



**Public Inquiry Into Foreign Interference in Federal
Electoral Processes and Democratic Institutions**

**Enquête publique sur l'ingérence étrangère dans les
processus électoraux et les institutions démocratiques
fédéraux**

Public Hearing

Audience publique

**Commissioner / Commissaire
The Honourable / L'honorable
Marie-Josée Hogue**

VOLUME 26

ENGLISH INTERPRETATION

Held at :

Library and Archives Canada
Bambrick Room
395 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N4

Wednesday, October 2, 2024

Tenue à:

Bibliothèque et Archives Canada
Salle Bambrick
395, rue Wellington
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N4

Le mercredi 2 octobre 2024

INTERNATIONAL REPORTING INC.

<https://www.transcription.tc/>

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Ottawa, Ontario

--- The hearing begins Wednesday, October 2, 2024 at 9:32
a.m.

THE REGISTRAR: Order, please.

This sitting of the Foreign Interference
Commission is now in session. Commissioner Hogue is
presiding.

The time is 9:32 a.m.

COMMISSIONER HOGUE: [No interpretation].

You're ready?

**--- INTRODUCTION OF THE PANEL ON CIVIL LIBERTIES, RACISM, AND
FOREIGN INTERFERENCE NARRATIVES:**

**--- FACILITATION OF THE PANEL BY MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD AND MR.
GABRIEL POLIQUIN:**

MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD: Yes.

So Commissioner, for the record, it's Howard
Krongold, and I'll be facilitating this first panel with my
colleague, Gabriel Poliquin.

We will be hearing from four consultation
panels today. These panelists are here to share information
based on their experiences.

Unlike the fact witnesses appearing before
the Commission, these panelists are appearing without oath or
affirmation. They have been advised against making
allegations against individuals or organizations in Canada.

The first consultation panel is entitled
"Civil Liberties, Racism, and Foreign Interference
Narratives". This panel will speak to the negative impacts

1 that they and their communities have experienced as a result
2 of the responses to foreign interference.

3 I will now introduce our panelists.

4 Paul Robinson is a Professor of Public and
5 International Affairs at the University of Ottawa. Dr.
6 Robinson holds an MA in Russian and Eastern European Studies
7 from the University of Toronto and a DPhil in Modern History
8 from the University of Oxford.

9 Prior to his graduate studies, he served as a
10 regular officer in the British Army Intelligence Corps from
11 1989 to 1994 and as a reserve officer in the Canadian Forces
12 from 1994 to 1996.

13 Next we have Teresa Woo-Paw. She has been
14 the Chair of the Canadian Race Relations Foundation since
15 2018 and is the Chair of the Action Chinese Canadians
16 Together Foundation. She holds a BA in Social Work from the
17 University of Calgary. She was a member of the Legislative
18 Assembly of Alberta from 2018 to 2015 [sic], serving on its
19 executive council from 2013.

20 Wawa Li is a first-generation Chinese
21 Canadian originally from Quebec City. Now living and
22 studying in Montreal, she is involved with the Chinese
23 Canadian community there. Ms. Li is familiar with the work
24 of the Chinese Canadian community centres in Montreal that
25 were recently accused of being Chinese police stations.

26 And finally, we have an anonymous
27 participant. The final panellist is appearing by Zoom. The
28 Commissioner has agreed to permit this panellist to

1 participate without publicly revealing their identity, and
2 will release reasons explaining that decision shortly.

3 The anonymous panellist is a Professor at a
4 Canadian research university. This panellist was born in the
5 People's Republic of China and came to Canada to further
6 their studies. They are currently a Canadian citizen.

7 This panellist is an active member of their
8 local Chinese Canadian community as well as the Society of
9 Chinese Descent University Professors. This panellist has
10 engaged in collaborative research with other academics,
11 including academics based in the PRC.

12 So with that, I'll turn things to Professor
13 Robinson. Good morning.

14 **DR. PAUL ROBINSON:** Good morning.

15 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** First of all, perhaps
16 I'll ask you to tell us a little bit more about your
17 background.

18 **DR. PAUL ROBINSON:** Sure. Do I need to press
19 a button here or anything?

20 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** No, I think you're
21 good.

22 **DR. PAUL ROBINSON:** Okay. Yes, thank you for
23 the invitation to come here.

24 As you mentioned, before becoming an academic
25 I was a military officer and I have given talks to many
26 military institutions, such as West Point, U.S. Airforce
27 Academy, Canadian Forces College, British Staff College, and
28 so on.

1 But my primary academic interest in Russia.
2 When I was an undergraduate I travelled to the Soviet Union
3 to study the Russian language there. In the nineties, I
4 worked in Moscow for a short while for a media research
5 company, and I have been backwards and forwards to Russia
6 since then. The last time is 2019, when there was the
7 pandemic, and of course, the war.

8 As well as my academic work, I have also
9 written probably hundreds of articles for the national and
10 international media for, for instance, outlets such as the
11 *Spectator* magazine, *The American Conservative* magazine, *The*
12 *Globe and Mail*, *Ottawa Citizen*, *Canadian Dimension*, and
13 others.

14 From 2014 to 2022, I ran a blog which looked
15 at Russian affairs, and from 2020 to 2022, I used to write a
16 weekly for RT, and I stopped doing that in February of 2022
17 following the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

18 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** All right.
19 Professor Robinson, could you tell us about some of the
20 responses to foreign interference that you have observed and
21 the negative impact that they're having in your view?

22 **DR. PAUL ROBINSON:** Yes, I would. So I first
23 began to observe, I'll say, concerns about foreign
24 interference following the Russian annexation of Crimea in
25 2014, and a growing discourse about what's called "hybrid
26 warfare", which is a concept that ready states are able to
27 wage war against each other using non-violent means,
28 including information, but not just information, in hybrid

1 warfare theory, pretty much anything can be weaponised. That
2 then accelerated following Donald Trump's election in 2016
3 and the Russiagate scandal.

4 And this all led to growing accusations that
5 the Russian Federation was using information and other means
6 to undermine Western societies from within, and in that
7 context, I observed over the last decade a growing suspicion
8 of anyone associated with Russia or anyone who has deviated
9 in any way from conventional narratives regarding Russia. At
10 the same time, I have observed a tendency to accuse such
11 people, normally with no evidence, of being Kremlin
12 influencers, Russian proxies, agents of influence, and so on.

13 The effect of all this is the creation of a
14 toxic environment in which proper, reasoned conversation on
15 important topics is not possible. Non-conforming views are
16 shouted down and silenced or forced into self-censorship.
17 And I can give you some personal examples if that would be
18 useful.

19 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Certainly.

20 **DR. PAUL ROBINSON:** Yeah. So a few years
21 ago, my blog was mentioned in a report issued by a Canadian
22 thinktank on the subject of Russian influence operations in
23 Canada, and it was listed, among others, as a extremist
24 conspiracy theory website, along with some websites which are
25 really quite notorious.

26 I complained to the thinktank in question,
27 which commissioned an outside expert to look into the matter,
28 who concluded that the allegation was false. The thinktank

1 withdrew the report, republished it without the name of my
2 blog and with a footnote admitting error. But the error
3 should not have been made in the first place.

4 And other people were also mentioned in this
5 report, including some quite distinguished Canadians, with
6 their names being listed in sections of the report with
7 titles like, Proxy -- Russian Proxies and Agents of
8 Influence.

9 Someone told me that ---

10 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Pardon me, Professor.
11 Sorry for the interruption. Sorry. It's just a request from
12 the interpreters to speak a bit slower for -- we have
13 simultaneous translation. Pardon the interruption,
14 Dr. Robinson.

15 **DR. PAUL ROBINSON:** Okay. Yes, understood.

16 A little while after that, an article I had
17 written was mentioned in a report issued by the U.S.
18 Government. This report claimed to be investigating malign
19 influence activities by RT, and my article was mentioned in a
20 section on false -- Russian false narratives. And the report
21 claimed that this article promoted the false narrative that
22 Ukraine was a fascist country, and it provided a link to my
23 article.

24 If you clicked on the link, you would see
25 that what the article actually said, and I quote my exact
26 words, "Ukraine is not remotely fascist." That is what my
27 article said, and yet it was cited as being evidence of RT
28 promoting a false narrative of Ukraine being a fascist

1 country.

2 That peaks my interest, so I checked other
3 parts of this U.S. Government report, and they were also
4 making false claims, which were quite easy to determine were
5 false simply by clicking on the links the report itself
6 provided.

7 And this, I mean, brings to my mind the
8 extremely poor quality of much of the work which is done by
9 individuals and organisations who claim to be fighting
10 foreign interference and mis/disinformation. Their work is
11 often factually incorrect and intellectually sloppy, and
12 sometimes careless in terms of the potential effect on the
13 reputations of people who are named.

14 And it's somewhat disturbing to find one's
15 name issued, or not one's name but one's work, issued in a
16 foreign U.S. Government report, particularly when the
17 allegations are false. And this has a very chilling effect,
18 and puts people off from putting their heads out, from
19 writing things, from saying things, because you don't want to
20 be in further reports and being investigated by the
21 authorities. And the overall effect is to narrow what people
22 call the "Overton Window", which is the framework of
23 acceptable discourse in society, and this has the effect of
24 meaning we cannot properly analyse events, the truth is
25 covered up, public discourse narrows, and so, therefore, also
26 do policy options.

27 And I'll give another personal example. Two
28 years ago, I was asked to give evidence to a parliamentary

1 select committee. In this meeting, I pointed out to members
2 of the committee reports which had appeared in outlets,
3 including the *New York Times*, the BBC, the *Guardian*, outlets
4 which could not be described as pro-Russian or as non-
5 mainstream. One member of Parliament took severe offence at
6 what was apparently Russian propaganda, and claimed that this
7 was the most disgraceful, appalling, disgusting thing that
8 had ever been said in Parliament, or words to that effect.

9 When I asked if I could have a right to
10 reply, this member of Parliament said that
11 "Professor Robinson must not speak anymore." The committee
12 then voted and voted that I was not to speak anymore.

13 This is what happens to you if you step out
14 of line in certain subjects and step across, you might say,
15 acceptable bounds of discourse, even though in this case all
16 I did was point out to the committee reports which have
17 appeared in the BBC and the *New York Times*, and which,
18 incidentally, have subsequently been confirmed by the United
19 Nations. Does all this have an effect? Yes, it does.

20 And I could bring a more recent example,
21 which is of a scandal two weeks ago with the Toronto
22 International Film Festival which came under heavy pressure
23 to cancel the showing of a film by a Canadian director,
24 called *Russians At War*, which some people said was Russian
25 propaganda.

26 The festival eventually caved in to the
27 pressure, citing threats to the safety of its workers, and
28 they subsequently then unbacked down, but for a while they

1 cancelled the showing, citing safety of the workers. And
2 that of itself is evidence of the intimidating effect of some
3 of this discourse.

4 While this was going on, an editor of a
5 Canadian magazine asked me will I write on this topic. And I
6 thought about this, and I thought well, you know, the film
7 festival is afraid of the safety of its members. You know, I
8 have a family. I don't want to bring anyone I know into
9 danger. And I said no; I didn't do it. And in fact, I have
10 probably turned down 90 percent of media requests in the last
11 two years, simply because if you step out of line, say the
12 wrong things, people accuse you of being a Russian agent, and
13 things like this, and you get abuse pouring on your head.

14 Overall, therefore, the effect of the
15 discourse of hybrid warfare, disinformation, foreign
16 interference, and so on, is to have -- is -- it's a chilling
17 effect that restricts freedom of expression and intimidates
18 and silences those who have unorthodox views, and in general,
19 makes it harder to have intelligent conversations on key
20 issues. This further delegitimises our social and political
21 institutions, as many people see what is happening and become
22 increasingly alienated from those institutions. The struggle
23 against foreign interference, therefore, can backfire,
24 intensifying distrust in our state and our media.

25 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Can I just ask, has
26 there been any impact on your academic work and your ability
27 to engage in the research you were doing previously?

28 **DR. PAUL ROBINSON:** Very definitely. As I

1 mentioned, when I was a student, I went to the Soviet Union.
2 This was the height of the Cold War. Relations with Soviet
3 Union were very bad, yet one could still go to the Soviet
4 Union, one could still study Russian, one could do academic
5 research there. That is now all finished. There are no
6 student exchanges anymore. You will not get funding to go to
7 Russia to do research. You -- federal funding institutions
8 such as the Social Science and Humanities Research Council
9 have prohibited any funding which involves Russian
10 institutions, and that cuts off whole lines of research.

11 So for instance, sociological research,
12 survey research, which relies on using Russians to go and ask
13 people questions, you can't do it anymore, which means a lot
14 of political science has become impossible, a lot of
15 anthropology, sociology, has become impossible. And this
16 matters because, well, as Sun Tzu said, you know, "Know your
17 enemy and know yourself and in 100 battles you will never be
18 defeated."

19 The time we particularly need to study of a
20 country is when we have differences with them. We need to
21 know about them. We need to study them in detail. We need
22 to therefore have people who go there, who engage in research
23 there, who speak to those people. But you can't. Many of
24 the people who you would want to speak to, for instance,
25 foreign policy experts, have been sanctioned by the Canadian
26 Government.

27 I used to do peer reviewing for a very
28 prestigious Russian academic journal. They asked me to do

1 something again in January. One might imagine this is a good
2 thing. One would want Russian academic journals to be
3 publishing things which have gone under critical review and
4 checked for accuracy. However, I pointed out to the deputy
5 editor who contacted me that his boss, the editor, had been
6 sanctioned by the Canadian Government a month beforehand, as
7 had the academic institutions associated with the journal.

8 So even if a journal itself wasn't
9 sanctioned, then therefore I suppose I possibly could have
10 done it. It's not like you want to test the law; right? So
11 I said, "No, I'm not going to do it." And basic academic
12 things like that are now impossible. I had to cancel a
13 research project because it would have involved working in
14 Russian archives. It's very difficult to travel to Russia
15 because of sanctions. You can't get travel insurance. You
16 won't get funding, as I said.

17 And also, people will abuse you. So there
18 was a Canadian professor who, two years ago, attended the
19 Valdai International Discussion Club. This is a prominent
20 meeting once a year which Putin attends. And when she
21 accepted the invitation, it was not on the sanctions list.
22 By the time she went, it was. She could still legally go
23 because you can continue doing things which were agreed
24 before the sanctioning. And she made use of her visit to ask
25 Putin to release a prominent political prisoner, which one
26 might imagine is something one should encourage, but she got
27 an enormous amount of abuse in the media and elsewhere for
28 having dared to go to Russia and having dared to ask Putin a

1 question.

2 And now the rest of us look at this and
3 think, well we don't want that abuse. We don't want to do
4 that. And so we stop doing things.

5 And the result is we are now going back to
6 the old days of Crimeanology, where you work out what's
7 happening in Russia based on who's standing next to who in
8 the Revolution Day Parade, and properly informed
9 understanding is vanishing. And the result of impoverished
10 understanding is that, well, I mean, it's -- I think it's
11 probably self-evident. But that's what -- the situation we
12 have created for ourselves.

13 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Can you share with us
14 some of your views about how we could better respond to
15 foreign interference in terms of ways that we can avoid some
16 of the negative effects that you've identified?

17 **MR. PAUL ROBINSON:** I mean, I would first say
18 avoid threat inflation. I read an article in a major
19 Canadian newspaper the other day which said, and I'll quote,
20 "The tentacles of Russian oligarchs and agents have
21 penetrated deep into Canadian business, politics, and
22 society". This kind of alarmism, to my view, is not helpful.
23 It stokes unnecessary fears and can lead to the targeting of
24 innocent people. It should be avoided.

25 Secondly, we should be confident in the
26 resilience of Canadian society. Much of the discourse of
27 foreign interference seems to me to assume that our society
28 will crumble if we don't take immediate drastic action. I do

1 not believe that this is the case.

2 I think also we should be mindful of the
3 potential negative unintended consequences which can derive
4 from taking action.

5 So therefore my main recommendation would be
6 to act very cautiously.

7 Also, if you are going to suggest specific
8 government actions, then it is necessary to have firm
9 evidence that they will actually achieve the desired
10 objective. There's a tendency to make recommendations just
11 because something must be done. But often what is
12 recommended is ineffective.

13 So for instance, there are many proposals
14 that we should debunk disinformation or flag it so people can
15 be aware of it, but academic studies suggest debunking does
16 not work and is generally counterproductive. People do not
17 trust debunking from sources they already do not trust. And
18 in fact, the more something is debunked, the more they
19 actually believe it. This is what the evidence suggests.

20 So therefore, when you're going to propose
21 these things, you need to look at the actual evidence and not
22 propose things which are likely to be counterproductive,
23 particularly, as I said, because they can have unintended
24 consequences.

25 And in that regard, I think above all, we
26 should avoid anything that smacks of censorship. We should
27 not, for instance, be in the business of banning foreign
28 media or looking in other ways to restrict it. As I have

1 already said, on many issues, the framework of public
2 discourse has significantly narrowed in recent years. We
3 should be seeking to expand the Overton window, not further
4 restrict it.

5 Beyond that, we already have a problem of
6 growing distrust in public institutions. If people see or
7 perceive that the state is interfering with the media and
8 attempting to restrict what Canadians can access, this will
9 only compound that problem.

10 Finally, I would say if you are to do
11 something, it must be done well. As I mentioned, a lot of
12 the work which is carried out in this field is very sloppy,
13 is extremely poor, is full of factual errors, and it is
14 therefore almost certainly counterproductive. It is better
15 to do nothing than to do something badly.

16 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Okay. Thank you,
17 Professor Robinson.

18 We'll turn to Ms. Woo-Paw, if we could? Good
19 morning.

20 **MS. TERESA WOO-PAW:** Good morning.

21 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** So I'll ask you as well
22 to begin by telling us a little bit more about your
23 background?

24 **Ms. TERESA WOO-PAW:** Okay. thank you. I
25 think what is relevant for today is first of all, I'm a
26 first-generation Chinese-Canadian for over 50 years. I'm a
27 descendent of families impacted by both the head tax and the
28 *Chinese Exclusion Act*, both of my great grandfathers came to

1 North America. And so my family has experienced decades of
2 separation and the hardships associated with those public
3 policies.

4 For over 45 years I found and built eight
5 non-profit organizations from community service
6 organizations, to multicultural programs for children and
7 youth, to heritage international language schools, Asian
8 Heritage Society, the Ethnocultural Council with about 40
9 immigrant racialized community organizations in Calgary when
10 I started that in the early 1990s, and I founded the Action
11 Chinese Canadians Together Foundation, a national
12 organization with a focus on enhancing ---

13 **MR. MATTHEW FERGUSON:** I'm sorry, Ms. Woo-
14 Paw, I suspect I'm going ---

15 **MS. TERESA WOO-PAW:** Oh, I'm sorry.

16 **MR. MATTHEW FERGUSON:** It's okay.

17 **MS. TERESA WOO-PAW:** Okay.

18 **MR. MATTHEW FERGUSON:** It's very difficult to
19 keep one's pace down. But if I could ask you to please try
20 to slow down for the ---

21 **MS. TERESA WOO-PAW:** Okay.

22 **MR. MATTHEW FERGUSON:** --- benefit ---

23 **MS. TERESA WOO-PAW:** I will.

24 **MR. MATTHEW FERGUSON:** --- of the
25 interpreters?

26 **MS. TERESA WOO-PAW:** Okay.

27 **MR. MATTHEW FERGUSON:** Thank you.

28 **MS. TERESA WOO-PAW:** So I also founded the

1 Action Chinese Canadians Foundation with a focus on enhancing
2 civil engagement and anti-Chinese discrimination, building
3 capacity for full participation. And also, during the
4 pandemic, I convened several meetings and founded the Asian
5 Canadians Together Act to End Racism Network in response to
6 the resurgence of the anti-Asian racism.

7 So I have been exposed to and participated in
8 many public and civil society organizational change
9 initiatives since the early 1990s and was an
10 antidiscrimination trainer. I was in public office for a
11 total of 12 years, in both the education field and in school
12 board and provincial office, currently the Chair of the
13 Canadian Race Relations Foundation. So I've had years of
14 lived experience as the minority in the room, in the system,
15 in the organization, and acutely aware of the impacts of
16 persistent systemic underrepresentation.

17 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Thank you. Could you
18 tell us a little bit about some of the responses to foreign
19 interference that you've observed and the negative impact
20 that they're having, in your view?

21 **MS. TERESA WOO-PAW:** Okay. So first of all,
22 I want to say -- I want to start by saying that every
23 Canadian should be concerned about foreign interference in
24 our electoral processes and democratic institution. So
25 myself, like many Canadians, am concerned about foreign
26 interference and integrity of our democratic institutions and
27 processes. I have participated in several consultations,
28 whether it's in relation to, say, the modernization of the

1 CSIS Act and foreign interference. And I find that -- and I
2 had the opportunity to also convey my support to the
3 modernization of our public policy.

4 While the public is -- when -- now focus on
5 the foreign interference discourse. So while the public is
6 periodically provided with information and reports about the
7 facts and content on foreign interference, China was
8 constantly in the news. So between the start of the
9 pandemic, around 2019 when we saw the resurgence of anti-
10 Asian, anti-Chinese racism combined with the intense focus on
11 China with foreign interference between 2022 to 2024, the
12 level of racial discrimination Chinese Canadians experienced
13 escalated correspondingly.

14 So the 2020 Angus Reid Institute survey had
15 the finding that 40 per cent of the 550 respondents reported
16 being treated with less respect than other people, one-third
17 personally threatened and intimidated, only 1 in 10 Chinese
18 Canadians say they think others in this country view them as
19 Canadians all the time, 13 per cent, and versus 50 per cent
20 of non-visible minorities. Twenty-five (25) per cent feel
21 like an outsider in their own country. And this is
22 consistent with Statistic Canada surveys, which found in 2019
23 23 per cent and -- of the Chinese Canadian reported perceived
24 racial discrimination, increased to 40 per cent a year later
25 in 2020. And then 2024, quarter 2 of 2024, 54 per cent of
26 Chinese Canadians surveyed experienced discrimination or
27 unfair treatment in Canada, higher than the overall visible
28 minority population, so half of people of Chinese descent

1 this country are reporting they experience discrimination.

2 So while our public institutions and broad-
3 based organizations did not set out to cause harm to
4 Canadians of Chinese descent, the statistics are showing very
5 concerning unintended consequences of the type of discourse
6 and reporting on foreign interference is having on Chinese
7 Canadian citizens. These alarming numbers serve to remind us
8 of the deeply embedded biases and stereotypes on Asian and
9 Chinese Canadians, such as the perpetual foreigner, "Yellow
10 Peril"; someone took the time to write me a letter after I
11 won my first election in 1995 and called me a "Yellow Peril".
12 And also, the concept of "Model minority" are real and alive
13 in our country.

14 So these days, including myself, we feel we
15 are targeted, alienated, and disillusioned, guarded,
16 isolated, and losing faith in our public system. If I may
17 use an example ---

18 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Please.

19 **MS. TERESA WOO-PAW:** --- to illustrate some
20 of the impacts. So much of the foreign interference
21 reporting and discourse took place between 2022 to 2023. And
22 that period was also of particular importance to Chinese
23 Canadians who, while awakening or reckoning to anti-Asian
24 racism were also beginning to learn about and busy organizing
25 the recognition of the 100th anniversary of the *Chinese*
26 *Exclusion Act*, which barred all immigration of Chinese
27 through legislation.

28 So as the Chair of the Canadian -- of the

1 Action Chinese Canadian Foundation, which led the nomination
2 to have the policy be recognized by the Government of Canada
3 as an event of historic significance and the national
4 remembrance event that took place on June 23rd here in
5 Ottawa, I personally felt the reactions and treatments from
6 multiple sources. The event took place in Ottawa in June
7 with 500 people in Ottawa and hundreds of watch parties
8 through commissioned spoken words and arts performances
9 received no public entity support, and only 5 per cent of the
10 funds raised came from mainstream private sponsorship. All
11 the people we talked to, previous sponsors, said, oh, this is
12 very important. This is significant. This is a great idea.
13 And then at the end, none of them gave us a penny because no
14 one wanted to be associated to anything Chinese Canadian, or
15 to a Chinese Canadian event, or Chinese Canadian
16 organization. So all our friends, allies, supporters all
17 disappeared and stay far away from us. So -- and so the
18 distancing was from everyone and everywhere. The sense of
19 alienation and isolation was striking.

20 So with the ACCT Foundation, I was given the
21 opportunity to have a public launch on the remembrance events
22 at the National Gallery, and I thought that would be a great
23 opportunity to let people know about this piece of history.
24 And because I have three grown children, I have three
25 grandchildren, and I know, and I was a school board trustee,
26 that 95 per cent or more of Canadians, including Chinese
27 Canadian, know nothing about this history. So I quietly took
28 the opportunity, thinking that that would be a great way to

1 raise public awareness. And so what was waiting for us was
2 something I never anticipated. The chill I felt in that room
3 went straight to my core as a Canadian of over 50 years. It
4 was chilled with sharpened knives. I never felt so unloved
5 in this country, never. I felt so -- I've never felt so
6 unloved in this country in my 50 years as Canadian. You can
7 feel the hate in the room. And so it was difficult, it was
8 disappointing, and then as a -- someone who have been
9 involved in systemic change, in building community capacity
10 to participate in change efforts. So the rationalization is
11 the persisted -- the persistent underrepresentation, the lack
12 of meaningful systemic change, I was the product. I was a
13 believer of our *Multiculturalism Act*. That was my driver for
14 my work 45 years. And this is my third diversity inclusion
15 equity round. My third one.

16 And so what I'm seeing and observing is the
17 lack of meaningful systemic change, the lack of cultural
18 competency. In having day in, day out public discourse on a
19 subject that is sensitive and divisive, and there's no
20 consideration, no compassion, no competency to distinguish
21 Canadian citizens of Chinese descent from foreign nationals.
22 I asked that question in one of the hearings, public
23 consultation, "How do you distinguish Chinese nationals from
24 Canadian citizens?", and the answer was, "It's interesting.
25 We don't know".

26 So this is systemic, this is structural
27 because we are targeted in all areas of life. It's okay to
28 target Chinese in the education sector. It's okay to target

1 by the media. It's okay to target -- to be targeted by a lot
2 of different elements in society today.

3 So I think the lack of sensitivity and
4 competency is disappointing, and many civically engaged
5 Canadians of Chinese descent are questioning. So many people
6 around me over the past 45 years are deeply engaged Canadians
7 who love this country and want to participate in the change
8 process to improve our country, so we share that belief in
9 cross-cultural understanding. That's why we have Asian
10 Heritage Month and we do different things through sharing and
11 learning of diverse cultures, which will enhance our social
12 bond, the sense of belonging, innovation and co-creation, all
13 those good things.

14 But these people are also feeling they cannot
15 embrace and share their culture because they're Chinese.
16 They have become guarded. They feel that maybe we should not
17 do too much of those things even though they believe it's
18 important for the building of this country, so including
19 sharing that heritage with their own family, their
20 grandchildren.

21 So people are questioning why is it that it's
22 acceptable to exclude Asian Canadians in DEI initiatives in
23 law schools, in social work faculties, in education. So it
24 is okay to exclude Chinese and Asian Canadians when they talk
25 about DEI.

26 People are questioning why our institutions
27 would rather pay the wrongs and the damages rather than doing
28 the real change. And these are people who have served

1 decades in our militaries, and so public servants of Chinese
2 descent are seeing and questioning their security clearance
3 are taking much longer and definitely longer than other
4 people. So what signals are these sending to Chinese
5 Canadians serving in our public institutions?

6 So -- am I too long?

7 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** No.

8 **MS. TERESA WOO-PAW:** So -- and then the ACCT
9 Foundation focused on the full participation of Canadians in
10 Canadian society, including serving in leadership roles.

11 We counted 250 Federal Crown corporations,
12 Crown corporations in Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta,
13 1,000 Crown corporations. You can see many Chinese names.

14 And so we -- we want to encourage full
15 participation in Canadian society from volunteering to voting
16 to participate in public institutions. And people are
17 raising -- are questioning whether this is the best time to
18 do this and -- because even in organizations like the SOU,
19 people do not want to see Chinese Canadians on their board
20 because they cannot trust them.

21 So instead of seeing that this is an
22 opportunity for all Canadians for a public service that would
23 actually enhance connection and access, people are concerned
24 that they cannot trust Canadians of Chinese descent. So
25 people are cautious to write the word "Chinese" in electronic
26 communications, worrying that -- about government
27 surveillance and potentially bring trouble to their family.

28 So I think people are feeling, you know, why

1 is it okay to make the yo-yo of people's social, emotional
2 well-being day in and day out by the insensitivity of our
3 institutions.

4 So do you want me to talk about political?

5 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** That's what I was about
6 to ask you about, actually. Yeah.

7 I was about to ask you about whether the
8 responses to foreign interference is having an impact on
9 Chinese Canadians' involvement or willingness to get involved
10 in politics.

11 **MS. TERESA WOO-PAW:** Right. So I usually
12 like to -- as a social worker, I always like to talk to the
13 community, so I've had a number of people share with me that
14 it is having an impact. They don't want to donate any more
15 because by making a donation, they, themselves, feel that
16 they would be questioned. So are you trying to influence,
17 right, and interfere.

18 So why would I want to donate when, by the
19 act of donation, would actually cause -- potentially cause
20 personal trouble? And also trouble -- potential trouble for
21 the candidate.

22 So people are diminishing or stopping support
23 to candidates and with fear and frustration being suspected,
24 directly or implicitly, and they don't want to -- people --
25 quite a number of people, actually, are telling me that they
26 have aspiration to serve in public office, but almost all of
27 them are saying, "But this is not the time".

28 So it is having a chilling effect on our

1 citizens because they don't want their loyalty, their
2 integrity questioned and put their family, potentially, you
3 know, under public scrutiny. And it hurts, I think, all the
4 participants and stakeholders in our political process
5 because we have less people run, less people support, less
6 Chinese Canadians elected, and we already have very few. And
7 so erosion of the very small progress that we have made in
8 this country, further erode our social cohesion and the
9 silencing.

10 We already have very little voice and no
11 champion. They feel like they don't have no -- they don't
12 have champion in that systems, and I've -- and we firmly
13 believe that this is going to have generational impacts.

14 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Can I ask you if you
15 have any views about how we could better respond to concerns
16 about foreign interference in order to mitigate some of the
17 negative effects you've been telling us about?

18 **MS. TERESA WOO-PAW:** Well, first of all, I
19 think I'd like to support, I think, many things that Dr.
20 Robinson actually said earlier.

21 And because of my personal background, I
22 focus on our institutions. And I think that -- I think that
23 -- and for the first point, I think I'm speaking in -- from a
24 personal -- a positive perspective, that I think our
25 institutions, our media and -- should be sharing more facts
26 and information and communicate -- relate relevant
27 information to the public because I'm a diversity trainer.
28 I'm a social worker. I think that our -- the Canadian

1 public, including impacted communities relevant to foreign
2 interference, need to know, while we are going through a
3 challenging time, that our public institutions have shown
4 insensitivity, but they also need to know our public
5 institutions have been responding to issues about diversity
6 and equity.

7 And such as our government have a -- the
8 Canadian Anti-Racism Strategy, right. We have, actually, an
9 Anti-Racism Secretariat which shows awareness and commitment
10 to address some of these issues.

11 Last week, the government just announced the
12 Combatting Hate program with funding support. And the
13 government is undergoing the *Employment Equity Act*, which is
14 a significant Act. And so that our public institution is
15 acknowledging there are issues and challenges in this
16 country, and validate the impact the community's feeling.

17 You have -- I don't know whether you can
18 relate that so many of our racialized young people do not
19 have the vocabulary to actually express what they feel,
20 right?

21 So we acknowledge, we validate, and then we
22 also communicate to the public and the impacted community our
23 institutional commitment to make improvements. And in the
24 process, hopefully, we also engage and build the capacity of
25 the impacted communities so that they can also partake in the
26 change process.

27 But what's also important, for someone who's
28 been doing this since the 1980s, is that we also need to work

1 close -- we need to work together, and institutions must work
2 with impacted communities through ongoing communication,
3 working together to develop the strategies and the action
4 plans to monitor progress and share the learning and the
5 celebration, but also together to hold our public
6 institutions accountable more effectively, and so that this
7 kind of effort doesn't, you know, go through its ups and
8 downs. And we have to find ways to give voice to people who
9 do not have voice in our public institutions. And our public
10 institutions, sadly, is repeating some of the histories, you
11 know, that people had to experience in this country.

12 So I think that we have an opportunity to
13 learn, and I think that -- you know, I still believe even --
14 I still love the *Multiculturalism Act*, even though it still
15 remain to be an inspirational policy, and I still believe
16 that we are in a better place to pick up, you know, where we
17 were and do better.

18 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Thank you very much.
19 I'll pass things over to my colleague, Mr. Poliquin.

20 **MR. GABRIEL POLIQUIN:** We can start with Ms.
21 Li. Thank you for joining us this morning.

22 And so as we've done with the other
23 panelists, you can start by introducing yourself and talking
24 a little bit about your involvement in the Chinese-Canadian
25 community.

26 **MS. WAWA LI:** Yes. Thank you so much for
27 having me.

28 So my name is Wawa, I'm a first-generation

1 immigrant from China, and I moved from Quebec City which --
2 around the age of two, which makes me a full-fledged Chinese
3 Quebecois.

4 What I feel is relevant to say about myself
5 is I noticed from a very young age that there was a lack of
6 services in Quebec City to help the diaspora surpass the
7 language barrier. So I served as the family translator my
8 whole life, and if there's any Chinese-Canadians as part of
9 the Commission -- which I hope because we are inquiring about
10 Chinese interference -- you might relate with my childhood.

11 So eventually I moved to Montreal, and I
12 studied, I'm still studying; I'm a fulltime student at
13 Concordia University, and I'm also a freelancer.

14 And, yeah, my connection to the Chinese
15 Community in Montreal started with Chinatown because I have
16 family members living there. But also eventually I started
17 organizing, doing community work, and one thing I've learned
18 from my experience -- I focused my work on the low-income and
19 seniors of the community. One thing I've learned is that the
20 Chinatown ecosystem revolved around key institutions, such
21 like the Chinese hospital; you have the affordable housing
22 units, you also have the Catholic church, and you also have
23 the community centres. But now they're under threat and the
24 current foreign investigation allegations are unfairly
25 targeting my community, and they are -- this is amplified by
26 media, police, and opportunistic politicians and it's
27 throwing suspicion and fears.

28 So this undermines the critical work that we

1 are doing on the community, and they're trying to discredit
2 our efforts, but I'm here to present the truth today to the
3 Commission.

4 **MR. GABRIEL POLIQUIN:** If you could talk a
5 little bit about what services do the community centres
6 provide; what kinds of services?

7 **MS. WAWA LI:** Yeah. So the services they
8 provide, it started as any essential services for newcomers
9 to integrate well into the Canadian life, but then these
10 services extended to many immigrant communities, so they have
11 -- they have English and French classes that are very
12 convolded [sic] by other immigration -- immigrant
13 communities.

14 They have employment support; they have legal
15 aid; they have women's committees also that provides a social
16 network for Chinese women to integrate; and domestic violence
17 support; housing support, so on and so forth. It's really --
18 it really started like this.

19 **MR. GABRIEL POLIQUIN:** Okay. And those are
20 services that are provided by the community centre or by
21 organizations that use the community centre as a forum, so to
22 speak? What kinds of organizations work out of the community
23 centre?

24 **MS. WAWA LI:** What kind of organizations are
25 convoldant [sic]?

26 **MR. GABRIEL POLIQUIN:** I'm saying, so are
27 those services that are provided by the community centre
28 itself, or is it organizations that use the community centre?

1 **MS. WAWA LI:** Oh, by the community centres
2 themselves, yes.

3 **MR. GABRIEL POLIQUIN:** Okay.

4 **MS. WAWA LI:** Yes, yes, yes.

5 **MR. GABRIEL POLIQUIN:** And so are there other
6 organizations that use the community centre as a space?

7 **MS. WAWA LI:** I mean, the community centre
8 has a building and they're renting to tenants, if this is
9 what you're asking.

10 **MR. GABRIEL POLIQUIN:** Yeah.

11 **MS. WAWA LI:** The community centre is an
12 independent kind of organization, but they also share with
13 other tenants.

14 **MR. GABRIEL POLIQUIN:** And those
15 organizations are organizations of the community?

16 **MS. WAWA LI:** Honestly, I wouldn't know.

17 **MR. GABRIEL POLIQUIN:** Okay, that's fine.
18 That's fine.

19 Now, you mentioned that those community
20 centres are under threat. If you could talk about that; what
21 is that threat and how did it come about?

22 **MS. WAWA LI:** Yes, well, actually if I could
23 just kind of make a statement I have -- like, a statement I
24 have about foreign interference.

25 So today I'm here to highlight the damages of
26 domestic interference that are disguised as a concern for
27 foreign interference. And the narrative and the stories that
28 I'm about to present are not abstract; these directly attack

1 the livelihood of our members from the low income to the
2 witch hunt of our political -- politicians and academics.
3 And these are all Canadian citizens of the class spectrum
4 that are being denied their rights under the *Canadian Quebec*
5 *Charters*.

6 So, yeah, I think it's important to lay the
7 premise of why I'm here. There's also, like, a fixation that
8 I've noticed on foreign interference that is fueled by
9 federal authorities and opportunistic politicians, and this
10 is fueling a mainstream hysteria that overstates the impact it
11 has on the material conditions on the low income of the
12 community. This is mostly the perspective that I'm going to
13 bring today.

14 And I think it's important to say for a
15 disclaimer that I'm not against -- no; I am against foreign
16 interference, and I hope the government takes action if it
17 exists, but not at the expense of the community.

18 So to give a portrait about my experience,
19 maybe, with foreign interference. I've personally never
20 heard of foreign interference before. Last year was the
21 first time that I've been aware of these processes. It was
22 through an article from (indiscernible) where it was talking
23 about the two of our community centres that were referred to
24 as illegal police stations. And a little personal
25 interjection, there was a picture in the article that was a
26 group picture taken of the community at the commemoration of
27 the 100th anniversary of the *Exclusion Act* of Chinese
28 Canadian, on Parliament Hill, and I was there with my family.

1 So ironically the fear mongering that is witnessed today
2 shares a direct pattern with the events of 100 years ago.

3 And you know, the frenzy that I'm talking
4 about is fueled by powerful forces. You have the politically
5 motivated groups that are instrumentalizing the context to
6 spread fear amongst the community. You have the federal
7 authorities of the RCMP that are making unsupported claims --
8 and I will provide more details about this later -- and you
9 have the mainstream media that are disseminating unfounded
10 claims and confusing informations all over the public
11 discourse, and all of this is contributing to an asymmetrical
12 culture of intimidation. And such investigation has to be
13 conducted responsibly by authorities, given the influence you
14 have on mainstream discourse and mainstream ecosystem, where
15 the public opinion is giving the benefit of the doubt for
16 those who claim foreign interference but paying little to no
17 attention to the victims.

18 So going back to the community centres, as
19 you asked, yeah, I'm going to focus mostly on the Chinese
20 Family Service of the Grand-Montréal because I work in
21 Chinatown and they are located at the heart of this
22 neighbourhood.

23 So more about the centre. From last year's
24 report, they served more than 6,000 clients across their
25 services. So they are vital to our community. And as I
26 said, it's not only the Chinese community that are going to
27 these services.

28 And for some context, for those who don't

1 know, in 2023, there was an irresponsible public announcement
2 that stated that services [no interpretation] were under
3 investigation by the Integrated National Security Enforcement
4 Team, and were allegedly operating as illegal Chinese police
5 stations. All of these without evidence.

6 When the RCMP made those public allegations,
7 they did not provide any definition to what was a police
8 station. And those claims are hurtful, and they constitute
9 defamation under Quebec's law. The consequences were also
10 immediate. There was funding cuts following the accusations.
11 They were unable to renew the funding from the government,
12 affecting 70 percent of the operations. Essential -- the
13 essential programs that I have described earlier were cut,
14 the French classes first, and half of the staff and the care
15 workers had to be laid off as a result of this, despite the
16 community's continuing need.

17 This is very important, it is very damaging
18 to the -- to our -- the ecosystem of the community but also
19 the fear that it's spreading amongst our people because the
20 members that are going to the Chinese Family Service are
21 vulnerable people of the community. They need those help,
22 but you're attacking on people -- we are attacking on people
23 that are already vulnerable.

24 So as a concerned member whose family need
25 those services, it's perplexing that after a year-and-a-half
26 of investigation we still don't know what our community has
27 done to warrant these severe cuts that we're faced. And six
28 months later, the RCMP suddenly announced that they were

1 successful in disrupting the activity of the police stations,
2 yet they never described what they were. The Chinese Family
3 Service to this day, and the community, still don't know.
4 We're left in the unknown.

5 And I want to lend a hand in the process of
6 emptying the buildings, the spaces of the Chinese Family
7 Service, in hope of finding tenants to offset the funding
8 cuts. And everyone, from the employees to the members, were
9 scared, where everyone was freaking out, overwhelmed,
10 reorganising the space, automatically unable to comprehend
11 the abrupt nature of the situation.

12 So -- and also, they were about to rent the
13 second floor to an organisation, but they retracted the deal
14 -- the offer because the tenant didn't want to be associated
15 with the space. This happened multiple times, interested
16 tenants calling back to retract the deal.

17 So because of that, the centre had difficulty
18 to pay the mortgage, and when the mortgage was due, the
19 community mobilised forcefully to save the building. So
20 different streams of solidarity contributions, and there was
21 also current and old board members that mortgaged their own
22 house to the cause.

23 So the community is left alone to defend
24 itself into the condition, damages caused by the fevered
25 dream and hysteria, and left in the unknown. So both centres
26 has filed a lawsuit, and the RCMP has not offered a defence
27 about the lawsuit.

28 So this leads to July 10th, 2024, if you're

1 still following. I was in the neighbourhood that day. It
2 was a casual day, where a big RCMP truck was parked at the
3 entrance of the neighbourhood. And I enquired the police
4 officers what this was about, and they told me they were here
5 to warn the merchants of the neighbourhood about the foreign
6 interference. Honestly, it felt intimidating.

7 And the following morning there was
8 widespread coverage on the medias. The media explained that
9 the RCMP was doing door-to-door discussing with the merchants
10 and distribute cards with QR codes and contact points from --
11 about any form of harassment from the Chinese Communist
12 Party.

13 So I was concerned by the non-existing
14 opposing voices, or at least skeptical voices in the media,
15 about the police operation, so I returned to do independent
16 kind of investigations. So I enquired about 12 merchants,
17 which wish to remain anonymous, and there was two important
18 takeaways from my independent investigations.

19 First of all, the fear and intimidation stems
20 from the Canadian security establishment, not the foreign
21 interference. Secondly, the merchants I spoke to were
22 unclear about what the RCMP were seeking. No one knew about
23 foreign interference. In fact, the majority shared that the
24 officers presented the cards and encouraged them to denounce
25 thieves and disturbances from unhoused populations of the
26 neighbourhood. So there is a discrepancy between the RCMP
27 story about foreign interference in the media and the RCMP
28 narrative on the ground with the merchants.

1 When we talk about institutional
2 irresponsibility, this is an example of an irresponsible
3 operation that fuels a suspicion in the neighbourhood. This
4 happened in the midst of the wait for the allegation of the
5 community centres. It wasn't explicit if the investigations
6 were related to the community centres or not, but due to the
7 media coverage, naturally there is artificial connections and
8 associations that are made, and they threaten the belief and
9 the fear in the community.

10 Other instances, anonymous instances from
11 community conversations. Some diaspora groups claiming
12 transnational repression are recklessly accusing fellow
13 Canadians of being Chinese spies simply for holding different
14 views. Many leaders of Chinese Canadian organisations
15 reported -- community organisations reported being victims of
16 bullying tactics at the doorstep of their house. Anonymous
17 groups were circulating pamphlets, that I have with me today
18 if you want to see an example, written in Chinese and
19 English, threatening them to expose to foreign agents.

20 So such stories demonstrate how Chinese
21 Canadians are currently exploiting the fear of foreign
22 interference to target, you know, other -- and stigmatise
23 other Chinese Canadians who disagree with them, and yet now
24 we're Canadian citizens and we are entitled to right of
25 freedom of expression and freedom of association under the
26 *Charter*; this foreign interference hysteria suppresses both.
27 And these stories also demonstrate the repression that is
28 made on Chinese Canadians, weaponizing the Canadians' fear of

1 foreign interference, normalise the intimidation and threats.
2 So as a young member of the diaspora, I am left concerned for
3 the potential exclusion of Chinese Canadian voices from the
4 political process.

5 So as a conclusion, we're all Canadians,
6 full-fledged citizens, entitled to democratic rights under
7 the Canadian and Quebec *Charters*. I understand that my
8 hearing today is part of a public testimony, which is
9 different from the formal witness process regarding the
10 foreign investigation -- the foreign interference
11 investigation, and while I'm really, really grateful, I --
12 for the opportunity to talk, I know that there is targeted
13 politicians and relevant figures that have submitted
14 testimonies, and I urge that their voices not be marginalised
15 in this investigation. And the story that I have shared
16 today demonstrate the targeting of the community centres, as
17 well as the instances of the witch hunt, demonstrating the
18 real impacts that the domestic interference, entitled under
19 foreign interference, threats has on our community.

20 As Mr. Robinson said earlier, you know, there
21 is like a distrust amongst academic research about the
22 subject, but if we can at least listen and trust the stories
23 on the ground that would be a first step. And yeah, these
24 narratives aren't abstract, and federal authorities and
25 politicians bear responsibilities for fuelling this hysteria
26 and the hyperfocus that oversees the impact on the material
27 conditions of our community. And once again, I am against
28 foreign interference, and I hope that the government takes

1 action, if it exists, but not at the detriment of our
2 communities.

3 And I just want to end saying that as a
4 racialized, educated, Canadian citizen, who lived but also
5 have studied thoroughly our history, the history of the
6 Canadian -- of Canada, I have seen how profiling has
7 historically led to violence, fearmongering and
8 stigmatisation of the targeted communities. This has led us
9 to today's foreign interference dilemma. So I thank you for
10 your listening.

11 **MR. GABRIEL POLIQUIN:** Thank you very much
12 for your intervention. And just to conclude, do you have any
13 other recommendations for the Commission how foreign
14 interference should be dealt with, all the while mitigating
15 any negative effects that you've highlighted?

16 **MS. WAWA LI:** I really do believe that if we
17 at least consider and act on the, like, demands or
18 suggestions that I've made, there's going to be a
19 ramification of other opportunities to find the best
20 solutions to not harm the communities. As you're going to
21 listen to the testimonies and you're going to -- there's
22 probably going to be reassessment of the narrative.
23 Honestly, only this is a really good start moving forward for
24 the diaspora.

25 **MR. GABRIEL POLIQUIN:** Okay. Thank you very
26 much.

27 So we'll move on now to our anonymous
28 speaker. Can you hear us all right?

1 **ANONYMOUS PARTICIPANT:** Yes. Can you hear my
2 voice?

3 **MR. GABRIEL POLIQUIN:** We can hear your
4 voice. Yeah. Thank you. So I can't identify you, so I may
5 refer to you as Ms. A., as in the letter A.

6 If you could, in as much as you can, tell us
7 a little bit about your background to start and what your
8 concerns are?

9 **ANONYMOUS PARTICIPANT:** Thank you. Thank you
10 for the chance to share my voice. I'm a Chinese Canadian. I
11 think it's time for the silent majority among us to speak up
12 for a balanced perspective. I am a full professor in a top
13 research Canadian university in the STEM, stands for science,
14 technology, engineering, and mathematics. I have extensive
15 publications, received national and international
16 recognitions, but beyond that, I'm a proud Canadian mom. So
17 I believe this Commission's decisions will impact not just
18 me, but also our students, kids, and the future generations.
19 So I'm thankful for this opportunity to be here.

20 **MR. GABRIEL POLIQUIN:** Very good. Thank you.
21 And if you could speak a little bit about the evolution of,
22 you know, the perception of say collaborations with PRC
23 researchers and PRC institutions in your career, over the
24 course of your career?

25 **ANONYMOUS PARTICIPANT:** Yeah, I was born in
26 China and immigrated to Canada about the age of twenty-some.
27 And after I finished my PhD degree here in Canada, I launched
28 my career as an assistant professor in a Canadian university.

1 And since then, I began to build up my research program and I
2 tried my best to reach out to the best talent who would like
3 to join my team, as well as the best talent who I can
4 collaborate with. And among them, some of them are from
5 China.

6 **MR. GABRIEL POLIQUIN:** Okay. So you have
7 collaborators in the People's Republic of China. And have
8 you noticed a change in recent years, how those
9 collaborations are viewed in the academic community, but also
10 by funding agencies?

11 **ANONYMOUS PARTICIPANT:** Yeah, definitely. So
12 for probably for many people this is a long story, because
13 this can put my answer into context.

14 **MR. GABRIEL POLIQUIN:** Sure. Go ahead.

15 **ANONYMOUS PARTICIPANT:** Yeah. I have
16 participated in Canadian elections, voting based on my
17 judgement of each politician's policies, record learned from
18 their platforms and the media. The fact that many of us are
19 on Chinese language apps does not mean we do not look at
20 other sources of information and cannot think for ourselves.
21 The stereotype that Chinese Canadians are more vulnerable to
22 foreign interference is discriminatory and baseless.

23 History has painful lessons about the Chinese
24 exclusion in Canada. Chinese arrived in Canada since 1788.
25 They were hardworking and endured hardships beyond what
26 others could tolerate. For instance, 12,000 Chinese
27 immigrants worked for the trans-Canada railroad, and many
28 lost their lives due to the harsh conditions.

1 However, by 1870s, the media began spreading
2 anti-Chinese rhetoric leading to widespread violence and the
3 1923 *Chinese Exclusion Act*.

4 Sadly, this cycle seems to be repeating
5 today. Some media and politicians have turned their attacks
6 against the Chinese Government into attacks against Chinese
7 people and anti-Chinese sentiment. One politician has been
8 especially vocal, rating China as an enemy and even calling
9 for a new Cold War.

10 Such rhetoric directly hurts Chinese
11 Canadians, being targets of the resulting hostility.

12 I voted against him because I stand for
13 peace, not because I was influenced by the Chinese
14 Government.

15 I'm deeply concerned that his approach for
16 treating Chinese community voters as incapable of independent
17 thought, implying that if we don't share his view, we must be
18 under foreign interference.

19 Many other politicians, journalists, and
20 activists are -- also push the narrative that Chinese
21 Canadians who don't adopt a harshly critical view of China
22 should be suspect of being foreign agents. This is unfair,
23 dangerous, and it reduces us to second-class citizens in our
24 own country.

25 I fully support making our electoral
26 processes being fair and free of foreign interference, but
27 singling out China as the primary concern is unjustified and
28 uncomfortable, especially when someone's election loss is

1 attributed to unproven claims of Chinese interference.

2 As a professor, I know that labelling people
3 is never right. We judge students by their work, not by
4 labels. The same should apply to foreign nations. We must
5 evaluate them based on facts; did they start wars, harm
6 innocents, or invade others? We should hold every country to
7 the same standards, always putting Canada's national
8 interests first.

9 As a U.S. politician once said, a nation has
10 no permanent friends, no permanent enemies, only permanent
11 interests.

12 It's disheartening that I have to speak
13 anonymously today. The anti-China sentiment in Canada is so
14 intense that I'm afraid of retaliation for sharing my views.
15 The hostility is so pervasive that I was advised to stay
16 anonymous to protect myself, my family, and even my
17 university.

18 This shows how far the anti-China hysteria
19 has spread and how real the threat against Chinese Canadians
20 have become.

21 In a recent issue of Canadian Ethnic Studies,
22 a survey in November 2022 to February 2023 revealed that 40
23 percent of Chinese-origin STEM professors felt anxiety about
24 being under surveillance by Canadian Governments, compared to
25 just 11 percent of non-Chinese STEM professors. Given the
26 recent resurgence in anti-China sentiment, these numbers are
27 likely even worse today.

28 The climate of fear and suspicion began with

1 the Trump Administration's China Initiative in the U.S. in
2 2018 targeting perceived Chinese spies in academia and
3 industry. Many innocent Chinese-origin professors were
4 wrongfully persecuted as spies. Even without evidence, they
5 lose their jobs and face catastrophic legal fees and the
6 mental torture.

7 Recently, Jane Wu, a distinguished China-born
8 scientist, lost her research lab due to a security
9 investigation. Being stripped of her right to research, she
10 took her own life and we lost a star researcher forever.

11 The same atmosphere is brewing in Canada. In
12 November 2022 and April 2024, Yuesheng Wang, a former Hydro-
13 Québec employee, was accused of being a Chinese spy, making
14 headlines everywhere before his trial even began, yet we've
15 heard nothing about the trial's outcome. It's shocking to
16 read that accusations against him are based on vague
17 statements like, "He seems to promise to transfer knowledge
18 to China." Shouldn't a criminal charge be based on action
19 with clear, hard evidence? Charging someone based on what
20 they might do is deeply troubling and sets a dangerous
21 precedent.

22 As a professor, I have seen how anti-China
23 rhetoric has led to new policies to restrict research
24 collaborations with Chinese scholars, damage beneficial
25 academic exchanges. These policies not only harm our
26 research, but also cast a shadow over Chinese-origin
27 academics from denied funding to direct harassments, all
28 under the guise of national security, while hiring committee

1 member even suggest investigating those candidates solely
2 based on their last names, assuming they might be risky due
3 to perceived foreign guise. So my grandchildren carry
4 Chinese last names will face the same thing I face today.

5 This profiling is blatant discrimination,
6 contradicting the values of inclusivity and diversity that
7 Canada claims to uphold.

8 This hostile environment is fueled by
9 exaggerated or false claims about Chinese interference spread
10 by reporters, politicians and anti-China groups. This
11 climate has made us the targets of suspicion, so I have had
12 to be self-censorship. I cut off ongoing research
13 collaboration and abandoned my funding application because I
14 cannot prove my research poses no potential risk. This alone
15 could result in funding rejection by CSIS.

16 Meanwhile, these new research security
17 policies rest on two flawed assumptions. The first is that
18 collaborating with China only benefits them. This is not the
19 reality.

20 China has made remarkable strides in the last
21 four decades with a stand workforce 10 times larger than
22 ours. According to Australia's strategic policy, China now
23 leads in 57 out of 64 technologies. Very often, we gain more
24 from these collaborations.

25 One example is the mental health
26 collaboration program in one of Canada's strategic research
27 priorities. Each year, Chinese researchers, funded by their
28 government, come to Canada to share their findings. With a

1 much larger population, their data and their insights are
2 invaluable to us, but this year, 17 out of 20 couldn't get
3 visas to attend the workshop here. That's a total loss for
4 Canada.

5 The second outdated assumption is that China
6 can steal our research for military or industrial gains.
7 Let's be real. Knowledge today grows at a pace never seen
8 before, especially with the internet. Picture our collective
9 knowledge as a giant ball. Its surface marks the boundary
10 between what we know and the unknown. As this ball expands,
11 so does that boundary, and that's where academic research
12 operates, pushing into the unknown.

13 In academia, we value originality. We push
14 boundaries, develop new technologies and focus sharply to
15 advance quickly. We publish openly, aiming for impact.

16 There is a vast gap between academic findings
17 and the practical market-ready solutions. It's industry
18 experts who bridge that gap, so stealing academic research is
19 pointless. It's already out there, accessible to everyone.

20 Hunting for spies in universities is close to
21 modern-day witch hunting. Overly broad and vague research
22 security measures aimed at fighting foreign interference are
23 weakening the very foundation of our research. Our
24 universities are losing top talent, reducing productivity due
25 to compromised academic freedom and cutting services for
26 students due to budget deficit.

27 Built on flawed assumptions, these research
28 security policies cannot protect our national security.

1 Instead, they foster fear and anxiety in the Chinese academic
2 community, discourage international talent and risk a brain
3 drain as top performers feel unwelcome. This not only harms
4 our education in the high-tech sectors, but ultimately
5 weakens Canada's global competitiveness.

6 I should say decoupling from China won't give
7 Canada a competitive edge either. History proves that a
8 closed-door policy only hinders a nation's growth and
9 progress. To be competitive, we must stay open to learning,
10 sharing knowledge and collaborating where it benefits us
11 most.

12 So I urge this Commission to make a wise and
13 informed decision for our future. We must guard against
14 harmful foreign interference. Whether it's foreign agents
15 coming to kill our citizens or police our people, we must do
16 so with a balanced and fact-based approach. Over-reacting to
17 minor threats with extreme measures only hurts ourselves. If
18 we waste our premium resources on non-essential risks, we
19 will miss the real threats that's from climate change, global
20 pandemic to nuclear war.

21 So I, along with many other Chinese
22 Canadians, look to the Commission to put a stop to the witch
23 hunts and defend our rights. A nation that is open, fair and
24 inclusive to all is the one that will survive and prosper in
25 the long run.

26 That concludes my statement.

27 **MR. GABRIEL POLIQUIN:** Thank you, Ms. A.

28 So we've asked other panelists if they had

1 any recommendations to alleviate the effects of this kind of
2 discourse. I think you've ended with recommendations like
3 that, but I was just going to give you the opportunity to --
4 do you have anything to add?

5 **ANONYMOUS PARTICIPANT:** Yeah, thank you. I
6 would like to.

7 So yeah, we have know the sentence if there
8 is avalanche, no snowflake is innocent. So we see there are
9 many players in this situation and we want to highlight every
10 sector and every actor need to pay attention and do
11 something.

12 Firstly, the government agents -- from my
13 hearing today of the other stories bring by other panelists
14 as well as my own experience, I believe our government agents
15 need to be hold account against discrimination and the
16 baseless accusations to minorities like Chinese or Russian,
17 whatever.

18 So it's important for themselves to see
19 whether their actions are based or motivated by some anti-
20 nation or anti certain races, so this is the first thing.

21 Second thing is our media. And I think I'm
22 very disappointed of our current media. In many cases, they
23 just don't try to present a balanced view. They just tell
24 one side of the story.

25 So if our media tell one side of the story,
26 do not present us a balanced perspective, it's easy for our
27 Canadian people to look for other sources and it's easy to
28 let the misinformation from foreign resources come in.

1 So first of all, we need to make sure our
2 media do their job and our media need to also be the one to
3 monitor whether our government agents do the same.

4 So -- and our politicians. I hope our
5 politicians -- so my point, really, is I hope our politicians
6 always put the Canadian people's health, wealth, prosperity
7 first. If I hear some politicians they keeps on, like,
8 attack others, attack foreign agents -- foreign nations, kind
9 of try to blame others rather than find and establish
10 solutions for internal business, so I found that that's a
11 problem of our politicians with short-sighted decisions.

12 So I hope our politicians in the future, they
13 can bring us more solutions for our -- to improve Canada
14 rather than baseless accusations of other because it's not
15 helpful.

16 And I also hope then can propose their like
17 electoral frameworks based on large-scale consultations, and
18 so every people, including the silent majority, have a chance
19 to contribute our views and our perspectives to improve this
20 whole process.

21 So yeah, that's a few things that come to my
22 mind.

23 **MR. GABRIEL POLIQUIN:** Okay. Thank you very
24 much for that.

25 **MR. HOWARD KRONGOLD:** Thank you to all the
26 panelists here today. We're very grateful for your
27 participation.

28 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** We'll take the break,

1 come back at 11:20.

2 **THE REGISTRAR:** Order, please.

3 This sitting of the Commission is now in
4 recess until 11:20 a.m.

5 --- Upon recessing at 10:56 a.m.

6 --- Upon resuming at 11:21 a.m.

7 **THE REGISTRAR:** Order please.

8 This sitting of the Foreign Interference
9 Commission is now back in session.

10 The time is 11:21 a.m.

11 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** So before you start, I
12 just want to make -- and although our panelists are not in
13 the room anymore, I'd like to thank them for the information
14 they gave us this morning. I didn't before because I was
15 under the mistaken impression that they were coming back
16 after the break, so I thought I would have the opportunity to
17 thank them at that point. I really believe that the
18 information they provided us with was very pertinent and
19 useful. I want to avoid and try to avoid any blind spot, and
20 I think it will be very helpful in this respect. So although
21 they are not there, I express my gratitude. Thank you. So
22 it's now your turn.

23 **--- PRESENTATION BY MS. KATE McGRANN AND MS. DAWN PALIN**

24 **ROKOSH:**

25 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Good morning, everyone.
26 My name is Kate McGrann, and I'm joined by my colleague, Dawn
27 Palin Rokosh. We're members of the Commission counsel team,
28 and today, we are here to provide a presentation and update

1 on the Commission's public consultation process.

2 Today we will be discussing some of the
3 relevant themes and topics arising from the information the
4 Commission has received through its public consultation
5 process. It's important to keep in mind that the information
6 shared today does not constitute findings by the Commissioner
7 or the Commission, but rather, an overview of the public
8 consultation process itself and a non-exhaustive description
9 of information the Commission has received.

10 An important part of the Commission's mandate
11 is to examine and report on the experiences of members of
12 ethnic and cultural communities who may be especially
13 vulnerable to foreign interference. The Commission's public
14 consultation process was designed to allow the Commission to
15 hear directly from members of diaspora communities who may be
16 especially vulnerable to foreign interference, along with
17 members of the general public about the impacts of foreign
18 interference and how to make things better. The Commission's
19 public consultation process involved three components: a
20 call for written submissions from members of the public, a
21 publicly available questionnaire on foreign interference, and
22 consultation meetings. The call for submissions and
23 questionnaire were open to all members of the public. The
24 Commission convened consultation meetings with groups of up
25 to eight people from diaspora communities represented by the
26 diaspora participants in the Commission.

27 **MS. DAWN PALIN ROKOSH:** [No interpretation].

28 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Further to safety and

1 security considerations, both for those engaging in the
2 public consultation process and for the public consultation
3 process itself, the Commission incorporated the following
4 approaches. Individuals were able to participate in the
5 public consultation anonymously and confidentially.

6 Individuals making written submissions were provided with
7 several options for how to deliver their submissions to the
8 Commission, including through encrypted messaging. Security
9 protocols were established and employed for virtual and in-
10 person consultation meetings. And to protect the integrity
11 of the questionnaire, the Commission ensured measures were
12 put in place to detect and counter artificial responses.

13 **MS. DAWN PALIN ROKOSH:** [No interpretation]
14 ...different ways to participate, as well as resources that
15 were available to be able to support individuals who were
16 interested in participating. Recognizing the diversity of
17 diaspora communities who are affected by foreign
18 interference, as well as the importance of communicating with
19 the members of the diaspora communities in the language that
20 they're -- in which they're most comfortable, the Commission
21 made available information and key resources in French, in
22 English, as well as in 17 other languages.

23 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** The Commission's call to
24 the public for written submissions was launched, along with
25 supporting guidelines and resources, in May 2024. The
26 Commission committed to read and consider all submissions
27 received by the submission deadline of August 12th, 2024.

28 Through this process, the Commission has

1 received over 145 written submissions from individuals and
2 groups. The Commission accepted anonymous and confidential
3 submissions. Submissions were accepted in all languages, and
4 members of the public were invited to deliver their
5 submissions via email, encrypted messaging, and regular mail.
6 These submissions will inform the Commission's work and a
7 summary of key topics and themes highlighted through these
8 submissions will be shared publicly.

9 The Commission extends its thanks to all of
10 those who took the time to prepare and send a written
11 submission.

12 **Me DAWN PALIN ROKOSH:** The Commission tried
13 to directly gather opinions and experiences of the members of
14 the community, of the diaspora community, who were affected
15 by foreign interference. Therefore, the Commission organized
16 meetings in August and September with those people who were
17 identified by the organizations who had the participant
18 status in the Commission's work, and representing diaspora
19 communities.

20 Those meetings took place in person in some
21 meeting places that were kept secret in several regions of
22 the country, as well as virtually.

23 During those meetings, the participants did
24 not have to make any solemn affirmation or swear, and they
25 were not cross-examined. They were encouraged to not
26 formulate any specific allegations against any people or
27 entities in Canada so as to respect the principle of equity,
28 which is one of the fundamental principles of the Commission,

1 and given the fact that these people or entities would not
2 have the opportunity to respond to these allegations.

3 The Commission will not come to any factual
4 conclusions about the information that was shared during
5 those meetings.

6 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** All in all, the Commission
7 heard directly from 105 members of diaspora communities in
8 Canada in a series of 22 meetings. Meeting attendees were
9 asked to respond to the following two questions:

10 Question 1: How are you, your loved ones,
11 members of your community impacted by foreign interference in
12 Canada's electoral processes and democratic institutions?

13 Question 2: What are your suggestions for how you and others
14 in your community that may be vulnerable to foreign
15 interference could be supported and protected, and for how
16 foreign interference could be detected or combatted?

17 To allow individuals to participate
18 anonymously and confidentially while sharing information
19 received at those meetings with the public, anonymized
20 summaries for the meetings will be published on the
21 Commission website. Attendees will have had the opportunity
22 to review, edit, and approve the summaries prior to their
23 publication.

24 You will hear from some individuals who
25 participated in those consultation meetings during this
26 afternoon's diaspora community panels, where they will
27 discussing some key themes and suggestion they raised during
28 those meetings.

1 The Commission extends its thanks to all
2 those individuals who participated in the consultation
3 meetings.

4 **MS. DAWN PALIN ROKOSH:** The Commission
5 launched a questionnaire in September. This questionnaire
6 requires five to 10 minutes to complete and allows members of
7 the public to share their experiences and opinions on foreign
8 interference in the electoral and democratic processes at the
9 federal level in Canada. The answers obtained for this
10 questionnaire will inform the work of the Commission
11 including its final report.

12 Over 460 responses were received to this
13 date. This questionnaire will remain available until October
14 16th. The Commission invites all the members of the public
15 to contribute to the work of the Commission by answering this
16 questionnaire. The link to the questionnaire on the
17 Commission's website, on the dedicated page to the public
18 consultation process.

19 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Through the different
20 aspects of the public consultation process, members of the
21 public have shared with the Commission their diverse and
22 sometimes difficult experiences. Here is a summary of some
23 of the key themes addressed by members of the public: mis-
24 and disinformation and its use to limit, disadvantage,
25 incite, undermine and harm individuals and organisations here
26 in Canada; the leveraging of Canadian civil, community, and
27 academic institutions and organisations or those working
28 within them to further the objectives of foreign actors; and

1 the collateral damage caused by government efforts to combat
2 foreign interference, particularly for members of diaspora
3 communities.

4 Let's move now to discuss some of the
5 suggestions received through the public consultation process.

6 **MS. DAWN PALIN ROKOSH:** Amongst the many
7 different suggestions that were received by the Commission,
8 we can find the following:

9 To reinforce the government response to
10 foreign interference and transnational repression;

11 To improve and broaden the information that
12 the government shares with the public about the risks
13 associated to foreign interference, and the measures taken in
14 fighting it;

15 To establish and maintain collaborative
16 relationships between the government and its agencies, as
17 well as the diaspora communities, focusing particularly in
18 the improvement of cultural knowledge and making sure that
19 the government contact points for the diaspora communities
20 remain as constant and stable as possible.

21 During the public consultation process, the
22 Commission also gathered comments regarding the resources and
23 the means available in order to improve the knowledge and
24 general awareness of the public when it comes to
25 disinformation and misinformation in Canada, as well as on
26 how minimize their impact.

27 The suggestions shared on this include the
28 creation of resources dedicated to foreign interference and

1 transnational repression; critical education for media; and
2 the fight against racism. Furthermore, the Commission heard
3 many calls to deploy increased public efforts aiming to
4 factually check the information linked to common issues of
5 disinformation and misinformation.

6 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Through the three
7 components of the consultation process, the Commission has
8 heard from people across the country, and we aren't done yet.
9 The Commission continues to learn from the experiences and
10 ideas of members of the public, including from members of
11 diaspora communities vulnerable to the impacts of foreign
12 interference in our democratic processes and institutions.

13 This afternoon, the Commission will hear from
14 certain attendees of consultation meetings who will join
15 panels to discuss suggestions centred around three themes:
16 public awareness and education, dis- and misinformation and
17 how to respond, and supports and resources for diaspora
18 communities. Members of the public can participate in the
19 public consultation process by completing the Commission's
20 questionnaire, which remains open until October 16th, 2024.
21 And the Commission will be publishing more information on
22 what it has heard through the three components of its public
23 consultation process on its website.

24 The Commission thanks all those who have
25 taken the time to participate in the public consultation
26 process.

27 **MS. DAWN PALIN ROKOSH:** [No interpretation].

28 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you very much. So

1 we will stop here for lunch, and we should all be back for
2 1:30. And this afternoon again we will have a consultation
3 panel with members of the different diaspora communities.

4 **THE REGISTRAR:** Order, please.

5 This sitting of the Commission is now in
6 recess until 1:30 p.m.

7 --- Upon recessing at 11:39 a.m.

8 --- Upon resuming at 1:32 p.m.

9 **THE REGISTRAR:** Order, please.

10 This sitting of the Foreign Interference
11 Commission is now back in session.

12 The time is 1:32 p.m.

13 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** So good afternoon.

14 **MS. SARAH TEICH:** Madam Commissioner, I'm
15 sorry. Before we get started, I'd like to bring a motion,
16 and this is related to the indirect identification of Mr.
17 Marcus Kolga by the witness this morning. And I'd like to
18 seek a remedy for that indirect identification, either
19 striking the particular sentence from the record or recalling
20 the witness and cross-examining him or striking the entirety
21 of his remarks from the record.

22 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** What are you referring
23 to exactly in terms of the -- what had been said this
24 morning?

25 **MS. SARAH TEICH:** Maybe I'll just come up so
26 I'm not bending over, if that's okay, for a second.

27 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Yes, sure.

28 **MS. SARAH TEICH:** Again, I apologize for the

1 slight delay.

2 This is the quote:

3 “So in response to the question by
4 Commission counsel, can you share
5 with us some of your views about how
6 we could better respond to foreign
7 interference in terms of ways that we
8 could avoid some of the negative
9 effects that you’ve identified?” (As
10 read)

11 The witness, this is Mr. Robinson, I believe,
12 Paul Robinson, he says:

13 “I mean, I would first say avoid
14 threat inflation. I read an article
15 -- I read an article in a major
16 Canadian newspaper the other day
17 which said, and I’ll quote,
18 ‘Potential tentacles of Russian
19 oligarchs and agents have penetrated
20 deep into Canadian business, politics
21 and society.’ This kind of alarmism,
22 to my view, is not helpful. It
23 stokes unnecessary fears and can lead
24 to the targeting of innocent people.
25 It should be avoided.” (As read)

26 Madam Commissioner, if you pull that quote
27 and put it into Google, the very first search result
28 identifies that it’s a report, a paper by Mr. Kolga, that was

1 published by the MacDonald-Laurier Institute.

2 COMMISSIONER HOGUE: Okay. But what is the
3 or what are the allegations, in your view, that is made
4 against ---

5 MS. SARAH TEICH: He says it's ---

6 COMMISSIONER HOGUE: --- this individual?

7 MS. SARAH TEICH: He says ---

8 COMMISSIONER HOGUE: What is the -- because
9 the idea not to identify anyone is just -- is to avoid
10 accusing someone of misconduct while this person cannot
11 defend himself or herself.

12 MS. SARAH TEICH: Yes, that's right.

13 COMMISSIONER HOGUE: What is the -- in your
14 view, what is the misconduct that is alleged against this
15 person in this instance?

16 MS. SARAH TEICH: Yes, thank you.

17 I mean, he says right in the quote -- he says
18 it's "threat inflation". He says it's alarmism, it's not
19 helpful, it stokes unnecessary fears. He says it can lead to
20 the targeting of innocent people. So that's an allegation
21 that that kind of reporting leads to harm.

22 MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS: If that may help,
23 Madam Commissioner -- Guillaume Sirois, from the RCDA -- we
24 support that motion, which is a very reasonable motion, in
25 our opinion.

26 We were not warned in advance of that
27 presence of that panellist, and we think that there should be
28 an opportunity to correct the record regarding his

1 allegations. And it may be difficult to extract his
2 allegations from his whole testimony this morning because he
3 referred to fact checkers or researchers about this
4 information as being intellectually sloppy. He made a bunch
5 of blatant comments about this, and we think that -- for
6 these reasons, we support the application.

7 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Madam Commissioner,
8 Commission counsel here, Natalia Rodriguez.

9 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Just a moment. I just
10 want to make sure that Maître Sirois ---

11 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Yeah, we're done.

12 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** You're done?

13 **MR. GUILLAUME SIROIS:** Exactly.

14 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Okay.

15 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Commission counsel
16 here.

17 We think this is something that should be
18 brought in writing to the Commissioner and this gives an
19 opportunity for the other parties to be able to weigh in as
20 well. So we would ask if you can please bring this motion in
21 writing so that it can be duly considered.

22 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** I agree it should be a
23 written motion, and so I will invite you to make formal
24 application. You know the rules, so the application will be
25 notified to the other parties. And I'm inviting you to
26 indicate in details because I'll be very, very frank; I see
27 it as the expression of an opinion much more than a factual
28 allegation against someone.

1 So I would like to hear from you on this
2 specific aspect because it's not obvious to me, but I'm not
3 making any decision. I'm just telling you to address this
4 point in your application because this is clearly something
5 that I'm interested in.

6 **MS. SARAH TEICH:** Okay. Thank you.

7 We'll make it in writing.

8 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

9 **MS. SARAH TEICH:** Thank you so much.

10 **--- INTRODUCTION OF THE PANEL ON PUBLIC AWARENESS AND**
11 **EDUCATION:**

12 **--- FACILITATION OF THE PANEL BY MS. KATE McGRANN AND MR.**
13 **BENJAMIN HERRERA:**

14 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Good afternoon. My name
15 is Kate McGrann, and I'm joined by my colleague, Benjamin
16 Herrera. We are members of the Commission counsel team, and
17 we will now be hearing from a panel of people who attended
18 consultation meetings with the Commissioner and members of
19 her team this summer.

20 These panelists are here to share information
21 based on their experiences. Unlike fact witnesses appearing
22 before the Commission, these panelists are appearing without
23 oath or affirmation.

24 As was the case in the consultation meetings
25 held with the Commissioner this summer, these panelists have
26 been advised against making allegations against individuals
27 or organizations here in Canada.

28 These panelists will be discussing

1 suggestions that they and others are their meeting provided
2 for how to improve Canada's approach to foreign interference,
3 including suggestions focused on the theme of public
4 education and awareness.

5 **MR. BENJAMIN HERRERA:** Thank you.

6 We will begin by introducing each of the
7 panelists.

8 So first we have Katpana Nagendra. She is a
9 Tamil Canadian human rights activist who serves as the
10 general secretary and official spokesperson for the Tamil
11 Rights Group. The Tamil Rights Group is a non-profit
12 organization that advocates for human rights and seeks
13 justice for the crimes committed against Tamils in Sri Lanka.

14 Second we have Mr. Sieru Kebede. He is an
15 information technology professional who serves as a vice-
16 president of Tigray Community Toronto. Mr. Kebede also
17 volunteers as an advocate with the Alliance of Genocide
18 Victim Communities, Security and Justice for Tigrayans
19 Canada, and Ethiopian Canadians for Peace.

20 Third we have Ms. Svetlana Koshkareva. She's
21 a Canadian citizen born in Omsk, USSR. She travelled as a
22 journalist to Ukraine during the period between 2004 and
23 2023. She has been involved in fundraising for the Armed
24 Forces of Ukraine. She's an activist whose work includes
25 serving on the Anti-War Committee of Russia and volunteering
26 with the Russian-Canadian Democratic Alliance.

27 And last but not least, we have Ms. Farzaneh
28 Fard. She holds a PhD in Computer Science at Dalhousie

1 University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. She served as a board
2 member of the Iranian Justice Collective and she's an
3 advocate for the End Gender Apartheid campaign.

4 Thank you very much.

5 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Good afternoon.

6 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Ms. Nagendra, we will
7 begin with you. At your consultation meeting, you discussed
8 public awareness and education efforts for and about the
9 Tamil Canadian community. Please explain your suggestions
10 and discuss them.

11 **MS. KATPANA NAGENDRA:** Thank you. Good
12 afternoon, Commissioner. I appreciate the opportunity to
13 speak today.

14 Before addressing the first question, I want
15 to clarify that I am here not only as a human rights
16 advocate, but also as a member of the Tamil diaspora and a
17 victim of the ongoing foreign interference that hampers our
18 pursuit of justice and accountability.

19 To provide meaningful suggestions for
20 enhancing public awareness and education aimed at countering
21 foreign interference, I would first like to give you some
22 context about the challenges the Tamil Canadian community is
23 facing regarding the Sri Lankan Government's actions.

24 Sri Lankan Government's interference in the
25 lives of Tamil Canadians has significant implications. This
26 includes surveillance, threats, harassment, disinformation
27 campaigns aimed at discrediting Tamil activists. The regime
28 has labelled peaceful human rights advocates as terrorists to

1 silence their voices and undermine their legitimate calls for
2 justice and accountability. This tactic not only targets
3 Tamil Canadians, but also seeks to manipulate international
4 perceptions and hinder the global response to the human
5 rights violations committed during the genocidal war against
6 Tamils in Sri Lanka.

7 As a survivor of the violence during the 1983
8 anti-Tamil riots in Colombo, I have experienced the Sri
9 Lankan Government's intimidation tactics first hand, even in
10 Canada.

11 Many in the Tamil community, including
12 myself, sought refuge here for safety and for the freedom to
13 advocate for our people, yet we face ongoing harassment and
14 discrediting efforts from the Sri Lankan Government. Online
15 campaigns target our activism and in-person intimidation
16 disrupts our efforts. Whenever we speak about the atrocities
17 against our families or demand accountability for genocide,
18 we are met with defamation, threats, and malice falsehoods.

19 The Sri Lankan Government's interference in
20 the lives of Tamil Canadians has taken many egregious forms,
21 as documented by Tamil rights groups.

22 For example, the government pressured
23 officials in Brampton to block the construction of a monument
24 for the Tamil genocide.

25 Additionally, Tamil Canadians returning to
26 Sri Lanka have faced detention, torture, and interrogation
27 due to their activism. Family members of these activists
28 still in Sri Lanka have also been harassed and tortured as

1 intimidation tactics.

2 Furthermore, the Sri Lankan Government
3 supported a challenge against the constitutionality of Bill
4 104, the Tamil Genocide Education Week Act, undermining
5 efforts to educate Canadians about the genocide.

6 Sri Lankan agents have also launched
7 disinformation campaigns to mislead the international
8 community and damage the reputations of Tamils seeking refuge
9 in Canada. When Tamil refugees arrived on the Ocean Lady and
10 MV Sun Sea, the Sri Lankan Government spread false
11 information leading Canadian authorities to label them as
12 suspected terrorists and unjustly detaining them, including
13 pregnant women and children.

14 This interference has also affected Canadian
15 Tamil activists travelling abroad, causing travel
16 restrictions and delays.

17 Additionally, Tamil Canadians running for
18 office who call for accountability from the Sri Lankan
19 Government have faced smear campaigns and accusations of
20 links to terrorism.

21 Our first recommendation is to increase
22 public awareness and education about foreign interference,
23 especially within diaspora communities. Canadians need to
24 understand how foreign governments like Sri Lanka's
25 infiltrate our borders using tactics such as disinformation,
26 intimidation, and surveillance to suppress advocates for human
27 rights. Many are unaware of the subtle yet insidious ways
28 these actors extend their influence. Public education

1 initiatives should empower individuals, particularly in
2 vulnerable communities, to recognize signs of interference
3 and know their legal protections.

4 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** I'm sorry,
5 Commissioner. We're just getting an indication from the
6 interpreters that if we can try to make an effort to speak a
7 little bit more slowly? Thank you very much.

8 **MS. KATPANA NAGENDRA:** Thank you. The
9 Canadian ---

10 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Everyone is reminded of
11 the same thing everyday.

12 **MS. KATPANA NAGENDRA:** The Canadian
13 Government must ensure that citizens have access to resources
14 and support if targeted, including legal recourse and
15 protective measures.

16 The government must proactively combat
17 disinformation campaigns that vilify communities, especially
18 the Tamil diaspora. False narratives labeling Tamil
19 Canadians as extremists or terrorists distort public
20 understanding of legitimate human rights advocacy. These
21 campaigns aim to discredit calls for justice regarding the
22 Sri Lankan conflict and accountability for genocide.

23 It is essential for the government to
24 challenge these falsehoods through transparent communication
25 and engagement with affected communities. By addressing
26 disinformation at its roots, we can ensure that advocates for
27 justice, or even general members of the diaspora communities
28 can operate freely and without fear of retaliation.

1 Thank you.

2 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

3 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Mr. Kebede, at your
4 consultation meeting you discussed the benefits that may flow
5 from public recognition of the experience of diaspora
6 communities. Please share and discuss your views.

7 **MR. SIERU KEBEDE:** Thank you. Imagine not
8 knowing if your family is alive for over two years, all
9 because a brutal war is raging in your homeland. This was
10 the reality for millions in Tigray.

11 To provide context, Tigray is a northern
12 province in Ethiopia with about seven million people. The
13 war arose from a failure to establish a new political
14 arrangement between the Tigray People's Liberation Front and
15 the Prosperity Party led by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. This
16 conflict, which lasted from November 2020 to November 2022 --
17 '20 to '22, has been described as a genocide, yet it
18 struggles for recognition.

19 During this period, Tigray was under complete
20 siege, with media blackouts and a government-imposed blockade
21 on internet and telephone services, one of the longest in
22 global history.

23 Essential utilities, commercial trade, food
24 aid, and banking services were also cut off.

25 Families in the diaspora were left in the
26 dark, unable to contact loved ones to check on their safety.
27 Journalists attempting to report on the situation faced
28 harassment, expulsion, imprisonment, or death.

1 Despite these draconian measures, information
2 still leaked. Bodies began washing up in Sudan from the
3 Tekezé River and western Tigray and refugees fled to share
4 their horror stories.

5 A few brave souls risked their lives to
6 smuggle information and report to the media in the
7 neighbouring areas where communication was possible.

8 It was through these limited pieces of
9 information that we came to know the tip of the iceberg, the
10 catastrophe and the genocide in the order of magnitude of the
11 Rwanda genocide, if not more.

12 The Ethiopian and Eritrean Governments
13 launched extensive propaganda campaigns, making it difficult
14 for people to grasp the true extent of the crisis. As a
15 result, the international community remained largely unaware.

16 In response, Tigran diaspora communities
17 across Canada organized mass protests in cities like Toronto
18 and Ottawa. We protested in front of the Parliament, the
19 U.S. Embassy, major media outlets, and provincial municipal
20 buildings seeking to raise awareness and garner support.

21 However, local media largely ignored our
22 efforts. Our protests were met with counternarratives from
23 the Ethiopian Government and its sympathizers, complicating
24 the struggle to convey the realities on the ground. Media
25 outlets found it challenging to discern the truths as they
26 were often unable to access the region themselves.

27 The government of Ethiopia and Eritrea had
28 immense resources and access to lobbyists and the

1 international institutions. Despite our tireless advocacy,
2 we felt helpless and frustrated by the lack of attention from
3 the Canadian public and major news organizations, especially
4 in light of the enormity of the crisis.

5 The Tigray war has resulted in over a million
6 civilian deaths, primarily due to the brutal siege and
7 targeted massacres. The Ethiopian government led the
8 conflict, supported by Eritrean soldiers and the Amhara
9 paramilitary groups, with an estimated million combatants
10 involved. The war has led to the sexual assault of over
11 200,000 women and girls, often tortured in gruesome ways by
12 gangs. It had also led to the destruction of more than 90
13 percent of schools, hospitals, as well as factories, water
14 supplies, civic buildings with essential public records.

15 Currently over 40 percent of Tigray remains
16 under occupation by the same forces responsible for these
17 atrocities, hindering justice and the return of displaced
18 persons. There are over a million internally displaced
19 people in Tigray and more that 70,000 refugees have fled to
20 Sudan where they face further violence. Many have attempted
21 dangerous journeys to South Sudan, Uganda, and Libya, often
22 falling victim to human trafficking and perilous conditions.
23 A small number have arrived in Canada, particularly in
24 Toronto, but they lack adequate support to address the mental
25 trauma and resettle effectively.

26 My youngest brother is among those still in
27 Libya, highlighting the ongoing struggles faced by our
28 community. Compared -- compared to conflicts in Ukraine and

1 Israel, the Tigray war has resulted in far -- excuse me.
2 Thank you.

3 Compared to conflicts in Ukraine or Israel,
4 the Tigray war has resulted in far more casualties and urgent
5 needs. Yet it has received minimum media coverage. This
6 lack of awareness significantly hinders our ability to raise
7 funds for recovery efforts and support refugees in both -- in
8 Tigray and within Canada.

9 As a small community we face overwhelming
10 requests for assistance with nearly every member having lost
11 a loved one or supporting relatives in Tigray. Despite our
12 efforts, the scale of the need far exceeds our capacity.
13 Many Canadians, including charitable organizations, remain
14 unaware of the situation in Tigray, making it challenging to
15 secure the necessary support.

16 This gap in public knowledge has hindered our
17 ability to galvanize broader assistance and apply pressure on
18 the Canadian government for humanitarian aid. Increased aid
19 and recognition could alleviate the mental and financial
20 burdens our community faces daily, stretching our limited
21 resources even thinner. Many individuals have lost jobs,
22 marriages have ended, due to the stress of feeling unheard,
23 while trying to raise awareness. Some community members have
24 taken on multiple jobs and relied on personal credit lines to
25 send assistance, while low-income individuals desperate to
26 save their relatives or childhood friends, struggle to
27 contribute as they once did.

28 Unfortunately, some in our community have

1 turned to unhealthy coping mechanisms in response to the
2 dismissal of our genocide. This collective trauma has added
3 an overwhelming layer of stress affecting our overall
4 wellbeing.

5 Thank you.

6 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Ms. Koshkareva. In your
7 consultation meeting, you discussed the importance of
8 education in addressing the spread of disinformation. Please
9 share and discuss your suggestions.

10 **MS. SVETLANA KOSHKAREVA:** Thank you, Kate.
11 Hello, Commissioner. [No interpretation].

12 I think Western governments, including
13 Canada, do not appear to consider themselves in the war with
14 Russian yet. However, I can state that Russia views itself
15 as being in the war with the West, being Russian citizens as
16 well as Canadian.

17 Education on those issues requires time and
18 resources, and we have not invested in much -- as much as we
19 should in this area as Russia has. There is a lot of
20 catching up to do. We can't combat Russian interference or
21 cognitive warfare without naming it and building a production
22 which include moving forward with the essential steps.

23 For example, government actions and policy.
24 Our government must prioritize transparency in public
25 education. It should clearly educate Canadians about who is
26 spreading disinformation, how it works, and why it's a threat
27 to democracy. This includes outlining the specific tactics
28 used by Russian actors like Russia Today, who are creating

1 the fake news manipulation and social media algorithms and
2 the use of troll farms and amplify harmful content, as well
3 as making it clear when and how this information is being
4 spread.

5 For example, disclosing the origin of
6 Kremlin-based narratives, such as fake images of Canadian
7 military personnel in Ukraine, or false claims about war
8 crimes, can be -- weaken the impact of those stories. As
9 well, I should mention, social media platforms like a
10 Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, and Telegram, and primary vectors
11 who spread this disinformation.

12 We should push the stronger regulation that
13 requires platforms to remove the false information in real
14 time, ban repeat offenders who spread disinformation or
15 propaganda by Russia, introduce transparency measures to
16 reveal the sources of political advertisement and content,
17 evaluate and address systematic risk associated with their
18 operations.

19 As well, we have to support media literacy,
20 very much, as a robust long-term strategy to educate citizens
21 here in Canada on media literacy is essential. Teaching
22 individuals, especially teenagers -- and speaking as a mother
23 of two teenagers, and as one more coming up -- how to
24 critically evaluate information sources, recognize
25 disinformation, and avoid falling victims to fake news should
26 be our top priority.

27 Schools and the university can integrate
28 media literacy programs to prepare the next generation to

1 navigate the complex information landscape here in Canada.

2 It should be more strong factchecking
3 network, like DisinfoWatch and StopFake, and they are playing
4 the vital role now, but more needs to be done to expand their
5 reach. Those organizations should be supported by the
6 government to continue monitoring disinformation and
7 providing reliable, factual alternatives.

8 Also, I would like to emphasize community-
9 based interventions, because disinformation targets
10 vulnerable communities like us here, for exploiting cultural
11 and political divisions. It's critical to empower local
12 leaders to defend themselves.

13 I must stress the education and public
14 awareness, while it's most important and not sufficient on
15 their own, effectively counter Russian propaganda. Only the
16 government can mount the coordinated response needed to
17 protect our democracy here in Canada.

18 Thank you.

19 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Ms. Fard, at the
20 consultation meeting you attended, you spoke about a general
21 knowledge gap within the Canadian government, and Canadian
22 society more generally, when it comes to the activities of
23 agents acting for foreign regimes. Please describe your
24 suggestions on this topic.

25 **MS. FARZANEH FARD:** Thank you.

26 Dear Madam Commissioner, and esteemed members
27 of the committee, I appreciate the opportunity to address you
28 today on the critical issues of national security, foreign

1 interference, and the misuse of Canada's immigration system
2 by individuals associated with hostile regimes like Islamic
3 Republic in Iran.

4 These concerns have been raised by our
5 community through articles, interviews, and other forums, and
6 they demand urgent strategic responses. While Canada has a
7 proud tradition of welcoming immigrants and refugees,
8 embracing diversity and equality, it is essential that we
9 address the vulnerabilities in our system to preserve the
10 integrity of our democracy and ensure the protection of
11 Canadian citizens.

12 I urge the government to prioritize a
13 specialized training, public awareness, and targeted
14 interventions. Today, I will outline several recommendations
15 for your consideration.

16 One: Education and awareness campaigns for
17 law enforcement and judiciary.

18 There is a critical need to enhance the
19 awareness of key institutions, like the judiciary, RCMP, and
20 CSIS, regarding the activities of foreign agents linked to
21 oppressive regimes, such as Islamic Republic in Iran.
22 Comprehensive education and specialised training are
23 essential to equip these institutions to effectively identify
24 and address threats.

25 A: Judicial awareness and training.

26 Judges, prosecutors, and immigration
27 officials must receive specialised training on the tactics
28 used by individuals associated with hostile regimes, such as

1 the use of false identities or forged documents. This will
2 enable better legal judgements and deportation decisions.

3 B: Specialised RCMP and CSIS units.

4 Establish dedicated teams within these
5 agencies focussed on foreign interference and threats,
6 particularly from regimes like the Islamic Republic in Iran.
7 These units should collaborate with national security experts
8 to counter covert operations and protect activists who face
9 intimidation.

10 C: Public awareness campaigns.

11 A national campaign should be launched to
12 educate the public on the risks of foreign interference,
13 ensuring that communities are informed about the exploitation
14 of Canada's legal and immigration systems by hostile
15 entities. Multilingual materials should be provided to reach
16 diverse audiences.

17 D: Facilitating community communication with
18 security agencies.

19 At the moment, members of our community who
20 are targets of foreign interference, or are aware of the
21 presence of Iranian regime officials in Canada, struggle to
22 convey this information to the appropriate authorities.
23 Establishing a well-publicised method of contacting the
24 authorities with relevant information can protect our
25 community and quickly alert our agency -- our security
26 agencies about risk.

27 Two: Immigration reforms and enhanced
28 background checks.

1 There is clear evidence that individuals
2 associated with oppressive governments have exploited
3 Canada's immigration system. Stricter immigration policies
4 are needed to prevent these individuals from entering the
5 country under false pretenses while prioritising the safety
6 of genuine human rights activists in danger of deportation.
7 This is only possible through specialised training.

8 A: Enhanced background checks.

9 Collaborate with trusted members of the
10 Iranian Canadian community whose background and history does
11 not suggest connection with or sympathy for the Islamic
12 Republic, who can verify the legitimacy of immigration
13 claims, especially for individuals suspected of using false
14 identities or concealing ties to oppressive regimes.

15 B: Transparency in deportation cases.

16 The government must balance public safety
17 with privacy by providing transparency in deportation
18 hearings for individuals linked to human rights abuses.
19 Canadians deserve to know if high-ranking officials from
20 oppressive regimes are residing in Canada.

21 Three: Combatting extremism on university
22 campuses.

23 Universities are increasingly becoming hubs
24 for foreign influence and extremist recruitment. The
25 government should focus on campus awareness and prevention
26 initiatives.

27 A: University partnership.

28 Partner with universities to raise awareness

1 about the presence of extremist groups. Educational
2 campaigns for students and staff should help them recognise
3 and respond to radicalisation efforts. Authorities should
4 also more closely monitor universities to ensure that
5 sanctions are not being violated and the students or
6 professors with close ties to hostile foreign regimes are not
7 admitted.

8 B: Stricter oversight on -- of non-profits.

9 Ensure stricter government oversight of non-
10 profits operating on campuses to prevent their use as
11 platforms for extremist recruitment. Organisations tied to
12 terrorist groups should face immediate legal action and be
13 banned from public institutions.

14 Thank you.

15 **MR. BENJAMIN HERRERA:** Ms. Nagendra, if we go
16 back to you. At your consultation meeting, you discussed
17 actions the Canadian government could take to address foreign
18 interference affecting the Tamil Canadian community at its
19 very source. Could you expand on that idea?

20 **MS. KATPANA NAGENDRA:** Yes, thank you.

21 It's imperative that Canada takes decisive
22 actions to hold the Sri Lankan government accountable so that
23 Tamil Canadians can live and advocate without fear of
24 reprisal. The Sri Lankan government's ongoing interference
25 in the lives of Tamil Canadians will only cease once they are
26 held fully accountable for their actions. As long as they
27 continue to operate with impunity, feeling shielded from
28 repercussions for their war crimes, human rights violations,

1 they will persist in using intimidation tactics against Tamil
2 activists in Canada. The fact that they believe they are
3 getting away with their crimes emboldens them to target those
4 who oppose their actions and advocate for justice.

5 The Canadian government must adopt a more
6 assertive and principled approach in holding Sri Lankan
7 government officials responsible for their involvement in the
8 genocide and systemic human rights abuses against the Tamil
9 people. Despite overwhelming evidence of their role in
10 crimes, such as extrajudicial killings, enforced
11 disappearances, torture, and sexual violence, the Sri Lankan
12 conflict, many of these individuals continue to occupy
13 positions of influence and authority within the Sri Lankan
14 government.

15 As a country committed to upholding the
16 principles of justice, human rights, and international law,
17 Canada cannot remain passive in the face of such gross
18 violations. This requires not just symbolic gestures, but
19 tangible actions through collaboration with international
20 judicial institutions, such as the International Criminal
21 Court, and International Court of Justice, and the United
22 Nations, as well as by invoking mechanisms under Canadian
23 law, such as the *Magnitsky Act*, which allows for sanctions
24 against foreign officials.

25 Canada should also champion efforts within
26 the international fora, such as the UN Human Rights Council
27 session, to renew and strengthen mandates for independent
28 investigations into the Sri Lankan government's actions

1 during and after the war. The goal must be to secure not
2 just accountability for individual perpetrators, but also to
3 dismantle the systems and the institutions within Sri Lanka
4 that continue to allow human rights abuses to persist.

5 Additionally, Canada should more actively
6 exercise its existing universal jurisdiction laws to
7 prosecute Sri Lankan officials responsible for international
8 crimes, such as genocide, war crimes, and crimes against
9 humanity. By utilising universal jurisdiction more
10 effectively, Canada can demonstrate its commitment to
11 upholding international law.

12 It also seems clear that the Sri Lankan
13 government thinks it can interfere in the decisions by the
14 Canadian government when it comes to Sri Lanka's violation of
15 international law. This is clearly demonstrated by Sri
16 Lankan government's outright condemnation and rejection of
17 Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's remarks on May 18th, where he
18 marked the day as Tamil Genocide Remembrance Day. This is --
19 the Sri Lankan's government's response reflects a disregard
20 for Canada's sovereign powers and decision-making of its own
21 citizens, and represents a direct challenge to Canadian
22 government's powers.

23 Our recommendation is for a stronger message,
24 and urge the Canadian government to move beyond this House of
25 Commons acknowledgement of the Tamil genocide, and also
26 extend formal recognition to all other instances of Tamil
27 genocide, including at the United Nations, and urge Canadian
28 allies to follow suit in recognising similar historical

1 injustices.

2 At the heart of this issue is the need to
3 provide justice for the Tamil victims and survivors who
4 continue to suffer the consequences of the genocide. Justice
5 in this context means not only holding individuals
6 accountable for their actions, but also ensuring that the
7 Tamil people can safely return to their homeland and seek
8 redress for the harms they have endured.

9 It is heartbreaking to think that activists
10 like myself may never be able to return to the land of our
11 ancestors, as we fear for our lives at the hands of the Sri
12 Lankan government.

13 Canada must lead by example in the
14 international community, demonstrating that war criminals
15 will not find refuge, or impunity, no longer [sic] how long
16 it takes to hold them accountable. By doing so, we uphold
17 the values of justice, deter future atrocities, and send a
18 clear message that Canada will not tolerate foreign
19 interference or the violation of fundamental human rights.

20 Thank you.

21 **MR. BENJAMIN HERRERA:** Thank you very much.

22 Mr. Kebede, at your consultation meeting you
23 discussed resources and supports that may assist the
24 Tigrayan-Canadian community. Could you please expand on
25 this?

26 **MR. SIERU KEBEDE:** Thank you.

27 Yes, our community receives numerous requests
28 for assistance from refugees and victims, both within Canada

1 and abroad. Locally, we need government support to provide
2 mental health services to our refugees and community members
3 coping with the loss of loved ones. Additionally, our
4 refugees require settlement services, financial aid, housing
5 assistance, and career development and support.

6 Unfortunately, our local communities are
7 under-resourced and lack the capacity to meet these needs,
8 necessitating both technical and financial assistance to
9 effectively support our genocide survivors. For instance,
10 our largest community in Toronto does not have the funds to
11 establish a community centre for these vital services.

12 Internationally, the Canadian government has
13 a history of providing humanitarian aid to Tigray, dating
14 back to the famine in the eighties. However, aid sent so far
15 either lacks verification of receipt to the needy or is not
16 proportionate to the severity of this tragedy. The people of
17 Tigray urgently need support from international donors.
18 Reconstruction aid that was anticipated after the Pretoria
19 Agreement has not materialized, leaving victims reaching out
20 the diaspora communities in despair.

21 In Tigray there are still many internally
22 displaced persons requiring regular support. Schools,
23 hospitals, water wells, and factories need to be rebuilt and
24 -- or repaired. Refugees scattered across East Africa are
25 suffering due to the lack of support. Many aid organizations
26 in Sudan have fled due to the ongoing conflict there, leaving
27 refugees without assistance.

28 Canada can play a critical role by providing

1 food and medical aid to those refugees in need, as well as
2 offering resettlement assistance for those returning to their
3 homes in Tigray, and providing reconstruction aid for the
4 devastated public infrastructure. Additionally, Canada can
5 use its international influence to advocate for the full
6 implementation of the Pretoria Agreement.

7 To combat foreign interference and repressive
8 governments via social media or through proxy, a report was
9 published and endorsed with several recommendations by Sarah
10 Teich and human rights action group, Security and Justice for
11 Tigrayans, Alliance of Genocide Victim Communities, and
12 several member organizations. Below are nine of the 37
13 recommendations made in the report, which can be found online
14 for full details. I'll just call out the nine.

15 First one is create a designated agency or
16 taskforce designed for online repressions.

17 Second recommendation; create a dedicated
18 hotline for -- or a reporting mechanism so that incidents of
19 such nature are centralized;

20 Criminalize online harassment and digital
21 violence;

22 Raise awareness among diaspora communities
23 about what their legal rights are;

24 Train law enforcement officers about
25 incidents of foreign interference and how they can handle it;

26 Provide psychological support to services --
27 support services to victims;

28 Create a specialized fund for victims of

1 transnational repression;

2 Monitor and track incidents of transnational
3 repression;

4 And, finally, bar perpetrators. The
5 *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* could be utilized to
6 bar or remove individuals engaged in transnational repression
7 here within our borders.

8 Thank you.

9 **MR. BENJAMIN HERRERA:** Thank you very much.

10 Ms. Koshkareva, at your consultation meeting,
11 the impact of disinformation on the Russian-Canadian
12 community was discussed. Could you expand a bit on this?

13 **MS. SVETLANA KOSHKAREVA:** For sure, thank
14 you.

15 As a Canadian citizen, I have observed how
16 many Russian-speaking communities here in Canada,
17 specifically targeted by cognitive warfare. Russian media
18 outlets spread misleading information to the broader Canadian
19 publics in both, not only Russian, but English and French.
20 They are using events, like a victory day parades in Canadian
21 cities which celebrate Second War hero here, but have been
22 coopted to promote support for Canadian military actions in
23 Ukraine, including the ongoing conflicts for sure.

24 Social media groups in the cities like
25 Ottawa, Montreal, Toronto, and Calgary also used by -- to
26 push Kremlin narratives. As Canada has shown more resilience
27 in Russian propaganda than our American neighbours,
28 Canadians, especially members of Russian diaspora for sure,

1 are directly exposed by those narratives as evidenced by the
2 Tenet Media operations. So I will talk more about this.

3 Some citizens and influencers in Canada may
4 gain financially by promoting Russian narratives. We must be
5 very careful about propaganda in the movies, specifically
6 documentary movies, which can amplify narratives which can be
7 also seen on social media.

8 I have three key messages on that to share.
9 Russia and other autocratic states are actively engaging in
10 cognitive warfare against Canada. The cognitive warfare is
11 significantly impacting the Russian diaspora in Canada.
12 Russia is gaining the upper hand because we have not taken
13 this threat seriously enough for too long.

14 Russia have been conducting propaganda
15 campaign in Canada aimed in social division, and eroding
16 trust in our institution, including the media and the long
17 time. This is because it's dividing society and easier for
18 Russia to manipulate and control.

19 Beyond division, Russia seeks to influence
20 how Canadians think and what, ultimately shaping Canadian
21 policies to advance its strategic goals. Their goals
22 includes establishing a wrong order aligned with the
23 autocratic values, dismantling NATO and any sanctions lifting
24 against Russia, and ending Canada's support to Ukraine.

25 Our public institution is not ready yet to
26 this threat to Canadians. We learn about some of them from
27 US government, and Canadian authorities do not want to tell
28 us more about what it's already public. Without the US, this

1 propaganda campaign might have never been detected. Yes, the
2 government has issued public statement already about the
3 separation, but Government of Canada has seemingly done
4 nothing yet.

5 So Russian dictator doesn't really care about
6 Canadian statements, and nor he don't care about sanction
7 against him, and he never do. It is critical to understand
8 that Russia, it's leading an expanding coalition with
9 autocratic states like China, Iran, et cetera, and those
10 interested in presently converting towards that shared goal
11 and to terminate the core and Western-led global order.

12 To maintain this grip on power, they employ
13 sophisticated methods such as propaganda, alliance
14 surveillance, electoral interference, using financial
15 schemes, and destabilize democracy here.

16 We already starting to witness the effects of
17 cognitive warfare through the decline in support to the war
18 in Ukraine, increasing social division, and eroding trust in
19 our institution.

20 So I have to say it's also some political
21 parties here in Canada who is acting by tempting some more
22 person adopting the last (indiscernible) stance to support
23 Ukraine now.

24 The Canadian video of Tenet Media have been
25 made headlines, but they represent only tip of iceberg of
26 Russian propaganda in Canada. Russia has been waging
27 cognitive warfare in Canada for close to a decade. A foreign
28 nation should not be allowed to shape Canadian thoughts and

1 policies, especially when this is -- have been ongoing issue
2 for 25 years.

3 This Tenet Media complaint about Canada have
4 been watched and viewed in Canada for more than 500,000 --
5 it's like 500,000 pamphlets was spread across Canadian
6 cities; just imagine that. That would have been the
7 reaction. This media allegation -- for Tenet, I mean -- much
8 more worse than that, first because video from Canadian
9 influencers is much more likely to influence the target
10 audience than that. Secondly, because Russia have been
11 employing their strategy in Canada and elsewhere for years in
12 the circumstances affect, if the cognitive warfare is not
13 understood and barely discussed.

14 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** I'm really sorry to
15 interrupt. Our interpreters are just asking if you would
16 mind just slowing down a little bit for them.

17 **MS. SVETLANA KOSHKAREVA:** Sure.

18 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Thank you.

19 **MS. SVETLANA KOSHKAREVA:** Yeah, I'm just
20 trying to reach the time.

21 Effectively, continue cognitive warfare as
22 preparing for broader conflict cannot be achieved overnight
23 which is why immediate actions is essential. Here is some
24 calls to action for your consideration:

25 We must address the issue as the national
26 threat it pose. This is not just the disinformation
27 campaign, this is cognitive warfare targeting Canadians and
28 the Russian diaspora for sure. We need to respond. If

1 Russia feels it can target Canadian thoughts and beliefs, we
2 should be doing the same. We need to have one person or
3 institution responsible for this, and it's very important
4 because we can see the threat.

5 In the longer term, that likely means
6 creating the institution whose sole responsibility would be
7 respond to this cognitive of warfare, coordinated with all
8 other actors, which is CSIS, Global Affairs Canada, et
9 cetera, as political parties. I also hope that Commission
10 can investigate the events related to Tenet Media, including
11 the -- requesting the testimony of those media founders and
12 the people who have been working there.

13 In short, we need to act immediately to
14 protect Canada's national security and democratic values.
15 Thank you.

16 **MR. BENJAMIN HERRERA:** Thank you very much.

17 Last, but not least, Ms. Fard. At your
18 consultation meeting, the topic of foreign asset holdings in
19 Canada was discussed. Could you share your ideas and
20 recommendations on the topic?

21 **MS. FARZANEH FARD:** Sure.

22 Dear Madam Commissioner, and esteemed members
23 of the committee, seizing assets linked to foreign
24 interference can disrupt the financial operations of
25 individuals working to undermine Canada's security. My
26 recommendations are targeted asset seizures and expanding
27 sanctions.

28 The government should expand its asset

1 seizure policies to include individuals connected to foreign
2 regimes, similar to sanctions imposed on Russian officials.
3 This would limit the influence and financial capacity of
4 those connected to Iran's regime, for example. Education and
5 financial intelligence and the tactics used to hide assets is
6 vital for these policies to succeed.

7 Sanctions should be extended to include not
8 only senior regime officials but also mid and lower ranking
9 individuals associated with organisations like the IRGC.
10 This would prevent them from continuing their activities in
11 Canada and intimidating critics.

12 The public too must be educated on how
13 foreign regimes use financial resources within Canada.
14 Awareness campaigns can help citizens understand the
15 importance of sanctions and asset seizures as tools to
16 safeguard democracy.

17 In conclusion, addressing the national
18 security threats posed by foreign interference, especially by
19 individuals connected to oppressive regimes, requires a
20 multi-faceted approach. Specialised training for the
21 judiciary, law enforcement, and the public is vital to raise
22 awareness and ensure that these issues are addressed with the
23 seriousness they deserve.

24 Stricter immigration reforms, asset seizures
25 and legal protections for human right activists are equally
26 important steps in safeguarding Canada's democracy and
27 national security. Through these measures, we can better
28 protect Canada from foreign threats and ensure that those who

1 seek refuge in our country do so genially, not as means to
2 evade accountability for past crimes.

3 I urge the committee to consider these
4 recommendations seriously as we work together to strengthen
5 Canada's resilience against foreign interference. Thank you
6 for your time and attention.

7 **MR. BENJAMIN HERRERA:** Thank you very much.

8 And this, Madam Commissioner, wraps up our
9 first panel of the day.

10 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** So thank you for sharing
11 your ideas.

12 We'll take a 20-minute break, and we'll come
13 back at 3:40, 3:45.

14 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** I think the schedule
15 has us breaking for 15 minutes, and then ---

16 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Fifteen minutes? I'm
17 sorry.

18 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** That's okay.

19 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** You're right, it's
20 15 minutes. So we'll come back at 3:20.

21 **MR. BENJAMIN HERRERA:** Maybe ---

22 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

23 **MR. BENJAMIN HERRERA:** --- 2:40?

24 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** What time is it? Now
25 it's 2:22. So we'll ---

26 **MR. BENJAMIN HERRERA:** I think it would be
27 2:40.

28 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** I'm not very good with

1 numbers. If we add 15 minutes, it's 2:38. So 2:40.

2 **THE REGISTRAR:** Order, please.

3 This sitting of the Commission is now in
4 recess until 2:40 p.m.

5 --- Upon recessing at 2:23 p.m.

6 --- Upon resuming at 2:43 p.m.

7 **THE REGISTRAR:** Order please.

8 This sitting of the Foreign Interference
9 Commission is now back in session.

10 The time is 2:43 p.m.

11 **--- INTRODUCTION OF THE PANEL ON MIS- AND DISINFORMATION AND**
12 **WAYS TO RESPOND:**

13 **--- FACILITATION OF THE PANEL BY MS. KATE McGRANN AND MR.**
14 **BENJAMIN HERRERA:**

15 **MR. BENJAMIN HERRERA:** Thank you, Madam
16 Commissioner. Good afternoon.

17 We will now be hearing from a second panel of
18 people who attended consultation meetings with the
19 Commissioner and members of her team this summer.

20 These panelists will be discussing
21 suggestions they and others at their meetings provided for
22 how to improve Canada's approach to foreign interference
23 including suggestions focused on the theme of misinformation,
24 disinformation, and how to respond to it.

25 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** We will begin by
26 introducing each of the panelists, beginning with Alexandra
27 Chyczij.

28 Since 2018, Alexandra Chyczij has served as

1 the President of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, the
2 umbrella organization uniting and advocating on behalf of
3 Canada's 1.4 million Ukrainian Canadians. Alexandra is a
4 lawyer by profession and for over 25 years has led legal
5 associations like the Advocate Society and the Canadian
6 Corporate Counsel Association.

7 Since 2018 she has been a prominent Ukrainian
8 Canadian voice in shaping the diaspora's and Canada's
9 response to the war in Ukraine.

10 Sherap Therchin is a human rights activist
11 and community leader. He serves as the Executive Director of
12 the Canada Tibet Committee. He also acts as a consultant, an
13 advisor on issues related to human rights, refugees, and
14 democracy, including serving as an advisor to the Refugee
15 Advisory Network of Canada.

16 Ghezae Hagos Berhe cofounded Hidmonna
17 Eritrean Canadian Human Rights Group of Manitoba, a non-
18 profit organization, in September 2009 in Winnipeg, Manitoba.
19 Ghezae was one of the first journalists of the first private
20 papers in Eritrea until they were banned.

21 And finally, last but not least, Pixing Zhang
22 has been advocating on behalf of Falun Gong practitioners'
23 human rights for the last 20 years, including advocating two
24 elected officials.

25 Mr. Zhang was awarded the Queen Elizabeth
26 II's Diamond Jubilee Medal in 2012 for his volunteer work for
27 the Falun Gong group.

28 He has also worked closely with many Chinese

1 Canadians on a number of issues of importance to the Chinese
2 Canadian community, including the 2006 Chinese head tax
3 apology and the regulation of the practice of traditional
4 Chinese medicine.

5 **MR. BENJAMIN HERRERA:** Thank you all.

6 So Ms. Chyczij, let's begin with you. At
7 your consultation meeting, you discussed the need for
8 education on media literacy and critical thinking. Could you
9 please explain and expand on these suggestions?

10 **MS. ALEXANDRA CHYCIJ:** Thank you, Madam
11 Commissioner, for the invitation to appear before you today.

12 I think a little background would be in order
13 to set the stage for why we make this recommendation. So
14 disinformation is, as we know, one of the principal
15 instruments of Russian hybrid warfare that has been deployed
16 against Western democracies to destabilize them.

17 After World War II, the Ukrainian Canadian
18 community was targeted by the Soviet Union and today
19 continues to be targeted by its successor state, Russia.

20 In its most recent annual report, CSIS
21 stated:

22 "Russia also continues to attempt to
23 discredit Canada's Ukrainian
24 community, falsely claiming that it
25 is composed of neo-fascists who
26 control Canada's foreign policy.
27 Such narratives support the Russian
28 government's efforts to delegitimize

1 and mute the views of Canada's
2 Eastern European diaspora [...] and
3 their status as Canadians, in support
4 of Russia's broader hybrid warfare
5 against Ukraine. The Russian Embassy
6 in Canada continues to use its social
7 media accounts to spread
8 disinformation regarding [this]
9 conflict." (as read)

10 This disinformation has very real and
11 dangerous consequences for our community. Our recent
12 community survey showed that the number of respondents
13 experiencing hate-motivated incidents because of their
14 support for Ukraine has risen dramatically from under one in
15 three before Russia's full-scale invasion to almost one in
16 two after the invasion. Successive Ministers of Public
17 Safety have refused to condemn this activity.

18 However, this story of disinformation goes
19 back a long way. One of the worst attacks our community
20 suffered was in the 1980s when we were forced to expend money
21 and resources to defend our good name when the Mulroney
22 Government was duped into establishing the Deschênes
23 Commission of Inquiry on War Criminals.

24 In Chapter I(6) of his report, Justice
25 Deschênes confirms that the inquiry was struck after public
26 hysteria was stoked by deliberately false stories in the
27 media about the presence of the infamous Dr. Mengele hiding
28 in Canada. Justice Deschênes goes on to say that these

1 stories, planted by Sol Littman, a representative of the
2 Simon Wiesenthal Center, had absolutely no basis in fact.
3 Between them, Simon Wiesenthal and Sol Littman falsely
4 accused over 9,000 individuals of being war criminals. They
5 could not prove a single allegation and Littman later
6 admitted that he took the names from the Toronto phone book
7 because they sounded East European.

8 Justice Deschênes concluded that the
9 allegations about the presence of war criminals in Canada
10 were grossly exaggerated, and publicly chastised Littman.

11 As a result, Justice Deschênes ordered that:

12 "In view of the nature of this
13 inquiry, my Report is divided into
14 two Parts: Part I, which is designed
15 for publication; [and] Part II, which
16 is destined to remain confidential."

17 Part II of this report contains the names of
18 these 800 individuals who were investigated and exonerated by
19 Justice Deschênes. He found evidence in only 29 cases that
20 warranted further investigation and these cases were referred
21 to Canada's War Crimes Unit.

22 We now have documentary evidence in a book
23 called *Operation Payback* which confirms that this was a
24 deliberate Soviet disinformation campaign. The KGB archival
25 document describes the precise *modus operandi* that was used
26 to manipulate the Canadian Government into calling a
27 Commission of Inquiry.

28 Unsurprisingly, these same allegations are

1 being resurrected today, at a time when Russia is desperate
2 to discredit a very active and effective Ukrainian Canadian
3 diaspora. What is surprising is that the government is
4 falling for the same tricks and is seriously considering the
5 release of the names of hundreds of Canadians who were
6 falsely accused of being war criminals and who were cleared
7 by Justice Deschênes of any wrongdoing. This demonstrates
8 the susceptibility of our government and media to Soviet
9 disinformation in the past and today. The only interest that
10 the release of Part II of the Deschênes Report would serve is
11 that of the KGB Officer in the Kremlin.

12 The recent widely publicized scandal about a
13 Russian propaganda film that was funded by Canadian tax
14 dollars provides further illustration of Canadian gullibility
15 and naivete.

16 How does someone with a known public history
17 of working for and producing 11 films for the sanctioned
18 Russian propaganda network Russia Today get \$340,000 of
19 Canadian taxpayers' money to make a movie whitewashing
20 Russia's genocide against Ukraine? How does any credible
21 granting agency believe that someone could film a movie in
22 Russian-occupied Ukrainian territory embedded in Russian
23 troops, invading troops, without Russian military
24 intelligence being aware of this individual's presence and
25 actively condoning the filming and even dictating the
26 direction of this film?

27 How does any funding agency treat such an
28 individual as a legitimate documentary filmmaker when other

1 Westerners are routinely arrested in Russia and used to
2 exchange Russian assets in the West, such as journalist Evan
3 Gershkovich?

4 Less fortunate are the Russians who dare to
5 stand up to Putin: Anna Politkovskaya, Boris Nemtsov,
6 Alexander Litvinenko, and countless others who have been
7 murdered by the Kremlin.

8 So I come to our recommendation, which is
9 that Canada should build the resilience of Canadians to
10 disinformation by developing disinformation and propaganda
11 literacy programs like those in Finland, Denmark, and Norway,
12 where critical thinking and media literacy are taught from
13 kindergarten. Finland tops the European media literacy
14 index, which measures a nation's resilience to
15 disinformation. Unfortunately, the degradation of media
16 standards plays a big role in the spreading of disinformation
17 and a literacy program in schools would improve the ability
18 of journalists to discern fact from fiction.

19 We also recommend the expulsion of the
20 Russian Embassy in Canada. CSIS has identified the Russian
21 Embassy as the vector for the spread of disinformation.
22 Today there are 69 Russian diplomats registered in Canada.
23 Canada has only 17 diplomats in Moscow. What is wrong with
24 this picture?

25 Canada is the only NATO country that has not
26 expelled a single Russian diplomat since the full-scale
27 invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Other NATO and EU countries
28 have expelled over 600 Russian diplomats. Amongst its many

1 favourite themes, the Russian Ambassador in Canada regularly
2 denounces and undermines the credibility of Ukrainian
3 Canadian politicians: Chrystia Freeland; Borys Wrzesnewskyj;
4 and James Bezan.

5 And we should also complete a ban on Russian
6 state media. RT was finally banned from cable television in
7 2022, but we must now ban them not only from cable T.V., but
8 from the internet and social media apps. Thankfully Meta, or
9 Facebook, and even TikTok, recently banned them. It's time
10 that we complete that job.

11 So together with the Russian Embassy, these
12 Russian state media are the primary sources of disinformation
13 and attacks on our community and we ask that they be dealt
14 with.

15 Thank you, Madam Commissioner.

16 **MR. BENJAMIN HERRERA:** Thank you.

17 Mr. Therchin, at your consultation meeting,
18 you spoke to misinformation and disinformation about the
19 Tibetan community. Would you please expand on that topic and
20 on your suggestions for how to respond?

21 **MR. SHERAP THERCHIN:** Thank you, Madam
22 Commissioner for the opportunity to speak on the important
23 issue of foreign interference.

24 I will start by sharing two cases which we
25 felt were targeted to mislead Canadians about human rights
26 situations in Tibet.

27 In 2018, a delegation representing the Tibet
28 Autonomous Region came to Canada and testified before the

1 Foreign Affairs Committee, repeating the CCP lines on Tibet.

2 In response to a question from a committee
3 member on whereabouts of Tibet's Panchen Lama, the delegates
4 responded that Panchen Lama was alive, in good health, and
5 did not wish to be disturbed.

6 For a quick context on Panchen Lama, Panchen
7 Lama is widely considered as one of the most important
8 figures in Tibetan Buddhism and has historically played an
9 important role in recognizing the reincarnations of the Dalai
10 Lama and vice versa.

11 On May 14th, 1995, the 14th Dalai Lama
12 recognized and announced a six-year-old kid named Gedhun
13 Choekyi Nyima as the 11th Panchen Lama. Three days later,
14 the newly identified six-year-old Panchen Lama got abducted,
15 along with his family. And since then, the world hasn't seen
16 or heard him. We don't know what he looks like, we don't
17 know what he sounds like.

18 And as China has ramped up its claims and
19 preparation to identify and appoint the next Dalai Lama as
20 part of the succession of the tradition of reincarnation of
21 Dalai Lama, we believe there is going to be a massive
22 influence campaign internationally over the next few years
23 and we cannot let Canadian soil be misused and Canadian
24 democracy be taken for granted in assisting People's Republic
25 of China in imposing state interferences in the religious
26 freedom of the Tibetan people.

27 We also saw an incident in recent years where
28 a Chinese proxy organization disseminated a document intended

1 to mislead Canadians about human rights situation in Tibet.
2 The group claimed that Tibet now enjoys freedom of religion,
3 economic development, ecological and environmental
4 preservation, and improvement of Tibetans' livelihood.

5 This claim fit very well with PRC's narrative
6 on Tibet and it whitewashes the actual situations in Tibet,
7 including the situations of Tibetans not being allowed to
8 keep any photos of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who many
9 Tibetans revere as living God.

10 It also constitutes as active state
11 interferences in the process of identifying the reincarnation
12 of His Holiness the Dalai Lama through legislative
13 impositions. It includes the forced migration of millions of
14 Tibetan nomads and through the forced separation of over one
15 million Tibetan children into residential boarding schools.

16 The proxy organization even forged a
17 signature of a Canadian official to give it an appearance of
18 legitimacy. It is very clear that such actions by state-
19 sponsored or influence proxies are intended to mislead public
20 perception about Tibet.

21 As part of my suggestions on this, taking
22 these two specific cases and many other instances into
23 consideration, I would like to suggest exploring the
24 feasibility of reciprocity in relationship between Canada and
25 China.

26 The fact that PRC delegates could come to
27 Canada and speak what, where, and whom they want to, and the
28 fact that there are heavy restrictions on Canadian delegates

1 to even visit Tibet, and other sensitive regions, and that
2 there are restrictions on who, where, and what they want to
3 speak, it doesn't seem fair, equal or reciprocal.

4 The detention and the treatment of Canadians
5 Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor highlighted the risk of
6 arbitrary arrest and lack of due process for Canadian
7 citizens in China. Canadian journalists and businesses face
8 similar challenges, whereas Chinese media and businesses have
9 literally free access in Canada. So I hope we can integrate
10 some aspect of healthy reciprocity in relations --
11 relationship between Canada and China through this
12 Commission. Thank you.

13 **MR. BENJAMIN HERRERA:** Thank you very much.

14 Turning to you now, Mr. Hagos Behre, at your
15 consultation meeting, mis- and disinformation affecting the
16 Eritrean Canadian community was discussed. Could you please
17 explain and share your suggestions for how to address this
18 situation?

19 **MR. GHEZAE HAGOS BEHRE:** Thank you,
20 Madam Commissioner, for giving me and other communities the
21 opportunity to share our experiences.

22 Eleven years ago, on this very day,
23 October 2nd, 2013, more than 365 Eritreans, including
24 pregnant women and children, perished attempting to cross the
25 Mediterranean Sea. I would like to start by honouring the
26 victims of the Lampedusa boat tragedy and all other refugees
27 who died in search of freedom and protection.

28 First I would like to provide some context

1 into the Eritrean Canadian diaspora experience.

2 It is quite hard to imagine any other foreign
3 regime that has successfully and for so long managed to
4 control its diaspora than the Eritrean government. The
5 Eritrean regime has for decades considered the diaspora
6 communities as a integral and crucial constituency providing
7 political and financial support. In fact, the regime calls
8 its ardent agents the Fourth Front.

9 Eritreans are some of the largest refugee
10 communities coming to Canada, after Syrians and Afghans.
11 Yes, Canada is recipient of tens of thousands of Eritreans,
12 but the question remains are we giving them the protection,
13 healing, and safety? The answer is unfortunately an emphatic
14 no because there is a systematic and widespread control of
15 the Eritrean Canadian diaspora by the Eritrean government,
16 chiefly through its Consulate office in Toronto, its proxy
17 organisations in different cities, and other media groups.

18 Eritrean newcomer members have been
19 victimised by mis- and disinformation and consequently face
20 re-traumatisation, settlement and integration challenge,
21 deepening polarisation and disintegration of trust in our
22 Canadian institutions, despite the presumed protection
23 granted by the Canadian government. The perception and fear
24 that the tentacles of the mighty Eritrean government can
25 reach anyone wherever they are, circumventing the Canadian
26 government, make them -- make the tens of thousands of
27 Eritreans feel helpless, fearful, and forces them to remain
28 loyal to the regime.

1 Proxy organisations in all major cities
2 claiming to be non-political and neutral, but in reality have
3 close affiliation with the Eritrean Consulate, operate as the
4 political arms of the regime. In short, as a victim aptly
5 told the media, or lamented rather, "It's like you run away
6 from the regime, you thank God, yet the regime is right here
7 in Canada."

8 Hence, our first suggestion is investigating
9 the activities of all regime-affiliated groups and implement
10 appropriate measures to monitor and restrict their operations
11 in our country. In short, what we need is empowerment, and
12 that starts when Canada starts taking the long-awaited
13 actions.

14 The mis- and disinformation are deep and
15 widespread. Through intense social media and community
16 campaigns, those of us who spoke truth to power, who fled
17 from the regime have been labelled non-Eritreans, traitors,
18 Ethiopians, paid agents of the enemy, informing -- and
19 disinforming the diaspora community, the Canadian public, the
20 Canadian media, and the Canadian government. Moreover, and
21 as a major hub of disinformation and misinformation, are
22 military fundraisers organised under the guise of cultural
23 festivals and using them for promoting propaganda and hate
24 language, radicalisation of the youth and children,
25 polarisation of the Eritrean communities, and fundraising for
26 its military efforts.

27 Clashes between pro-democratic and regime
28 supporters were reported in Toronto, Edmonton, and Calgary,

1 where thousands of Eritreans participated resulting in
2 numerous injuries, arrests, and destruction of properties.

3 Our second suggestion for Canada is to
4 investigate and thus ban those controversial Eritrean
5 fundraisers organised under the guise of cultural festivals
6 by the Eritrean Consulate in Toronto and its affiliate
7 groups.

8 We also suggest creating a dedicated and
9 legally mandated agency to tackle all actors offering
10 interference by hostile regimes, such as the Eritrean regime,
11 along with psychological support to victims, raising public
12 awareness on how the foreign government, such as Eritrean
13 regime, engage in mis- and disinformation, and creating
14 dedicated hotline for reporting incidents of transnational
15 repression with robust and diverse language capabilities are
16 also crucial. Moreover, we recommend expanding the scope of
17 foreign registry up to include community based inform of
18 political activities that are done on behalf of the Eritrean
19 government.

20 Our concerns on mis- and disinformation
21 affecting our communities have been corroborated by reports
22 of Amnesty International, the Special Rapporteur on human
23 rights situation on Eritrea and as human rights watchdogs, as
24 well as mentioning that many Western countries have been
25 grappling with foreign interference from the Eritrean
26 government. Norway and others have banned and restricted
27 fundraiser festivals.

28 We look forward for Canada to act decisively

1 to protect the Eritrean Canadian communities from foreign
2 interference and misinformation and disinformation coming
3 from Eritrea. Thank you.

4 **MR. BENJAMIN HERRERA:** Thank you.

5 Mr. Zhang, at your consultation meeting mis-
6 and disinformation about and affecting Falun Gong and Falun
7 Gong partitioners was discussed. Could you please explain
8 and share your suggestions for how to respond?

9 **MR. PIXING ZHANG:** Thank you. Thank you,
10 Madam Commissioner, Your Honour, for hearing our input.
11 Thank you for your kind introduction, and this is a very
12 important question.

13 I definitely would like to share my
14 observations on the impact of the Chinese Communist Party's,
15 CCP's, disinformation based on my experiences, mainly in the
16 political arena.

17 A little bit of background here: Since 1999,
18 the CCP has conducted a large-scale propaganda and a
19 disinformation campaign to portray Falun Gong as a dangerous
20 and political, justifying its persecution and misleading the
21 public, including in Canada. The CCP controls most the
22 Chinese Canadian media and it pressures Western outlets to
23 adopt its narratives. As a result, a representation or
24 report of Falun Gong usually falls off of the horizon of
25 media reporting, in particular, Chinese media.

26 In response, Falun Gong practitioners engage
27 in truth-touting efforts, especially to inform Mainland
28 Chinese of the persecution, and also warn the Canadian

1 government and the society about the broader dangers of the
2 CCP, whose malicious tactics could threaten anyone due to its
3 global ambitions.

4 For two decades ---

5 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** I'm really sorry to
6 interrupt. The interpreters are asking if we can slow the
7 speech down a little bit.

8 **MR. PIXING ZHANG:** All right.

9 **MS. NATALIA RODRIGUEZ:** Thank you.

10 **MR. PIXING ZHANG:** Yeah. For two decades, I
11 happen to encounter the barriers forming friendship with the
12 many fellow Mainland Chinese in concerning community issues,
13 except for some who are really close to the Chinese
14 Consulate. Many found me trustworthy, but the Falun Gong
15 practitioners believe in strong moral principles. From my
16 experience, there is a legal hostility toward the Falun Gong
17 among average mainlanders, however, fear of the CCP's
18 ruthless tactics leave the most to remain silent on the
19 persecution of Falun Gong.

20 Now back to the question: From my
21 observation these information attacks have been tried at
22 every election since 2004, but had not much impact until
23 2021. I am going to discuss three common disinformation
24 related to Chinese Canadians, most particularly, Mainland
25 Chinese.

26 Misinformation 1: Mainland Chinese in Canada
27 are pro-Beijing and follow Beijing's directives when it comes
28 to voting. No, most are not, and they are the biggest

1 victims of CCP foreign interference. CCP agents and proxy
2 groups actively spread this narrative to politicians, but in
3 my experience most Mainland Chinese actually dislike and
4 don't trust the CCP regime at all.

5 Most, if not all, Mainland Chinese immigrants
6 came here for safety, freedom, and a better future for their
7 children. However, many Mainland Chinese feel their
8 communities here are heavily influenced by CCP activities, of
9 people like the Communist China. They are not sure of
10 independent or public representation, and in reality, most
11 the Chinese politicians avoid challenging the CCP.

12 I have many stories to tell, but just one
13 example here. In a city with a large Chinese population,
14 most Chinese Canadian city councillors are close to the
15 Chinese Consulate. One time a person, not favoured by the
16 Consulate, showed up at an event. Three councillors reported
17 this to the Consulate, which then summoned the event
18 organiser twice to explain why this individual was there.

19 In the 2021 election, CCP proxies'
20 mis/disinformation created a widespread fear and alienations
21 among Mainland Chinese, concerning local lives could be
22 affected. Many though, not following pro-CCP voting
23 suggestions, chose not to vote, thus undermining the
24 democratic process.

25 It's inaccurate to believe Mainland Chinese
26 are pro-CCP by default, most are not. However, with the
27 CCP's immense resources, high motivation, and clandestine
28 actions, agents or proxies can sponsor at a rally the pro-CCP

1 organisations and some Chinese nationals and can influence
2 some election nominations.

3 So my first suggestion is that Canadians need
4 to find a way to better understand and engage with the
5 Mainland Chinese people. They are the victims, not the
6 accomplices. While some individuals act as agents for the
7 CCP due to greed or fear, the silent majority are not CCP
8 followers. Most Mainland Chinese are just -- cannot open,
9 cannot openly express opposition about CCP.

10 So Misinformation 2: Supporting Falun Gong.
11 Supporting Falun Gong's basic rights will damage Chinese
12 support for the trade with China.

13 In 1999, Canada and the Liberal Government
14 was the first one to speak against the persecution of Falun
15 Gong. There have been many politicians from all parties
16 spoke out to support Falun Gong community in their fight for
17 human rights. For 25 years, the CCP and its agents and some
18 uninformed insiders have spread disinformation to Canadian
19 politicians, claiming supporting for Falun Gong would
20 alienate Chinese voters and harm China/Canada business ties.
21 That is a groundless, false claim.

22 In Harper's time, he and some Cabinet
23 Ministers, like Kenney, were very vocal in China's human
24 rights abuses and they support strongly the basic rights of
25 Falun Gong community. Despite targeting Harper as anti-
26 China, anti-Chinese or Falun Gong supporters, these efforts
27 had little negative impact on Chinese voters. It did not
28 hurt our trade with China either. Chinese voted according to

1 their concerns, moreover issues that affected their lives,
2 such as the children education or drug safety, et cetera.
3 While these texts and rumours did not sway Chinese voters,
4 they did influence the extent some politician support for the
5 basic rights of Falun Gong. These politicians fall into the
6 hands of the CCP's manipulation.

7 When politicians and their CCP influence
8 defamed our group within their own party, things got worse.
9 Around 2013, a provincial minister told me that her fellow
10 politician close to the Chinese Consulate distributed
11 defamatory pamphlets against the Falun Gong from the
12 Consulate, and it discouraged his colleagues from supporting
13 the Falun Gong community. Because of his high position and
14 strong fundraising abilities for politicians, many followed
15 his lead. After Prime Minister Trudeau took office, this
16 pro-Beijing figure also pressured the PMO not to support
17 Falun Gong. Another politician from a different party close
18 to the Consulate similarly urged colleagues to withdraw their
19 support of Falun Gong. This has weakened our government's
20 protection of Falun Gong community, contrasting with a strong
21 public support from U.S., both during the Trump, under the
22 current Biden administrations.

23 My suggestion here is for our politicians and
24 the governments not to be misled by the CCP's
25 mis/disinformation and their manipulations, be alert to the
26 Chinese agents and of those compromised politicians when they
27 spread narratives on behalf of the CCP interest. They need
28 to have the courage and the integrity to stand up for

1 principles and values.

2 Lastly, I want to underscore that many in the
3 mainland Chinese community welcome the C-70 *Countering*
4 *Foreign Interference Act*, which could protect them from the
5 CCP rule of fear, hate and misinformation.

6 The CCP is good at blending its agents with
7 the civilians. It's a guerilla warfare. The Act can empower
8 the Chinese community, especially businesspeople, to resist
9 CCP coercion to work for them. However, many mainlanders
10 still are wondering how serious our government really is
11 about enforcing the C-70 Act, rather than just putting on a
12 show for the public.

13 So this leads to my third suggestion, that
14 actions speak louder. Regulation is a very important next
15 step. Time to stay in a line with our allies, like the U.S.,
16 German, Australia, who are taking actions. This is my answer
17 to your question. Thank you.

18 **MR. BENJAMIN HERRERA:** Thank you.

19 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Coming back to you, Ms.
20 Chyczij, what other recommendations would you make to improve
21 Canada's resilience to disinformation?

22 **MS. ALEXANDRA CHYCZIJ:** Thank you. We would
23 recommend a review of Canada's foreign policy direction in
24 relation to Russia. Ukrainian Canadians and Ukrainians are
25 grateful for the military, humanitarian and economic aid that
26 Canada has provided to Ukraine, but years of downplaying the
27 threat that Russia posed to global security resulted in the
28 full-scale invasion of Ukraine. We looked the other way when

1 they invaded Georgia, Syria, the Crimea and the Donbas.

2 So the Helsinki Commission of the U.S.
3 Congress recently recommended that the United States reframe
4 its thinking about Russia and label Moscow a persistent and
5 ongoing threat to global security. Canada should do the
6 same. We should review and refresh the roster of policy
7 advisors and staff at Global Affairs Canada with specialists
8 who understand contemporary Russia and the threat that it
9 poses to Canadian democratic institutions. This could in
10 future prevent former Canadian ambassadors to Russia taking
11 up paid positions on the boards of Russian companies.

12 We agree with our friends that Bill C-70, the
13 *Foreign Agents Registry Act* is a welcome addition, but we
14 recommend that it be narrowed. It is unmanageable at present
15 because, in theory, it requires the entire planet to
16 register.

17 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** I apologize for
18 interrupting, but your time has come to an end ---

19 **MS. ALEXANDRA CHYCZIJ:** Ah ---

20 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** --- and so we will ---

21 **MS. ALEXANDRA CHYCZIJ:** --- okay.

22 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** --- have to move on.

23 **MS. ALEXANDRA CHYCZIJ:** So we also ask that
24 Canadians -- the Canadian Government be proactive and take
25 action and communicate what it does. Canada has been home to
26 sleeper agents that we only learn about when they are
27 arrested by other governments.

28 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Thank you very much for

1 your comments.

2 **MS. ALEXANDRA CHYCZIJ:** Thank you.

3 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Mr. Therchin, in your
4 consultation meeting you discuss the fear that members of the
5 Tibetan Committee and community experience, its impact on
6 their lives, and how that fear may be alleviated. Please
7 explain your comments.

8 **MR. SHERAP THERCHIN:** More than any
9 individual act of foreign interferences, including the two
10 cases of misinformation and disinformation I mentioned
11 earlier, what I find more damaging is the fear that foreign
12 interference creates among public, especially among forced
13 migrant diaspora, who are vulnerable to foreign state
14 threats. The fear that foreign interference creates has
15 lasting impact, has ripple effects, often resulting into self
16 censorship, coercion, psychological stress, doubts, and in
17 some cases not fully exercising or even knowing the
18 democratic rights in our new adopted home country. The fear
19 of being watched, being surveilled, being spied on makes them
20 afraid of participating in public events, in our cases, like
21 annual Tibetan Uprising Day on March 10, afraid of
22 communicating with our families and friends in Tibet, and
23 afraid of speaking out publicly or even privately about
24 actual situations in Tibet in case if they get one of those
25 rare opportunities to visit Tibet.

26 I would like my community members and members
27 from other community in Canada to feel confident about their
28 rights as citizens, as resident of Canada. I would like them

1 to feel that they are protected, that they can live their
2 lives freely, get education they want to, do jobs they are
3 passionate about, and speak freely and generally about what
4 they believe in, without any fear from foreign states. In
5 that regard, I would like to suggest capacity building and
6 awareness raising programs at community level, and I would
7 like to suggest visits from key officials involved in the
8 study of the foreign interferences in Canada to extend the
9 education about foreign interference beyond the advocacy
10 group and media. I believe this would be a crucial part of
11 the successful implementation of this well-researched and
12 consulted study on foreign interferences in Canada.

13 And my final suggestion is that, please,
14 don't let anti-Asian narrative or rhetoric derail this
15 important study on an initiative from moving ahead, because
16 the first line of victim of foreign interferences by PRC is
17 actually Asian, including pro-democracy Chinese, Hongkongers,
18 Taiwanese, Falun Gong practitioners, Uyghurs and Tibetans.
19 Thank you for your time and attention.

20 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Mr. Hagos Berhe, at your
21 consultation meeting, you talked about the importance of
22 safeguarding and protecting Eritrean Canadian community
23 members and how that might be done. Please share what you
24 discussed.

25 **MR. GHEZAE HAGOS BERHE:** Thank you. The
26 Eritrean Consulate Office in Toronto, its proxy operators and
27 agents have been known to use extortion, threats of violence,
28 intimidation, denial of community and consular services,

1 harassment, origin, surveillance, intelligence gathering,
2 threats of prison against activists and community members.
3 The regime punishes their families in Eritrea by confiscating
4 their property or businesses, jailing them, denying services
5 to them, or even prohibiting their relatives from being sent
6 to their homeland for burial. These are all corroborated
7 evidences.

8 The long arms of the state stretching through
9 Eritrean diplomatic missions and members and supporters of
10 the ruling party, proxy community groups closely monitor
11 activists and enlist various forms of threats and attacks and
12 harassment on community members. Hence, we recommend taking
13 an appropriate action against the Eritrean Consulate in
14 Toronto for operating in a manner that contravenes its proper
15 diplomatic mission and mandate. In the past, Canada has
16 imposed sanctions on Eritrea, and in July 2013, Canada has
17 actually expelled the Eritrean Consul from Toronto for acting
18 outside his diplomatic mandate. We also recommended to
19 reconsider reimposing sanctions related to Eritrea such as
20 the *Magnitsky Act* or the *Special Economic Measures Act*.

21 We also have very, very serious concerns
22 about the systematic abuse of Canadian immigration system by
23 regime operatives who came here as refugees but may have
24 obtained their status through misrepresentation.

25 The generosity of the Canadian immigration
26 system has been vastly abused. We recommend investigation --
27 investigate those cases and the misuse of public funds by
28 proxy organizations, including registered charities and

1 religious groups that have affiliation with the Eritrean
2 regime. Taking visible and decisive action against regime
3 agents not only sends a clear message but also involves our
4 community members.

5 In short, what we need, again, is empowerment
6 and that happens when Canada takes the long awaited actions
7 in this regard and protect our community members.

8 The Eritrean regime is one of the most
9 repressive in the world. For more than 33 years under the
10 dictatorship of Isaias Afwerki, Eritreans have been subjected
11 to a complete totalitarian rule. Eritrea is akin to North
12 Korea of Africa. The country has no legislature, no
13 independent judiciary, no independent civil society, no
14 constitution, no private papers, and it has not held any
15 elections since its independence in 1991. Its Cabinet has
16 not even been convened in more than six years. The Human
17 Rights Council has acknowledged that the regime has
18 perpetrated crimes against humanity.

19 The Eritrean leader, internationally, is the
20 only African leader that supported the Russian invasion of
21 Ukraine. He visited Putin and he asked, actually begged him,
22 to lead the world, and called for war against the European
23 Union, against Canada and the NATO allies.

24 Mr. Afwerki also visited China and called for
25 the overhaul of the rules-based international system, in
26 addition Eritrean forces have been implicated in Tigrayan
27 conflict in Northern Ethiopia.

28 This is our conclusion, Madam Commissioner;

1 we believe the interference of the Eritrean government in the
2 lives of Eritrean diaspora community that has remained
3 unaddressed for decades, and the importation of these
4 repressive methods into the diaspora communities are the root
5 cause.

6 As a result, we urge Canada to look into
7 those root causes seriously, and take any measures necessary
8 to stop the Eritrean Consulate, obviously in Toronto, his
9 proxy groups and agents from interfering in the lives of
10 Eritrean-Canadians and their institutions.

11 We understand Canada may not be able to put
12 an end to the tyrannical and totalitarian regime in Eritrea
13 and install the rule of law. That job is for Eritreans, God
14 help us. But Canada, and we believe, should put an end to
15 all acts of foreign interference that has been so pervasive
16 in Eritrean-Canadian communities for so long, so Eritrean-
17 Canadians can finally be free from the long tentacles of the
18 Eritrean regime they fled from and finally enjoy the freedoms
19 of their second home from Sudan.

20 Thank you very much.

21 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Mr. Zhang, at your
22 consultation meeting, attendees discussed strengthening the
23 Canadian government's response to foreign interference.
24 Please share your suggestions on this topic.

25 **MR. PIXING ZHANG:** Thank you. I have a few
26 more suggestions here. I'll try to not repeat others.

27 So first, Canadian immigration rules should
28 be more stringent to screen human rights violators from PRC.

1 I'll tell you a story. One day a non-Falun Gong friend
2 called me in shock, sharing that one of his WeChat contacts
3 was bragging about being a military police who arrested the
4 Falun Gong practitioner and forced him to kneel on broken
5 glass. This person later become the president of a
6 provincial Chinese association in Canada, and also often show
7 off his photos with the Chinese officials.

8 We should not welcome individuals who have
9 persecuted Falun Gong or other innocent groups into Canada,
10 such as the 610 Office members, doctors that have
11 participated in forced organ harvesting, police officers,
12 military personnels, or propaganda officials.

13 Once these individuals become residents or
14 citizens of Canada they can easily become a force to work
15 with the CCP in Canada to conduct foreign interference and
16 transnational repression.

17 Second, we should educate our government
18 officials to counteract foreign interference and the
19 transnational repression. A few points here. We need to
20 stress an effort to raise awareness across all government
21 levels about the foreign interference, focusing on
22 distinguishing CCP disinformation from other sources.

23 We need to educate officials and the public
24 on CCP propaganda targeting Western democratic values and
25 involving those groups. We need to maintain close
26 communication with the diaspora community to stay updated.

27 We need to take concrete actions to limit the
28 spread of disinformation, including investigating and

1 restricting CCP-funded media in Canada.

2 Immediate action is needed to counter CCP
3 attack, particularly against the Falun Gong, through
4 investigation and the deterrence measures.

5 So my final remark is due to the PRC's
6 aggressive foreign interference using proxy organizations and
7 the Chinese nationals to influence Canadian politics and the
8 surprise distinct voices, our government must be more
9 proactive in protecting the Chinese community, including
10 Falun Gong and other affected diaspora groups.

11 These are my recommendations, Commissioner.
12 Thank you, and thank you for you and your team's great work.
13 We are looking forward to having your final report.

14 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you. Thank you,
15 all. It was very interesting and useful hearing from you.

16 We'll break for 15 minutes, and that means at
17 3:45.

18 **THE REGISTRAR:** Order, please.

19 This sitting of the Commission is now in
20 recess until 3:45 p.m.

21 --- Upon recessing at 3:27 p.m.

22 --- Upon resuming at 3:46 p.m.

23 **THE REGISTRAR:** Order, please.

24 This sitting of the Foreign Interference
25 Commission is now back in session.

26 The time is 3:46 p.m.

27 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Good afternoon.

28 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Our third and final panel

this afternoon also features people who attended consultation meetings with the Commissioner and members of her team this summer. These panelists will be discussing suggestions they and other at their meeting provided for how to improve Canada's approach to foreign interference, including suggestions focused on the theme of resources and supports for diaspora communities.

--- INTRODUCTION OF THE PANEL ON RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS FOR
DIASPORA COMMUNITIES:

--- FACILITATION OF THE PANEL BY MS. DAWN PALIN ROKOSH AND
MS. KATE McGRANN:

MS. DAWN PALIN ROKOSH: We will begin by introducing each of the panelists. Gloria Fung is the co-convenor of the Canadian Coalition for a Foreign Influence Transparency Registry consisting of 33 multicultural communities, think tank, and human rights groups across Canada. She is the Immediate Past President of Canada-Hong Kong Link. She is a political analyst and commentator for Canadian and international media on issues related to Canada, China, and Hong Kong.

Moninder Singh is a prominent Sikh leader in Canada and around the world advocating for Sikh sovereignty and speaking out against ongoing human rights abuses against Sikhs in India. He is a director of the Sikh Federation Canada, and the spokesperson of the British Columbia Gurdwaras Council. He works closely in partnership with the Ontario Gurdwaras Committee.

Kayum Masimov is an active member of the

1 Uyghur Canadian community and working as a project
2 coordinator of Ottawa-based Uyghur Rights Advocacy Project.

3 Katherine Leung is the policy advisor for
4 Canada at Hong Kong Watch. She serves as a representative
5 for the Chinese Canadian Concern Group on CCP Human Rights
6 Violations. She has worked on issues related to human rights
7 and foreign affairs in the Canadian Parliament and in the
8 advocacy space.

9 Amir-hassan Ghaseminejad-tafreshi holds a PhD
10 in communication from Simon Fraser University and has been a
11 faculty member at Canadian universities for 24 years. He is
12 secretary of the Iranian Canadian Congress.

13 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Beginning with you, Ms.
14 Fung, at your small group meeting, you made suggestions about
15 the implementation of the Foreign Agents Registry. Would you
16 please explain and expand on those suggestions?

17 **MS. GLORIA FUNG:** Madam Commissioner and
18 legal counsels of the Commission, thank you for inviting me
19 to this important community panel to share my views on the
20 implementation of Bill C-70 and support for diaspora
21 communities.

22 Diaspora communities are direct victims of
23 foreign interference and transnational repression. The
24 passage of Bill C-70 enhance transparency in Canadian
25 democratic processes. It is an important first step to
26 protect our vulnerable diaspora communities from
27 transnational repression on Canadian soil.

28 To ensure integrity of Canadian democratic

1 elections, actions to counter foreign interference should
2 address nomination campaigns of party candidates, which as
3 present beyond the purview of Elections Canada. We recommend
4 that Elections Canada provide policy and protocol guidelines
5 for party candidate nomination campaigns with respect to the
6 verification of voters' Canadian citizenship, if their
7 residences are within the riding, payment of membership fees,
8 and source of donations to candidates.

9 Elections Canada's same policy and protocol
10 guidelines should apply to party leadership campaigns as
11 well.

12 There should be the appointment of a
13 competent and knowledgeable commissioner for foreign
14 interference independent of all governments and political
15 parties to minimize undue influence. The Commission under
16 the Foreign Interference Commissioner will be responsible for
17 the overall coordination, implementation, community
18 consultation, and periodic review of all legislations related
19 to foreign interference in accordance with the rapidly
20 evolving foreign tactics.

21 The registry should cover federal,
22 provincial, municipal, territorial government and district
23 school boards. Legislation should add provisions to allow
24 the Commission to be proactive in implementing the registry,
25 such as the sending of an information notice or transparency
26 notice requesting information with a specific timeline to
27 determine if individuals or entities need to register or not,
28 failing which, the penalty shall apply.

1 The administrated monetary penalty should be
2 scrapped, as it significantly weakens the deterrent effect on
3 foreign interference. All registrants of FITR should be made
4 public on the official website to enable elected members of
5 government and civil servants to fully understand whom they
6 are dealing with when they are approached by lobbyists.

7 The first review of the bill should be
8 conducted within two years from 2025 Federal Election to fill
9 in possible gaps. It would be reasonable to review the
10 legislation every five years.

11 Regulations need to be drafted to address
12 foreign interference with respect to transnational
13 repression, misinformation and disinformation, elite capture,
14 intellectual property theft, United Front organizations'
15 operations, and espionage.

16 Elected members of governments and high-
17 ranking civil servants should be banned from working with
18 foreign states or state corporations after resignation or
19 retirement from their post.

20 Infiltration in the 2019 and 2021 Elections
21 only represents the tip of the iceberg. Time is of essence.
22 We encourage all federal parties to continue to work with our
23 Canadian FITR Coalition to build non-partisan consensus on
24 the implementation of Bill C-70 to ensure that it will be a
25 strong and effective bill and to be up and running before the
26 2025 Federal Election is called.

27 Last but not least, the government should
28 timely allocate sufficient funding for this purpose.

1 Thank you.

2 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Mr. Singh, in your
3 consultation meeting you discussed the need for resources to
4 protect diaspora communities' freedom of expression,
5 including identifying and responding to disinformation.
6 Please explain and discuss your suggestions.

7 **MR. MONINDER SINGH:** [Speaking in other
8 language] which is the Sikh address for the Khalsa belongs to
9 the creator and to truth, and victory will always be to the
10 creator and truth. And I speak to you today with this Sikh
11 address as my foundation.

12 I would like to begin by acknowledging that I
13 live on the traditional and uncaded occupied territories of
14 the Kwantlen, Katzie, and Semiahmoo First Nations in what is
15 now British Columbia. Deeply thankful to them for being able
16 to live and exist on those lands which they have been
17 caretakers for since times immemorial.

18 We stand in solidarity with all peoples of
19 the world who have shared experiences of colonization,
20 genocide, and displacement and continue their quest for
21 sovereignty and freedom.

22 To the Commission, for the Sikh community,
23 the issue of foreign interference is one that extends far
24 beyond manipulation of elections or the undermining of
25 democratic institutions. For us it's now a matter of live
26 and death rooted in the history of violence and repression
27 inflicted upon us by the Indian State.

28 This violence has reached Canadian soil,

1 manifesting in the most brutal and direct forms in the
2 assassination of Bhai Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a respected Sikh
3 leader who was gunned down in the parking lot of Guru Nanak
4 Sikh Gurdwara, which is one of the busiest Gurdwaras in North
5 America, in front of men, women, elders, and children on a
6 Sunday that was Father's Day.

7 This heinous act was not an isolated incident
8 but part of a broader strategy of eliminating Sikh leadership
9 in diaspora communities, as was proven by Prime Minister
10 Trudeau's statement in Parliament in Canada and the United
11 States indictment that was opened up on a plot to kill Mr.
12 Gurpatwant Singh Pannun from Sikhs for Justice in the United
13 States.

14 Further, many Sikhs, including myself, live
15 under constant threat. We have received multiple duty to
16 warn notices from Canadian authorities indicating that our
17 lives are at risk due to our political beliefs and activism.

18 This pervasive sense of danger is not just
19 limited to individuals. It exceeds and it goes into our
20 families, our communities, those that we deal with, and from
21 a personal and professional aspect, the impact is very deep
22 and broad, and it is exactly what India wants.

23 This intimidation is something that the Sikh
24 community will not give in to. This fear and this
25 propagation of fear is not something that we are willing to
26 kind of back away from as we pursue our own sovereignty in
27 the form of Khalistan, but the result of exercising our
28 freedom of speech and expression in Canada has resulted in

1 extreme violence against us.

2 It's crucial now that we combat this Indian
3 foreign interference in the form of protective measures,
4 along with fighting disinformation and misinformation at
5 every corner of Canadian existence within the media, within
6 academia, within cultural environments, and also within
7 religious spaces. It is essential then to shift our approach
8 from merely offering written or verbal warnings of threat to
9 a life, to actively deterring these risks at the root cause.

10 The current strategy of warning individuals
11 like myself about threats to our lives, and then advising
12 them to cease in their activism along with taking them out of
13 public life is not something that is an approach that we are
14 okay with. This would inadvertently align with India's
15 strategy in silencing and repressing Sikhs by taking them out
16 of public life and being able to actively participate as
17 community leaders in their sovereignty movements.

18 In the form of protective measures, we have a
19 number of recommendations that we would like to kind of speak
20 to. The first being protective legislation and policy
21 coordination, push for legislation that mandates
22 comprehensive protection measures for individuals under
23 threat, such as mandatory security assessments and the
24 provision of personal security details.

25 On the side of policy coordination, we've
26 seen an extreme failure, I would say, in our perspective of
27 agencies across this country being able to share information
28 quickly, and precisely, and concisely when lives are at risk.

1 So ensuring policies at the local, national, and
2 international levels are aligned and that there's a clear
3 protocol in responding to threats from foreign powers.

4 The second would be cyber surveillance.
5 Strengthening cyber security measures to protect individuals'
6 digital presence. When we are given these warnings to our
7 lives, we are often told that we can be tracked via our phone
8 GPS and other things, yet we have no education, no ability to
9 actually protect ourselves. So education around cyber
10 security for individuals that are facing these types of
11 threats is paramount.

12 A thorough review of security and
13 intelligence agents in this country. Conduct an in-depth
14 review of security and intelligence agents, as well as their
15 proxies, who are actually suspected of working on behalf of
16 the Indian Government. This review should assess their
17 activities, affiliations, and the extent of their
18 involvement, including exploring all legal avenues to
19 prosecute the individuals involved, whether they live here or
20 they are abroad.

21 Finally, on the issue of disinformation and
22 misinformation, we do need what we feel is initiatives to
23 educate the public. Social media campaigns that are jointly
24 done by the Sikh community in conjunction with the Canadian
25 Government along with other agencies. Partnerships with
26 media organizations that are actually pushed through the
27 Canadian Government. These media organizations then are able
28 to accurately disseminate information to the Canadian public,

1 which actually is then put through a filter by the Canadian
2 Government, versus relying on what the Indian Government is
3 actually feeding out here.

4 What we see is that Canada does have a
5 process in being able to detect disinformation and
6 misinformation. Often it is only in the English language,
7 and it is only limited to certain kind of outlets. That
8 should be expanded to include many different languages, as we
9 are speaking to diaspora communities that are being impacted
10 by this violence and this foreign interference in particular.

11 And finally, what I would like to kind of end
12 with on this first question, is that we watched as a
13 community for 40 years after the attack on Darbār Sahib,
14 which is commonly referred to as the Golden Temple in India
15 40 years ago in 1984, and misinformation, disinformation, and
16 foreign interference started with the Sikh community then and
17 nothing was done.

18 We watched for over a decade as Mr. Nijjar
19 was vilified and demonized by not only Indian media, but that
20 Indian media also bled over to Canadian media. His bank
21 accounts were frozen in this country, he was put under
22 surveillance, there was many things that he had to suffer for
23 10 years before he was shot, killed, in a public space, and
24 Indian media, along with Indian public, celebrated his death.

25 And over the last year we've had multiple
26 individuals, like myself and others in the Sikh community,
27 receiving warnings to our lives. And we have to expect that
28 in that time that we don't want to go into another generation

1 of Sikhs then wondering what could have been done and should
2 have been done, and we lose more lives. We feel our lives
3 are at stake.

4 So anything that comes out of this Commission
5 or from government agencies, we would push very hard to take
6 these recommendations seriously. Thank you.

7 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Mr. Masimov, at your
8 consultation meeting you gave suggestions about how to meet
9 the security needs of vulnerable diaspora communities.
10 Please explain and expand on those suggestions.

11 **MR. KAYUM MASIMOV:** [No interpretation].

12 The context and background for the Uyghur
13 community, like many diaspora communities in Canada, we have
14 faced significant and ongoing threats due to foreign
15 interference, especially from the Chinese government. These
16 activities often manifest in covert surveillance,
17 intimidation, and harassment, all aimed at silencing our
18 voices and curbing our advocacy for human rights.

19 It is crucial for Canadian Government to
20 proactively support these communities by addressing their
21 unique vulnerabilities, ensuring their safety, and providing
22 resources to help them understand and defend their rights.
23 The Federal Government must take comprehensive measures to
24 provide effective support to the Uyghur Canadian community.
25 This should include translation and community outreach
26 regarding legislative protections, proactive security
27 measures, and enhanced coordination with law enforcement
28 agencies like the Canadian Security Intelligence Service.

1 The government should focus on building
2 trust, providing clear communication, and ensuring tangible
3 support in areas such as personal safety, digital security,
4 and mental health resources.

5 One of the key recommendations I would like
6 to highlight now is -- would be number one, a proactive
7 intelligence sharing and security support. Strengthen
8 coordination with CSIS and other security agencies. CSIS and
9 RCMP should establish dedicated channels to share information
10 and provide timely alerts to Uyghur Canadian organizations
11 and leaders about any emerging threats from foreign actors,
12 particularly Chinese government proxies. This would help
13 community members to be more vigilant and take pre-emptive
14 measures to ensure their safety.

15 Implementing a risk alert system for high-
16 risk individuals and organizations. Establish a risk alert
17 system that notifies designated community leaders and
18 activists about possible risks. CSIS and local enforcement
19 should have clear protocols for responding to these alerts,
20 including rapid response measures for situations where
21 community members are directly targeted.

22 Number two, enhancing security measures for
23 community leaders and organizations. Given the targeted
24 nature of the threats, the government should provide specific
25 security support for Uyghur Canadian leaders, activists, and
26 organizations. Provide personal safety training for
27 community leaders to help them recognize, deescalate, and
28 respond to potential security threats. Training should be

1 tailored to address the unique risks faced by Uyghur
2 Canadians and include both physical and digital safety
3 components.

4 Technical and digital security assistance.
5 Provide resources and support to ensure that Uyghur Canadians
6 have access to robust digital security tools to protect their
7 devices and communications. This includes training on best
8 practices and offering encryption software.

9 Safe physical spaces and security
10 communication channels. Establish safe physical spaces for
11 meetings and ensure that Uyghur organizations have access to
12 secure communication channels to reduce the risk of espionage
13 or information leaks.

14 [No interpretation]

15 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Ms. Leung, at your
16 consultation meeting you discussed a legislative response to
17 transnational repression. Please explain your suggestion and
18 discuss it.

19 **MS. KATHERINE LEUNG:** I spoke in support of
20 Bill C-70 when it was being studied in committee, both in the
21 House and in the Senate. C-70 was a great start to a problem
22 that has long been pertinent in Canadian society. With
23 respect to what we are here to discuss today, the experience
24 of diaspora communities as it pertains to foreign
25 interference, it was simply the first step.

26 What I would like to use my time to speak to
27 today is the need for a legislative response to transnational
28 repression. Let me begin first by talking about some of the

1 frameworks we have in place so that I can speak to the gaps.

2 The *Security of Information Act* has
3 provisions on espionage and threats from foreign actors that
4 speak to transnational repression, while the *Foreign*
5 *Influence Transparency and Accountability Act* requires
6 registration when an individual or entity has an arrangement
7 with a foreign principal and engages in activities like
8 communicating with public officials, disseminating
9 information to the public or providing money or services
10 related to political processes in Canada.

11 While it has potential to tackle aspects of
12 transnational repression by imposing registration
13 requirements, we don't know for a fact right now that
14 individuals involved in activities that suppress activism or
15 political engagement are the same ones as those who would be
16 required to register. Therefore, we need a stronger
17 framework than what already exists.

18 We need a legislative response to
19 transnational repression in Canada that achieves a different
20 -- a few different goals.

21 Number one is to define clearly what is
22 transnational repression. My understanding is that there
23 are currently definitions used by government departments
24 internally, but there is not a shared definition in law. We
25 need that if we are to have a coherent response to it. We
26 must define very clearly what the problem is.

27 The second is to impose a deterrence to
28 engaging in transnational repression. We need to make it

1 very costly to threaten, silence, harm or otherwise suppress
2 political engagement. This could take a few different forms,
3 like empowering the Government of Canada to impose property
4 and visa blocking sanctions on certain foreign individuals
5 and entities that directly engage in transnational
6 repression.

7 The third is to develop a clear strategy for
8 how we as a country respond to transnational repression. As
9 rightly noted in the initial report, foreign interference is
10 both persistent and evolving. Global Affairs Canada could
11 develop a strategy to address transnational repression,
12 including by raising the cost of perpetrating repressive
13 activities and by protecting targeted individuals and groups.

14 The most important part is that this strategy
15 should be reviewed periodically to ensure that it is updated
16 to meet the needs of the current environment.

17 Last, but not least, we have to train our
18 government departments. If we are to respond, we need to
19 know how.

20 The Government of Canada should train
21 relevant government employees and law enforcement partners on
22 transnational repression and direct the intelligence
23 community to prioritize the identification of those
24 perpetrating transnational repression against communities in
25 Canada.

26 Transnational repression is a form of foreign
27 interference. Foreign states use transnational repression to
28 discourage dissent from diaspora communities, thereby

1 undermining democratic participation and the ability of
2 elected officials to represent their constituents fully.
3 Foreign interference at the community level has the effect of
4 discouraging Canadians from speaking out on issues that
5 matter to them, which results in elected representatives not
6 hearing about these issues.

7 For elected officials to represent their
8 constituents fully, it is crucial that Canadians, including
9 those who are parts of diaspora communities, can freely
10 express their views without fear of retribution, not to
11 mention to threaten, silence or harm any Canadian to
12 discourage them from democratic participation is an
13 infringement on our *Charter* rights.

14 Whether someone's background is from a
15 community that is seen by a foreign regime to be a threat to
16 their hold on power or not, every Canadian has the right to
17 have and express opinions, to participate in our democracy
18 and to speak our minds, even if those actions encourage
19 Canadian lawmakers to do the right thing and stand up against
20 human rights violators.

21 To conclude, addressing transnational
22 repression closes off opportunities for foreign interference
23 to take hold. When we confront transnational repression, we
24 not only safeguard our sovereignty and national security, but
25 also shield vulnerable communities, a basic right that these
26 communities deserve, as it ensures their freedom to express
27 political views, engage in civic activities and live without
28 fear of intimidation or coercion from foreign governments.

1 Thank you.

2 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Mr. Ghaseminejad-tafreshi,
3 at your consultation meeting, you discussed the importance of
4 allowing for a diversity of opinions in a democratic society.
5 Please share your recommendations on that topic.

6 **MR. AMIR-HASSAN GHASEMINEJAD-TAFRESHI:** Thank
7 you.

8 Dear Honourable Commissioner Hogue, in 1859
9 English philosopher John Stuart Mill wrote, and I paraphrase,
10 it is possible that any opinion that is compelled to silence
11 may be true. To deny this is to assume our own
12 infallibility. It is only by collision of adverse opinions
13 that the remainder of the truth has any chance of being
14 supplied.

15 I want to start by thanking the Commission
16 and our Government of Canada for allowing diverse reflections
17 on foreign interference in Canada's democratic processes.

18 Dealing with covert foreign interference by
19 foreign governments and corporations is something that needs
20 expertise and a lot of resource allocation. However, I wish
21 to draw your attention to what is overt foreign interference
22 through silencing some voices and amplifying other voices by
23 our friends and foes. This interference can be mobilized
24 directly by foreign governments or indirectly through foreign
25 institutions, foreign corporations, foreign individuals or
26 even indirectly through Canadian institutions, corporations
27 and individuals.

28 Some of media organizations based in Canada

1 are owned by foreign entities, including our allies such as
2 United States. Canadian public sphere must be a place in
3 which various opinions are heard and the result of
4 deliberation of informed Canadians should determine the path
5 of our country.

6 Independent religious non-partisan diaspora
7 organizations such as Iranian Canadian Congress are part of
8 Canadian public sphere and should be protected from
9 information wars organized by media outlets established with
10 foreign investments by authoritarian or democratic states.

11 Foreign actors and governments of other
12 nations democratically elected, authoritarian or autocratic,
13 friend or foe, are not citizens of Canada and do not have the
14 right to intervene in our democratic processes but, of
15 course, feel entitled to pursue their own national interests.
16 Foreign countries are not monolithic. Various actors and
17 diverse ideologies may prevail in other countries at
18 different times.

19 It is quite possible that what Canadians
20 decide to do may be inconsistent with the decisions made by
21 other democracies. The prevailing parties in other
22 democracies may wish a different outcome in Canadian
23 elections than what the majority of Canadians want.

24 The history has shown that Canadian people
25 have been able to independently make choices that later were
26 found more prudent than the decisions made by other
27 democracies. In fact, the recent history, for example, in
28 Iraq shows that our allies would have been better off if they

1 had followed the Canadian lead.

2 While we cannot block freedom of press and
3 media, we should ensure that when foreign linked or foreign
4 backed media organizations engage with our public, the public
5 is aware of the linkages and foreign backing. Some
6 suggestions are it should be illegal for institutions funded
7 by foreign governments, foreign corporations and foreign
8 individuals to try to mobilize campaigns to influence
9 democratic process in Canada. It should be illegal for media
10 institutions and individuals with opaque sources of funding
11 to try to influence the Canadian political system.

12 We need to investigate these organizations
13 and their financial sources and ensure that any individual or
14 group engaging in political activities in Canada disclose
15 their foreign financial and organizational ties. This will
16 prevent them from acting through proxies or front
17 organizations.

18 Activities of foreign journalists and
19 contractors for foreign institutions or government within
20 Canada should be regulated. Journalists employed by foreign
21 media institutions should be required to remain impartial.
22 Their biased or hostile statements regarding Canadian
23 political figures, including political candidates, should be
24 illegal. It should be required that such foreign-linked
25 media organizations to be clearly identified and recognized
26 when reporting or asking questions at Canadian political
27 events.

28 Furthermore, those who testify in front of

1 parliamentary committees must be required to disclose any
2 foreign ties, financial or organizational, as part of
3 parliamentary records. Canadian agencies who are protecting
4 us from foreign adversaries can also ask our foreign partners
5 to refrain from allowing their public or private entities to
6 conduct disinformation or misinformation operations targeting
7 Canadian entities. It should be clear to any government,
8 adversarial or partner, that there will be a price if they
9 conduct such operations against Canadian citizens or
10 institutions.

11 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Thank you.

12 **MS. DAWN PALIN ROKOSH:** Ms. Fung, at your
13 consultation meeting, you made suggestions about how best to
14 support and protect vulnerable diaspora communities through
15 the lens of CCP's infiltration and foreign interference
16 strategy in Canada.

17 Would you please explain and expand on those
18 suggestions?

19 **MS. GLORIA FUNG:** The Chinese Communist
20 Party, CCP, is by far the most active foreign state player in
21 foreign interference on Canadian soil. This poses a major
22 threat to our national security, sovereignty and democracy.

23 CCP has a long-term strategy to infiltrate
24 into democracies. Its aim is to infiltrate, divide, and
25 rule, take control, and finally silence individual dissidents
26 and eliminate opposition groups that challenge its
27 legitimacy.

28 Canada is one of the most covertly

1 infiltrated of all liberal democracies. Since 1990 a
2 comprehensive sophisticated network of hundreds of pro-China
3 United Front organizations operate in Canada, directed by
4 China's United Front Work Department. CCP agents capitalize
5 on our openness and political naivete to infiltrate into our
6 multicultural communities to falsely claim community
7 representation to promote the China official narrative.

8 Most importantly, they infiltrate all levels
9 of government in Canada. CCP proxies cover a wide-range of
10 professional and business associations, social service
11 centres, and even some Chinese-Canadian political party
12 associations.

13 Why is Canada targeted? From the
14 geopolitical perspective, Canada is the backdoor to the U.S.,
15 China's major adversary. By infiltrating Canada, China can
16 access sensitive intelligence information of the U.S., the
17 Five Eye Allies, NATO, and military packs among liberal
18 democracies. Canada possesses advanced technology and rich
19 natural resources needed by China for technological
20 advancement and military expansion to realize Xi Jinping's
21 global China Dream.

22 In recent years, CCP's transnational
23 repression increased -- have become increasingly arrogant to
24 include counterprotests and disinformation campaigns through
25 WeChat, Chinese language public forums, community newspapers,
26 and CCP proxies on the ground.

27 How could we protect vulnerable diaspora
28 communities? The passage of Bill C-70 is an important first

1 step to protect the vulnerable diaspora community members
2 from transnational repression. We must redouble our efforts
3 to ensure the safety and security of individual Canadians and
4 community organizations. A multilingual national hotline and
5 the use of friendly and secure online reporting systems
6 should be set up so that victims can report to the Foreign
7 Interference Commissioner incidents of infiltration or
8 foreign interference.

9 WeChat and TikTok should be banned in Canada.
10 We need regulations to represent -- to prevent social media
11 platforms, Chinese language forums, CCP proxies, and future
12 AI bots from spreading fake news and disinformation.

13 A global engagement centre similar to that in
14 the U.S. should be set up to pre-empt this information.

15 Public education should enhance Canadian's
16 awareness of foreign interference. Experts from CSIS, RCMP,
17 and civil society should be involved. Government funding
18 should be made available for vulnerable diaspora communities
19 to educate, engage, and empower the community members. Reps
20 of vulnerable communities should be engaged in periodic
21 review of the legislation. CSIS and RCMP should reach out to
22 diaspora communities to regularly educate community members
23 about the most updated tactics of foreign interference and
24 how they can protect themselves. And Canada must increase
25 its collaboration with democratic allies in the exchange of
26 intelligence information to combat the rapidly evolving
27 tactics of malicious regime.

28 Thank you.

1 **MS. DAWN PALIN ROKOSH:** Thank you.

2 Mr. Singh, in your consultation meeting, you
3 discussed measures to increase government transparency about
4 foreign interference threats. Please share your views on
5 this topic?

6 **MR. MONINDER SINGH:** Sikh communities --
7 sorry, the Sikh community's struggle is not really about
8 securing political expression and democratic rights within
9 Canada. It's about defending our very existence against a
10 foreign state, India, that employs violence and intimidation
11 to achieve its objectives.

12 The Indian Government's actions are designed
13 to stifle Sikh advocacy and activism, using tactics that
14 range from disinformation and electoral interference, and now
15 all the way up to assassination.

16 In particular, the Sikh community is
17 concerned with the transparency and accountability shown
18 within information in regards to India within Canada. This
19 information is heavily redacted, more so than any other
20 potential states that are engaging in foreign interference in
21 various public reports.

22 While other nations are termed as hostile
23 actors, India is often treated with padded gloves, with
24 passing acknowledgement at most of their interference, yet
25 they're the only known foreign state that has killed a Sikh
26 leader Canadian citizen on Canadian soil.

27 In regards to recommendations on how we could
28 actually counter this, I will quickly move through this

1 portion.

2 Public acknowledgement is first and foremost.
3 Clearly and openly identifying and condemning India's
4 activities that undermine the safety and democratic rights of
5 our communities.

6 Educational investment. Allocating public
7 resources to educate potential threats, this includes the
8 media, professionals, academic institutions, security
9 agencies, and politicians, and other relevant stakeholders
10 about the nature and extent of India's interference. This
11 education should encompass tactics used, the impact on
12 targeted communities, and the broader implications for
13 Canadian society.

14 Transparency and reporting, ensuring that
15 reports fully disclose the involvement of foreign states like
16 India in activities that threaten Canadian citizens. This
17 includes addressing any previous omissions in previous
18 reports that have been influenced by economic or diplomatic
19 interests, thereby restoring trust and transparency in
20 governmental reporting.

21 More specifically, a transparent inquiry into
22 the Indian Government involvement and Canadian Government
23 failures in the assassination of Bhai Hardeep Singh Nijjar.
24 This should be a transparent and comprehensive inquiry into
25 the involvement of the Indian Government. And until such is
26 done so, the freezing of all security and intelligence
27 sharing agreements with India so as to protect the interests
28 of Canadian citizens, along with the Sikh community, along

1 with their families back in India, who are often harassed due
2 to the information provided by Canada back to India due to
3 these agreements that have been signed.

4 And finally, in conclusion, the pursuit of
5 Sikh sovereignty for Khalistan is not a matter of if, it's a
6 matter of when for the Sikh community. It will continue in
7 the Sikh diaspora. India has shown it will retaliate
8 violently. Canada has seen this violence and has to act.
9 The assassination of Bhai Hardeep Singh Nijjar on Canadian
10 soil has only strengthened our resolve and that of our next
11 generation to commit to the struggle for sovereignty.

12 I conclude as I began, recognizing these
13 unceded lands and historical wrongs of residential schools
14 and genocide utilized against First Nations people, standing
15 in solidarity with all people around the world breaking free
16 from the impacts of colonialization and seeking their
17 sovereignty and freedom, and as Sikhs for Khalistan as well,
18 and recognizing that the Khalista belongs to the creator and
19 truth and victory shall always be to the creator and truth.
20 [Speaking in other language].

21 **MS. DAWN PALIN ROKOSH:** Thank you.

22 Mr. Masimov, at your consultation meeting,
23 several suggestions were made for how to better support the
24 Uyghur Canadian community in the face of foreign interference
25 and transnational repression. Please share some of those
26 suggestions?

27 **MR. KAYUM MASIMOV:** Thank you.

28 **MS. DAWN PALIN ROKOSH:** [No interpretation]

1 **MR. KAYUM MASIMOV:** This is an important
2 question for us.

3 We would probably -- we would suggest
4 introducing the Countering Transnational Oppression Act to
5 detect and counter this crime. As the Uyghur diaspora, we
6 are welcoming the adaption of the long overdue Bill C-70, but
7 this bill alone is not sufficient. We think Canada needs to
8 introduce a specific law targeting the transnational
9 repression, intimidation, and harassment. For example, the
10 Bill C-70 does not define what constitutes the transnational
11 repression. There are gaps in criminalizing offences such as
12 online harassment and digital violence, nor it does not
13 address the issue of the refugee espionage.

14 Two, translation and community outreach on
15 legislative provisions. We recommend translating Bill C-70
16 and relevant provisions into Uyghur language.

17 Recently passed Bill C-70 includes provisions
18 to combat foreign interference and protect targeted
19 communities. It is crucial that this legal text, along with
20 guidelines and resources be translated into Uyghur language
21 to ensure that Uyghur Canadians fully understand their rights
22 and the protection available to them.

23 We recommend conducting community education
24 sessions. Organize informational session across major cities
25 and towns with Uyghur Canadian communities, such as in
26 Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal, as well as smaller towns,
27 to explain Bill C-70's implications in accessible language.
28 Community meetings should be held in multiple formats, both

1 in person and virtually to maximize accessibility and
2 participation.

3 We recommend taking a look at the mental
4 health and psychological supports. Establishing dedicated
5 mental health support services, because the emotional toll on
6 foreign interference is significant. Many Uyghur Canadians
7 have family members still living under oppressive regimes,
8 and may be directly targeted by -- or by harassment or
9 surveillance in Canada. The government should provide
10 culturally appropriate mental health services, including
11 trauma counselling and psychological support to help
12 community members manage stress and anxiety stemming from
13 these threats.

14 Support networks for families and community
15 members. Create support groups where Uyghur Canadians can
16 connect and share their experiences in a safe environment.
17 The government should fund community-led initiatives to
18 establish these networks and offer professional facilitation
19 when needed.

20 We would further recommend long term
21 organizational and capacity building support to fund Uyghur
22 Canadian organizations to build community resilience.
23 Allocate federal funding to support Uyghur Canadian
24 organizations in their capacity building efforts. This would
25 include resources for advocacy, community outreach, and legal
26 support. Strengthening these organizations will help ensure
27 that they can respond effectively to interference to support
28 their community members.

1 In conclusion, I would say that the Canadian
2 Government must act decisively to address these unique needs
3 of the Uyghur Canadian community in face of increasing
4 foreign interferences. By translating legislative
5 protections, enhancing security measures, and providing
6 tailored support, Canada can ensure that these communities
7 are not only aware of their rights, but also empowered to
8 exercise them without fear. A coordinated and comprehensive
9 approach led by the federal government in partnership with
10 CSIS, RCMP, and community organizations is essential to
11 safeguard the Uyghur Canadian community and uphold Canada's
12 values of inclusion, safety, and human rights.

13 In conclusion again, I would say we need to
14 implement these recommendations. A dedicated task force
15 should be established to oversee the rollout of translation
16 services, security measures, and community outreach. Regular
17 consultations with Uyghur Canadian leaders and organizations
18 will be essential to fine tune these measures and ensure they
19 are responsive to evolving threats.

20 Since I have some time, I would like to wrap
21 up my presentation.

22 [No interpretation] Canada and the Canadian
23 Parliament, being the First-World entity, legislative, that
24 recognize the Uyghurs and is -- we're very grateful for this.

25 Also, Canada was the first country to pass a
26 motion M-72, which has to do with the repatriation of Uyghur
27 refugees to third countries. We know that Uyghur refugees
28 will arrive soon, and this community, once again, will be

1 exposed to transnational oppression. I would like to warn
2 the government that we must take measures in order to protect
3 this vulnerable population.

4 Thank you very much once again.

5 **MS DAWN PALIN ROKOSH:** [No interpretation].

6 Ms. Leung, at your consultation meeting,
7 suggestions were made for how the Canadian Government and its
8 agencies can best support the Chinese Canadian community.
9 Please discuss some of those suggestions.

10 **MS. KATHERINE LEUNG:** Thank you.

11 There are a few ways that the Government of
12 Canada and its departments can provide further support to
13 diaspora communities that have faced, and continue to face,
14 transnational repression.

15 Let me take you through the perspective of
16 someone who has been threatened, silenced, or harmed by
17 someone acting on behalf of a foreign regime. You likely are
18 afraid, or at least shaken by whatever it was that was done
19 to you, whether it be anonymous threats, witnessing someone
20 surveilling you, being followed, or God forbid something even
21 more frightening like a physical altercation.

22 You do what you think is the right thing and
23 report it to your local law enforcement agency. You tell
24 them all the facts of what you experienced, your background,
25 your work in human rights, and they note it all down. They
26 thank you for the information and your time, but for some
27 members of the Hong Kong community that I have spoken to,
28 this is where the story ends. There is no follow up, no

1 indication of progress, and no sense of safety or closure.

2 Now, I have to note that this is not the case
3 with everyone. I am happy to say that I know some RCMP
4 officers with the National Security Program who diligently
5 follow up with diaspora community members who reported their
6 cases, and that gives reassurance to someone who would
7 otherwise feel unsafe. Unfortunately, I have also heard from
8 community members who tell me that they stopped hearing from
9 the RCMP or their local police after they had finished
10 collecting information. For these individuals, the silence
11 that follows can be as unnerving as the initial threat. The
12 lack of follow up leaves them feeling vulnerable, uncertain
13 if their case is being pursued, and no safer than before they
14 reached out for help.

15 The problem here is twofold. First,
16 individuals who report incidents of transnational repression
17 often do not feel any safer after reaching out to law
18 enforcement, despite the fundamental role of these agencies
19 being to protect them. The expectation is that law
20 enforcement provides more than just a sympathetic ear. Their
21 mandate is to keep Canadians safe and secure. The absence of
22 follow up, whether it be a simple update on the
23 investigation, or increased security measures, or even just
24 an officer checking in, leaves them feeling as though the
25 process of reporting leads nowhere, as though their concerns
26 have been noted, but are not taken seriously enough to
27 warrant action.

28 This leads me to my second point. This lack

1 of follow up erodes trust in the very institutions that are
2 supposed to protect Canadians from foreign threats. When law
3 enforcement fails to communicate progress or follow up on
4 cases, it sends a message, even if it is unintentionally,
5 that the safety of victims is not a priority. The longer
6 these gaps in communication and action persist, the more
7 likely individuals are to feel isolated and disempowered.

8 As a result, some may even become hesitant to
9 report future incidents, believing their voices won't be
10 heard, or that no meaningful protection will be offered.
11 This will in turn compromise Canada's ability to deal with
12 transnational repression. Without reporting, law enforcement
13 lacks the information needed to identify, track, and counter
14 foreign interference, rendering them unable to act and
15 protect those most vulnerable to these threats.

16 What this means is that the cycle of
17 underreporting and the lack of action undermines Canada's
18 overall security efforts and leaves entire communities at
19 risk.

20 A policy suggestion would be to ensure that
21 law enforcement officers follow up on every reported case of
22 transnational repression. This could include an update on
23 the status of the investigation, any steps being taken to
24 enhance the individual's security, and providing information
25 on available resources. Regular communication would reassure
26 victims that their cases are being taken seriously and help
27 build confidence in law enforcement and encourage future
28 reporting.

1 We would also recommend that a dedicated
2 officer or team in respect of law enforcement jurisdictions
3 handle these cases to ensure consistency and improve overall
4 responsiveness. This would not only help provide victims
5 with a greater sense of safety, but also ensures that law
6 enforcement is gathering information necessary to better
7 counter foreign interference in Canada. Thank you.

8 **MS. DAWN PALIN ROKOSH:** Thank you.

9 Mr. Ghaseminejad-tafreshi, at your
10 consultation meeting the topic of the flow of benefits and
11 funds into the Canadian political system was raised. Please
12 share and explain your suggestions.

13 **MR. AMIR-HASSAN GHASEMINEJAD-TAFRESHI:** Thank
14 you.

15 Diaspora organizations, such as the Iranian
16 Canadian Congress who value Canada's soft power and want the
17 image of Canada to remain as peacekeeper and peacemaker, have
18 anti-war and anti-occupation tendencies. They are eager to
19 find win-win solutions for conflicts. They may be at odds
20 with the tendencies of those who see every situation as a
21 win-lose game and see the use of force as the solution for
22 every problem.

23 There are political actors among our partners
24 and our non-partners who believe that political power grows
25 out of the barrel of a gun, and there are those who instead
26 value the soft power. While war is sometimes inevitable,
27 often a win-win solution is possible. Presumption of the
28 absolute truth of one solution or another to a given problem

1 requires the assumption of infallibility.

2 The worldview of war hawks in our allied
3 nations and in other countries dictates an impossibility of
4 the existence of win-win solutions. Therefore, they attempt
5 to discredit and silence the organisations that do not echo
6 their desire for a confrontational approach. But ideology is
7 not the only factor. It is unfortunate that the
8 privatisation of military industrial complexes all over the
9 world has created incentives for adoption of such a worldview
10 everywhere.

11 At this dangerous moment in world history,
12 many foreign actors have various incentives to interfere in
13 Canada's political discourse. It should be self-evident that
14 it must be illegal for Canadian political actors to engage in
15 what is called favour economy by accepting favours from any
16 channel that may give foreign actors the opportunity to
17 funnel their funds and then influence Canadian political
18 system.

19 All foreign powers, including parties who may
20 come in power in our partner states, may use Canadian
21 thinktanks, diaspora organisations, and other non-
22 governmental institutions to sway our political actors to
23 their ideological ends. Whether or not institutions are
24 aware that their actions is affected by their funding is not
25 important because funding influences diaspora organisations,
26 regardless of the amount of their confidence in themselves.

27 Moreover, Canadian institutions and
28 individuals may be used as a front for foreign entities

1 funnelling favours, benefits, and funds into Canadian
2 democratic system. Entities whose interests are not aligned
3 with national interests of Canada should be monitored for
4 such interference, but authorities should not give Canada's
5 supposed allies a free pass for funding -- for funnelling
6 money into Canadian democracy and public sphere.

7 MPs should not be allowed to accept favours
8 from organisations or individuals whose source of income is
9 opaque or ambiguous. Increasing MPs' allowances to
10 facilitate foreign travel and reasonable accommodation, such
11 that they would not need to accept favours, will be taxpayer
12 money well spent, since it reduces the likelihood of Canadian
13 politicians to be cheaply influenced by foreign entities.
14 Then they can be prohibited from accepting foreign-linked
15 favours and then the purpose of any other benefit may be
16 accept -- may be -- that they may accept can be questioned.

17 All non-governmental institutions who
18 interact in public sphere in Canada should be prevented to be
19 used as middlemen to channel the favours to Canadian
20 political actors. It should be illegal for thinktanks and
21 lobbyists, Canadian or foreign, to conceal the evidence of
22 any foreign funding by any source, and they should be
23 mandated to disclose their sources of funding. Canadians
24 have every right to know the identities of the states,
25 corporations, or foundations they are funding what the
26 influences their public discourse.

27 Universities and thinktanks who accept
28 foreign-linked funding should be required by law to disclose

1 the sources of their funding. All individuals, institutions
2 who provide funding, favours, or benefit to actors in
3 Canadian democracy should be registered with lobbyist status
4 and disclose all their sources of income and spending.

5 A little more time.

6 All political figures in Canadian democracy
7 should be prohibited from accepting favours from foreign
8 entities, or from organisations or individuals whose source
9 of income is opaque or ambiguous. Such behaviour should be
10 regulated. Allowances and budgets should be large enough to
11 facilitate the needs of politicians.

12 I will finish with a quote from the wonderful
13 Canadian TV series, Murdoch Mysteries. In it, while
14 Detective William and Dr. Julia use the most advanced
15 technologies of the time to find criminals, the
16 Inspector Brackenreid had one advice that often helped the
17 start of their very technical investigation. His advice was
18 "follow the money." Thank you.

19 **MS. DAWN PALIN ROKOSH:** Thank you, sir.

20 Commissioner, this concludes our final panel
21 for today.

22 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you very much. I
23 listened very carefully to what you said. I took notes, and
24 by chance I also have others that are taking notes, and will
25 produce summaries because there is a lot of information that
26 have been provided. But I really want to thank you all.
27 Thank you.

28 Tomorrow morning, 9:30.

1 **THE REGISTRAR:** Order, please.

2 This sitting of the Foreign Interference
3 Commission is adjourned until tomorrow, the 3rd of October
4 2024 at 9:30 a.m.

5 --- Upon adjourning at 4:42 p.m.

6
7 **C E R T I F I C A T I O N**
8

9 I, Sandrine Marineau-Lupien, a certified court reporter,
10 hereby certify the foregoing pages to be an accurate
11 transcription of my notes/records to the best of my skill and
12 ability, and I so swear.

13
14 Je, Sandrine Marineau-Lupien, une sténographe officielle,
15 certifie que les pages ci-hautes sont une transcription
16 conforme de mes notes/enregistrements au meilleur de mes
17 capacités, et je le jure.

18 
19 _____

20 Sandrine Marineau-Lupien
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