

Please let it be noted in the record that all recommendations provided by Operation Ezra are also the recommendations of Project Abraham. We provide the same services, have run into the same challenges in the resettlement of the GARs, and our recommendations are the same.

Instead, I will focus on a few issues that I don't believe have yet been given voice in these hearings. Many of our GAR families are going hungry while waiting for child benefit payments. Without these payments, the money provided to them barely covers rent let alone anything else.

Child Benefit payments should arrive within 11 weeks from the time of application. However, there is a continual glitch where around this time, the family receives notification that the government is waiting to receive information on the spouse's income...this from grieving widows. So, in reality, some families do not see these payments for up to six months.

The experience of arriving in Canada actually exacerbates the trauma of Yezidi refugees. They are met by people who speak the language of their oppressors. They are taken to a dirty hotel room where it can take a couple of days before anyone communicates with them. They have no knowledge of an existing Yezidi community who could immediately welcome them - which would go a very long way towards bringing them comfort. The food is alien and for some, seemingly inedible. They are sometimes treated rudely by those who are serving them. They are not given adequate orientation on what they can expect to happen next. They get minimal if any help in finding a home. Some believed that they were back in the hands of ISIS. From their perspective, their future is uncertain and frightening.

There is huge, ongoing stress for Yezidis due to being separated from surviving family members who are still in Iraq. The Canadian government allows for family reunification under the 'One-Year Window of Opportunity' provision which assumes that family members left behind are identified in the original application - often not done by Yezidis who believe these family members are dead. Sometimes spouses and children are discovered alive after the fact and, under the current provision, cannot be brought over without a long, drawn out process that could take years.

Project Abraham raises money to help with resettlement projects as well as to bring in more privately-sponsored Yezidi families. However, it is challenging to raise funds for the administrative costs involved in managing the larger project. If Project Abraham had funds available to hire more staff, there is so much more that we could do to help our Yezidi community.

As a result of all issues mentioned here, Project Abraham would like to make the following recommendations:

1. Inform the local Yezidi community when Yezidi refugees will arrive and where they will be placed so that a delegation can meet them at the airport and provide immediate support.
2. Expedite the processing of child benefit payments and correct the application to reflect the correct information regarding widows.

3. Provide adequate amounts of funding to be able to provide the trauma counselling and health services required.
4. Extend the One-Year Window of Opportunity Provision for victims of genocide to include family members who are discovered to be alive after the refugee families have emigrated to Canada. In addition, for the special needs of this community, extend this provision to siblings and parents.
5. Provide funding for staff for grass-roots Resettlement undertakings like Project Abraham and Operation Ezra who are working daily with the Yezidi community to help them resettle, heal, and integrate fully into Canadian society, enhancing the existing government services.
6. Prioritize genocide as a criterion for selecting refugees to resettle in Canada and, therefore, work outside of the UNHCR who has stated it does not use genocide as a criterion, directly contravening both the UN and GOC mandate.

To speak more on this, I will pass the floor to our communication director, Gary Rose.