



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 seven individuals belonging to the Iranian Canadian community in a meeting organized with the assistance of the Iranian Canadian Congress (the "**ICC**"). This is a summary of the information shared at that meeting.

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 of anonymizing themselves for the purposes of the present public summary. Where meeting attendees 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

- Certain attendees provided background information about the Mojahedin-e-Khalq (the “**MEK**”) and its historical practices, including recruiting and membership practices. Certain of the attendees recounted the loss of family members who were involved with the MEK in the 1980s, subsequently arrested, and ultimately killed, including through torture and by execution. Certain attendees expressed concern about what they described as growing ties between Canada and the MEK.
- One attendee described actions taken by the Iranian government against their loved ones living in the Islamic Republic of Iran (“**Iran**”) in response to the attendees’ activities in Canada, including speaking and writing about human rights.
- Certain attendees spoke about being targeted online and facing harassment due to their advocacy for peace and against sanctions and war with Iran, explaining that those who voice such views are falsely labelled by some political groups within the Iranian Canadian community as disloyal to Canada, and subject to intimidation and harassment. Attendees described the chilling effect this has on a portion of the Iranian Canadian community, explaining that it silences people. Several attendees indicated that they have restricted or ceased their advocacy work, and that the ICC had lost volunteers, due to such harassment. Certain attendees described the negative impacts that the closing of the Iranian embassy in Canada had on members of the Iranian Canadian diaspora, including the expense and difficulties encountered in accessing consular services readily available to non-Iranian Canadians.
- Certain attendees expressed the view that certain countries that are considered Canadian allies and partners are also perpetrating foreign interference in Canada. Certain attendees talked about a disinformation campaign in Canada and the United States regarding the conflict in Gaza. The attendees said that the purpose of the disinformation campaign was to influence Canadian opinions about Muslims in Gaza, and referenced reporting by *Haaretz* that Israel was the source of the disinformation campaign. One attendee described a social media analysis carried out in recent years that indicated that Israel had targeted activists, scholars and

journalists of Iranian origin in Canada and the United States with disinformation campaigns.

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 focused their comments on the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran, also known as Mojahedin-e-Khalq or MEK. Participant 1 said the MEK is funded by foreign governments and has links to the Canadian government.

Participant 1 described the time frame around 1979, following the Iranian revolution, as a time of excitement in Iran. Participant 1's then-17-year-old brother, who was not politically active, had been accepted to one of the best technical universities in Iran. Shortly after, Participant 1's brother was recruited into the MEK. Participant 1 stated that the MEK manipulated young, politically naive individuals, such as their brother, to advance its agenda. After joining the MEK, Participant 1's brother was arrested at a demonstration. Participant 1 described the painful experience of lining up at the prison gates with other families to look at pictures of the dead youth checking if their brother was still alive. Participant 1's brother died from torture while imprisoned and was buried in the Behesht Zahra cemetery. Participant 1 stated that their family was provided with the plot number where he was buried.

Participant 1 stated that the MEK began to operate like a cult, requiring members to send their children away. Participant 1 referenced a book, "My Hand in Mine", written by Atefeh Sebdani, the adult child of MEK members in which the author described her life after being separated from her parents at 5 years old and subsequently smuggled to Europe. Participant 1 also described an article published in *The Guardian* claiming that the MEK has many cult features, including forced labor, sleep deprivation, sexual control, emotional abuse, and limited exit options.

Participant 1 described that recently, the MEK successfully lobbied in support of the introduction of US Senate resolution 599 protecting MEK members residing in Camp Ashraf 3 [the MEK's current headquarters], in Albania.¹ Participant 1 stated that several Canadian politicians have conducted lectures and praised MEK members in Albania. Participant 1 stated that, while the MEK is not listed on Canada's Registry of Lobbyists, the MEK attempts to interfere in Canadian political systems and institutions, namely by trying to get the Canadian government to cut any ties with Iran. Participant 1 said that the MEK successfully convinced Canada to close the Iranian embassy in Canada, making life difficult for Iranian Canadians. Participant 1 stated that MEK's ultimate objective is to topple the current regime in Iran through violent means and isolating the country. Further, MEK is upheld and praised by far-right politicians in the EU, UK and the US.

Participant 2

Participant 2 said they have served in various Iranian Canadian organizations over the last two decades and clarified that their remarks were made in their personal capacity and were not to be taken as remarks made on behalf of any organizations.

Participant 2 stated that Iran has a history of targeting activists in Canada. Participant 2 has not travelled to Iran for a long time, fearing for their safety because of their public writing and work on human rights. Participant 2 described how one of their family members was targeted by Iranian police because of Participant 2's advocacy and political activism in Canada.

Participant 2 said that in Canada, peace and anti-war advocates and activists especially of Muslim origin are targeted for daring to present critical views, and that these activists and advocates find their loyalty to Canada questioned. By way of example, Participant 2 described that those who spoke out in favor of a 2015 nuclear deal between the US and Iran were the target of efforts by MEK and other similar political organizations to smear

¹ **Note:** U.S. Senate Resolution 599 is entitled *A resolution protecting the Iranian political refugees, including female former political prisoners, in Ashraf-3 in Albania* and was introduced before the Senate on March 20, 2024 and has since been referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

and silence them. Participant 2 said, for instance, that MEK activists tried to cast doubts about Participant 2's loyalty to Canada and falsely accused them of being an Iranian lobbyist. Participant 2 said that this caused them to reduce, then halt their engagement in the community due to fears for their safety and security, and that of their loved ones.

Participant 2 stated that Israel has carried out a disinformation campaign in the US and Canada regarding the conflict in Gaza, citing recent reporting by Haaretz to that effect. Participant 2 said that forensic data analysis carried out by a third party organization they described as reputable also identified individuals of Iranian origin in Canada and the United States targeted with disinformation orchestrated allegedly by Israel.

Participant 2 stated that the MEK has given Canadian elected officials and former political leaders lavish trips and likely paid them high speaker fees in respect of appearances at MEK events.

Participant 2 said that the MEK has also interfered in the procedures of the House of Commons committees including by lobbying to cancel a speaking engagement with a prominent scholar due to the scholar's support for the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran.

Participant 2 explained and provided examples of how the smear campaigns against peace advocates, or scholars and researchers in the Iranian-Canadian community, negatively impact their engagements, including their engagements with Canadian federal government, and Parliamentarians.

Participant 3

Participant 3 described a disinformation campaign carried out by or on behalf of the Israeli government. Participant 3 said that the campaign amplified and disseminated narratives depicting Muslims as threats to Canada and the United States. Furthermore, Participant 3 noted the use of fake news websites sharing anti-immigrant and deeply Islamophobic content as part of this influence operation.

Participant 3 said that social media industry participants confirmed the existence of this influence campaign and opined on its source (referring to Israel).

Participant 4

Participant 4 described themselves as being part of a generation of immigrants that saw Canada as friendly towards Iran. Participant 4 said that shortly after their immigration to Canada, there was a shift in that relationship, with Canada cutting back on its diplomatic relationship with Iran. Participant 4 said that this led to the closure of the Iranian embassy in Canada, in 2013. Participant 4 noted that it is now extremely difficult and costly to renew Iranian passports and obtain other necessary documents. Participant 4 said that consular rights are denied to Iranian Canadians.

Participant 4 said after they began volunteering for the ICC, which promotes peace and diplomatic relations with Iran, they were subject to hate and harassment online. Participant 4 stated that many ICC volunteers have ceased volunteering as a result of such activities. Participant 4 teaches their children to stand up against bullies, and will stand up against bullying themselves, particularly if the bullies are foreign-backed bots. Participant 4 noted that such activities decreased after the Albanian government confiscated electronic equipment used by the MEK [in a crackdown on the MEK's headquarters in Camp Ashraf 3, in 2023].

Participant 4 described that Iranian Canadians felt they could have been the ones killed in the downing of Flight PS752, as a result of the high tensions existing in this part of the world. Participant 4 noted that since the designation of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (“**IRGC**”) as a terrorist entity by Canada, many Iranians who had done their military service with the IRGC were scared to travel abroad out of fear of potential arrest.

Participant 4 stated that Israel and the MEK successfully lobbied for the cancellation of a friendly soccer game between Iran and Canada, despite the fact that thousands of tickets to this event had been sold very quickly. Participant 4 described the disappointment of friends who were once political prisoners in Iran who had wanted to see the match take place and saw it as an opportunity to build ties between the two countries.

Participant 4 said that the Canadian government had made inquiries with Israel regarding influence operations around the war in Gaza, and that the G7's Rapid Response Mechanism ("RRM") was investigating allegations regarding the spread of anti-Muslim influence operations. Participant 4 cited reporting by *Haaretz* and the *New York Times* as the source of this information, and asked why the Canadian Security Intelligence Service ("CSIS") did not disclose any information about this disinformation campaign to Canadians. Participant 4 expressed the view that CSIS is ideologically biased and predisposed to view influence activities of Western allies such as Israel to be positive, whereas non-Western states are perceived as nefarious actors.

Participant 5

Participant 5 described their excitement at 6 years old for the first day of school, but that day was the first day of Saddam Hussein's invasion of Iran [in September 1980]. Participant 5 said that MEK-fueled civil unrest added to the anxiety, stating that the MEK declared war against the new Iranian government and that the terror MEK created was primarily in the capital city of Tehran while the war was mainly fought on the border between Iran and Iraq. Participant 5 described parents running scared to the school during recess to get their children after the MEK dropped pamphlets warning residents to stay home because the MEK was going to blow up the Iranian Parliament building, which was close to Participant 5's school.

Participant 5 said that the MEK ran a terror campaign, spreading disinformation and actively recruiting young members who were disillusioned with the monarchy and drawn towards the MEK's Marxist ideology. Participant 5 said that the MEK recruited some of their young cousins, and brainwashed them. Participant 5 said their families had unsuccessfully tried to convince their cousins to leave the MEK. Eventually, those cousins were arrested and executed by the Iranian government shortly thereafter; one was shot in the head.

Participant 5 said that MEK leaders fled Iran, leaving their young recruits behind to face the consequences. Participant 5 stated that the MEK joined forces with Saddam Hussein [Iraq's president at the time], fighting against their own country. Participant 5

said that MEK fighters carried out major offensives involving multiple thousands of fighters in the hopes of toppling the Iranian government. Participant 5 said that one of their young relatives, who had just been accepted into medical school, was killed during those operations.

Participant 5 said that they immigrated to Canada in 2008 and their memories of these traumas faded. Participant 5 said that at the time, MEK was designated as a terrorist organization in Canada and the US.

Participant 5 stated that the MEK was subsequently removed from the US State Department's terrorist list in 2012. Participant 5 said that the US Secretary of State invoked the closing of Camp Ashraf in Baghdad [the MEK's previous headquarters] to justify that change and the MEK's public renunciation of violence, while acknowledging continuing concerns about the MEK and its treatment of its members. Participant 5 referred to the disclosure by two senior US officials of the MEK's role in the assassination of an Iranian nuclear scientist as proof that the MEK was still engaging in violent and terrorist conduct.

Participant 5 described themselves as an Iranian Canadian who has witnessed the brutality of the MEK over the years, and stated they are concerned about growing ties between Canada and the MEK, referencing the acceptance of gifts and trips by Canadian elected officials.

Participant 6

Participant 6 explained that, while they obtained their master's degree more than 28 years ago in Iran, they did not pass the Iranian ideological selection process and were forced to wait about 20 years before starting their doctorate in Canada. Participant 6 said that, unlike the treatment they faced in Iran, they have faced no discrimination in Canada.

Participant 6 spoke about the impacts of silencing voices in society, particularly by one side of the Iranian Canadian community. Participant 6 quoted John Stuart Mill,

“If any opinion is compelled to silence, that opinion may, for aught we can certainly know, be true. To deny this is to assume our own infallibility. Though the silenced opinion be an error, it may, and very commonly does, contain a portion of truth; and since the general or prevailing opinion on any subject is rarely or never the whole truth, it is only by the collision of adverse opinions that the remainder of the truth has any chance of being supplied.”

in support of the proposition that the diversity of opinion and dissention is important in every society. Participant 6 stated that while opinions some seek to silence may be held in error, there may still be aspects of truth in such opinions.

Participant 6 stated that while some U.S. political ideologies favor rapprochement with Iran, perhaps to prevent its alignment with Russia and China, others support applying maximum pressure to force Iran to meet U.S. demands. Participant 6 said that some Iranian American contractors of the US government do not tolerate diverse opinions in Canadian society. Therefore, Participant 6 stated that these individuals’ attempt to impose the political ideology of a specific U.S. faction on Iranian Canadians is improper.

Participant 6 noted that Canada is only one of two NATO country members that does not have diplomatic relations with Iran. Participant 6 explained that they do not support the view that an absence of a diplomatic relationship between Canada and Iran will achieve the optimum result for Canada’s national interest.

Participant 6 identified a key element of debate within the Iranian Canadian community and the Canadian society more generally – whether Iranian Canadians are better served by distancing from or resuming relations with Iran, noting that opinions on this question within the community are divided. Participant 6 said that some people believe that the strategy of the other 30 members of NATO [the North Atlantic Treaty Organization] who have relations with Iran, like the Obama administration’s approach, would lead to democratization, moderation and peace in the Middle East. Participant 6 said that these people believe that the existence of diplomatic relations with Iran would increase Canada’s soft power and would maximize Canada’s national interests politically, economically, and strategically. Participant 6 expressed that while the ICC

advocates for peace, dialogue, and collaboration between Canada and other nations, particularly Iran, they have witnessed a process of interference and pressure to convert this advocacy institution into another political organization fighting for a confrontational approach toward Iran. Participant 6 shared their view that silencing the opinions of Canadians advocating for peace is not productive. Participant 6 provided some examples of activities carried out by foreign linked or foreign funded actors.

Finally, Participant 6 mentioned that if baseless allegations regarding the ICC had any truth, they should have been pursued through other channels. They affirmed that the ICC was a cross-cultural not-for-profit, non-partisan, non-governmental, and non-religious organization which advocates for peace and seeks to enable members of the Iranian Canadian community to cooperate with and contribute to the larger Canadian society.

Participant 7

Participant 7, who described themselves as a naturalized citizen of Canada, began by clarifying that the information they would be sharing at the meeting was their views as opposed to the views of the ICC. Participant 7 mentioned that they had been the subject of intimidation since they joined the ICC, due to the ICC's anti-war positions.

Participant 7 opposes the distinction between foreign influence and foreign interference on the basis that foreign influence describes activities carried out by Canada's allies, whereas foreign interference describes activities carried out by so-called foreign malicious actors. Participant 7 stated that in their opinion, the categories of Canadian allies and oppressive states are not mutually exclusive.

Participant 7 expressed the view that the Commission should investigate the influence activities carried out by the US and Israel, noting that Israel has been accused of genocide in the International Criminal Court, and that the US has systematically stood alongside Israel. Participant 7 noted that Canada has exhibited similar behavior towards protesters and has expressed support for Israel despite its war crimes. Participant 7 asked how Canada can justify making a distinction between friendly and oppressive states in such dire circumstances.

Participant 7 described their own experiences with foreign interference as an Iranian Canadian without access to an Iranian embassy, explaining that they must engage with and communicate documents to the Pakistani embassy in the US when they want to travel to Iran. Participant 7 described the US as having an aggressive attitude towards Iran. Participant 7 recounted receiving their documents back from the Pakistani embassy in the US by mail and realizing that the envelope containing them had been opened. Participant 7 investigated and found that the mail carrier had rerouted the package through a longer path. Participant 7 felt demeaned to have this experience with their personal documents, viewed it as an act of intimidation and explained that they were aware of at least one other individual who had a similar experience.

Participant 7 described themselves as an immigrant who has never felt fully welcomed into Canadian society and explained that the closure of the Iranian embassy made them feel like a second-class citizen. Participant 7 feels that Canada should provide them with protection.

Participant 7 expressed the view that one must fall in the ranks to be classified as the right kind of foreigner, including refraining from exercising freedom of speech and other rights, so as to avoid legal trouble that could further delay the processing of their immigration cases. Participant 7 stated that Muslims may avoid becoming politically active to avoid drawing attention to themselves, and that organizations do the same.

Participant 7 stated that Iranian Canadians who express views that do not fall in line with the dominant narrative face harassment and doxing.

Participant 7 described surveillance at protests against the war in Gaza, including people with multiple and professional cameras focusing on individuals. Participant 7 described witnessing a protestor being approached by a woman who described herself as a documentary filmmaker who repeatedly asked for that person's name while refusing to give her own.

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 there is a strong need for strict transparency around Canadian MPs accepting gifts from foreign non-governmental organizations like the MEK.

Participant 1 also expressed the need for the acceptance of a diversity of opinions on divisive topics.

Participant 2

Participant 2 stated that Canada's intelligence agencies and Global Affairs Canada need to be more involved in combatting transnational repression.

Participant 2 suggested that a dedicated office be created and made available to assist Canadians who find themselves the target of disinformation.

Participant 2 stated that Global Affairs Canada needs to pro-actively engage other countries to counter disinformation and interference efforts. Participant 2 said that this engagement to deter disinformation against Canadians should be done both with allies and adversaries.

Participant 2 stated that companies that participate in disinformation and foreign interference operations against Canadians should be sanctioned, named and shamed by the Canadian government.

Participant 2 said that the MEK should be investigated, and that disclosure of its financial and organizational ties should be made, especially funding provided to Canadian organizations involved in public discourse.

Participant 2 said that witnesses who testify before Parliamentary committees should be required to disclose their financial ties with foreign state and non-state organizations.

Participant 2 said that political leadership and federal public service should step up to protect Canadians falsely accused of dual loyalty and ties with foreign governments.

Participant 3

Participant 3 stated that it is crucial to clarify the rationale behind the laws on foreign interference, explaining their understanding that if someone wants to prioritize the interests of a foreign country before Canada, they must register as a foreign agent.

Participant 3 supports aggressively intensifying political oversight of lobbying in Canada.

Participant 4

Participant 4 cited Iranian Canadian factions that have engaged in discrediting other Iranian Canadians through allegations of dual loyalty and ties with Iran, using bots and online narratives. Participant 4 suggested that the sources of financing of such groups should be investigated. Participant 4 stated that media outlets, particularly those media outlets funded with public money, should disclose any ties with foreign state and non-state actors.

Participant 4 is in favor of banning political organizations and non-state organizations from funding travel for and providing gifts to Canadian politicians.

Participant 4 stated that online harassment must be addressed.

Participant 4 said that Canada must increase its scrutiny of its allies, particularly the US and Israel, stating that they should not be given a free pass. Participant 4 noted that Canada interferes in the politics of other states, and thus has little credibility when complaining about interference in its own affairs. Participant 4 said that Canada may encourage interference by other states through the sanctions it imposes. Participant 4 noted that under international law, Taiwan forms part of China, and said that China rightly feels that Canada and the US are going against international order.

Participant 5

Participant 5 stated that concerns about human rights violations and nuclear violations may be valid, but such concerns do not justify Canada aligning with the MEK, which does not share Canada's values.

Participant 6

Participant 6 stated that the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission ("**CRTC**") should regulate the presence and activities of foreign journalists in Canada, citing a journalist who unsuccessfully tried to interfere in the ICC's elections. Participant 6 noted that the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation ("**CBC**") referred to this journalist as a "dissident" but did not disclose the journalist's links with foreign funding and stated that may be an example of interference.

Participant 7

Participant 7 highlighted the importance of freedom of speech and freedom to protest. They deplored online harassment and doxing, whose authors are difficult to identify, and which impact individuals' ability to exercise their freedoms.

Participant 7 said security and support should be provided to members of diaspora communities who voice diverse opinions.