



## Foreign Interference Commission

### Public Consultation Process

## Small Group Consultation Meeting Public Summary

In the summer of 2024, Commissioner Marie-Josée Hogue and members of the Foreign Interference Commission's (the "**Commission**") Public Consultation Process ("**PCP**") team met with two individuals belonging to the Tibetan Canadian community in a consultation meeting organized with the assistance of the Human Rights Coalition.

#### Notes to reader:

- The Commissioner has not and will not be making any findings about the accuracy of the information shared at the consultation meeting or make any findings of fact based on this information.
- The meeting attendees did not make an oath or swear to tell the truth before sharing information at this meeting.
- The meeting attendees were not subjected to cross-examination.
- The meeting attendees have reviewed and approved the contents of this public summary.
- Meeting attendees were given the option to anonymize themselves for the purposes of the present public summary. Where meeting attendees have opted to anonymize themselves, they are designated as "Participant 1", "Participant 2", etc.
- At each of the consultation meetings, the meeting attendees were asked to answer two questions, which are set out below. The meeting attendees were each given a total of 15 minutes to respond to both questions.
- Where necessary, Commission counsel have provided explanatory notes in square brackets and in the footnotes to assist the reader.

## Executive Summary

- Meeting attendees advised that they were unaware of any foreign interference in elections in communities with Tibetan Canadian populations.
- Meeting attendees explained that Tibetan Canadians are targets for transnational repression by the People's Republic of China ("**PRC**"), particularly Tibetan Canadians who still have loved ones inside Tibet and those who are actively working to raise awareness about Tibet.
- One attendee provided an example of a prominent scholar and activist who speaks internationally about the situation in Tibet, including sharing their personal experience in Chinese residential schools. The attendee explained that the scholar was forced to cut off communications with their loved ones in Tibet due to their ongoing activism.
- One attendee described challenges Tibetan Canadians face when they seek visas to travel to Tibet, advising that they are required to provide detailed information about their loved ones living in Tibet. The attendee also explained that a condition of the visa is that the visa-holder must refrain from engaging in community events commemorating the deaths of Tibetans in 1959; if the visa-holder breaks that condition, their loved ones in Tibet can suffer consequences, including imprisonment.
- One attendee described a Tibetan official appointed by the Chinese government who provided inaccurate and misleading information about the Panchen Lama<sup>1</sup> to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development of the House of Commons, stating that the Panchen Lama was fine and did not want to be disturbed. The attendee explained that the Panchen Lama was abducted by PRC authorities at the age of 6.
- One attendee provided examples of people pretending to be Tibetan to spread the inaccurate information that people in Tibet are peaceful and happy.
- One attendee spoke about a Tibetan student facing bullying and harassment from Chinese students in the context of a university student leadership election. That

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<sup>1</sup> **Note:** The Panchen Lama is an important spiritual figure in Tibetan Buddhism, second only in spiritual authority to the Dalai Lama.

attendee also spoke about Chinese students protesting an event held at a Canadian university intended to provide information about Tibet.

## 1. Participants' responses to Question 1

The first question posed to the participants was: *How are you, your loved ones and members of your community impacted by foreign interference in Canada's electoral processes and democratic institutions?*

### Participant 1

Participant 1 said that they were unaware of any foreign interference in the Canadian federal electoral ridings where most Tibetans live. Participant 1 said that Tibetan Canadians are targets for transnational repression, particularly those who still have loved ones inside Tibet and those who are actively raising awareness about Tibet. Participant 1 provided an example, describing a prominent human rights activist and scholar who personally experienced Chinese residential schools in Tibet and who speaks internationally on the issue. Participant 1 said that this person received a call from their loved ones still living in Tibet asking them to stop their activism. Participant 1 said this person had to cut off communications with their loved ones in Tibet because of their activism.

Participant 1 said that Tibetan Canadians face challenges when they seek visas to travel to Tibet. Participant 1 said that Tibetan Canadians seeking visas to travel to Tibet are asked to provide detailed information to the Chinese embassy about their family members living in Tibet. Participant 1 stated that where Tibetan Canadians obtain such visas, the visas come with conditions including a ban on engaging in community events commemorating the Tibetans who died in 1959 [during the Tibetan uprising against the PRC's control of Tibet]. Participant 1 said that agreeing not to attend such peaceful events is a condition for obtaining a visa to travel to Tibet. Participant 1 said that if that condition is not respected, the visa-holders' loved ones in Tibet can suffer consequences such as detention and imprisonment.

Participant 1 said that a Tibetan official appointed by the Chinese government testified at the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development of the House of Commons in 2018. Participant 1 said that no prior public notice was provided of this appearance, which was unusual. Participant 1 said that one of the Committee members inquired into the whereabouts of the Panchen Lama, who Participant 1 said had been abducted by PRC authorities at the age of 6. Participant 1 recalled that the Tibetan official said that the Panchen Llama was fine and didn't wish to be disturbed. Participant 1 described this response as an attempt to confuse Canadian elected officials about the situation in Tibet. Participant 1 was disappointed by these events and wished that they had been informed in advance of this appearance before the House of Commons.

## Participant 2

Participant 2 said they were not aware of any foreign interference in Canadian elections. Participant 2 spoke about a Board Member of a Tibetan community association who ran for the position of president of the student union at their university. Participant 2 said that the student reported that they were the victim of an organized bullying and online threats campaign from the Chinese student community, which shocked the Board.

Participant 2 said that same student leader assisted in organizing an event at their university to host a visiting elected representative of the Tibetan government in exile. Participant 2 said that the event would include meetings with MPs and Ministers, along with educational talks about the history of Tibet. Participant 2 described being shocked upon being informed that a large number of Chinese students with PRC flags that were preparing to protest the event. Participant 2 said they had to increase the security personnel for the event.

Participant 2 spoke about people who they said pretend to be Tibetan in order to portray Tibetans as peaceful and happy, and misrepresent the Tibetan situation to the Canadian public. Participant 2 mentioned two specific examples: a group of Chinese dancers who perform in major cities holding themselves out as Tibetans, and a group of [ethnically Han] Chinese individuals who forged a letter of congratulations to their group from the

Prime Minister's office. Participant 2 said that they reported the letter to their MP, who informed the offices concerned about the matter.

Participant 2 also noted that many Tibetan Canadians who still have family members in Tibet refrain from attending public protests in front of Chinese consular buildings or Tibetan community events in Canada. Participant 2 said that they fear that their identities will be captured on video or pictures, and that their family members in Tibet might suffer consequences as a result.

## 2. Participants' responses to Question 2

The second question posed to participants was: *What are your suggestions for how you and others in your community who may be vulnerable to foreign interference could be supported and protected, and for how foreign interference could be detected or combated?*

### Participant 1

Participant 1 said that establishing a definition for the term “transnational repression” would be helpful.

Participant 1 suggested that support, such as funding, be provided to study the impact of transnational repression on the Tibetan community. Participant 1 said that such support could provide Tibetan Canadians with the required reassurances as to their safety in Canada. Participant 1 said that educational and awareness programs regarding Tibetan Canadians of their rights and recourses could also be useful.

Participant 1 suggested that the principle of reciprocity would be very helpful in countering disinformation spread by Chinese officials in Canada about Tibet. Participant 1 referenced a recently passed American bill [the 2018 *Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act*] regarding reciprocal access to Tibet. This piece of legislation requires American officials to be provided to the same levels of access in the PRC to the level of access granted to PRC officials in the US.

## Participant 2

Participant 2 said that protection is needed for Canadians who are the targets of transnational repression.

Participant 2 further recommended the imposition of sanctions on the PRC government by the government of Canada.

Participant 2 said that funding to assist in the continued operation of a community center established for Tibetan Canadians would be helpful to the preservation of Tibetan culture and identity in Canada.