effects that the presence of international students has, the situation is becoming incoherent with these measures, one on top of another, that are undermining Canada's reputation as a study destination, and thus the ability of our programs and institutions to attract students. The federal government's announcements are heightening the vulnerability of international students and causing uncertainty, and are significantly affecting their success and their mental health.

Our mission, as a federation, is to guarantee that postsecondary education is accessible in all regions of Quebec. International students are one way of preserving access to essential programs in fields where workforce needs are crucial. Without them, the vitality of the programs would be affected and their survival might even be in jeopardy.

The CEGEPs play a unique strategic role by virtue of their contribution to regional dynamism and their contribution to Canada's economic objectives and labour market. They are a responsible model for attracting international talent and must be encouraged in what they do, not penalized by restrictive immigration measures. This is why we are making the following recommendations.

First, the autonomy and uniqueness of the CEGEPs, as strategic actors distinguished by their ethical approach and their contribution to regional development, the national economy and the promotion of French, must be recognized.

Second, the eligibility for post-diploma work permits of students who are enrolled in diploma of college studies programs and attestation of college studies programs at Quebec's 48 CEGEPs, on the terms that existed before November 1, 2024, must be preserved.

Third, we recommend that access to work permits for spouses of students, for all programs offered by CEGEPs, be preserved.

Fourth, people who have submitted an application for a study permit in order to continue their education at a different educational institution should be allowed to do so while waiting for their application to be processed if it was submitted before the expiry of their previous status.

And fifth, it is important that stakeholders be consulted and formal, structured discussions be held before any major change is made, to reduce uncertainty and negative impact on the ground.

In conclusion, I would note that Quebec's CEGEPs make an active contribution to training skilled labour and developing local communities. International students enrich our society and play a key role in its future. We ask that the federal government revisit these measures, in partnership with our system, in order to strike a balance between immigration considerations and the real needs of Quebec and Canada.

Thank you.

• (1120)

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Madame Laflamme.

Now we will go to honourable members, starting with Mr. Kmiec.

Mr. Kmiec, please go ahead for six minutes.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

I'll start with the student association first, since you're here, Mr. Chukwuma.

Was your organization consulted before these changes were announced and made?

**Mr. Nelson Chukwuma:** We have had conversations with IR-CC, but for a lot of the announcements that were made, we weren't fully consulted.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** You said you were not "fully" consulted. Were you partially consulted?

**Mr. Nelson Chukwuma:** There were discussions had with members of our team and the home office staff, yes.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Was that before they were made public?

**Mr. Nelson Chukwuma:** That was before they were made public.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** You are the first person to tell me at this committee that an organization was consulted before the government announced these changes.

**Mr. Nelson Chukwuma:** Discussions are had because they impact the way our priorities are brought forward by students. It's important to bring those conversations up in given the way we do our government relations with the IRCC.

We weren't fully consulted on the announcements that were made.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Does your organization support the temporary cap on international students?

The pause is an answer.

**Mr. Nelson Chukwuma:** To be honest, sir, I don't think that question is for us to answer. We believe that you in government are the experts. You know what's best for the economic and social fabric of Canada.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** The government doesn't know what it's doing. I'm sorry, but that's why you're here. That's why we're doing this study now.

Does your organization have a position on making the cap permanent?

**Mr. Nelson Chukwuma:** Our position is always to protect students already in the system and to make sure that Canada has a high-value educational system, so in that regard, you can see that a lot of our recommendations are focused on those two values.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Does your organization support adding to the cap master's students and Ph.D. students?

**Mr. Nelson Chukwuma:** We have some recommendations on master's and Ph.D. students, specifically about making sure we're retaining top-tier talent with the caps we're putting in place. For example, for our recommendation on Ph.D. students, and doctoral students in particular, one of the things we're asking for is a reversal on spousal work permits, because we don't believe that students should have to choose between pursuing an education and keeping their families together.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** I'm sorry, but I'm going to interrupt you. Could I define your answer as a conditional yes—yes, but with conditions?

**Mr. Nelson Chukwuma:** Yes, sure, with conditions—as long as it continues to promote how high quality the Canadian education system is and how we are willing to retain talent in Canada.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Thank you for those answers.

[Translation]

I now turn to the representatives of the Fédération des cégeps.

Were you consulted before the changes were announced?

**Ms. Annie-Claude Laflamme:** Good morning.

No, we were not consulted before the changes were announced.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Do you agree with the cap on international student permits?

**Ms. Annie-Claude Laflamme:** In fact, we can't object to soundly and ethically managed immigration. However, as my colleague said before, we do not have the necessary competence to offer a guideline relating to this recommendation.

• (1125)

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** So you are not taking a position on that.

If the cap were to become permanent for international students, would you be in favour, opposed, or neutral?

**Ms. Annie-Claude Laflamme:** In fact, we believe we are not the cause of immigration problems. Student immigration is positive immigration. For the CEGEPs of Quebec, it is also francophone immigration.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** In his speeches, Mr. Miller talks about bad actors. Are the Fédération des cégeps and its members bad actors? From what the Minister said, it seems that you are the problem.

**Ms. Annie-Claude Laflamme:** We can confirm that we are not a bad actor. On the contrary: we contribute to the vitality of programs of study, of the development of post-secondary education, and of the development of a skilled labour force.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** I would now like to ask a few somewhat more specific questions that relate to how the CEGEPs manage the applications they receive from international students. I would like to know whether the Department of Citizenship and Immigration consults the CEGEPs or asks the CEGEPs to confirm that tuition fees have been paid before issuing a study permit to an international student who wants to study in Canada.

**Ms. Annie-Claude Laflamme:** No, there is no confirmation. The Department of Citizenship and Immigration asks the student to provide proof of their financial support, but it does not request proof that tuition fees have been paid before students arrive.

Ms. Casanovas, do you have anything to add?

**Ms. Vanesa Casanovas (International Attraction and Immigration Advisor, Fédération des cégeps):** Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and the honourable member.

If I may, I am going to add to my colleague's answer by talking about some more technical points.

As my colleague said, it is Quebec's ministère de l'Immigration that deals with the necessary living expenses and tuition fees in the case of CEGEPs in Quebec, according to the ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur. The student must present proof at the time they apply for a CAQ, a Certificat d'acceptation du Québec, or for a study permit. The Department of Citizenship and Immigration or Quebec's ministère québécois de l'Immigration are the departments responsible for verifying these points.

On your question about tuition fees—

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** I'm sorry to interrupt you, but I would like to ask you one last question.

Does the department ask you about international students who are attending one of the CEGEPs you represent? Does it ask you to confirm that the student is actually attending one of the CEGEPs you represent? Does the CEGEP know at what point the international student will be arriving in Canada?

**Ms. Annie-Claude Laflamme:** No, we are not in a position to verify that. We issue an admission letter, but we have no way of confirming or knowing whether they have arrived in Canada.

[English]

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

Now we will go to Mr. El-Khoury.

Mr. El-Khoury, you have six minutes. Please go ahead.

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

I want to welcome our witnesses.

Before I start, I would like to pass the first minute of my time to Madam Salma Zahid.

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

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

Thank you, MP El-Khoury.

I would like to give an oral notice of motion:

That pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study of no more than two meetings to examine the temporary public policy to facilitate temporary resident visas for certain extended family affected by the crisis in Gaza, including the challenges that the Government of Canada faces in facilitating the exit of Gazans, the challenges faced by families leaving Gaza and once out of Gaza, before reaching Canada. That the committee invite the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship to appear for one hour with departmental officials and that department officials appear for an additional hour. That the committee invite affected families as well as Canadian civil society. That the committee report its findings to the House and that, pursuant to Standing Order 109, the Government table a comprehensive response to the report.

I will now pass my time back to MP El-Khoury.

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

There is no debate on an oral notice of motion.

Mr. El-Khoury, please continue. You have about four minutes.

[Translation]

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

Ms. Laflamme, the new language proficiency requirements to be eligible for a post-graduation work permit are supposed to improve international graduates' integration and labour market results.

What is your assessment of the potential benefits of these criteria for international students and the Canadian economy and for protecting French in Canada?

• (1130)

**Ms. Annie-Claude Laflamme:** Thank you for your question.

I am going to let my colleague, Ms. Casanovas, answer it.

**Ms. Vanesa Casanovas:** Thank you for your question.

First, we are certainly in favour of knowledge of French. Moreover, that is established in Quebec's CEGEPs at the time of admission, since admission requirements include language requirements. Second, the Charter of the French Language also applies in the 48 CEGEPs in Quebec. That means that there are mandatory courses and also a test administered by the ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur for receiving diplomas.

So we have to point out that all these measures already exist, so that we can make sure our international students have the necessary language proficiency and have perfect or excellent knowledge of French, and our local students have to meet the same requirements.

Of course, no one can be opposed to making sure that graduates are proficient in the language. All our efforts are focused on that. With that said, the new language requirements very unfortunately do not take into account the fact that all these points have already been verified in advance in the CEGEP system, from admission to diploma granting.

**Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury:** Ms. Casanovas, do you think that giving priority to international students who are in fields where demand is high, such as healthcare or science, technology, engineering and mathematics, commonly known as STEM, as provided in the new requirements for post-graduation work permits, effectively support Canada's long-term economic and innovation objectives?

**Ms. Vanesa Casanovas:** Thank you for your question.

The recommendation of the Fédération des cégeps is to ensure that graduates of all the programs offered in the CEGEP system and who obviously meet the criteria for post-graduation work permits continue to be eligible for those permits. This is because the education model in Quebec's CEGEPs is based on what is called matching training to employment. That means that all our programs, not just those associated with certain industries, meet the very stringent requirements of the ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur for being perfectly matched with labour market needs.

I will give my colleague back the floor, if she wants to add anything.

**Ms. Annie-Claude Laflamme:** I will add that with the regionalizing of labour market needs, too restrictive a list would impede economic development in certain regions that have more specific economic activities.

**Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury:** Mr. Chukwuma, a lot of people argue that it would be wise for educational institutions to work with communities in order to align themselves with labour market needs.

Given the measures in place, what long-term opportunities do you see for adapting international education in Canada to have it better meet the needs of Canadian students and communities?

[English]

**Mr. Nelson Chukwuma:** For us, meeting labour shortage needs is important. A lot of the issues we've been seeing with our students regarding having access to jobs are mostly through work-integrated learning and being able to get Canadians experience while they're studying.

One of our recommendations, done through consultations with provinces, institutions, businesses and chambers of commerce, is for the government to identify province-specific labour market needs and adjust the field of study requirements province by province accordingly. That way, institutions in different provinces would be meeting needs with the kinds of students they accept and attract. We would also be able to continue promoting innovation and productivity in Canada with the current international student program.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. El-Khoury. I'm sorry, but I have to move to the next honourable member.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, please go ahead for six minutes.

[Translation]

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

Thanks to all our witnesses for being with us here today.

I am going to speak mainly to the representatives of the Fédération des cégeps during today's meeting.

At an earlier meeting of this committee, I asked the representatives of the department whether they knew how many international students are enrolled in the CEGEP system and they were unable to answer me, and yet this is the department that justifies withdrawing CEGEP students' access to a post-graduation permit on the basis that there has been unbelievable and unsustainable growth in the number of international students in these institutions.

Ms. Laflamme, how do you answer the department when you hear things like this?

• (1135)

**Ms. Annie-Claude Laflamme:** I am going to ask my colleague, Ms. Casanovas, to answer that question.

**Ms. Vanesa Casanovas:** First, we are sorry to learn that Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada does not know how many students there are in our system.

Second, regarding unsustainable growth. We have provided an appendix to the committee with figures on this subject so members can review them. You will see that there has been no unsustainable growth in foreign students in Quebec's CEGEPs.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you very much for that answer.

Ms. Laflamme, earlier, you spoke a bit about specific programs offered by the CEGEPs outside urban areas that may be more adapted to the socioeconomic circumstances in the region where the CEGEP is located. When it comes to international students, there are even programs that would be at risk, from what you said.

Can you explain to the committee what you meant by that?

**Ms. Annie-Claude Laflamme:** Outside urban areas in Quebec, enrolment in some programs is declining. We are talking about specific programs, such as forestry and industrial engineering. We know that it is difficult for these programs to attract Quebec students. When they attract international students who offer us a skilled workforce and offer our businesses the opportunity to hire workers, that is an enormous asset for our regions.

I can give you a very specific example involving the Cégep de Jonquière. In some very specific programs, such as chemical engineering, 75% of the student population comes from outside Canada. Without those students, our program would be in jeopardy and our chemical engineering businesses would no longer have skilled workers to hire.

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

You said that having international students come here was not actually a way to refill your institutions' coffers. That aspect is unclear to some people in the rest of Canada and I know there are different approaches on this point.

Could you explain what is different in the CEGEPs when it comes to the money that flows into the institution's coffers because of international students?



**Ms. Annie-Claude Laflamme:** Ms. Casanovas, I will let you start on the answer and I will then continue.

**Ms. Vanesa Casanovas:** Thank you for your question.

I am going to give a very brief description of this complex issue.

First, since we are in a public institution, the funding system is regulated by the ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur, which determines the tuition fees to be paid by international students.

Second, most of that money transits through the CEGEP, if I may put it that way, but goes back to the provincial ministry, so in the CEGEPs there are none of what are called deregulated fees.

This funding system is somewhat more complex, but that is the broad outline.

**Ms. Annie-Claude Laflamme:** I will add that this is not a financial benefit, since we do not receive any additional funds. We receive funding for a student in the standard program when we admit an international student. It is more a question of the vitality and survival of our programs.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** I imagine that resources must also be allocated to offering support for these students, who may sometimes need help adjusting to a different way of studying from the one they knew. That must cost our CEGEPs a bit of money, and I wanted to point that out.

It is important to talk about the federal department's lack of knowledge when it comes to the CEGEP system. That is why I absolutely wanted you to testify before our committee. I get the impression that Ottawa is not aware that Quebec has an education system that is different from those in the rest of Canada. Unfortunately, they are putting forward measures that apply across Canada to address challenges that relate to Ontario.

Should there be more targeted or more regional measures when Ottawa is making decisions? I would like to know your opinion about that.

**Ms. Annie-Claude Laflamme:** Ms. Casanovas, do you want to go first to answer the question?

**Ms. Vanesa Casanovas:** Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, we understand that the federal measures are decided by the federal government, but, as you said, the situation when it comes to CEGEPs is extremely different. This is a situation unique to our province, or even to our education system or post-secondary system. Yes, it would be desirable to have measures that are more tailored.

I would note that the Fédération des cégeps is always available to have this kind of conversation with the departments concerned. We will be very happy to talk to them. We will always be across the table.

• (1140)

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Ms. Laflamme, do you want to add anything?

**Ms. Annie-Claude Laflamme:** Regionalization is a subject dear to my own heart.

I think the unique feature of the CEGEP system is that the CEGEPs are not found solely in the big centres; they are also locat-

ed in all the regions of Quebec. They are not megacolleges or megaschools. There are between 500 and 5,000 students in our institutions, so there is not enormous growth.

What we mainly want is to give our people an opportunity to obtain a post-secondary education everywhere within Quebec. The presence of international students also enables us to offer a range of diverse programs and high quality teaching all across Quebec, which is why it is important to regionalize decisions. We want to meet specific labour market needs and the needs of local businesses, not Canadian needs that do not affect every region.

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

[English]

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

Now we will go to MP Kwan for six minutes.

MP Kwan, please go ahead.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for their presentations and for appearing before the committee today.

I'd like to direct my question to the representative for international students.

It has been cited repeatedly that international students contribute some \$30 billion to Canada's economy. With the abrupt changes the government brought about and with the targeting of international students—blaming them for the housing crisis that successive Canadian governments, Liberal and Conservative, have created—what do you think the impact of the changes will be on Canada's economy? In your discussion with IRCC officials, did you ask them whether they have taken that into consideration?

**Mr. Nelson Chukwuma:** For us, it comes down to a number of things. First of all, in terms of the economic contribution of international students, that comes from a lack of funding for institutions across the provinces. There's been over a decade of underfunding of public institutions, whether they're in Ontario, Alberta or Nova Scotia. International student tuition dollars have become an important component for a lot of public institutions, as they keep their operations going. The impact we're seeing right now is because they've become so over-dependent on international student tuition dollars due to the lack of funding. We're seeing programs being cut already at a lot of colleges, polytechnics and even some universities. Administrative staff are being let go as well. All of this is happening, especially just before the holiday season.... Imagine finding out that you may not have a job come the new year because of situations like this.

As for the impact on us, we're definitely making sure we continue to provide a high-quality education system while recognizing that funding is an important component that needs to come from our government to keep public institutions afloat.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** There's no question that post-secondary institutions and provinces have come to rely on international students. Frankly, in many ways, they're being used as a cash cow. Some people say they're being used as ATMs, because given international students' tuition fees, at minimum they're paying six times more than domestic students are.

Of course, there are implications with these changes not just for international students but for domestic students as well. As you've indicated, course selection and opportunities are being reduced because post-secondary institutions no longer have access to funding. They have to cut programs in a variety of different ways, so that impact would be significant.

In terms of housing, the government is blaming international students for creating the housing crisis, but part of the problem, as far as I can see, is that the federal government walked away from building social housing back in 1993 under the Liberals. In 1992, the Conservatives cancelled the co-op housing program and simply relied on the private sector to deliver housing. Clearly, for over three decades, the government has not addressed the housing crisis that we now face.

Historically, there have been times when institutions partnered with different levels of government to provide and build student housing. Do you think there should be a program like that in place, where all partners are required to make contributions in building student housing?

• (1145)

**Mr. Nelson Chukwuma:** I think that's something we've advocated for, and we thank the current government for giving us some of that through the national housing strategy last year.

You mentioned the lack of partnership in co-op housing in 1992. One thing we've advocated for with Minister Fraser in the past is to include co-ops and institutions in being able to access funding from the national housing strategy.

To your question, I think all stakeholders should partner together to solve the affordability crisis. The allocation of international students as the cause of the housing crisis is unfair. I've been in Canada since 2012, and even before the increase in international students, housing was always an issue.

Affordability is more the issue that we're facing now as a country. I think it's important to recognize that international students are also victims in this situation, but they could be part of the solution. If we encourage them to go into trade programs, where they can help contribute to the construction of housing, that could help increase the affordability of housing and could help with the affordability crisis we're facing in housing in general.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Canada used to go to the international community to try to attract international students. This about-face is stark in terms of its message. How do you think the international community is receiving that? What damage does that do to Canada's reputation?

**Mr. Nelson Chukwuma:** I go back to some of the things I've heard in my community. It's very concerning to international students because the message we put forth as Canada is one of having welcoming, loving and very kind people. A lot of the rhetoric being

put out does not represent those values, in my opinion. A lot of the anti-immigration rhetoric that we're seeing is mostly affecting South Asian and Black students. These are students we have invited to come to this country to access our education system.

We have to think about that when we're putting out rhetoric, because Canada is a country that I, as well as our organization, believe to be welcoming and diverse. These students are important for the diversity and cultural fabric of Canada.

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

Now we will go to the second round, with Mr. Kmiec for five minutes.

Please go ahead.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I hope we can do this part quickly.

I'm moving my motion from December 5, and I'm hoping to do this all within five minutes if we can get agreement from the committee. This is the motion to produce the documents that I requested and that this committee agreed to on October 31. The reason I'm doing this is that the department did not follow the directions of the committee. We specifically asked not for some but for all the redactions under section 14, "Federal-provincial affairs", and section 21, "Operations of Government", to be provided to the committee.

In the briefing note provided to the committee, four redactions for government operations are still there, so the department did not comply with the committee's request. I'm now making an order to produce the document, as well as annex A, annex B and annex C—everything, the whole document—and for the redactions to be applied exactly in the way we have asked for them.

I tried to do this the nice way. I note that the associate deputy minister said they tried to do it in a manner that was respectful of privacy, accuracy, scope and language. I submit to you that it was disrespectful of the committee's motion and that he be made to produce the document exactly in the way we had discussed.

The email sent by the clerk asked that these matters be kept confidential. I note that we have kept them confidential—I have kept them confidential—but if we don't pass this motion, I'm more than happy to read the entire briefing note into the public record.

I want these documents, and every single member of this committee, especially on the opposition side, deserves to know exactly what went into the changes made to the international student program. There is a lot of relevant information in the briefing notes we have now, but we need all of the information. That is why this motion is necessary. It will order IRCC to produce the international student program briefing notes within 30 days and all of the redactions we've asked for. We've been reasonable. There are three types of redactions the government can keep, but it has to stop hiding the information.

That is the motion I'm moving. It was put on notice on December 5.

• (1150)

**The Chair:** Thank you. The motion is in order and debatable.

We have two people on the list: MP Ali and MP Chiang.

MP Ali, please go ahead.

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

I just want to thank the witnesses for being here today. We have a very important study today.

It was Conservatives who were blaming international students and immigrants for creating the housing crisis. Now—

**The Chair:** Come back to the—

**Mr. Shafqat Ali:** I'm coming back to the point.

Now IRCC has taken measures, and we have witnesses for our study on international students. It's a very important study. Witnesses are here.

My friend brought this motion asking that we stop this study, go into debate and waste witnesses' time. I suggest that we listen to the witnesses, and then we can get into this motion and deal with it. That way, we will not waste their time.

**The Chair:** Is it a motion, or is it just—

**Mr. Shafqat Ali:** I just wanted to share my thoughts.

**The Chair:** They were your thoughts. Okay. There's no motion. Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Chiang.

**Mr. Paul Chiang (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Since we have the witnesses here, as my colleague mentioned, I move to adjourn the debate.

**The Chair:** We have a non-debatable motion to adjourn the debate. We'll have a recorded vote.

(Motion negatived: nays 6; yeas 5)

**The Chair:** We'll go back to debate on the motion. I have Mr. Chiang, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe and MP Kwan on the list to debate.

Mr. Chiang, please go ahead.

**Mr. Paul Chiang:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to move an amendment to Mr. Kmiec's motion. At the end of the motion, I would like to add the following: “and that if the requested document is not provided without redaction, the committee invite the deputy minister of IRCC to appear for one hour in camera to discuss any redactions that IRCC did not remove as per the Access to Information Act.”

**The Chair:** There is an amendment on the floor. Members are now speaking to the amendment.

Mr. Kmiec, please go ahead.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Does Ms. Kwan want to go before me?

**The Chair:** I asked Ms. Kwan, but she wants to speak to the motion.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** With regard to the amendment, did you mean the deputy minister or the associate deputy minister?

**Mr. Paul Chiang:** I meant the deputy minister.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** The deputy minister is Harpreet Kochhar. The person who signed off on this is the associate deputy minister, Scott Harris. If you're going to throw a bureaucrat under the bus by not having him respond, you should have the correct one.

I've had a good working relationship with the deputy minister. It's the associate deputy minister who's taking direction from your side to not disclose things properly. He put it in writing that he was not complying with requests from the committee for the production of documents.

**Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC):** Son of a gun....

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Mr. McLean. Let's have just one person speaking, please. You know that it's very hard for me and the interpreters to manage the meeting otherwise.

Is there any more discussion on the amendment brought forward by Mr. Chiang to Mr. Kmiec's motion?

Mr. Kmiec, please go ahead.

• (1155)

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Just to confirm, if they don't comply on the 31st day—at the next meeting of this committee potentially—we would have someone from the bureaucracy thrown under the bus because you don't want them to disclose the briefing note. Also, this would be in camera, so they would silently get badgered by me. The public deserves to know.

**Mr. Paul Chiang:** Thank you, Mr. Kmiec.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. Just hold on. Let me acknowledge you.

Mr. Kmiec, are you done?

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** I'm done.

**The Chair:** Okay, thank you.

Now, Mr. Chiang, you can go ahead.

**Mr. Paul Chiang:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to clarify with Mr. Kmiec whether he's moving a sub-amendment to my amendment.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Pick the person you want to sacrifice.

**An hon. member:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. We can only have one person speaking at a time.

Mr. Kmiec has the floor. Then I'll come to you, Mr. Chiang.

Mr. Kmiec, do you want to say something?

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** No.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Go ahead, Mr. Chiang.

**Mr. Paul Chiang:** I'm sorry, Mr. Chair. Could we suspend for a moment?

**The Chair:** Sure.

Before I suspend, I'll thank the witnesses for being here.

I'm suspending now.

• (1155) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1210)

**The Chair:** I call the meeting back to order.

The floor is with Mr. Chiang.

**Mr. Paul Chiang:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would love to debate this some more, but why don't we put it to a vote?

**The Chair:** Okay.

**Mr. Paul Chiang:** Are we going to vote on my amendment?

• (1215)

**The Chair:** Yes.

All in favour of the amendment by Mr. Chiang?

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Chair:** MP Kwan hasn't expressed herself.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** No.

**The Chair:** I don't think you have the votes, Mr. Chiang. Do you want a recorded vote or are you okay with that?

**Mr. Paul Chiang:** Let's have a recorded vote.

**The Chair:** We'll have a recorded vote.

(Motion negated: nays 6; yeas 5)

**The Chair:** We are back to the original motion. I have MP Brunelle-Duceppe and MP Kwan on the speaking list.

MP Brunelle-Duceppe, please go ahead.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** I asked for the floor to propose that we move to the vote quickly, out of respect for the witnesses and because we already know how we're going to vote. The witnesses have left, but I'd still like us to vote right away.

[English]

**The Chair:** MP Kwan, do you have something to add?

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Yes.

Very quickly, I think this is a reasonable request. At the end of the day, what we want to do at this committee is get the information so the public and we as parliamentarians can know about, and are then able to assess, the delivery of the programs, or the policy for that matter. We're just trying to do our job.

I think officials and departments have a responsibility to meet the requests of this committee. It's not unreasonable to ask for this basic information so let's get on with it.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Is there any more discussion?

Seeing none, are all in favour?

(Motion agreed to [See Minutes of Proceedings])

**The Chair:** Go ahead, MP Kwan.

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

Before you suspend, I'd like to move a motion that has already been put on notice:

That, in light of the failure of IRCC's special immigration measure to reunite family members of Canadians and permanent residents in the besieged Gaza Strip and Sudan, and pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study to examine the development and execution of these special immigration measures; that the committee also consider Canada's use of its diplomatic relations to help facilitate the free movement of persons authorized to travel to Canada; and that this study consist of no less than six meetings; that the committee consider testimony from affected families as well as Canadian civil society; that the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship appear for one hour with departmental officials along with the officials to appear for one additional hour; that the Minister of Foreign Affairs appear for one hour with departmental officials along with the officials to appear for one additional hour; and further that pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(a), the committee order the production of all documents and records related to the policy-making considerations that led to the specific dimensions of the temporary public policies that opened on January 9, 2024, and February 27, 2024, including the 1,000-person cap, the gradual issuance of access codes and delays in receiving codes experienced by many applicants, and the information requested from applicants on additional screening forms; that, while respecting s. 19, s. 23, and s. 69 of the Access to Information Act, these details be provided within 30 days of the adoption of this motion and relevant documents are released in full to the public; that the committee report its findings to the House; and that pursuant to Standing Order 109 the government table a comprehensive response to the report.

**The Chair:** The motion is in order. Is there debate?

I have two speakers on the list: Mr. Chiang and Mr. Redekopp.

Please go ahead, Mr. Chiang.

• (1220)

**Mr. Paul Chiang:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Since we have witnesses here and the international student study is an important study for us to complete before the year ends, I move that we adjourn debate.

**The Chair:** We have a motion to adjourn debate. It's a non-debatable motion.

Do you want a recorded vote?

**An hon. member:** Yes.

(Motion negated: nays 6; yeas 5)

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

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

I just want to mention that we have talked about this motion before. I'm not opposed to talking about it again, but I have an amendment that I would like to make to it.

I think six meetings is too many, so my thinking is that if we had one meeting for one of the ministers, a second meeting for the second minister and then a meeting on Sudan and a meeting on Gaza, that might be sufficient.

I'm going to propose two changes. First, I'd like where it says "no less than six" to become "no less than four". Also, at the end, where we're talking about the production of documents, I want to specifically add in a Sudan piece. After the section that says, in English, near the bottom of the motion, "and the information requested from applicants on additional screening forms", I would like to add the following words: "as well as documents related to the development of the Sudan humanitarian program and the family permanent residency pathway". Then we'd continue on with "that, while respecting s. 19", etc.

There are two things: changing "six" to "four" and adding in a piece on Sudan to the production of documents section. That's my amendment.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Redekopp, for bringing this amendment forward.

We are now on the amendment brought forward by Mr. Redekopp. I have a speaking list with MP Chiang and MP Kwan.

MP Chiang, please go ahead.

**Mr. Paul Chiang:** Mr. Chair, can we suspend for a moment, please?

**The Chair:** Why do we need to suspend?

**Mr. Paul Chiang:** I just want to clarify something with my team.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** We don't need to suspend. If they need to clarify, they can do it on their own. I'm—

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Chair, I raised my hand.

**The Chair:** Okay, MP Zahid, you are on the list as well, but let me focus on this first.

I'm not going to suspend this time, Mr. Chiang. You can talk to your team. You can always come back, because I'm not closing the debate yet.

In the meantime, I'm going to MP Kwan and then MP Zahid.

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

I appreciate that decision. If the Liberal members need to talk to their team, they can go ahead and do that, but it should not take committee time.

With respect to the amendment from MP Redekopp, I take as a friendly amendment amending the number of meetings from six to four.

With respect to the other piece related to documentation for Sudan, I'm fine with adding that language for clarity, but this motion speaks to two dates. The first date is January 9, which relates to when the Gaza policy became open. The February 27 date is the Sudan date. I thought incorporating those two dates made it clear that it was for documents related to both Gaza and Sudan, but I don't have any problem whatsoever with adding in the language that MP Redekopp wanted to add in to further clarify that. I just wanted to make it clear that this was already incorporated into the

motion to ensure that both Gaza and Sudan documentation was being sought.

• (1225)

**The Chair:** Go ahead, MP Zahid.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Thank you, Chair.

Right now we are on the amendment moved by MP Redekopp. He sent a significant amendment. Can we please suspend the meeting so it can be circulated in both official languages to all members and we can have a look at it?

**The Chair:** If there's a request for that, I have no choice but to suspend.

• (1225)

(Pause)

• (1240)

**The Chair:** We are back.

The amendment has been distributed. Is there any discussion or debate?

Go ahead, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** I just want to point out that the interpreters didn't hear anything.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I see MP Zahid's hand is raised.

MP Zahid, please go ahead.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Are we debating the amendment by Mr. Redekopp?

**The Chair:** Yes, MP Zahid, that is correct.

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

The war in Gaza has been a very important topic, and the community has been going through a lot in the last 16 months. For over 400 days, we have seen the suffering of the people in Gaza. We have seen international reports on this as well.

I represent a big Muslim community, especially a big Lebanese community, and I've been hearing stories of the people in Gaza. So many people in Canada have lost 15, 16, or 20 family members on average—their loved ones. It is very important to make sure we have programs through which they can bring extended family members out of Gaza and here to Canada. Many of our constituents are living by the phone just to hear from their loved ones—their parents, brothers and sisters.

We have been hearing about the issue that Israel is not letting people leave Gaza even if the Canadian government puts them on a list. I have a family living in my riding that had family members on the exit list. They came to Rafah, but the 16-year-old boy was not allowed to leave with his mother and sisters.

Initially, the mother was not willing to leave the child and come here, but with insistence by her husband, who is living in my riding, the mother crossed the border with her daughters. The 16-year-old boy was then sent back, although he was on the list provided by the Canadian government. When that child went back to his home with his older siblings—because they were over the age of 21 and were not counted as dependants—that same night there was a bomb blast in the building. That constituent of mine lost his 24-year-old daughter, who was a doctor, leaving behind two toddlers.

In the same bomb blast, my constituent's two sons, who were over the age of 21, were seriously injured, along with their wives. One of his daughters-in-law's legs were burned. The child who was not allowed to leave had serious injuries, life-threatening injuries, and lived in the hospital for many weeks. There was no care available for him, and he had to be transferred to Cairo for treatment.

These are the types of horror stories we have been hearing about from constituents. My constituent had to get custody of his two grandchildren, whose mother died in that bomb blast. These are the horrors our constituents are living every day, and they have been living them for over 400 days.

Many of our constituents were not allowed to get their mothers and siblings on the exit list because they are not considered immediate family. Based on Canadian law, only spouses and children under the age of 21 are considered immediate family. These are the parents and siblings of our constituents, and I think we need to make a serious effort to make sure we reunite these families. There have been a lot of challenges crossing the Rafah border and people have been paying money at the border—

• (1245)

**The Chair:** MP Zahid, I'm sorry to interrupt you. I have directions from the clerk that you should adjust your mic because it's creating some issues.

I'll give the floor to the clerk.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Rémi Bourgault):** Ms. Zahid, can you make sure that you have selected, at the bottom of the Zoom screen, the headset and not your computer microphone, please?

**The Chair:** I'm going to suspend until this is figured out.

• (1245)

(Pause)

• (1245)

**The Chair:** I'm sorry to have interrupted you, MP Zahid. The floor is yours. You can start from wherever you were.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Thank you, Chair.

The first issue is getting out of Gaza. The second issue is that even people who got out of Gaza and are in Egypt have been having lots of challenges in getting all of their documentation to come to Canada.

We're hearing more and more stories. A few weeks ago, I was at one of the local mosques in my riding, where I heard that one of my constituents lost his father in a bomb blast. One week after that, he lost his brother, wife and three children. A day after that, he lost his

youngest brother and his wife. These are the real stories of the people. This is what we have to hear every day.

As we have seen, the program we introduced in January of this year has not been as successful as we wanted it to be. There is a need to study what challenges have been happening and why we have not been able to get people out of Gaza. It is very important that we hear from families that have been trying to get their extended family out. We should also hear from some of the families that have been able to make it here so they can tell us what exactly the situation is like on the ground.

On Tuesday, HCI and Islamic Relief Canada organized a round table where they brought in some families. It happened at the Wellington Building in one of the committee rooms. There were two families that talked about the challenges they had to face to get out of Gaza.

One man talked about the challenges he had to face and the treatment they are getting compared to those who fled the war in Ukraine. People feel—and many families have been talking about it—that those who came from Ukraine had work permits and initial money to support them, whereas the people who came from Gaza or are coming have no support at all.

There are differences. I know, because of the war in Ukraine, that we were able to do biometrics in Ukraine. With Ukraine, we were able to get people out of other countries. They allowed Ukrainians to transit to a safe third country, like Canada. However, there is a feeling within the community that there is differential treatment for Palestinians when they compare the treatment they are getting with that of the people who came from Ukraine.

The situation in Gaza is beyond a tragedy. A genocide is happening there. There needs to be a ceasefire. Hostages and political prisoners must be released back to their loved ones, and humanitarian aid is badly needed. People are starving. Millions of people in Gaza have been displaced. The majority of the houses in Gaza are under rubble.

Have a look at the reports, like the one from Amnesty International, which just came out last week. They talk about the genocide happening in Gaza. One of my colleagues came back from Cairo and was telling me the stories he heard from the people of Gaza. So many kids have lost their legs and arms, and we really cannot imagine the mental health state they are going through.

As a mother, it has been very difficult for me watching on social media the pictures that have been coming. There are no schools. The hospitals in Gaza have been destroyed by the bombings of the Israeli government. These are war crimes. Every war has rules. Under the rules of law, civilians are protected everywhere, but this is not what we have seen in Gaza in the last many months, the last over 400 days.

• (1250)

I had the opportunity, along with one of my colleagues, MP Ali, in January to visit the West Bank in East Jerusalem. It was a 19-member delegation. We heard stories from the Palestinian people in the West Bank, and we saw the suffering the Palestinian people are going through there. We were not able to get to Gaza, but the suffering of the Palestinian people is beyond anyone's imagination.

In Gaza—

**The Chair:** MP Zahid, I'm sorry to disturb you again. I know it's a very emotional issue for you.

I have a long list of people to speak, so I would like to thank the witnesses for taking the stand. I will let you go. On behalf of committee members, I want to thank you.

MP Zahid, you have the floor. Please go ahead.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Mr. Chair, I have a point of order, just for clarification. Could you clarify whether the witnesses being released from the second panel will be invited back at another time?

**The Chair:** That's up to committee members. Committee members make that decision, and we'll figure that out. I don't want to interrupt MP Zahid time and time again, unless you want to do that now.

MP Zahid, if you don't mind, can I please take a moment to do that?

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Yes, please do.

**The Chair:** MP Kwan wants the witnesses to come back. Is it the will of the committee to do that?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** MP Kwan, we're good with that. Thank you.

MP Zahid, please go ahead.

• (1255)

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Thank you, Chair.

The situation in Gaza is beyond tragic. There is a genocide happening there. People are dying by the bombing being done day and night. People are starving. Schools are being used as shelters. No kids are learning. As a mother, that hurts me. It breaks my heart. I cannot sleep at night thinking about what's happening to the children in Gaza.

The number of children who have been killed in Gaza is more than in any other conflict we have seen in the world in the last many decades. Women and children are just trying to survive—to get food, water and the basic necessities of life, which every human being deserves and which we take for granted. Everyone has a right to live and everyone should be treated equally.

Just last month, on November 29, it was the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This is its second year. Both last year, on November 29, 2023, and this year, Palestinians and the people living in Gaza have been under a war, under a genocide. Thousands and thousands of people have died.

There is work UNRWA is trying to do through schools, but they have not been able to do it because no school is in existence. Instead, schools are being used as shelters to provide a place for people to lie down.

I think all members of this committee are honourable and would agree with me that... How do we feel about the books in those schools being used for fuel to cook food? No one wants that to happen. Those books are for allowing our next generations to learn. Instead, in Gaza, books are being used to cook food for families because they have no other way to do that.

These are basic human rights that we in Canada and people around the world take for granted, and we cherish them. We have to make sure that Palestinians also have those rights. They deserve the same rights.

I can't even imagine life in Gaza, but I saw what was in West Bank and what was in Jordan, and I talked with family members. I visited one of the schools in Amman, Jordan, and the kids there, a very intellectual group of students, were representatives in what was called a “model parliament”. We talked with them, and one of the children questioned us: “Why do you teach us about human rights when we have no human rights?” It was very heartbreaking to hear a 12- or 13-year-old say that, because they have seen the killing of their family members and have seen that past generations had to leave their homeland and live in tents and camps.

For generation after generation, the people who have been displaced, starting from 1948 and 1967, have been living in camps, some in the West Bank. I went to Hebron and Bethlehem when I visited and saw the miseries. I heard the stories. People go to sleep at night thinking in their minds that they never know what's going to happen at night—how many times their houses and windows will be bombed.

• (1300)

As I saw myself, along with MP Ali, at Aida refugee camp, there were houses with gunshots. As soon as it started getting dark, the local people were telling us, “You should get out of this place because you never know when a bombing is going to happen.” This is the everyday life of the people.

**The Chair:** MP Zahid, I'm sorry. We're past the clock.

We are suspended until next time.

*[The meeting was adjourned at 4:40 p.m., Monday, January 6, 2025. See Minutes of Proceedings]*







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