



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 consultation meeting organized with the assistance of the Iranian Justice Collective ("**IJC**"). This is a summary of the information shared at this 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 spoke about the need to hide their advocacy and activism work from their loved ones, particularly their loved ones living in the Islamic Republic of Iran (“Iran”), in order to protect them from retaliation by the Iranian regime.
- Certain attendees described steps they took to protect their loved ones from such retaliation, including cutting off contact and requiring loved ones to delete all the attendees’ contact information before travelling to Iran.
- Certain attendees described receiving threats over the phone and via email, including violent death threats and threats of sexual violence. Certain participants said that threats were relayed to them through loved ones living in Iran.
- Certain attendees described Iranian Canadians being detained upon visiting Iran. Certain attendees said that Iranian Canadians are pressured to report back on the activities of other Iranian Canadians to the Iranian regime.
- Certain attendees described the self-perpetuating fear that runs through the Iranian Canadian community, explaining that people who feel unsafe will not engage with Canada’s democratic institutions and processes out of fear of the consequences.
- Certain attendees discussed financial crimes including embezzlement and money laundering, referencing real estate transactions in Vancouver and the excessive number of money exchange offices in Toronto.
- Certain participants spoke about the use of mosques as centers for intelligence gathering in Canada.

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 they have been actively involved in activism and advocacy with the IJC, and in two Canadian election campaigns. Participant 1 also collaborated with a United Nations fact finding mission on human rights abuse in Iran.

Participant 1 said that they have not disclosed their activism to their loved ones in Iran in order to protect them. Participant 1 said that they have blocked their loved ones on social media for the same reason, explaining that when their Instagram account was public, one of their close relatives received threats which led them to ask Participant 1 to take down their social media account.

Participant 1 said that another of their loved ones who lives in Iran took a short trip to Canada. Participant 1 said that their loved one received a phone call after returning to Iran seeking the details of Participant 1's activism and activities in Canada. While Participant 1's loved one could not provide answers because they did not have the requested information due to Participant 1's decision to keep their activities secret as described above, that individual was told to tell Participant 1 that their activities are known by the Iranian regime and they cannot hide them. Participant 1's loved one was told that Participant 1 will be found and made to pay for their activism. Another of Participant 1's loved ones living in Iran was asked when Participant 1 would be returning to Iran and was told to tell Participant 1 to return to Iran to receive a message.

Participant 1 said that they reported these threats to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police ("**RCMP**"). Participant 1 said that the RCMP met with them promptly, and that the RCMP followed up with them multiple times as Participant 1 travelled across the country in conjunction with political campaign work they were doing at the time.

Participant 1 said that, as part of their political campaign work, they received threats and strangers tracked their location. Participant 1 said that a political nominee they volunteered for also had their phone hacked and observed strangers' cars parked outside their house.

Participant 2: Mr. Siavosh Jalali

Mr. Jalali said that the Iranian regime engages in the following five kinds of direct intimidation:

- (1) In-person threats, including abduction and assassination threats. Mr. Jalali noted that media reporting indicates that the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (the “**IRGC**”) is in contact with hitmen in Canada and the United States for the purpose of killing dissidents. Mr. Jalali said that Iranian intelligence services and the Islamic regime are in direct contact with organized crime in Canada to hire people to go after targets.
- (2) Threats issued through phone calls and direct messages on social media. Mr. Jalali said that he has received death threats and threats of sexual violence over social media, which he has reported to the police.
- (3) Actions taken against dissidents when they visit Iran. Mr. Jalali provided an example of a well-known software programmer who was interrogated and imprisoned by the IRGC for seven days when they visited Iran. Mr. Jalali said that the dissident was released on the promise that they would report on fellow dissidents in Canada.
- (4) Harassment of dissidents' family members living in Iran.
- (5) Instilling fear and relying on the self-perpetuation of that fear. Mr. Jalali said that the majority of Iranian Canadian community members are affected by this element.

Mr. Jalali said that the above-noted tactics cause Iranian Canadians to self-censor, which includes limiting their participation in Canadian civic life. Mr. Jalali said that the Iranian regime is well aware of how to spread the fear that causes this chilling effect on the Iranian Canadian community. Mr. Jalali said that a community that feels unsafe will not engage with Canada’s democratic institutions and processes out of fear of the potential consequences.

Mr. Jalali said that when he gives an interview for the IJC or takes on a related public role, he avoids contact with his family for weeks. Mr. Jalali said that he has his loved ones travelling to Iran delete his contact details before they go.

Mr. Jalali said that during the first months of the Woman, Life, Freedom movement¹, the Iranian regime was faced with an unprecedented, united front from Iranian diaspora communities. Mr. Jalali said that the regime responded by intensifying its multi-pronged warfare against the Iranian diaspora. Mr. Jalali said that the Iranian regime has been recruiting agents in Canada. Mr. Jalali said that the Iranian Canadian community requires help from Canada's intelligence community to identify these individuals. Mr. Jalali said that these individuals are operating more overtly now and engage in threatening and provocative statements, with a goal of sending a message to the Iranian Canadian community: that dissidents in Canada are not beyond Iran's reach.

Mr. Jalali said there have been a series of cases of embezzlement and economic corruption to the benefit of the Iranian regime, and that some of the perpetrators are in Canada. Mr. Jalali said that the relatives of the main perpetrator in a recent case are in Montreal, and that people see this individual at parties.

Mr. Jalali said that Iranian Canadian community organizations and think tanks are being used to propagate the Iranian regime's ideology and agendas. Mr. Jalali said that some of these entities receive Canadian government funding.

Participant 3

Participant 3 said that an artist friend of theirs who lived in Iran faced pressure because their artistic endeavours were not aligned with the Iranian regime's artistic policies. Participant 3 said that their friend moved to Canada under self-imposed exile. Participant 3 said that when their friend returned to Iran to visit ailing loved ones, they were arrested and interrogated upon their arrival in Tehran and taken to an infamous prison. Participant 3 said that while their friend was under arrest they were shown a picture of themselves attending a peaceful protest in Canada denouncing the arrest of a fellow activist.

¹ The Woman, Life, Freedom movement is a pro-democracy, pro-women rights and anti-oppression movement that garnered global recognition following the death of Mahsa Amini at the hands of Iran's police forces.

Participant 3 said that their friend was sentenced to prison and was only released after international attention and pressure.

Participant 3 said that an Iranian Canadian attended certain Woman, Life, Freedom protests as a participant. Participant 3 said that one of this individual's loved ones living in Iran was taken aside and told that if the Canadian individual did not stop their activism, the loved one may lose their privilege to education in Iran. Participant 3 said that it is scary that this monitoring of the actions of Iranian Canadians in Canada is taking place on such a granular level.

Participant 3 said that these examples are part of a larger campaign of fear intended to influence the large Iranian Canadian community to refrain from engaging in civic, social, or political activities – even in Canadian politics. Participant 3 said that members of the community are not willing to put their families at risk, and that the level and kind of harassment and resulting discomfort their families may face is unpredictable. Participant 3 said that this fear stops people from participating in Canadian society. Participant 3 said that the Iranian regime's tactics have managed to silence a majority of the Iranian diaspora.

Participant 3 said that there are Iranian community organizations in Canada that support the Iranian regime. Participant 3 said that while agents of the regime in Canada have the right to express themselves, claims that they represent the Iranian Canadian community are false. Participant 3 said that people falsely holding themselves out as representatives of the Iranian Canadian community have met with Canadian politicians to advocate for policies beneficial to the Iranian regime, and that their efforts have been successful. Participant 3 said that an indicator that individuals are acting on behalf of the Iranian regime is where people have no full-time employment, instead focusing solely on advocating for the Iranian regime. Participant 3 said that this suggests these individuals have access to funds from the Iranian government or benefit from embezzled money.

Participant 3 said that smear campaigns are used to prevent people from participating in the Iranian Canadian community if they don't support the Iranian regime, including by accusing people of being agents of dissident groups such as the People's Mojahedin

Organization of Iran (“MEK”). Participant 3 said that simply being rumoured to be associated with such groups can lead to imprisonment or execution in Iran, which contributes to the silencing of the diaspora community members in Canada.

Participant 4: Mr. A. Afshin Jam

Mr. Afshin Jam said that he is a human rights activist and policy advisor.

Mr. Afshin Jam said that his photo has been shown on national television in Iran, where he was portrayed as opposing the Islamic revolution. Mr. Afshin Jam stated that he is not able to speak with his family members who live in Iran because their phones have been tapped. Mr. Afshin Jam said one such family member was rejected from a job interview because they were related to him.

Mr. Afshin Jam described providing assistance to an Iranian Canadian who was being pressured to cooperate with the IRGC by spying on Iranian Canadians, under threat to them and their family by being forced to give control of some of their real estate assets to the IRGC, after being detained while on a trip to Iran.

Mr. Afshin Jam said that mosques in Canada have become targets for infiltration by individuals who wish to interfere in Canadian affairs. Mr. Afshin Jam said that agents recruit unsuspecting devout individuals to gather intelligence. Mr. Afshin Jam said that similar practices have been seen in Germany, leading to the closure of more than 50 mosques and the expulsion of imams who were involved in years of intelligence gathering.

Mr. Afshin Jam said that systematic abuse in the streets are increasing in Canada. Mr. Afshin Jam said that these activities, which are funded by unknown sources, are intended to depress morale among community members and to demonstrate the regime’s influence. Mr. Afshin Jam said that these activities are breeding grounds for terrorism and other illegal activities.

Participant 5: Ms. Nazanin Afshin-Jam Mackay

Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay said that one of her close family members was arrested and tortured in the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran. Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay said her parents expected freedom and safety for their children when they immigrated to Canada.

Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay said that she is a human rights activist and advocate. Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay said that she has been very active in denouncing the atrocities committed by the Iranian regime. Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay said that she has remained non-partisan when it comes to Iran, and that Iranian Canadians have trusted her to deliver their positions to elected officials.

Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay said that Canada is known as a safe haven for Islamic regime officials and their families. Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay said that it is very traumatizing for Iranian Canadians to see officials from the Islamic regime in Canada. Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay provided examples, such as seeing a group of Iranian nuclear officials invited to the University of British Columbia and experiencing feelings of despair upon seeing the children of Iranian regime officials driving fancy cars around Vancouver. Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay said that she has been told that Iranian Canadian realtors work with Iranian regime officials to park their money in British Columbia.

Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay said that it is a known fact that the Iranian regime hires hitmen to do their dirty work, including killing and abducting activists in the United States.

Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay provided an example of an individual in a leadership role in Canada advocating for the lifting of sanctions against Iran after travelling to Iran. Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay said that there is an Iranian Canadian organization that regurgitates the talking points of the IRGC and the Islamic regime that receives Canadian government grants.

Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay described her experiences as an activist and advocate, explaining that her work comes with financial and emotional costs. Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay said that when she speaks at public events, she pans the room for danger and

suspicious individuals. Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay said her romantic partner of many years, an architect and land developer, was called and warned that if Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay did not stop her activism, his office and everyone in it would be targeted. Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay said that the website of her advocacy organization has been hacked. Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay said that multiple fake profiles of her have been made. Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay said that when she travelled to promote some of her work, she had to hire police protection. Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay said that when a loved one ran for political office online threats were made, pictures of their children were posted online, as was their home address. Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay said that they were forced to hire personal security for many months. Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay said that the source of those threats remains unknown. Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay said that she continues to receive threats, including from a person who has identified that they live within driving distance of her home.

Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay said that while these forces will not stop her activism, others have left Iran traumatized and are too afraid to speak out. Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay said that it is upsetting that Iranian Canadians do not feel safe to enjoy their freedom in Canada. Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay said that they are afraid because there have been so many stories about people being harassed, such as people speaking out and then the next day regime agents come to their families in Iran.

Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay noted that certain mosques and Iranian community centers hosted pro-Iranian regime activities and received funding from the Iranian regime. Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay also said that some community organizations that receive federal funding have been known to simply regurgitate Iranian regime talking points and act as mouthpieces.

Participant 6: Mr. Javad Soleimani

Mr. Soleimani said that he lost his life partner in the downing of flight PS 752, following which he began to criticize the Iranian regime and the IRGC. Mr. Soleimani said that he quickly returned to Canada after his partner's funeral, which the IRGC tried to hijack. Mr. Soleimani said that he then became a protected person at the recommendation of Canadian Security Intelligence Service (“**CSIS**”) and other Canadian officials. Mr.

Soleimani said that following the public disclosure of an Iranian plot to kidnap an Iranian American activist, CSIS contacted him to warn him of the kidnapping risk. Mr. Soleimani said he was told to maintain a low profile on social media.

Mr. Soleimani said that three months after the downing of flight PS 752, he was contacted by the security intelligence service in Iran, who told him to remove a social media post which criticized the Iranian government. Mr. Soleimani said that, when he refused to remove the post, the security intelligence service threatened Mr. Soleimani's family living in Iran. Mr. Soleimani said that requests by some individuals to leave Iran have been refused, and a judge in Iran told families that their loved ones in Canada who oppose the regime can be killed.

Mr. Soleimani said that the IRGC perpetrates threats in Iran and in Canada, stating that Iranian dissidents have been threatened in Canada and that their families in Iran have been contacted by Iranian officials. Mr. Soleimani noted that threats are also perpetrated on social media platforms. Mr. Soleimani said that this shows that Iranian regime agents actively monitor activists in Canada. Mr. Soleimani stated that there are members of a branch of the IRGC who freely work and study here in Canada.

Mr. Soleimani said that the Iranian regime has been actively promoting its agenda through mosques and community groups. Mr. Soleimani said this should be investigated. Mr. Soleimani said that it is clear that the regime sends mullahs to Canada to promote its regime in religious events.

Mr. Soleimani said that some Iranians who have come to Canada as political refugees are now supporting the IRGC and travelling to Iran. Mr. Soleimani said that when you become a protected person, your passport is seized. Mr. Soleimani wonders how these individuals are able to travel to Iran.

Mr. Soleimani said that there had been considerable hesitancy in Canada to list the IRGC as a terrorist organization. Mr. Soleimani said that individuals, including an MP, had been arguing that there were significant investments made in Canadian real estate and businesses, and that the designation would cause significant disruption.

Participant 7

Participant 7 said that their life partner has close family members that were victims of the Iranian regime. Participant 7 said that one of their loved ones who was kidnapped, tortured, imprisoned, and placed under house arrest, committed suicide. Participant 7 explained that they cannot return to Iran because of their vocal activism.

Participant 7 said that foreign interference in Canada is well known. Participant 7 said that Vancouver Hills is known to be a place where Islamic officials have stashed their money. Participant 7 said that they have raised the issue of Islamic regime officials' ties to Canada with Canadian officials and members of Parliament. Participant 7 said that they have observed systematic efforts to infiltrate community organizations and promote pro-regime narratives.

Participant 7 spoke about examples of former regime officials coming to Canada. Participant 7 said that a former Iranian police chief was seen in Richmond Hill, noting that a picture was taken of him in Canada. Participant 7 said that a former Iranian cabinet minister took a summer vacation in Montreal, noting that the Iranian Canadian community raised concerns once they learned about this.

Participant 7 said that the Iranian regime wants to exert influence in Canada because there is a large and well-educated Iranian diaspora in Canada. Participant 7 gave an example, noting that there were 80 members of the scientific community on flight PS 752 and stating that this example provides a sense of the contribution of the Iranian diaspora in Canada. Participant 7 said that the Iranian Canadian community, which is very dynamic, has also become a pillar of the Iranian opposition that is making a major impact. Participant 7 said that Canada has also become a safe haven for money laundering. Participant 7 said that the fact that there are hundreds of currency exchange offices in Toronto is an obvious indication that there are regime money laundering activities taking place in Canada.

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 Canada needs to implement more effective sanctions on individuals, including asset seizure, similar to the sanctions it has imposed on Russia.

Participant 1 said that a recent United Nations report confirms that Iran has committed crimes against humanity. Participant 1 said that, on this basis, Canada can use universal jurisdiction to prosecute such crimes.

Participant 1 said that an Iran desk should be established within Global Affairs Canada, with the goal of ensuring that individuals tied to the Iranian regime are not allowed to remain in Canada. Participant 1 suggested that this desk be staffed by trusted members of the Iranian community that have deep roots in the community.

Participant 2: Mr. Siavosh Jalali

Mr. Jalali said that the Iranian Canadian community needs to be protected so community members feel safe participating in civic life in Canada.

Mr. Jalali suggested implementing a hotline to allow victims to report foreign interference.

Mr. Jalali said that the Iranian Canadian community can help to set up this system.

Mr. Jalali said that Canadian politicians and officials need to understand the ties and affiliations of those they are receiving information from. Mr. Jalali said that the Canadian government has provided funding to organizations that are close to the Iranian regime.

Mr. Jalali described this as “jaw-dropping”.

Participant 3

Participant 3 said that the Iranian regime funds the activities of its agents and those working on its behalf through, among other routes, foreign currency exchange offices. Participant 3 said that large sums of money are coming into Canada unnoticed. Participant 3 said that a cross-agency taskforce should be created to monitor these activities in order to avoid the isolation or segmentation of information, ensuring that information is shared across agencies.

Participant 4: Mr. A. Afshin Jam

Mr. Afshin Jam said that there are Iranian regime sleeping cells in every country, ready to do harm against institutions.

Mr. Afshin Jam said that the screening and vetting that is part of Canada's immigration process should be enhanced.

Mr. Afshin Jam said money is being sent to Canada in smaller batches, below the reporting threshold, and goes undetected by the Canadian government. Mr. Afshin Jam said that the monitoring of money exchange offices should be strengthened, noting that the number of money exchange offices is absurd when compared to the size of the Iranian Canadian community.

Mr. Afshin Jam called for the strengthening of Magnitsky sanctions now that the IRGC is recognized as a terrorist entity. Mr. Afshin Jam said that the Canadian government should use this designation to act against the IRGC.

Mr. Afshin Jam said that public awareness and safe, confidential reporting mechanisms are needed for those who are victims of foreign interference. Mr. Afshin Jam said that this is very important because people are scared.

Mr. Afshin Jam said that real estate transactions are another route through which money is flowing undetected into Canada, noting that once the real estate is sold, the sale profits are "clean".

Mr. Afshin Jam said that a specialized task force should be established and staffed with experts in financial crime and immigration to allow them to collaborate.

Participant 5: Ms. Nazanin Afshin-Jam Mackay

Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay asked that the Commission include Iran on the list of countries explicitly named in the Commission's Terms of Reference.

Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay said that the Canadian government should implement a secure portal and hotline that members of the Iranian Canadian community can use to report tips to CSIS and the police. Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay said that many people do not know where to report such information or what to do with it.

Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay said that the Iranian Canadian community should be involved in solutions through in-person townhalls and meetings.

Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay said that police files that relate to influence by the Iranian regime in Canada should all be handed to agents that understand the intricacies of the Iranian Canadian community. Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay said that Global Affairs Canada should take the same approach.

Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay said that border agents require increased awareness and training. Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay suggested that the government employees should use a tool called "Faces of Crimes", which is a database documenting abuse by regime officials in Iran.

Ms. Afshin-Jam Mackay said that police enforcement agencies should work more closely with banks to combat money laundering.

Participant 6: Mr. Javad Soleimani

Mr. Soleimani said that Canada should designate the IRGC as a terrorist organization.

Mr. Soleimani said that some organizations working to further the interests of the regime receive funds from the Canadian government.

Mr. Soleimani said a top priority is building relationships with trusted members of the Iranian Canadian community.

Mr. Soleimani said that the Canadian public should be updated regularly on the steps that are being taken to mitigate foreign interference. Mr. Soleimani said that, for example, there was a public announcement that funding was being provided to investigate IRGC agents in Canada, but no news about progress or outcomes followed.

Mr. Soleimani said that protection services for those under threat because of their activism should be established. Mr. Soleimani said that these services should include providing technical and financial support, and helping those under threat to improve their cybersecurity practices in order to improve their resilience against cyberattacks carried out by the Iranian regime.

Mr. Soleimani said that harsher sanctions should be implemented against individuals linked to the regime.

Participant 7

Participant 7 expressed their hope that the Commission would officially name Iran as a foreign interference actor.

Participant 7 said that the Commission and Canadian authorities should stay in touch with credible representatives of the Iranian Canadian community.

Participant 7 said that the Canadian government should provide individuals targeted by foreign interference and transnational repression with a safe means to report to the authorities.

Participant 7 said that the Canadian government needs to take Iran's influence in Canadian politics, economics, and social life very seriously.

Participant 7 said that the numerous currency exchange offices in Toronto would be a good place to start investigating claims of money laundering.