

Politics

Diaspora groups join calls for public inquiry on foreign interference

Groups say David Johnston should have consulted them

[Raffy Boudjikianian](#) · CBC News · Posted: Jun 07, 2023 6:28 PM EDT | Last Updated: June 7, 2023



Gloria Fung, head of the Canada Hong Kong Link, participates in a vigil in 2017. (John Sandeman /CBC)

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A day after embattled special rapporteur David Johnston defended his approach to investigating foreign interference before a parliamentary committee, multiple Chinese Canadian diaspora groups say he should have consulted them and are calling for a public inquiry.

"Mr. Johnston's report is a huge disappointment," said Gloria Fung, president of the Canada-Hong Kong Link, during a joint news conference with other diaspora groups organized by the Bloc Québécois.

Bloc Québécois Leader Yves-François Blanchet said Johnston has failed to reach out to the diaspora organizations.

"We expected consultation before the report came out," said Sherap Therchin, director of the Canada Tibet Committee.

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Asked to react to Johnston's promise of public hearings on foreign interference, Fung said they might not offer anything new.

"We have testified at numerous parliamentary committees over the last decade," she said. "We're not too sure how different the future public hearings will be from what we have gone through before."

Citing China's policy of forcibly separating Tibetan children from their parents to attend boarding school and its mandatory collection of biometric data, Therchin said Beijing's attacks on the Tibetan community and culture are "almost at an all-time high."



Mehmet Tohti, executive director of the Uyghur Rights Advocacy Project, said his group has briefed the government for years and public hearings would merely duplicate that work. (CBC News)

"When we try to raise awareness about such issues of human-rights violations happening in Tibet, in Canada ... we face opposition, we face interference from the Chinese government," he said.

"Our concerns and the problems that we've experienced are known by government officials and Parliamentarians," said Mehmet Tohti, executive director of the Uyghur Rights Advocacy Project.

Johnston report dominates question period

Johnston's committee testimony on Tuesday dominated question period Wednesday afternoon. Opposition MPs have voted three times for a public inquiry already and have asked the special rapporteur to resign his position.

"While the prime minister is protecting the secrets of the Liberal Party, he's not protecting people oppressed by the China who still family that have stayed under the thumb of the Chinese regime and deserve to be safe in Canada and Quebec,"

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Blanchet told the Commons. "Will the prime minister act like a leader and launch a public inquiry?"



David Johnston has said he intends to consult diaspora communities during the next phase of his work, which starts next month. (Sean Kilpatrick/The Canadian Press)

In response, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said protecting diaspora communities is a priority for his government.

"We know the first targets of Chinese interference are diaspora communities," he said. "That's why we're so firm in protecting them and are getting them involved in the decisions we're taking."

Trudeau reminded Parliament that Johnston plans to start touring the country in the summer to speak to diaspora communities and issue recommendations to

government "on the best way to protect them."

The special rapporteur's office did not respond to a request for comment for this story.

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Members of diaspora communities are calling for a public inquiry to address foreign interference in Canada. Power and Politics speaks to Sherap Therchin of the Canada Tibet Committee, Kayum Masimov of the Uyghur Rights Project and Bloc MP Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe.

During his testimony before the procedure and House affairs committee Tuesday, Johnston discussed his plans to speak with diaspora communities, government representatives, experts and intelligence officials in July.

"For this work, I will be supported by three special advisers with expertise in national security intelligence, law and diaspora community matters," he said.

He said those advisers have not yet been chosen.

Speaking to CBC's Power and Politics Wednesday evening, Therchin said at first he would participate in the public hearings if asked, but then said he would want to think about it more.

"If boycotting the engagement with David Johnston sends a stronger message, then that's something that I should discuss with my community," he said.

"Canada is a free democratic country. Why the hesitation to have a public inquiry?"

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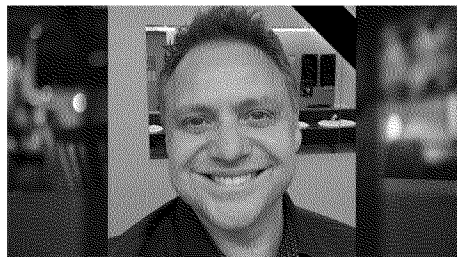
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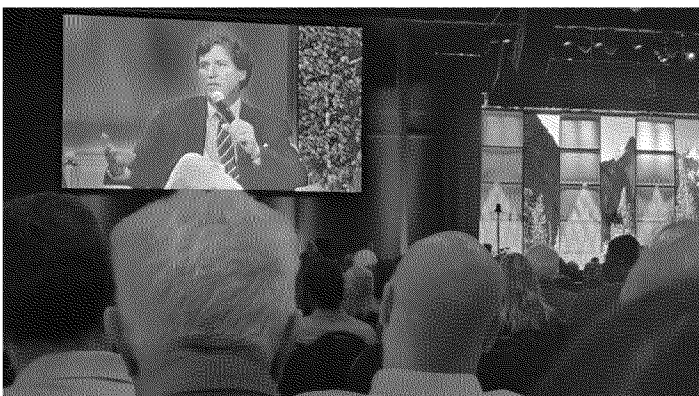
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