



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 three individuals belonging to the Uyghur Canadian community, in a meeting facilitated by the Uyghur Right Advocacy Project ("**URAP**"). This is the summary of the information provided during the consultation 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 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

- The attendees are active members of the Uyghur Canadian community. Some of them have been outspoken critics of the People’s Republic of China (“**PRC**”). They described examples of foreign interference they said were attributable, directly or indirectly, to the PRC.
- The attendees noted that Canadian Uyghurs are the victims of various intimidation and repression tactics used by the PRC in attempts to silence them. More specifically, they provided examples including threats being made against their family members in East Turkistan¹, receiving harassing phone calls, being monitored and their electronic devices being hacked, amongst other incidents.
- Moreover, one attendee recounted being physically and verbally assaulted on multiple occasions as they were protesting in front of Chinese consular buildings.
- Another attendee described the lack of understanding from Canadian elected officials and government officials as to the PRC’s interference strategies in Canada. The attendee also described the widespread use of technologies owned by companies associated or collaborating with the PRC government.
- Certain attendees stressed the need to provide psychological and legal support to Uyghur Canadians victimized by transnational repression.
- Certain attendees expressed their desire for the Canadian government to engage with the issue of transnational repression, including through legislating and by prosecuting individuals perpetrating intimidation, harassment, and repression in Canada.
- Some attendees also mentioned their desire for the Canadian government to diplomatically and openly engage the PRC on the matters of foreign interference and transnational repression.
- Certain attendees raised the importance of community engagement by Canada’s

¹ **Note:** The region of East Turkistan is also known as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, and is located in the People’s Republic of China.

intelligence and law enforcement agencies. They noted that agencies should share more information pre-emptively with potential targets of transnational repression.

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 immigrated to Canada from East Turkistan in March 2006, and settled with their family in Vancouver where they practiced as a nurse. Participant 1 said that shortly after their arrival, in December 2006, their father called them from a police station located in their hometown where he was being held hostage by Chinese police. Participant 1 said that during this call they were asked to fax a copy of their Canadian permanent resident card and provide their address in Vancouver to the Chinese police. Participant 1 said that they felt they had no choice but to comply and that they provided the requested information. Participant 1 stated that they, and other members of the Uyghur community in Vancouver who had lived through the same experience, reported these incidents to their local police department, as well as to their local MP.

Participant 1 said that on September 28, 2019, they were helping to co-organize a large protest in front of the Chinese consulate in Vancouver, which gathered attendees from the Uyghur, Tibetan and Hong Kong communities, among others. Participant 1 said that after the multi-community protest concluded, they continued their peaceful protest alone, in front of a Chinese art exhibition. Participant 1 said that they were verbally abused, pushed and struck by Chinese attendees of the art exhibition. Participant 1 said that although they called their local police department, that police did not show up at the scene and that no actions were taken subsequently. Participant 1 recalled feeling defenseless and unprotected.

Participant 1 said that until their recent move to Edmonton, they held weekly protests

before the Chinese consulate in Vancouver, often alone or with members of their family. Participant 1 said that incidents of verbal abuse and intimidation during their protests were commonplace, with Chinese individuals often reminding them in a threatening way that they “had to think about their relatives in China”. Participant 1 further recalled one time when they were protesting alone at the consulate. Participant 1 said that a Chinese individual yelled, “I hope all your people [the Uyghurs] die” before spitting on them. Participant 1 said that they later provided a photo of the man to their local police department, who warned him that any further incidents would result in criminal prosecution.

Participant 1 said that they have experienced harassment in the form of phone calls or WhatsApp messages from Chinese-speaking individuals, originating from Canada and the PRC, as well as from Chinese law enforcement agents. Participant 1 said that these phone calls often concern their family members back in East Turkistan. Participant 1 said that they have also been the target of hacking. Participant 1 described one such instance in which they said that their cellphone, laptop and desktop were all hacked simultaneously. Participant 1 believes that their activism on behalf of the Uyghur community against the PRC and the Chinese Communist Party (“**CCP**”) is the main reason they are a target of transnational repression.

Participant 1 mentioned that during the 2021 federal general election, they received screenshots demonstrating attempts by Chinese businessmen based in Vancouver to influence Chinese voters by providing information as to who they should vote for, offering bus transport to polling stations, providing free meals and even remunerating them to go vote.

Participant 1 shared their opinion that the surveillance, monitoring and harassment of members of the Uyghur Canadian diaspora is unacceptable. Participant 1 shared the heavy toll that feeling unsafe and vulnerable as a Canadian in Canada has had on their mental and physical health. Participant 1 said that this reality adds to the anguish they feel for the plight of their family members back in East Turkistan, some of whom are missing, incarcerated in concentration camps, or have passed away.

Participant 2

Participant 2 offered a contextualization of the transnational repression faced by Uyghur Canadians, and the suffering caused by it. Participant 2 stated that the PRC's extraterritorial attempts at controlling and intimidating Uyghurs manifested in numerous ways, including restricting communications with family members in East Turkistan; sanctioning, detaining, harming or killing family members; repeatedly refusing visa applications to the PRC; restricting access to one's assets; exercising constant surveillance and monitoring of one's activities; and, harassment and intimidation campaigns. Participant 2 explained that these forces leave Uyghur Canadians feeling unable to participate in Canadian democratic institutions or to fully enjoy their freedoms and rights.

Participant 2 emphasized the prominent role played by the United Front Work Department ("**UFWD**"), a department of the CCP, in engaging in foreign interference and trying to influence the Uyghur diaspora in Canada. Participant 2 noted that the UFWD's budget was superior to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and that it had more influence than many ministries. According to Participant 2, alongside the Publicity Department and the Organization Department, the UFWD is amongst the most important organs of the CCP's structure. Participant 2 expressed frustration with what they perceive to be a lack of understanding in Canada about the UFWD and its interference activities. Participant 2 also expressed concern and frustration at the fact that Canadian elected officials, including MPs, have voiced their support for the UFWD in recent years.

Participant 2 said that PRC interference in Canada also manifests itself through widespread use of technologies owned by companies associated or collaborating with the PRC government and the CCP. Participant 2 criticized the use of Zoom by the Canadian Parliament and other federal institutions, referring to privacy breaches and allegations of information sharing practices with the PRC government. Participant 2 also referred to the cancellation of a procurement contract awarded by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police ("**RCMP**") to a company partially beneficially owned by the PRC government.

Participant 3

Participant 3 recounted their experience when they applied for a Chinese visa in February of 2017 to go visit their sick father in East Turkistan. Participant 3 said that they were interviewed for one hour by Chinese embassy employees who asked them to provide information on the last three generations of their family and made them sign various papers as part of their visa application process. Participant 3 said that their application was initially denied, but was subsequently granted in April of the same year, albeit after their partner was warned by embassy staff that they “should be careful”.

Participant 3 said that they took full cognizance of the decline of Uyghurs’ living conditions and of the increased repression by the Chinese state during their 2017 trip to East Turkistan. Participant 3 said that this led them to become a more serious advocate for Uyghurs, and even gave an interview to *Radio-Canada* [French counterpart of CBC] after returning to Ottawa. Participant 3 said that the Chinese embassy in Ottawa called their partner once more, reminding them to be careful.

Participant 3 stated that on multiple occasions they saw vehicles bearing Chinese diplomatic license plates at their place of work. Participant 3 explained that such attempts at intimidation make them question their safety and their advocacy work on behalf of Uyghurs. Participant 3 said that they are a frequent public speaker on Uyghurs’ rights, and stated that on several occasions, Chinese people have attended events in which they participated and asked threatening and intimidating questions. Participant 3 believes these individuals, much like Chinese counter-protesters at pro-Uyghur demonstrations they have attended, wish to silence them through intimidation.

Participant 3 said that they organized a seminar on the Uyghur genocide in the PRC in the context of their academic work at a Canadian university. Participant 3 recounted that internally, there were concerns that the seminar would be perceived as anti-PRC and racist towards Chinese people. Participant 3 shared their opinion that this narrative is effectively used by the CCP to stifle debate in academic circles, and in Canadian society more generally. Participant 3 said that they have witnessed similar narratives on social media platforms such as WeChat and TikTok being used to the

same effect. Participant 3 noted that these social media platforms are also used by the CCP to disseminate anti-Uyghur propaganda.

Participant 3 recounted recently meeting two young Uyghurs from East Turkistan who came to Canada to study. Participant 3 invited the Uyghur students to their home so that they could eat Uyghur food and share stories. Participant 3 said that once the students heard that Participant 3 was a Uyghur activist, they decided not to come. Participant 3 said that they have seen Uyghur students calling other Chinese students in Ottawa “comrades”. Participant 3 shared their opinion that these are examples of CCP and PRC influence on Canadian soil.

Participant 3 said that recently, a Uyghur friend based in Montreal shared that she would be stepping away from Uyghur advocacy work because her mother contacted her via WeChat. Participant 3 said their friend’s mother mentioned they were aware of her activities in Canada and asked her to remove her hijab and urged her to consider her family’s safety. Participant 3 described this as extremely significant given that, out of the approximately 2,000 Uyghur Canadians, there are only a limited number of Uyghur activists.

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 suggested that local law enforcement services should designate a dedicated point of contact for Uyghurs to report incidents of transnational repression. Participant 1 said that this would also improve Uyghur Canadian community engagement and the relationship between the community and law enforcement services.

Participant 1 noted the heavy psychological toll imposed on Uyghurs, described the

need for free or subsidized counseling and psychological support for Uyghur Canadians.

Participant 2

Participant 2 emphasized the need for the Commission to recognize that foreign interference exists at the institutional and individual level. Participant 2 said that institutional foreign interference takes the form of influence operations, and that foreign interference at an individual level is akin to transnational repression.

Participant 2 said that Canada should introduce a Canadian equivalent to the American *Transnational Repression Policy Act*, which was introduced before Congress in May 2023.

Participant 2 said that transnational repression actions should be criminalized to empower Canadian stakeholders against foreign actors acting on Canadian soil against Canadian citizens.

Participant 2 noted that law enforcement and intelligence agencies should share information with potential targets of transnational repression in a more proactive manner.

Participant 2 highlighted the importance of the role played by Canadian intelligence agencies in the fight against foreign interference. Participant 2 said that intelligence agencies should be empowered to recommend actions based upon the intelligence gathered, rather than the Canadian government being tasked to determine whether intelligence is actionable or not. Participant 2 said that given the risk posed by foreign interference to national security and the security of Canadians, the threshold for action on the basis of intelligence should be lowered.

Participant 2 said that the technology and surveillance companies that are contracted by the Canadian government and its institutions should be reviewed, and that contracts concluded with Chinese companies should be suspended.

Participant 3

Participant 3 stressed the importance of providing legal and psychological support to victims of transnational repression.

Participant 3 said that the Canadian government should diplomatically and openly engage the PRC on the matters of foreign interference. Participant 3 also reiterated the need for the Canadian government to mention at every possible occasion the unacceptable actions taken by the PRC against Uyghurs, Hong Kongers, Tibetans, Taiwanese, and other victims of Chinese repression.

Participant 3 said that the Canadian government should prioritize freeing Huseyin Celil, a Canadian citizen and Uyghur activist who has been imprisoned in the PRC for almost 20 years. Participant 3 said that liberation of the “Two Michaels” showed that it was possible to bring back Canadians who had been wrongly imprisoned in the PRC.