



Public Inquiry Into Foreign Interference in Federal
Electoral Processes and Democratic Institutions

Enquête publique sur l'ingérence étrangère dans les
processus électoraux et les institutions démocratiques
fédéraux

Public Hearing

Audience publique

**Commissioner / Commissaire
The Honourable / L'honorable
Marie-Josée Hogue**

**VOLUME 6
ENGLISH INTERPRETATION**

Held at:

Library and Archives Canada
Bambrick Room
395 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N4

Wednesday, March 27, 2024

Tenue à:

Bibliothèque et Archives Canada
Salle Bambrick
395, rue Wellington
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N4

Le mercredi 27 mars 2024

INTERNATIONAL REPORTING INC.

<https://www.transcription.tc/>

(800)899-0006

II Appearances / Comparutions

Commission Lead Counsel / Procureure en chef de la commission	Shantona Chaudhury
Commission Counsel / Avocat(e)s de la commission	Gordon Cameron Erin Dann Matthew Ferguson Hubert Forget Howard Krongold Hannah Lazare Jean-Philippe Mackay Kate McGrann Lynda Morgan Siobhan Morris Annie-Claude Poirier Gabriel Poliquin Natalia Rodriguez Guillaume Rondeau Nicolas Saint-Amour Daniel Sheppard Maia Tsurumi Leila Ghahhary Emily McBain-Ashfield Hamza Mohamadhossen
Commission Research Council / Conseil de la recherche de la commission	Geneviève Cartier Nomi Claire Lazar Lori Turnbull Leah West
Commission Senior Policy Advisors / Conseillers principaux en politiques de la commission	Paul Cavalluzzo Danielle Côté

III

Appearances / Comparutions

Commission Staff / Personnel de la commission	Annie Desgagné Casper Donovan Michael Tansey
Ukrainian Canadian Congress	Donald Bayne Jon Doody
Government of Canada	Gregory Tzemenakis Barney Brucker
Office of the Commissioner of Canada Elections	Christina Maheux Luc Boucher Nancy Miles
Human Rights Coalition	Hannah Taylor Sarah Teich
Russian Canadian Democratic Alliance	Mark Power Guillaume Sirois
Michael Chan	John Chapman Andy Chan
Han Dong	Mark Polley Emily Young Jeffrey Wang
Michael Chong	Gib van Ert Fraser Harland
Jenny Kwan	Sujit Choudhry Mani Kakkar

IV Appearances / Comparutions

Churchill Society

Malliha Wilson

The Pillar Society

Daniel Stanton

Democracy Watch

Wade Poziomka
Nick Papageorge

Canada's NDP

Lucy Watson

Conservative Party of Canada

Nando de Luca

Chinese Canadian Concern Group on
The Chinese Communist Party's
Human Rights Violations

Neil Chantler

Erin O'Toole

Thomas W. Jarmyn
Preston Lim

Senator Yuen Pau Woo

Yuen Pau Woo

V
Table of Contents / Table des matières

	PAGE
Opening Statement by/Déclaration d'ouverture par Ms. Shantona Chaudhury	11
Overview Report: Definitions by /Aperçu de rapport: Définitions par Me Jean-Philippe MacKay	17
Overview Report: Definitions by /Aperçu de rapport: Définitions par Ms. Siobhan Morris	20
Overview Report: Definitions by /Aperçu de rapport: Définitions par Me Jean-Philippe MacKay (cont'd/suite)	29
Presentation: Canada's Electoral Process by/Présentation: Processus électoral canadien par Mr. Daniel Sheppard	32
Presentation: Canada's Electoral Process by/Présentation: Processus électoral canadien par Me Hamza Mohamadhossen	39
Overview Report: Federal Entities by /Aperçu de rapport : Entités fédérales par Ms. Erin Dann	43
Overview Report: Federal Entities by /Aperçu de rapport : Entités fédérales par Me Hannah Lazare	46
Overview Report: Federal Entities by /Aperçu de rapport : Entités fédérales par Ms. Erin Dann(cont'd/suite)	50
Panel Discussion : Diaspora Experiences with Electoral Interference/Discussion des panélistes : Expériences Diaspora avec l'interférence électorale	57
Panel introduction by/Introduction des panélistes par Ms. Kate McGrann	57
Statement by/Déclaration par Dr. Hamed Esmailion	59
Statement by/Déclaration par Mr. Yuriy Novodvorskiy	72
Statement by/Déclaration par Mr. Mahmet Tohti	86
Statement by/Déclaration par Ms. Grace Dai Wollensak	109
Statement by/Déclaration par Mr. Jaskaran Sandhu	131
Statement by/Déclaration par Ms. Winnie Ng	154

VI

Table of Contents / Table des matières

	PAGE
Final Remarks by/Remarques finales par Mr. Jaskaran Sandhu	169
Final Remarks by/Remarques finales par Mr. Yuriy Novodvorskiy	170
Final Remarks by/Remarques finales par Ms. Grace Dai Wollensak	171
Final Remarks by/Remarques finales par Dr. Hamed Esmailion	173

Ottawa, Ontario

--- The hearing begins Wednesday, March 27, 2024 at 9:30 a.m.

THE REGISTRAR: Order, please.

This sitting of the Foreign Interference Commission is now in session. Commissioner Hogue is presiding,

The time is 9:30 a.m.

COMMISSIONER HOGUE: My name is Marie-Josée Hogue. Some of you already know me, and I have been appointed Commissioner to preside over the Commission's work and bring it to a successful conclusion supported, naturally -- assisted by a group of competent and seasoned professionals.

The Commission counsel team is led by Mrs. Shantona Chaudhury, who many of you have already met.

Wherever you are, I welcome you and thank you for your interest in the Commission's work. It speaks to the importance you ascribe to our democracy and our values.

After holding preliminary public hearings earlier this year on issues arising from our duty to maximize the degree of public transparency while protecting the confidentiality of national security information, the Commission now begins its public hearings on matters that are at the core of its mandate.

First we will examine and assess the foreign interference that may have occurred during the 2019 and 2021 general elections and, if so, the impact this interference may have had on their integrity. This aspect of our work is

1 crucial for better understanding the threats our democratic
2 processes may have been faced, which will be particularly
3 useful when it comes time to make recommendations to
4 reinforce the safeguarding of these same democratic
5 processes.

6 Next, we will review and assess, where
7 applicable, how the information about this foreign
8 interference flowed within the federal government during
9 these electoral periods and in the weeks that followed, as
10 well as what measures were taken in response to that
11 information.

12 This is also a crucial component of our work,
13 as it is not enough to identify threats. We must also
14 respond to them effectively.

15 The findings we will make from these hearings
16 will also be very useful when, in the later phase, the
17 Commission will analyze foreign interference in electoral
18 processes and democratic institutions more broadly as well as
19 the capacity of the government apparatus to detect and
20 counter it.

21 I am counting on all counsel to respect the
22 framework that the Commission has put in place and not to get
23 into what will be subject of the second part of this work.

24 During the preliminary hearings, we had the
25 opportunity to discuss at length the challenges of
26 reconciling the principles of openness and transparency that
27 characterize a Commission of Inquiry with the need to protect
28 Canada's national security interests. I think it is

1 appropriate to highlight some of the findings reached through
2 this exercise.

3 I am well aware that some people will feel
4 that too much information is being kept secret while others
5 may feel that too much information is being disclosed. I
6 would ask the public to remember that although it may be
7 difficult, if not impossible, to strike the perfect balance,
8 the Commission is constantly striving to maximize the
9 transparency of its work.

10 On the one hand, no one can reasonably
11 challenge the fact that the public and journalists who work
12 to inform the public have a vested interest in knowing
13 whether Canada's democratic process have been targeted by
14 foreign actors and whether their actions had an impact on the
15 election integrity.

16 The process adopted by this inquiry must,
17 therefore, be as transparent as possible and lead to a report
18 that can be reviewed, understood and weighed by the public.
19 Many have stressed this point, and I share this view.

20 On the other hand, it is clear that both the
21 government and the public clearly have a compelling interest
22 in preserving and protecting the confidentiality of
23 information, the disclosure of which could damage our
24 national interest and that a public inquiry that will reveal
25 highly sensitive information could, depending on the
26 circumstances, do more harm than good. Some witnesses have
27 explained why.

28 The lesson here is that if openness and

1 transparency are virtues, so is secrecy in certain
2 circumstances. Let me explain.

3 When secrecy shields information held by the
4 government, people often view it with some suspicion, yet it
5 is undeniable that there is a strong public interest in
6 maintaining at least some forms of government secrecy. The
7 preliminary hearings have shown, amongst other things, that
8 withholding certain types of information may be essential for
9 Canada to conduct activities vital to its national security
10 and to respect its international commitments.

11 The preliminary hearings have also revealed
12 that this is particularly true in the area of foreign
13 interference since sophisticated foreign state actors may be
14 engaged in collecting information about Canada and Canadian
15 citizens. We must be aware that any information disclosed
16 publicly in the course of this investigation will become
17 known not only to Canadians, but also to states and
18 organizations having interests adverse to Canada's interest.
19 This is a reality that the Commission must take into account.

20 In this context, information that could
21 reveal the sources of intelligence, methods of collection or
22 the targets of investigations is particularly sensitive. The
23 disclosure of such information to hostile actors could cause
24 serious harm both to Canadian citizens and to Canada as a
25 whole. It could degrade our ability to detect and respond to
26 foreign interference.

27 This is not to say that all national security
28 information is inherently secret or should be kept from the

1 public. Far from it. On the contrary, informing and
2 educating the public is of the utmost importance, as it will
3 enable them to recognize and better deal with attempts at
4 foreign interference. This increases resilience which, in
5 turn, reduces the impacts of foreign interference.

6 However, those who testified at the
7 preliminary hearings as well as the participants who made
8 submissions following them generally agree that at least some
9 information related to national security must be kept secret,
10 and this includes some information relevant to the
11 Commission's mandate.

12 I am certainly not the first Commissioner to
13 have to consider national security interests in the course of
14 a public inquiry, but there are few, if any, examples of an
15 inquiry whose mandate is as closely tied to state secrets as
16 this one.

17 Some witness evidence has also helped us
18 understand that there may be other reasons to justify secrecy
19 which must be weighed against the public interest and
20 transparency.

21 The first reason stems from concerns
22 expressed by members of certain diasporas communities and by
23 others who may be the targets of foreign interference
24 activities. People who are subject to transnational
25 repression by foreign regimes may have very real fears in
26 speaking publicly about their experiences and, as a result,
27 the Commission will likely have to offer some witnesses
28 protections that are at odds with fully open proceedings.

1 The second reason is the need to protect
2 ongoing criminal investigations or proceedings or any other
3 investigation. I am not referring to the present inquiry,
4 but to other potentially open investigations. Here again,
5 the necessity of following the investigation to conclude may
6 justify keeping some information confidential.

7 The Commission's Terms of Reference expressly
8 require it to carry out its duties in such a way as not to
9 jeopardize any ongoing criminal investigation or proceedings
10 or any other proceeding. Thus, throughout these hearings, I
11 will take all these interests into account and endeavour to
12 balance them fairly and effectively.

13 I want to emphasize that, up to now,
14 confidentiality related to national security issues has in no
15 way hindered my ability to search for the truth. The
16 Commission has had access to a large number of classified
17 documents in their entirety, meaning without the redaction
18 needed to protect national security. In fact,
19 confidentiality imperatives has so far not prevented us from
20 doing the work we have been tasked to do, but they do pose
21 real difficulties as I endeavour to keep the process
22 transparent and open.

23 The Commission must walk a very fine line in
24 its work. As such, the present public hearings following
25 other hearings that held to be held recently *in camera*.
26 Essentially, the Attorney General of Canada requested that
27 certain evidence be received in the absence of the
28 participants and the public since, in his view, it contained

1 information that will be detrimental to national security if
2 disclosed.

3 After hearing *in camera* the submissions from
4 counsel for the Attorney General, I concluded that I should
5 allow the request and agreed to receive the evidence via *in*
6 *camera* hearings. I issued a ruling to this effect, which can
7 be read on the Commission's website where it is published in
8 full.

9 The Commission recently held six days of *in*
10 *camera* hearings where evidence was led. As part of our
11 ongoing commitment to transparency, the Commission is
12 preparing summaries of these hearings held *in camera* which
13 will be produced in the course of the present public
14 hearings.

15 In addition, when I felt that some of the
16 information provided during these *in camera* hearings could be
17 made public without unduly jeopardizing national security and
18 that this information will be useful for the public to
19 understand what happened during the last two elections, I
20 asked Commission counsel to ensure that this information is
21 reintroduced in evidence at these public hearings.

22 The Commission is making and will continue to
23 make every effort to ensure that the public has access to as
24 much information as possible.

25 The Commission has opted for flexible rules
26 of evidence and procedure that I hope will enable it to
27 achieve some of its objectives, to search for the truth,
28 hearing different and sometimes divergent points of view,

1 adequately informing the public, protecting national security
2 and the personal safety of vulnerable persons.

3 As such, over the next few days you will see
4 that evidence will not always be led according to the rules
5 that generally apply in a court of law. In my view, the
6 usual rules, though essentially in other forums, would be too
7 rigid in the context of this Commission. Certain hostile
8 actors are likely to take an interest in some of those who
9 will testify, requiring protective measures to be put in
10 place, and many of the documents to be examined are
11 classified documents, preventing full disclosure and
12 compelling us to be creative in disclosing as much of their
13 content as possible.

14 The parties via their counsel have already
15 been informed of the applicable rules of evidence and Mrs.
16 Chaudhury will outline them in a few minutes.

17 I would like to underline that some witnesses
18 working in the intelligence services will not be identified
19 given some safety concerns. It is unusual for these
20 employees who are unknown to the public to testify publicly.

21 Commission counsel have asked them to do so,
22 but to avoid any risk to their security, I have allowed their
23 identity to be protected. They have agreed in that context.

24 That said, those who hold the highest
25 positions within the intelligence agencies will testify and
26 will be identified.

27 As I have already mentioned on a number of
28 occasions, the Commission must complete its work within a

1 tight timeframe, to say the least. As a result, the time
2 allotted to the parties to cross-examine witnesses is
3 necessarily limited. In the interest of fairness and equity,
4 the Commission has opted for a one-to-one rule, meaning that
5 the parties and intervenors to whom I have granted the right
6 to crosse-examination will collectively have the same amount
7 of time to cross-examine a witness as the Commission counsel
8 have had to examine that same witness.

9 The Commission will use its good judgment to
10 determine how this cross-examination time will be shared by
11 all the parties. However, I invite the parties and
12 intervenors concerned to work together to identify which of
13 them have the greatest interest in cross-examining a given
14 witness and allow them to agree on a different division of
15 labour.

16 The aim in doing so -- it's just a
17 suggestion, but the aim is to avoid a multitude of short,
18 superficial cross-examinations, favouring instead a small
19 number of more effective and useful ones, even if they are
20 longer. Of course, only the counsel for the participants can
21 ensure that this objective is achieved.

22 In working with Commission's counsel to
23 prepare for these hearings, I have realized that the
24 Commission must be able to count on the cooperation of all
25 participants to ensure transparency and maximize the
26 information provided to the public. I therefore appeal to
27 your creativity and your flexibility to help us juggle all
28 the interests at stake.

1 While it will ultimately be up to me to
2 determine whether our procedures strike the necessary balance
3 between the strong public interest in openness and
4 transparency and the need to protect national security and
5 the personal safety of certain persons, I am counting on all
6 of you to assist me in achieving this balance.

7 I now turn to what's on the menu for the next
8 coming days.

9 Today, after short presentations by
10 Commission counsel, we will be hearing the perspectives of
11 representatives from various diaspora communities who will
12 provide insights essential to our work. In a panel
13 discussion, they will give us a better understanding of
14 certain sociopolitical issues, and the way in which foreign
15 interference manifest itself towards some of their members.
16 In particular, they will share their experiences and what the
17 consequences have been.

18 We will then hear from some 40 witnesses,
19 including representatives of intelligence agencies; current
20 and former elected officials; political parties'
21 representatives; Elections Canada; the Office of the
22 Commissioner of Canada Elections; senior public servants;
23 Cabinet Ministers; and from the Prime Minister.

24 These witnesses will first be questioned by
25 Commission counsel. Then they will be cross-examined by all
26 or some of the participants' counsel, based on the agreed
27 allocation of time.

28 Counsel representing a witness will also have

1 the opportunity to examine this witness, and Commission
2 counsel will have the right to re-examine if they see fit.

3 Following these hearings, participants will
4 be invited to make submission. The time allotted for this
5 will be short, which is inevitable given the tight deadlines
6 imposed on the Commission, but it will, nevertheless, allow
7 everyone to share their point of view.

8 I would like to thank the participants and
9 their counsels who, dealing with strict time constraints
10 stemming from these same tight deadlines, have rolled up
11 their sleeves, and so far have shown remarkable availability.
12 These are demanding conditions for all concerned, but they
13 are justified by the importance of the subject matter and the
14 need to draw valuable conclusions and make recommendations as
15 quickly as possible.

16 Everyone here has shown a great willingness
17 to cooperate and to help rather than hinder the Commission.
18 This professionalism is a credit to you, counsel, and I thank
19 you.

20 I now give the floor to lead counsel,
21 Shaudhury.

22 Thank you.

23 **--- OPENING STATEMENT BY Ms. SHANTONA CHAUDHURY:**

24 **MS. CHAUDHURY:** Thank you, Commissioner.

25 Good morning. My name is Shantona Chaudhury,
26 and I am lead counsel to the Foreign Interference Commission.

27 [No interpretation]

28 I'm going to take the next few minutes to

1 outline what you can expect to see over the next weeks as
2 these hearings unfold. Let me begin by addressing the scope
3 of the hearing.

4 As the Commissioner explained, these hearings
5 and the Commissioner's first report, are about clauses
6 A(1) (A) and A(1) (B) of the Commission's Terms of Reference;
7 that is to say, allegations of foreign interference in the
8 2019 and 2021 general elections and their impact, as well as
9 information flow to senior decision-makers and actions taken
10 in response in the periods leading up to the elections and the
11 periods immediately following the elections. Thus, the
12 evidence that will be adduced in the coming weeks will
13 pertain specifically to these matters, and the examinations
14 of witnesses will likewise focus specifically on them.

15 Issues and evidence that don't fall squarely
16 within the parameters of the 2019 and 2021 general elections,
17 will be left to Stage 2 of the Commission's investigation.

18 As a reminder, Stage 2, which corresponds to
19 Clause A(1) (C) of the Commission's Terms of Reference, asks
20 the Commission to examine more broadly Canada's ability to
21 detect, deter, and counter foreign interference.

22 So what happens over the next few weeks
23 should really be seen as a step in the Commission's ongoing
24 investigation and work.

25 The first presentation will first give us a
26 number of key definitions concerning the terms of the
27 Commission, for example, what are the various definitions of
28 foreign interference, what does the expression "democratic

1 institution" entail as well as "democratic process".

2 The second presentation will give you an
3 overview of the Canadian electoral system so that the public
4 and participants can be familiarized with some of the
5 concepts that we will be discussing during the audience --
6 the hearings.

7 The third presentation will describe the
8 entities of the federal government that are involved in
9 issues of foreign interference. It will give us an overview
10 of the structure of Canada, the national security and
11 intelligence community, and also the electoral system of
12 Canada as well as other concepts that will be dealt with in
13 depth as evidence is adduced.

14 This afternoon, as indicated by the
15 Commissioner, we will be hearing a panel of representatives
16 from a number of community and diaspora groups and
17 communities. They will be giving us their experience with
18 foreign interference and the challenges that they've had to
19 deal with.

20 There are two things that we have to remember
21 about this panel. First of all, it will be a discussion
22 moderated by counsel for the Commission and not an
23 interrogation. The panelists will be sharing information to
24 help us put into context the work of the Commission. They
25 will not be called upon to testify on any specific facts.

26 As well, although the parties -- the lawyers
27 for the parties can suggest questions for the members of the
28 panel, there will be no cross-examination.

1 Secondly, the discussion with the panel will
2 deal with the experience of diaspora communities in general
3 and not specific federal election issues from the 2019 and
4 2021 elections, so it will be the only part of the hearings
5 that will not be specifically linked to Division A and B of
6 the terms. As the Commissioner mentioned, this will give us
7 more context and an overview so that we can help -- that will
8 be helpful for the Commission in its work.

9 So testimonies will begin tomorrow with the
10 first panel of witnesses from Elections Canada, followed by a
11 second panel of witnesses from the Office of the Commissioner
12 of Elections Canada.

13 The hearing will then resume after the Easter
14 long weekend next Tuesday, when we will hear from a panel of
15 political party representatives who were security cleared to
16 received briefings from intelligence agencies in the 2019 or
17 2021 elections, as well as individual witnesses.

18 Next Wednesday, we will hear from current and
19 former members of Parliament. The last five days of the
20 hearing will then consist of calling a number -- and when I
21 say "a number" I mean a large number -- of witnesses from the
22 federal government, including current and former Deputy
23 Ministers and other senior public officials from the Canadian
24 Security and Intelligence Service, CSIS; the Communications
25 Security Establishments, CSE; the RCMP; Global Affairs
26 Canada, GAC; Public Safety Canada, and the Privy Council
27 Office.

28 Notably, the Commission will be calling as a

1 panel the Critical Election Incident Public Protocol Panel,
2 commonly known as the panel of five, for both the 2019 and
3 the 2021 election, as well as key members of the Security and
4 Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force, commonly known
5 as the SITE Task Force, for each of those elections.

6 The Commission will also call a number of
7 Cabinet Ministers, representatives from the Prime Minister's
8 Office, and the Prime Minister.

9 As you can imagine, this will make for five
10 very busy hearing days, but with the cooperation of the
11 parties and their counsel, we will manage.

12 Let me now take a moment to explain some of
13 the particularities of how the Commission will be addressing
14 the issue of national security confidentiality within the
15 context of these hearings.

16 Those of you who participated in or watched
17 the Commission's preliminary National Security Hearings in
18 late January or early February will recall that most of the
19 information that has been produced to the Commission by the
20 Government of Canada is highly classified and, as the
21 Commissioner explained, the Commission is required by virtue
22 of its Terms of Reference and the law to prevent the
23 disclosure of information that would be potentially injurious
24 to national security in the course of its proceedings.

25 The Commission has therefore developed a
26 protocol that will apply when a question posed to a witness
27 would elicit information protected by national security
28 confidentiality. This has been shared with counsel for the

1 participants and I will share it with you now and hope that
2 you will forgive me the foray into legalese.

3 When a witness is asked a question and the
4 witness or their counsel object or advise that the question
5 cannot be answered in the public hearing for reasons of
6 national security confidentiality:

7 One. The witness or their counsel will make
8 a statement to the effect that the question can't be answered
9 on the public record for reasons of national security
10 confidentiality. No precise form of words will be required,
11 as long as the position is made clear.

12 Two. When such a statement is made, it will
13 be deemed to be A, a statement that the answer to the
14 question would disclose information that could be injurious
15 to the critical interests of Canada or its allies, national
16 defence, or national security, and B, an objection to the
17 question on those grounds.

18 Three. Subject only to ensuring that the
19 question is clearly recorded, counsel who asked the question
20 shall then move on to their next question.

21 Four. After the examinations of the
22 witnesses have been completed, the Commissioner will review
23 the matter to determine whether further investigation is
24 necessary and appropriate in order to obtain information that
25 would be responsive to the question or questions that were
26 objected to.

27 Five. If further investigation is conducted
28 and further information is obtained by the Commission, it

1 will be summarized or otherwise disclosed to the maximum
2 extent possible without injury to the interests identified in
3 the Commission's Terms of Reference.

4 This protocol will allow the hearings to
5 proceed smoothly, despite the challenges that arise, given
6 the nature of the information at issue.

7 So with that out of the way, we can now move
8 on to the more substantive and probably more interesting
9 parts of the hearing, starting with the introductory
10 presentations. Thank you.

11 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** [No interpretation]

12 **--- OVERVIEW REPORT: DEFINITIONS BY MR. JEAN-PHILIPPE**

13 **MacKAY:**

14 **MR. JEAN-PHILIPPE MacKAY:** I'm counsel for
15 the Commission, and today I'm in the company of Siobhan
16 Morris, who is going to share the podium for part of the
17 presentation on the first summary report entitled "Definition
18 of Key Terms in the Commission's Terms of Reference".

19 So before we begin the presentation per se --
20 yes, so the pointer is working. That's good.

21 So first of all, I'm going to be presenting
22 you an overview report. What does that mean? It is going to
23 give us some context for the hearings.

24 As the Commissioner and counsel Chaudhury
25 mentioned, we are dealing with tight deadlines and, in this
26 context, the Commission will use certain tools that will
27 allow it to manage a vast quantity of information without
28 having to call witnesses to introduce each piece of evidence

1 or information. In the past, inquiry commissions like this
2 one have developed a tool which is called the "Overview
3 Report" to bring forward vast quantities of information
4 necessary for its examination without having to call
5 witnesses for that purpose. The objective of this
6 information is to present information in a summarized form
7 with references to the original document.

8 So in the summary report that I'll be
9 presenting today that is available on the website of the
10 Commission, there are a series of notes that explain the
11 sources that were used by counsel for the Commission. The
12 same process was applied for the summary report that will be
13 presented by my colleagues further on. And the whole purpose
14 of this exercise, of course, is to shorten the proceedings,
15 or at least...

16 So for those of you who want to refer to the
17 rules, the Rules of Practice and Procedures, Rules 42 to 44
18 of the Commission that explain the process under which these
19 -- the overview report is produced. So this is the process
20 that we followed in this case and the counsel for the
21 Commission produced the reports, and the reports were shared
22 with the parties to obtain comments.

23 Some of the parties did share with the
24 Commission some of their comments. These comments are
25 precious and they're not necessarily integrated into the
26 reports themselves, but they do allow counsel for the
27 Commission to prepare and produce a report that is of higher
28 quality.

1 So once the reports are finalized and parties
2 have submitted their observations, we then produce the -- we
3 publish the report, as we have done today, and participants
4 and the Commissioner can then rely on the content of these
5 reports in the process of the hearing. Of course, these
6 reports are not necessarily exhaustive and it is possible for
7 parties, as for the counsel for the Commission, to complete
8 the reports by bringing forth further information during the
9 process of the hearings.

10 So the Commissioner is not bound -- the
11 report was produced by counsel for the Commission and so the
12 Commissioner is not held to limit herself to these reports.
13 She is free to choose the elements on which she is going to
14 rely to come to any examination or conclusion. And parties
15 may disagree with some of the aspects of the summary report
16 and they are free to complete the information or correct it
17 as they feel necessary during the course of the hearing.

18 So before I give it over to my colleague, Ms.
19 Morris, the presentation today is going to deal with the
20 definition of key terms in the Terms of Reference. These are
21 not exhaustive or comprehensive definitions. The intention
22 is to explore certain concepts that are fundamental to the
23 Terms of Reference of the Commission to allow us to better
24 understand the nature of the evidence and the information
25 that will be submitted over the next few weeks.

26 This evidence will be made public and will
27 deal with foreign interference and also the democratic
28 institutions and processes, and so is of public interest.

1 The Terms of Reference of the Commission I've
2 taken -- there are two extracts or excerpts of the Terms of
3 Reference and, as we can see, it's not necessarily limited to
4 Divisions A and B which bring us together today. When we
5 look at the whole of the Terms of Reference, we see mention
6 to foreign interference and democratic institutions in the
7 Terms of Reference themselves.

8 And I'm now going to invite Ms. Morris to
9 take the podium to continue the presentation and I will
10 resume afterwards.

11 **--- OVERVIEW REPORT: DEFINITIONS BY MS. SIOBHAN MORRIS:**

12 **MS. SIOBHAN MORRIS:** Good morning,
13 Commissioner.

14 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Good morning.

15 **MS. SIOBHAN MORRIS:** Good morning, everyone.
16 As my colleague stated, my name is Siobhan Morris and I am
17 Commission Counsel.

18 Today I'm going to walk us through various
19 definitions of foreign interference set out in the overview
20 report. These definitions come from various bodies,
21 including federal government departments and institutions
22 like Public Safety Canada or the Canadian Security
23 Intelligence Service. They also come from academia, Canadian
24 legislation, and parliamentary committees, and from
25 international sources.

26 I will begin by reviewing the definitions
27 coming from Federal Government set out in the first part of
28 the report. Then I will move on to discuss definitions from

1 legislation, as well as definitions from international
2 sources, before inviting my colleague to present on the
3 definitions of democratic processes and democratic
4 institutions.

5 At the outset, it's worth noting that the
6 primary elements of the foreign interference tend to be
7 consistent across definitions coming from the federal
8 government.

9 These elements are drawn from section 2 of
10 the *Canadian Security Intelligence Service Act*, which defines
11 threats to the security of Canada as including:

12 "...foreign influenced activities [that
13 are] within or relating to Canada
14 that are detrimental to the interests
15 of Canada and [that] are clandestine
16 or deceptive or involve a threat to
17 any person..."

18 These elements assist in distinguishing
19 foreign interference from other legitimate foreign influence
20 such as normal diplomatic conduct between countries.

21 And we can see these elements reflected in
22 the text of section 2 of the Act here. This is the
23 definition that CSIS uses in the ordinary course of its
24 activities.

25 Now, the *CSIS Act* does not directly define
26 foreign interference. However, public reports from CSIS
27 explain that the term "foreign influenced activities"
28 encompasses activities that can be viewed as foreign

1 interference.

2 According to these reports:

3 "Foreign interference involves
4 foreign states, or persons [or]
5 entities [acting] on their behalf,
6 attempting to covertly influence
7 decisions, events or outcomes [in
8 Canada] to better suit their
9 strategic interests. In many cases,
10 clandestine influence operations are
11 meant to deceptively influence
12 Government of Canada [decisions or]
13 policies, officials or democratic
14 processes in support of foreign
15 political agendas."

16 It should be noted that the *CSIS Act*
17 distinguishes foreign influenced activities from espionage,
18 which is defined separately in the same section.

19 The Communications Security Establishment,
20 which you have heard is Canada's national cryptologic agency,
21 defines foreign interference in a similar way to section 2 of
22 the *CSIS Act*, that specifies the activity is directed against
23 a democratic process and is used to advance strategic
24 objectives.

25 This definition is specific to CSE's focus on
26 cyber threats to Canada's democracy. Other federal
27 institutions may use a similar definition, but apply it
28 differently, depending on the context.

1 The National Security and Intelligence
2 Committee of Parliamentarians is a body composed of Members
3 from the House of Commons and Senate which reviews the
4 activities of the Government of Canada's National Security
5 and Intelligence Agencies.

6 The Committee's definition of foreign
7 interference is foreign state action meeting the same three
8 requirements of foreign influenced activities set out in the
9 *CSIS Act*.

10 According to the committee, foreign
11 interference activities can include:

12 "...using clandestine or deceptive
13 methods to influence or manipulate
14 Canadian immigrant communities,
15 [government officials, and] political
16 parties, [among other entities]."

17 The Independent Special Rapporteur on Foreign
18 Interference also defines foreign interference with reference
19 to those three elements set out in section 2 of the *CSIS Act*,
20 but specifies that foreign interference involves state or
21 state proxy action.

22 And for its part, Public Safety Canada
23 defines foreign interference as:

24 "...covert, deceptive and sometimes
25 threatening means [by foreign states]
26 to advance their own strategic
27 objectives, to the detriment of
28 Canada's national interests."

1 Once again, we see elements of both the CSE
2 and CSIS definitions here. Under this definition, examples
3 of foreign interference include threats, harassment, or
4 intimidation by foreign states or those acting on their
5 behalf against anyone in Canada, Canadian communities, or
6 their loved ones abroad.

7 It may also include attempting to interfere
8 in Canadian democratic institutions and processes such as
9 elections. It may include stealing Canadian intellectual
10 property, know-how, or imposing market conditions to gain an
11 economic advantage over Canada; or targeting officials at all
12 levels of government to influence public policy and decision
13 making in a way that is clandestine, deceptive, or
14 threatening.

15 On to some elections related bodies, the
16 Security and Intelligence Threats to Election Task Force,
17 also known as SITE, is an information sharing body designed
18 to help safeguard Canadian elections from foreign
19 interference.

20 The SITE definition of foreign interference
21 also involves the three elements from the *CSIS Act* definition
22 of foreign influenced activities, but specifies that:

23 “In the context of Canadian
24 [electoral processes], the objective
25 of [such] interference is to affect
26 electoral outcomes or [to] undermine
27 public confidence in Canadian
28 democratic institutions..”

1 Related to SITE, the Critical Elections
2 Incident Public Protocol is a mechanism for communicating
3 with Canadians during federal elections in the event of a
4 critical election incident.

5 A 2021 review of the Protocol notes that:

6 "...`interference' is not defined in
7 the Protocol [but] is generally
8 understood to mean involving oneself
9 in a situation where one's
10 involvement is not wanted or [...]
11 helpful."

12 For the Protocol, foreign interference
13 includes activities aimed at affecting the electoral process,
14 shaping narratives around strategic interests, reducing
15 public trust and democratic processes, decreasing social
16 cohesion, weakening confidence in leaders, lowering trust in
17 the media, and dividing international alliances.

18 Canada is also a part of the G7 Rapid
19 Response Mechanism, which is a coordination initiative among
20 G7 countries to identify and respond to foreign threats to
21 democracy.

22 The G7 RRM defines foreign interference as:

23 "...the attempt to covertly influence,
24 intimidate, manipulate, interfere,
25 corrupt or discredit individuals,
26 organizations, and governments [...] to
27 further the [views] of a foreign
28 country..."

1 In 2021, to capture constantly evolving
2 activities in the information environment by state actors and
3 their proxies, the G7 RRM focused on Foreign Information,
4 Manipulation, and Interference, termed FIMI. This term:

5 "...describes patterns of behaviour
6 that negatively impact or have the
7 potential to negatively impact
8 values, procedures and political
9 processes."

10 "It includes all tactics used to
11 manipulate information [...] and
12 encompasses activities conducted in
13 an intentional and coordinated manner
14 by a range of actors from state to
15 non-state, including proxies."

16 Foreign interference and certain types of
17 foreign influence also feature in Canadian legislation. The
18 overview report describes two pieces of legislation touching
19 on these concepts: the *Canada Elections Act*; and the *Security*
20 *of Information Act*.

21 The *Canada Elections Act* does not explicitly
22 define foreign interference, but it sets out various
23 prohibitions aimed at preventing foreign persons from
24 interfering or influencing Canadian electoral processes by
25 funding parties, candidates, electoral district associations,
26 or leadership and nomination contestants, from using a
27 broadcasting station outside of Canada to try and influence
28 the electoral process, from incurring expenses to promote or

1 oppose a candidate, a registered party, or a leader of a
2 registered party, and committing an offence under Canadian
3 law to influence the choice of an elector in a federal
4 election.

5 Meanwhile, subsection 20(1) of the *Security*
6 *of Information Act* makes foreign influence, threats, or
7 violence an offence. The offence is limited to circumstances
8 where someone uses threats or violence to cause a person to
9 commit an act that is meant to increase the capacity of a
10 foreign entity to harm Canadian interests or where the act is
11 reasonably likely to harm Canadian interests.

12 It is worth noting that this definition does
13 not encompass non-violent foreign interference, including
14 interference with democratic processes.

15 Finally, the overview report collects a
16 number of definitions set out by other countries and by the
17 European Union.

18 For example, Australia has enacted laws that
19 criminalize foreign interference and define it as an
20 activity:

21 "...by, or on behalf of, a foreign
22 power, [which] is coercive,
23 corrupting, deceptive or clandestine,
24 and contrary to Australia's
25 sovereignty, values and national
26 interests.

27 It involves [a] foreign [power]
28 trying to secretly and improperly

1 interfere in Australian society to
2 advance their strategic, political,
3 military, social or economic goals,
4 at [Australia's] expense."

5 The Australian definition predominately
6 targets interference in the political or government sphere,
7 or interference prejudicial to national security, rather than
8 interference with market processes or with individuals.

9 The United States Department of Homeland
10 Security defines foreign interference as:

11 "Malicious actions taken by foreign
12 governments or [...] actors designed to
13 sow discord, manipulate public
14 discourse, discredit the electoral
15 system, bias the development of
16 policy, or disrupt markets for the
17 purpose of undermining the interests
18 of the United States and its allies."

19 The Federal Bureau of Investigations
20 similarly describes foreign influence operations as:

21 "Covert actions by foreign
22 governments to spread disinformation,
23 sow discord, and ultimately undermine
24 confidence in our democratic
25 institutions and values." (As read)

26 For the European Union, a staff working
27 document has defined foreign interference as:

28 "Acts carried out by, or on behalf

1 of, a foreign state-level actor,
2 which are coercive, covert, deceptive
3 or corrupting, and contrary to the
4 sovereignty, values, and interests of
5 the European Union." (As read)

6 At this stage, I would like to invite
7 my colleague to speak on the definitions of democratic
8 institutions and democratic processes set out in the report.

9 Thank you.

10 --- OVERVIEW REPORT: DEFINITIONS BY MR. JEAN-PHILIPPE MacKAY

11 (cont' d) :

12 **MR. MacKAY:** Hello again.

13 My task is made easier by the fact that the
14 words [no interpretation] processes that are mentioned, as we
15 will see, they are assimilated to democratic institutions and
16 democratic processes so, of course, and that is the starting
17 point of this part of the presentation, Parliament and the
18 Executive Branch constitute, of course, a democratic
19 processes, democratic institution, and same can be said for
20 the electoral process.

21 Of course, the Commission is interested in
22 the point of view of the intelligence community on foreign
23 interference, but also the way that these agencies perceive
24 and describe these processes. So in the public reports of
25 CSIS that are published yearly, the service affirms that the
26 electoral process, whether it's out of the election period or
27 during, constitutes an institution and a democratic process.
28 From CSIS' point of view, the electoral process comprises the

1 following components, so elections at all three levels of
2 government, the politicians and the political parties as well
3 as the media.

4 When it comes to the Centre for Security, the
5 CSE in its first report on cyber threats in 2017 that they
6 refer to focuses on three aspects of the democratic process,
7 so elections, political parties and politicians, and the
8 media. And media have to be heard in the broad sense of the
9 word, so it's a notion that comprises conventional media as
10 well as social media.

11 More recently, in 2019, the CSE modified the
12 last part to speak of voters instead to focus more on the
13 target of the foreign interference rather than the means used
14 for the communication of some intelligence that can be
15 associated to some form of foreign interference. And so what
16 the CSE indicates in the 2019 report is that voters interact
17 with political parties, candidates and between themselves
18 through social media and traditional media, hence this
19 change.

20 The CSE adds that the threats on elections
21 are about preventing the voters to vote, changing the
22 results, stealing databases of voters and manipulate social
23 media and traditional media to change the political discourse
24 and affect credibility and trust, so those are potential
25 means described by the CSE.

26 On this question of the persons or entities
27 that could be targeted by foreign interference, the summary
28 report at paragraph 48 discusses the points of view, and here

1 I only have the acronym in English, the NSICOP, the
2 Parliamentary Committee on National Security and
3 Intelligence. It's hard enough to master the acronyms in one
4 language; try and know them in two languages. That's a very
5 difficult task.

6 But having said this, the Committee explains
7 that foreign interference is targeting elected
8 representatives, civil servants and the staff at every levels
9 of government, including Indigenous governments that are
10 included in this description. So under this angle, the
11 legislative power is included in democratic institutions.

12 So now, once again, we can see a series of
13 acronyms, but I will talk of SITE to talk about this working
14 group on the threats to security and intelligence around
15 elections, and about public protocol.

16 So according to this working group, SITE
17 working group, the electoral process in Canada is a
18 democratic institution and the examinations done of the
19 exercises for protocol in 2019 and 2021 explain that the
20 electoral process in Canada is a democratic institution. So
21 as I was saying, those are notions that are interchangeable
22 and describe the same reality.

23 The interesting aspect here is the electoral
24 ecosystem, that the electoral process is described as an
25 ecosystem in which a whole of components interact between
26 themselves. And in this ecosystem, we can find the voters,
27 political parties, academia and civil society, social media
28 platforms, media, Elections Canada and the Commissioner of

1 Canada Elections and security and intelligence agencies.

2 When it comes to the Special Rapporteur on
3 Foreign Interference, in the report that was produced in
4 2023, the special rapporteur underlines that the elections
5 per se and political parties are electoral -- are democratic
6 processes. They add that democratic institutions include
7 some government institutions, legislative assemblies or
8 organizations such as Elections Canada and the Commissioner
9 to Federal Elections.

10 And lastly, the Permanent Committee for
11 Access to Information and Privacy Commissioner and Ethics
12 includes our government policies and programs and democratic
13 institutions.

14 And to conclude, a note about what comes from
15 the Privy Council Office, Democratic Institutions Bureau.
16 The democratic institutions include the electoral process,
17 the formation of government, the separation of powers, the
18 House of Commons, the Senate and the Governor General.

19 So this concludes the first presentation
20 about the summary report, and I will now invite my colleague,
21 Mr. Sheppard, to take over.

22 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you, Mr. McKay,
23 Mrs. Morris.

24 **--- PRESENTATION: CANADA'S ELECTORAL PROCESS BY MR. DANIEL**
25 **SHEPPARD:**

26 **MR. DANIEL SHEPPARD:** Good morning, Madam
27 Commissioner.

28 The next presentation from Commission Counsel

1 is an overview of Canada's electoral process.

2 For the benefit of the parties and
3 participants, there is no overview report associated with
4 this presentation. So this does not, in and of itself, form
5 evidence before the Commission. Rather, the purpose of this
6 presentation is to ensure that participants, and perhaps more
7 importantly, member of the public are able to engage with the
8 work of the Commission with a common baseline understanding
9 of the democratic process.

10 I will be splitting my time today with my
11 colleague, Mr. Mohamadhossen, and we will be discussing
12 issues such as why it is that we hold elections in a
13 democracy, and the nature of free and fair elections; how
14 Canada's electoral map is established; the rules respecting
15 when elections are held; the role of different participants
16 in the electoral process; how candidates are chosen; the
17 electoral period itself; a brief introduction to the
18 political financing regime, and then a description of the
19 basic mechanics of election day from voting through to the
20 announcing of results.

21 So the most fundamental question we can ask
22 about the electoral process is why we have elections in the
23 first place, and the answer is that it is one of the core
24 defining elements of a vibrant democracy. It is what
25 distinguishes political orders like the one that exists in
26 Canada from other non-democratic states.

27 Elections serve a number of critical
28 functions. At a very practical level, it is the mechanism by

1 which individuals and communities select their political
2 representatives. Members of Parliament are elected, they
3 assemble in Parliament and perform critical functions like
4 scrutinizing legislation, voicing community concerns and
5 holding the government to account.

6 At a broader level, elections are the means
7 by which the community voices its political aspirations, its
8 views about how Canada should function and its hopes about
9 future change.

10 Throughout these proceedings, people will use
11 -- will make reference to the concept of free and fair
12 elections. After all, simply having an election, the mere
13 act of casting a ballot, is not in and of itself sufficient
14 to guarantee that vibrant democratic order that we all aspire
15 to. People who think about and discuss elections use the
16 concept of a free and fair election to describe the type of
17 electoral process that guarantees us a true democratic order.

18 It is a complicated and multi-faceted
19 concept. It involves narrow and broad concepts.

20 Some of the components to free and fair
21 elections include universal suffrage, that is to say, who is
22 allowed to vote, meaningful competition between political
23 parties, which is to say that electors have a genuine choice
24 in terms of who they wish to cast their ballots for.

25 It includes fair and transparent
26 administration of elections, which is to say that the rules
27 that govern the electoral process are fair, they are applied
28 in a fair manner, and they're applied in a way that is

1 transparent so that members of the public can be satisfied
2 that they have been applied fairly.

3 Security also forms a part of free and fair
4 elections. It describes the circumstances in which
5 individuals feel as though they are practically able to cast
6 a ballot in favour of their preferred candidate to express
7 their authentic political voice. Components of security can
8 include measures like ballot secrecy.

9 And underlying the notion of free and fair
10 elections is the concept that the rights established are
11 enforceable and are protected, that what we say about how we
12 run our elections, in fact, matches the reality of the
13 elections as they are administered.

14 I should note that even this definition that
15 I've described is a limited one. There are even broader ways
16 in which we can understand the necessary preconditions to
17 free and fair elections. Things like freedom of the press
18 can be understood to be a critical and necessary component of
19 a democratic order, albeit one that exists outside the strict
20 confines of the electoral process itself.

21 So I'd like to move to a different topic, and
22 that is how it is we divide up the electoral map. We speak
23 of having federal elections, but in a very real sense, we
24 have 338 elections that take place simultaneously.

25 Canada is divided into electoral districts,
26 more commonly known as "ridings", and the residents of each
27 of those districts elect their representative to Parliament.
28 How it is that we go about deciding on what those districts

1 are can be a somewhat complicated process, but boiled down to
2 its basics, three considerations inform how ridings are
3 drawn.

4 The first is the concept of voter equity or
5 parity. It is the idea that every elector's ballot should be
6 worth roughly the same as every other elector's. In practice
7 what this means is that the population of electoral districts
8 ought to be roughly equal. However, I say "roughly" because
9 there are other considerations that justify departures from
10 the principle of voter equity and parity.

11 Community of interest is the concept that
12 there can be groupings or communities that share certain
13 common aspirations, a certain stake in particular issues, and
14 that it may be appropriate to group such communities into
15 electoral districts so that they can jointly deliberate and
16 decide on who will be their representative.

17 Equally so, geography can play a significant
18 role in how electoral districts are formed. In a country as
19 large and diverse as Canada, there are portions of the
20 country that are very densely populated and other portions
21 sparsely populated. For practical reasons, it may be
22 difficult for a single representative to represent a very
23 broad geographic area, and on that basis we also see
24 departures from the equity or parity principle.

25 In practice, these principles play out
26 through an independent Boundaries Commission that is
27 established every 10 years following the census in order to
28 assess and determine whether electoral boundaries need to be

1 redrawn, and this is the result. As it stands now, this is
2 Canada's current electoral map and, indeed, the picture above
3 shows the results of the 2021 general election.

4 And it's important to recognize that the
5 amount of colour you see spread across this map is not
6 necessarily indicative of the actual results of the election.
7 What matters are the number of ridings which, as you can see,
8 vary dramatically. The size of a riding in northern
9 Saskatchewan is fundamentally different in size and scope
10 than a riding in downtown Toronto.

11 The next topic I'd like to discuss is the
12 timing of elections.

13 Historically, elections were held largely at
14 the discretion of the Crown and, in more modern times, at the
15 discretion of the government of the day. The Prime Minister,
16 who is the head of government, advises the Governor General,
17 who's the head of state, when an election ought to be held
18 and, as a matter of convention, the Governor General accepts
19 such advice and directs the Chief Electoral Officer to
20 prepare to administer an election.

21 Over time, however, legal restrictions or
22 rules have come into effect that constrain the discretion
23 about when elections can be held. Importantly, the *Charter*
24 *of Rights and Freedoms*, a component of the *Constitution of*
25 *Canada*, requires that elections be held at least every five
26 years. More modern legislation has further impacted how
27 elections are called.

28 Currently, elections exist under a fixed

1 election date system. The *Canada Elections Act* provides that
2 elections are to occur on the third Monday of every fourth
3 October.

4 However, it is important to note that due to
5 the nature of a parliamentary democracy, elections can occur
6 more frequently. And indeed, that explains why it is in this
7 inquiry we're looking into elections that took place in 2019
8 and then again in 2021.

9 The next thing I'd like to discuss are some
10 of the actors or participants in the electoral process. Many
11 different types of participants play a role in how elections
12 take place in this country. Electors, those who cast votes,
13 obviously play one of the most fundamental.

14 Today I'd like to discuss briefly the role of
15 two other types of actors: political parties and third
16 parties.

17 Political parties are registered entities
18 that exist to, amongst other things, contest elections. They
19 are the vehicle by which individuals who share a common set
20 of political commitments, beliefs, and aspirations can come
21 together and attempt to express their political voice through
22 contesting elections, trying to convince electors to cast
23 votes in favour of them, and ultimately through the
24 democratic process to gain and then wield political power.

25 In practice, political parties endorse
26 candidates, coordinate campaigns, and attempt to win as many
27 votes as possible.

28 Third parties are a different actor in the

1 political system, one that shares some characteristics with
2 political parties, but also important differences.

3 Third parties are essentially anyone other
4 than political parties, candidates, electoral district
5 associations, or other specific defined categories of
6 participants in the electoral process. These are independent
7 entities that try to influence the results of elections.
8 They too go and try to raise awareness about issues, convince
9 people to take particular positions on issues in elections,
10 and ultimately put forward their own community's voice as to
11 political questions and ideals about how Canada should run.

12 Examples of third parties include industry
13 associations, trade unions, community groups, and indeed,
14 individuals who choose to go out in the electoral process and
15 try to convince people on particular political topics.

16 With that, I'd like to turn the podium over
17 to Mr. Mohamadhossen, who will continue with the
18 presentation.

19 **--- PRESENTATION: CANADA'S ELECTORAL PROCESS BY MR. HAMZA**

20 **MOHAMADHOSEN:**

21 **MR. MOHAMADHOSEN:** Thank you, Daniel.

22 Hello, Madam Commissioner.

23 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Good morning.

24 **MR. MOHAMADHOSEN:** Hello, everyone.

25 So we'll continue the presentation by
26 discussing how candidates are chosen.

27 So elections and electoral regime, in a broad
28 sense, are regulated very strictly. This regulation also

1 applies to political parties. However, political parties do
2 have a large margin for manoeuvre for their internal affairs.

3 So political parties can decide whether they
4 want to organize nomination contests or simply nominate a
5 candidate. They can also choose the delay that will apply to
6 this process as long as it takes place 21 days before the
7 scheduled date for the election. Political parties can also
8 select their criteria that will apply to potential
9 candidates.

10 When it comes to financing, though,
11 nomination contests are held to strict rules. An individual
12 can present themselves as an independent candidate not
13 belonging to any existing political party.

14 Now, what is an election campaign period? So
15 the election -- the campaign period begins with the
16 dissolution of the Parliament until the day of the actual
17 election, so this is a period of 36 to 50 days when special
18 rules apply, especially in the area of political financing or
19 party financing.

20 So there is no meeting of the House or the
21 Senate and there's no organization that can hold a government
22 to account during this period, so the government is in a
23 transition period during the political -- the electoral
24 campaign.

25 This convention means that the government
26 must restrain its activities, limit them to current affairs,
27 avoid controversial issues and always work in the interests
28 of the public. No irreversible decision can be made during

1 this interim position.

2 During the electoral campaign, parties,
3 candidates and third parties will dispute the election and
4 seek to influence the public through the media, community
5 activities, debates and also door to door.

6 I'm now going to talk about the limits on
7 political contributions.

8 It is important to have rules in this respect
9 because, of course, elections do cost money, for example,
10 advertising for different parties, transportation, location,
11 leasing of office space and so forth. So the limits on
12 political contributions limit the way parties, candidates and
13 others can spend the funds at their disposal, and this regime
14 also puts a limit on the amount that can be contributed to
15 the party from the public.

16 An individual or a Canadian citizen -- only
17 Canadian citizens and residents can make a political
18 contribution and, then again, without overstepping the
19 ceiling of \$1,725. So this has to do with the -- this is a
20 contribution that can be given to each party, each candidate,
21 riding associations, nominated candidates or candidates that
22 are running for leadership of the party.

23 What happens on election day? This is the
24 day where polling stations open so that voters can cast their
25 vote. There are other means of voting than going to polling
26 stations. In other words, it is possible to vote in
27 anticipation by mail and using advances polls.

28 At the end of the voting day, polling

1 stations are closed and the results for each riding are
2 announced by media outlets as they receive updates from
3 Elections Canada agents in each poll. And in general, we are
4 in a position to know on election night who will be the
5 elected members of the parties in each riding and which party
6 will form the next government.

7 Of course, it's possible that there are
8 delays in the opening of the ballots.

9 Who can vote? To be able to vote, you must
10 be a Canadian citizen, have at least -- be 18 or more on the
11 day of the election and be able to provide ID to prove your
12 Canadian citizenship. There's no longer an obligation to be
13 a resident of Canada, which means that Canadian citizens
14 living abroad are authorized to vote despite -- no matter the
15 length of the time they've been away from Canada.

16 So how do we decide who wins? Our electoral
17 system is called the first past the post, or single member
18 plurality, and this means that each riding -- the election is
19 contested in each riding. Each voter will vote for one
20 candidate among the list of all the candidates for that
21 riding and the candidate with the most -- the highest number
22 of votes is declared the winner without necessarily having a
23 majority. And the party that has the greatest number of
24 ridings and, of course, of members, in other words, then gets
25 the right to form the next government.

26 So this brings us to the end of our overview
27 of the electoral system in Canada. Thank you.

28 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** I think that we've

1 arrived at the time to take a break, so we will make it a 15
2 or 20-minute pause.

3 **THE REGISTRAR:** Order, please.

4 This hearing is in recess until 11:10.

5 --- Upon recessing at 10:50 a.m.

6 --- Upon resuming at 11:13 a.m.

7 **THE REGISTRAR:** Order please.

8 This sitting of the Foreign Interference
9 Commission is back in session.

10 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** So I will invite the
11 next counsel. Maître Dann and Lazare.

12 **--- OVERVIEW REPORT: FEDERAL ENTITIES BY MS. ERIN DANN:**

13 **MS. ERIN DANN:** Thank you.

14 Good morning, Commissioner; good morning,
15 everyone.

16 In our next presentation, we'll review some
17 of the information contained in the overview report on
18 federal government entities involved in foreign interference
19 matters.

20 The content of our presentation today is not
21 evidence, the overview report, the written material in the
22 overview report is.

23 I forgot to mention but my name is Erin Dann,
24 and I'm one of the Commission counsel. I'm joined today by
25 Hannah Lazare, and we will together briefly review the
26 various government entities that play a role in relation to
27 potential foreign interference in federal democratic
28 processes and institutions, sort of a federal government 101.

1 We expect that throughout the hearings you
2 will hear about many of the institutions that are listed on
3 the screen. Our goal in the next half hour or so is to
4 provide a high-level description of the mandates, roles, and
5 interactions of these various entities and institutions.

6 We'll start with the Governor-in-Council.

7 The Governor-in-Council refers to the
8 Governor-General acting by, and with the advice of the King's
9 Privy Council for Canada.

10 The King's Privy Council is a -- in its
11 totality is a sort of ceremonial body that rarely meets
12 altogether. Its constitutional functions are performed by
13 Cabinet; Cabinet Ministers are members of the King's Privy
14 Council.

15 By constitutional convention, powers held by
16 the Governor-in-Council are exercised on the advice of
17 members of the King's Privy Council and Members of Cabinet.
18 Decisions of the Governor-in-Council are often formally
19 expressed through Orders in Council.

20 Next we turn to the Prime Minister, which as
21 you likely know is the head of government, and the leader of
22 the party that has the confidence of the House of Commons.
23 In almost all cases that is the party that was elected with
24 the largest number of Members of Parliament.

25 The Prime Minister selects members for
26 Cabinet, or perhaps more precisely, the Prime Minister makes
27 recommendations, and the members of Cabinet are formally
28 appointed by the Governor General.

1 The Cabinet is a political decision-making
2 body. Cabinet Ministers are usually elected members of the
3 House of Commons, and in particular, generally elected
4 members of the governing party. Cabinet is a forum for
5 Ministers to discuss which policies the government should
6 pursue, and how its priorities should be advanced. The Prime
7 Minister sets the agenda for Cabinet, and is the ultimate
8 decision maker.

9 Several Cabinet committees support the work
10 of Cabinet. The Prime Minister establishes their membership
11 and mandates, most decisions are made at the committee level,
12 although Cabinet must ratify these decisions.

13 The powers, duties, and functions of Cabinet
14 Ministers are set out in various legislation. They are also
15 derived from royal prerogative, and in addition, the Prime
16 Minister will provide to Ministers mandate letters. These
17 mandate letters outline the objectives the Prime Minister
18 wants each Minister to accomplish. They will also identify
19 pressing challenges for the various ministries.

20 All Cabinet Ministers swear an oath of
21 secrecy on joining the King's Privy Council -- excuse me, on
22 joining the King's Privy Council.

23 Cabinet secrecy requires Ministers and any
24 officials attending Cabinet meetings not to disclose the
25 substance of deliberations in Cabinet.

26 Ministers preside over various federal
27 departments, and we'll review a number of the federal
28 departments relevant to the Commission's work throughout this

1 presentation.

2 The -- while Ministers formally preside over
3 these various federal departments, the day-to-day operation
4 of the federal departments is carried out by officials who
5 report to the Deputy Minister. The Deputy Minister, in
6 contrast to the Minister, is a non-partisan position. These
7 are the most senior members of the public service. They are
8 not political staff.

9 We'll turn now to two offices that play a key
10 role in supporting the Prime Minister, Ministers, Cabinet,
11 and the Government. You'll hear about both of these offices
12 throughout the course of the Inquiry.

13 The Privy Council Office is part of the
14 public service, it's not a political office, provides non-
15 partisan advice.

16 The Prime Minister's Office, in contrast, is
17 made up of political staff who are not members of the public
18 service.

19 To go through these and further describe
20 these two offices, I'll hand the clicker over to Ms. Lazare.

21 **--- OVERVIEW REPORT: FEDERAL ENTITIES BY MS HANNAH LAZARE:**

22 **MS. HANNAH LAZARE:** ...the two offices, the
23 Privy Council Office and the PMO, or the Prime Minister's
24 Office.

25 So let's start with the Privy Council. As
26 my colleague explained, its role is to provide non-partisan
27 advice on matters of national and international importance.
28 And the Prime Minister's Office is composed of political

1 appointees. So the Privy Council Office is really the
2 organization at the head of the government, the civil
3 service.

4 The functions of the Privy Council Office, as
5 I said, involve providing non-partisan advice to the Cabinet
6 and its committees, ensure the implementation of government
7 policy and legislative agendas across federal departments and
8 agencies.

9 The Privy Council Office has many
10 secretariats. There is one for democratic institutions that
11 supports the Public Security Canada, so the -- and it is
12 responsible for monitoring democratic institutions and
13 protecting them by looking at monitoring disinformation. It
14 orchestrates a coordinated response to any threat to
15 democratic institutions in Canada.

16 One of the essential roles of the Privy
17 Council -- one of the secretariats is National Security and
18 Intelligence Advisor to the Prime Minister, so the NSIA
19 provides the Prime Minister and the Cabinet with intelligence
20 analysis and policy advice. It has two secretariats.
21 There's one for security and intelligence and there's the IA
22 secretariat, which has to do with the intelligence analysis.

23 Let's now look at the second office that
24 provides essential support to the Prime Minister, and that is
25 the Prime Minister's Office.

26 The Prime Minister's Office is composed of
27 political appointees and not civil servants, and so they're
28 very often referred to as "exempt staff" because they are not

1 part of the civil service and not subject to the rules of
2 neutrality and impartiality that behooves civil servants.

3 The PMO's Office supports the Prime Minister
4 in his functions. The Prime Minister's Office also works
5 with -- acts as a link between the activities of the
6 government and the decisions of the Prime Minister.

7 We now turn to Public Safety Canada.

8 It is responsible for issues of public
9 safety, national security and management of crises, so it is
10 a centralized forum for the coordination of interventions for
11 any national security issues such as foreign interference.
12 So it includes supervising of the -- of CSIS and RCMP.

13 CSIS is a civil agency -- civil intelligence
14 agency. The Director of CSIS is supported by the Deputy
15 Director of Operations and Deputy Director of Policies and
16 Strategic Partnerships.

17 The Deputy Director of Operations deals with
18 investigations on foreign interference incidents in Canada,
19 notably foreign interference in electoral process in
20 democratic institutions. The Deputy Director for Strategic
21 Priorities is responsible for strategic aspects of the
22 service. This has to do with the development of policies
23 that will allow CSIS to intervene in the event of foreign
24 interference activity.

25 The principal mandate of CSIS is to
26 investigate threats to the security of Canada and to counsel
27 the government on these issues. The *CSIS Act* determines
28 which activities can be investigated by CSIS and, as my

1 colleagues underscored, any issues that are of interest,
2 foreign activities that are prejudicial to the interests of
3 Canada and are of a clandestine character or constitute a
4 menace to or a threat to whoever.

5 So the role of CSIS is to gather information
6 on threats to Canadian national security on the basis of
7 section 12 of the *CSIS Act*, but under paragraph 12.1 it must
8 also take measures to reduce these threats in certain
9 circumstances.

10 I'm now going to talk about the
11 Communications Security Establishment.

12 This is the national cryptology service of
13 Canada. It provides the Government of Canada with cyber
14 security and information assurance. The chief of CSE heads
15 the agency under the Minister of National Defence and is
16 responsible for the operations of CSE. It is involved in
17 intercepting foreign communications to make sure that Canada
18 is aware of any activities that could pose a potential threat
19 to our security. It can engage in defensive or active cyber
20 operations if authorized.

21 The CSE assists federal law enforcement and
22 security agencies to protect our democratic institutions
23 against malicious activities. It helps CSIS and the RCMP in
24 their operations as well.

25 And now on to Global Affairs Canada. This is
26 a federal department whose role is to promote international
27 relationships with other countries.

28 So Global Affairs Canada is one of the

1 largest consumers of intelligence in the federal government.
2 Global Affairs Canada also produces specialized diplomatic
3 and open source reporting on foreign interference related
4 issues, and it also provides intelligence analysis.

5 It's important to note that Global Affairs
6 Canada houses the secretariat for the G7 rapid response
7 mechanism. So the rapid response mechanism for the G7
8 evaluates threats on democracy.

9 In Canada, this mechanism monitors the
10 environment using open source data to detect indications of
11 manipulations of information coming from foreign interests.

12 The RCMP, as you probably know, is the
13 national police of Canada and under the terms of the law on
14 the RCMP, it is charged with preventing and investigating
15 criminal activities linked to national security in Canada.

16 For this purpose, it can investigate criminal
17 activities targeting democratic institutions in Canada and
18 protect -- to protect the electoral process.

19 And I'm now going to give it over to my
20 colleague.

21 **--- OVERVIEW REPORT: FEDERAL ENTITIES BY MS. ERIN DANN**

22 **(cont'd):**

23 **MS. ERIN DANN:** We'll move, then, from the
24 RCMP to electoral officials.

25 Federal Elections, as we heard earlier this
26 morning, are governed by the *Canada Elections Act*, which
27 contains provisions that could be relevant to foreign
28 interference, including financing -- those about financing

1 rules, and also prohibitions against undue influence by
2 foreigners.

3 During the hearings, you'll hear about two
4 different electoral bodies, Elections Canada and the Office
5 of the Commissioner of Canada Elections. These two entities
6 have distinct mandates and carry out their work independently
7 from one another.

8 The Chief Electoral Officer heads Elections
9 Canada. The Chief Electoral Officer is an officer of
10 Parliament, directly responsible to Parliament itself and not
11 to the government.

12 Elections Canada administers federal
13 elections. The mandate of Elections Canada covers both
14 electoral operations; that is, running the election, and
15 regulatory compliance, ensuring others comply with electoral
16 rules such as third-party financing provisions.

17 Elections Canada works to ensure the
18 integrity of federal elections, that can include working to
19 identify and respond to misinformation or disinformation
20 about elections.

21 The Office of the Commissioner of Canada
22 Elections is headed by the Commissioner of Canada Elections.
23 The CCE is the independent officer who is responsible for
24 ensuring the *Canada Elections Act* is complied with and
25 enforced. The CCE is appointed by the Canada Elections
26 Officer after consulting with the Director of Public
27 Prosecutions of Canada.

28 Although the office of the Commissioner of

1 Canada Elections sits within the Office of the Chief
2 Electoral Officer -- now I'm getting my own -- I need my
3 acronym cheat sheet as well. So it sits within that body and
4 carries out its compliance and enforcement work independently
5 from Elections Canada.

6 The Commissioner of Canada Elections may
7 launch an investigation of their own initiative, or following
8 a complaint from the public, or a referral made by the Chief
9 Electoral Officer, or from another government department or
10 agency.

11 The Office of the Commissioner of Canada
12 Elections maintains a relationship and communications with a
13 range of security and intelligence partners, who we heard
14 about today, including CSIS and the RCMP. It may also
15 cooperate with the RCMP in conducting investigations.

16 We'll turn now to an entity that we've heard
17 about earlier this morning.

18 In January of 2019, the Minister of
19 Democratic Institution announced the government's plan to
20 protect Canada's democracy. That plan sets out four pillars:
21 First, enhancing citizen preparedness; second, improving
22 organizational readiness; third, combatting foreign
23 interference; and fourth, building a healthy information
24 ecosystem.

25 The Security and Intelligence Threats to
26 Elections Task Force was created as part of this plan. And
27 you will continue to hear of that task force being referred
28 to as SITE, or the SITE Task Force throughout these hearings.

1 The SITE Task Force has representatives from
2 CSE, the RCMP, GAC, and CSIS. Its role is to help safeguard
3 Canadian federal elections from foreign interference. It
4 does so by providing a point of engagement with the security
5 and intelligence community for government partners doing
6 related work; by reviewing and focusing intelligence
7 collection, assessment, and open-source analysis related to
8 foreign interference in a coordinated manner; providing
9 situational awareness for government partners, senior public
10 servants and other relevant partners; and promoting the use
11 of intelligence, assessment, and open-source information
12 analysis in the protection of electoral processes; there may
13 be sharing with partners, and where the respective mandates
14 of the individual entities that make up the SITE Task Force
15 take actions to mitigate particular threats.

16 Next we'll turn to the Critical Election
17 Incident Public Protocol, which we also heard about earlier
18 today. This was created in 2019. It is a mechanism for
19 senior public servants -- you'll hear them referred to as
20 "The panel" or "The panel of five" -- to communicate with
21 Canadians during an election if there is an incident that
22 threatens the integrity of a federal election.

23 The panel is made up of five senior public
24 servants: The Clerk of the Privy Council, the National
25 Security and Intelligence Advisor, which is the Prime
26 Minister, that is the NSIA; the Deputy Minister of Justice
27 and Deputy Attorney General; the Deputy Minister of Public
28 Safety, and finally the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs.

1 The panel considers issues of electoral -- or
2 of election interference generally, not just foreign
3 interference. The protocol is only initiated to respond to
4 incidents occurring during the caretaker period, the writ
5 period, which we heard about earlier this morning. It does
6 not cover incidents within Election Canada's responsibility.

7 The caretaker period, as we heard in an
8 earlier presentation, is the time between the dissolution of
9 Parliament and the election. During this period, the routine
10 business of government continues, but there is a convention
11 that more -- that other, more intensive decision-making
12 should wait until the new government is in place.

13 During this period, this caretaker period,
14 national security agencies provide regular briefings to the
15 panel. If informed of interference in a general election,
16 the panel will evaluate the incident or incidents and
17 consider all options to address those incidents or incident.

18 One of the tools available to the panel is to
19 make a public announcement or to ask an agency head to issue
20 a statement to the Canadian public if an incident or an
21 accumulation of incidents threaten Canada's ability to have a
22 free and fair election. This is what's described as the
23 panel's threshold.

24 And in making that consideration, the panel
25 considers, first, the degree to which the incident or
26 incidents undermine Canadians' ability to have a free and
27 fair election. Second, the potential of the incident or
28 incidents to undermine the credibility of the election. And

1 third, the degree of confidence officials have in the
2 intelligence or information about the incident of
3 interference.

4 The threshold for making a public statement
5 is high. After each general election, the protocol requires
6 an independent assessment of its implementation.

7 During election periods, an election security
8 architecture is established such that multiple departments
9 and agencies are able to ensure that intelligence and
10 information about possible foreign interference is gathered,
11 assessed and shared as rapidly as possible. The Election
12 Security Coordinating Committee, or ESCC, is a key component
13 of this architecture.

14 The committee can meet at the Deputy
15 Minister, Assistant Deputy Minister or Director-General
16 levels. It is co-chaired by the Privy Council Office, PCO,
17 and by Elections Canada. Its purpose is to help ensure a
18 coordinated approach among the security and intelligence
19 community, Elections Canada and the Commissioner of Canada
20 Elections.

21 Operational coordination between the ESCC,
22 the task force, the Panel of Five allows -- or the goal is to
23 allow key players to coordinate, assess and verify threat-
24 related information regarding potential interference
25 activities. I note that the ESCC meets -- also meets outside
26 of election periods.

27 Finally, there are a number of inter-
28 departmental standing committees of senior public servants

1 involved in coordinating responses to foreign interference.
2 These are comprised of national security operational and
3 policy committees that exist at the Deputy Minister,
4 Assistant Deputy Minister and Director-General levels. The
5 names of some of those committees are on the screen in front
6 of you and I will not read them all out.

7 This concludes our review of the federal
8 entities involved in matters of foreign interference. You
9 will be glad to know there is no quiz at the end of this
10 presentation and it is our last presentation this morning,
11 Commissioner.

12 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you very much.

13 You will have understood that it was all
14 about setting the stage in a way to allow some of us,
15 including some members of the public who are following the
16 Commission, to be able down the road to fully understand what
17 we're referring to. But we will have the benefit right away
18 this afternoon of delving right into the topic by having the
19 privilege of hearing about foreign interference directly from
20 some of these people who can be victims of it.

21 So we will be back at 1:00 p.m. and we will
22 be with our diaspora panel this afternoon.

23 Thank you.

24 **THE REGISTRAR:** Order, please.

25 This hearing is in recess until 1 o'clock
26 p.m.

27 --- Upon recessing at 11:43 a.m.

28 --- Upon resuming at 12:59 p.m.

1 **THE REGISTRAR:** Order please.

2 This sitting of the Foreign Interference
3 Commission is back in session.

4 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** So good afternoon. I'm
5 going to turn to the panel for the rest of the afternoon, so
6 just forgive me.

7 **--- PANEL DISCUSSION: DIASPORA EXPERIENCES WITH ELECTORAL**
8 **INTERFERENCE:**

9 **--- PANEL INTRODUCTION BY MS. KATE McGRANN:**

10 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** My name is Kate McGrann;
11 I'm a member of the Commission counsel team.

12 This afternoon's panel is representatives of
13 diaspora groups; they'll be sharing their experiences and
14 those of their communities to provide information and context
15 through the Commission's Stage 1 hearings.

16 I'll introduce our panellists, and then we'll
17 begin with today's panel presentations.

18 Dr. Hamed Esmaeilion is a novelist, dentist,
19 human rights activist, and Director and spokesperson for the
20 Association of Families of PS752 Victims. Flight PS752 was
21 shot down in the early morning of January 8th, 2020, three
22 minutes after taking off from Tehran's Imam Khomeini
23 International Airport, by at least two missiles -- pardon me;
24 two missiles of Iranian's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

25 The Association of Families of PS752 Victims
26 seeks to unite grieving families; keep the memories of the
27 passengers alive; and seek justice.

28 Yuriy Novodvorskiy is a long-time critic of

1 the Russian regime, and a Director and founding member of the
2 Russian Canadian Democratic Alliance. The Russian Canadian
3 Democratic Alliance seeks to unite the Russian community in
4 Canada and to advocate against the Russian Regime.

5 Jaskaran Sandhu is a lawyer and cofounder of
6 Baaz News, which is a news outlet of record for Sikh and
7 Punjabi diaspora communities. Mr. Sandhu has been actively
8 involved in the Sikh community, with a particular focus on
9 advocacy for the last 15 years, including as a board member
10 and Executive Director of the World Sikh Organization.

11 Mehmet Tohti is a Uyghur-Canadian activist,
12 the Executive Director of the Uyghur Rights Advocacy Project
13 and cofounder and former Vice-President of the World Uyghur
14 Congress.

15 Grace Dai Wollensak is a National Director of
16 the Falun Dafa Association of Canada. She is the coauthor of
17 a report released by the Association, titled, *Foreign*
18 *Interference and Oppression of Falun Gong in Canada*. This
19 report details the instances of oppression experienced by
20 Falun Gong at the hands of foreign state actors of the
21 People's Republic of China.

22 She's also a member of the Canadian Coalition
23 on Human Rights in China, an initiative led by Amnesty
24 International. She's advocated for the human rights of Falun
25 Gong practitioners since 1999, and acts as a government media
26 contact on behalf of the Falun Gong community in Canada.

27 Unfortunately, Mr. Cheuk Kwan is prevented
28 from joining us today by unexpected circumstances.

1 Fortunately for us, we are instead joined by Ms. Winnie Ng,
2 who is a long-time advocate for the Chinese-Canadian
3 community, and, among other things, serves as co-chair of the
4 Toronto Association for Democracy in China.

5 With those impressive introductions out of
6 the way, turn to our first panellist, Dr. Esmaeilion.

7 Would you please describe your community or
8 communities?

9 **--- STATEMENT BY DR. HAMED ESMAEILION:**

10 **DR. HAMED ESMAEILION:** Thank you very much.

11 On behalf of the Association of Families of
12 Flight PS752 Victims, I want to thank the Madam Commissioner
13 and her team for their efforts in this all-important
14 endeavour and giving me the opportunity to offer my
15 testimony.

16 Like many in the Chinese and Russian and
17 Indian communities, several hundred thousand Iranians have
18 made Canada their home. They're deeply concerned by the
19 increasing threat posed to Canadian democracy, our civil
20 society, and the communities who strive to participate in the
21 cultural mosaic that makes this country so special.

22 I would like to first start by emphasizing to
23 this Commission the urgent importance of officially include
24 Islamic Republic of Iran in the terms of events in the
25 mandate of this Commission. But this inclusion, this
26 Commission will be able to garner the cooperation and input
27 of other security, diplomatic, and intelligence organizations
28 in order to reach a more accurate and comprehensive view of

1 the extent of the threat the Islamic regime poses to Canadian
2 society and the Iranian-Canadian community.

3 As we all know, Iran is fundamentally a
4 diverse, multiethnic society with people of different faiths
5 and ethnicities making up the rich cultural tapestry of
6 Iran's national identity.

7 The first immigrants from Iran are reported
8 to have arrived in Canada in 1901. By 1979, the Iranian
9 community in Canada was no more than a few thousand scattered
10 around the country. In aftermath of the revolution and
11 Islamic takeover of the government, the Iranian community in
12 Canada has grown exponentially. Current estimates indicate
13 that there are over 400,000 Iranians residing in Canada with
14 a high concentration of Iranian-Canadians in Ontario.

15 While initially most Iranians are refugees
16 that fled the brutal repression and persecution of the
17 Islamic Republic regime over the past four decades, Iranian
18 residents of Canada include students, academics,
19 entrepreneurs, and skilled workers from all walks of life.

20 The Islamic regime has not been oblivious to
21 these facts, and since the 1980s, the Islamic regime has
22 focused on Canada for various reasons, including, among
23 others, Canada's vicinity to the United States and the
24 opportunities they may seek in the political and clandestine
25 agenda.

26 In the aftermath of what became known as the
27 Woman, Life, Freedom uprising in September 2022 that was
28 sparked by the brutal murder of Mahsa Jina Amini, Iranian-

1 Canadians made history by coming together in the largest
2 gathering in a political rally organized by my association
3 and other activists in Toronto. On October 1st, 2022, over
4 50,000 people came together in Richmond Hill to express their
5 solidarity with the brave young men and women in Iran and
6 their opposition to the brutal Islamic regime in Iran.

7 While the majority of Iranians who have
8 immigrated to Canada are secular, they have not demonstrated
9 a clear tendency to organize around ideological or partisan
10 institutions. Despite the growing number of immigrants from
11 Iran, engagement in the Canadian democratic institutions has
12 been sporadic at best, with only a handful of Iranians
13 finding their way into provincial or federal political
14 positions. Ontario has had a few MPPs and provincial
15 ministers from among Iranian Canadians, and so far only two
16 MPs have reached the federal Parliament. We are yet to have
17 any ministers in the federal government from members of our
18 community.

19 Behind the political arena, Iranians have
20 made remarkable progress in academia, business, arts and
21 culture, medicine, and many other fields in Canada. This,
22 unfortunately, has brought Canada and the Iranian community
23 in this country squarely in the crosshairs of the Islamic
24 regime and its nefarious plan to not only cause division and
25 mayhem in the Iranian-Canadian community but to also disrupt
26 the Canadian political system in an effort to peddle
27 influence in favour of its policies. I will talk about these
28 in my next comments.

1 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Before I turn to our next
2 question, I have been reminded that I need to slow down so
3 that the translators who are assisting us can follow us and
4 translate along. So I'm reminding myself, and I'll also take
5 this moment to remind our panellists that if you could slow
6 down, that would be very useful.

7 Turning back to you, would you please
8 describe the forms of foreign interference that your
9 community experiences?

10 **DR. HAMED ESMAEILION:** To pick up where I
11 left off in this first part of my comments, I would like to
12 bring into focus how the Islamic regime in Iran seeks to
13 interfere in the political system of democratic countries
14 along the activity -- along its activities to disrupt and
15 divide the Iranian communities around the world.

16 As I noted earlier, the Islamic regime has
17 demonstrated to have a special interest in Canada, and as
18 such, it has made efforts on many levels to further its
19 agenda using the leverage it can muster through the Iranian
20 community in this country.

21 We can consider this effort in two main
22 categories: first, to interfere in Canadian political affairs
23 in service of the regime's interest; and second, to monitor
24 and survey the Iranian community in Canada and identify
25 political and civil rights activists who seek to promote
26 democracy in their home country, but also, to use its
27 operatives to intimidate, harass, sometimes even threaten
28 community members with the intent of blocking any dissent or

1 organized efforts to expose the corruption of the regime in
2 the international arena.

3 Furthermore, there are several reports that
4 have become public, exposing terrorist conspiracies
5 throughout Canada aimed at the United States that have been
6 planned, funded, and directed by the Islamic regime in Iran.

7 As an example, two years ago there was
8 reports about a kidnapping plot of a well-known reporter in
9 the United States and there were reports that there were
10 three Canadians on the list of the kidnappers, but we never
11 heard any report from our government or any report from
12 intelligence services who those people were and what was the
13 plan. There is an existing indictment about that in the
14 United States.

15 Let me give you other examples for each of
16 these main categories that merely represent the tip of a much
17 larger and nefarious iceberg of interference by the Islamic
18 regime in Canada.

19 If I go to my personal experiences, I've been
20 targeted for -- on social media. I've been targeted in
21 Canada if I go to some experiences, verbal attacks, physical
22 attacks. Like 20th of May last year was one of the examples.
23 I'm sure police has a report of that, and we had a gathering
24 in Toronto.

25 When I was in Toronto in last October in
26 downtown Toronto, there was a person approached me, he was on
27 a motorcycle, and then he stopped and he was searching his
28 pockets for something, and then I had to leave the area, go

1 back to the hotel, report to the police. And RCMP and
2 police, I'm sure they have the reports. They were only a few
3 examples.

4 Like, when I go to some names of the former
5 officials of the Islamic Republic, I can say that a former
6 Minister of Islamic Republic, when he was here, he threatened
7 me too. So I will get to that.

8 But once when I went to a grocery store, in
9 the spring of two years ago, when I went back, I had two flat
10 tires on one side. I reported that to the police and still I
11 don't know what RCMP did or what your police did, and I
12 didn't get any report back.

13 So about what they do in Iran. My parents,
14 they're banned to leave the country. My mother is 73 years
15 old. My father is 74. They planned to travel to Canada in
16 November to participate in the fourth anniversary of the
17 downing of Flight PS752. Their passport was confiscated and
18 now they know that they can't leave the country, at least for
19 six months. We don't know what happens after six months.

20 And I can say about other family members of
21 the victims in Iran, also they have been tortured, they have
22 been prisoned. And we have several reports supporting that
23 fact.

24 A very small minority of Iranians in Canada
25 are engaged directly or indirectly as either sympathizers or
26 sometimes even overt operatives of the Islamic regime. It's
27 a small minority, however, leverage is financial advantages
28 that mostly originate from inside Iran and political backing

1 advantages that -- political backing from the Islamic regime
2 to create institutions disguised as community advocacy
3 groups, media, social media, or even research institutes, but
4 effectively seek to undermine the majority of the community
5 that opposes the regime, as well as to meddle with the
6 influence Canadians or influence Canadian government and non-
7 government institutions in favour of the regime's agenda.

8 The level of sophistication of these plans is
9 highly disconcerting to our community and many of us are
10 making our best efforts to identify and expose these covert
11 and overt activities that we find highly dangerous and
12 disruptive. Hence the importance of including the Islamic
13 regime in the Terms of Reference of this Commission.

14 This small minority has demonstrated the
15 intent and capacity to cause division in the Iranian Canadian
16 community while creating an atmosphere of fear and
17 intimidation here in this country.

18 Many Iranians who participate in public
19 events, such as the massive October 1st rally, wore masks to
20 avoid being identified by the regime operatives. A
21 documentary that was made about Flight PS752 had to anonymize
22 many crew members in the final credits of the film because
23 they were in fear of persecution and threats by regime
24 operatives.

25 Another highly concerning example is a
26 multitude of revelations of the increasing number of Islamic
27 regime officials who have sought and been granted permanent
28 residency in Canada or got visas to come to Canada.

1 When I go to examples, we have the person,
2 Mahmoud Reza Khavari. He is a former banker and he was the
3 head of National Bank. He immigrated to Canada in 2011 and
4 he was involved in corruption. And I'm sure the Canadian
5 Government and the intelligence services, they have reports
6 about him.

7 We have Morteza Talaei. He was the former
8 Chief of Police of Tehran. He was seen in Richmond hill two
9 years ago working out in a gym. This is a person who was the
10 Chief of Police of Tehran at the time of killing Zahra
11 Kazemi. He was the Chief of Police who founded Morality
12 Police in Iran, the same organization who killed Mahsa Amini
13 and other innocent girls in Iran.

14 We have Hassan Ghazizadeh Hashemi, the former
15 Minister of the Islamic Regime that was seen vacationing in
16 Montreal, Canada last August.

17 I go to that threat right now. When I raised
18 the issue on Twitter and I wrote to our government, this man
19 had an interview with some media outlets inside Iran and he
20 said:

21 "When I come back to Iran, the
22 actions of Hamed Esmaeilion and the
23 foreign media will be retaliated."

24 (As read)

25 But he was free to walk in Montreal, go visit
26 Casa Loma in Toronto a day after, and finally he went back
27 without any consequences.

28 Now I know that he can't come back to Canada,

1 but we have concerns that how a former Minister of the
2 Islamic Regime can come to this country, threaten the
3 activists here, and just freely go back?

4 I'll go to another name. Son of the current
5 speaker of the Islamic Parliament in Iran, Es'hagh Ghalibaf.
6 He even initiated a lawsuit against the Canadian Government
7 to obtain a visa to come to this country. Hopefully -- you
8 know, I'm happy that we heard his visa finally got rejected
9 after the outcry of the community.

10 Another person is Iran's representative in
11 ICAO, International Civil Aviation Organization. He lives in
12 Montreal. Farhad Parvaresh. Not only because of denial and
13 his role after the downing of Flight PS752 in misinformation
14 campaigns, but this person had connections with Quds Force,
15 is the person who was the head of Iran Air for years, for
16 smuggling weapons to Syria with commercial airplanes. But
17 this person is in Montreal and he is representing the Islamic
18 Regime.

19 These are merely the high-profile names that
20 have been exposed and unfortunately indicate the severity and
21 the scale of this highly dangerous problem for Canada and the
22 Iranian Canadian community.

23 I would like to emphasize that these are not
24 benign attempts by regime officials to seek a better life in
25 Canada, but serious indicators of money laundering at best,
26 but also efforts to increase the presence and influence of
27 regime operatives in Canada.

28 I share our community's concerns that there

1 may be thousands of other lesser-known regime affiliates,
2 officials, and operatives, who have found their way to Canada
3 and the threat their presence poses to our society and
4 communities.

5 Last but not least, an example of how regime
6 operatives have breached the very depths of our democratic
7 institutions in order to interfere and have an influence.

8 Just recently, a member of the Iranian
9 community in Canada sought to run for as a member of the
10 federal Parliament. The intensity of the smear campaign
11 against him went far beyond the normal fervor of political
12 competition in Canada. We believe that this is indicative of
13 a much more sophisticated and multi-layered attempt by the
14 regime and its operatives to hinder the participation of
15 Iranians opposed to the regime in the Canadian democratic
16 institutions.

17 On the other hand, there are examples of
18 organized support for those who are known to be aligned with
19 the Islamic regime in Iran. There are many alarming reports
20 of a certain member of the federal Parliament to be
21 supporting regime sympathizers and even meeting with regime
22 officials and Parliamentarians in Canada.

23 Again, these are just the tip of the iceberg
24 that is visible to us, and we fear that these examples are
25 indicative of a much more serious and dangerous problem that
26 must be investigated and dealt with.

27 Let me end with another example. The Islamic
28 regime has a stranglehold on every aspect of social,

1 political, economic, cultural and civil life in Iran. The
2 sports is, of course, no exception. Every sport category is
3 closely monitored and influenced by various security,
4 intelligence, political and even military arms of the regime.

5 All international sporting events are
6 carefully orchestrated by the intelligence, propaganda and
7 military establishment of the Islamic regime. Every sport
8 team, most especially soccer teams, are accompanied by
9 multitude of those operatives who not only seek to direct and
10 monitor the athletes, but also disguise the state covert
11 operations under the guise of sporting events. For example,
12 the entourage of a given soccer team usually reaches over 50
13 individuals in number, but nearly one-third of those
14 individuals having no connections with the given sporting
15 events.

16 Shortly after the downing of flight PS752
17 where 177 innocent civilian lives, including that of my wife
18 and nine-year-old daughter, was taken, we heard rumours of a
19 so-called friendly soccer match that was planned to take
20 place between the Canadian and the Islamic Republic national
21 soccer teams. It was planned to be held in B.C. Place in
22 Vancouver.

23 Against the backdrop of the tragic murder of
24 so many Iranian Canadians, this was outrageous to us, the
25 families of the victims, but also to the community as a
26 whole. Given the lack of diplomatic relations between Canada
27 and the Islamic Republic regime, one wonders who was behind
28 the planning and execution of such an event.

1 Who were the liaisons on behalf of the
2 Islamic regime here in Canada? Who supported or sponsored
3 the event, and why? We were asking how were the visas for
4 the entourage being processed.

5 Ultimately, we believe that this was an
6 attempt to sports wash the criminality of the Islamic regime
7 and to bury the story of flight PS752.

8 Fortunately, the community came together and
9 posed not only serious questions surrounding this nefarious
10 plan, but also helped to put an end and cancel the event.
11 Again, this example demonstrates the level of sophistication
12 and nefariousness of the Islamic regime's scheme to influence
13 and meddle the community and political discourse in Canada.

14 Thank you.

15 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** The last question for now
16 is, would you please describe the impact that foreign
17 interference has had on your community?

18 **DR. HAMED ESMAILION:** Yeah. As I explained
19 before, I notice every time we go to rallies several members
20 of the community, they wear masks, sunglasses, hats to not be
21 identified.

22 There are reports that when they travel to
23 Iran, the cell phones get confiscated, they get persecuted,
24 interrogated. Their family members are under pressure. Even
25 we have had members who met Canadian Parliament members here
26 and their family members in Iran have been pressured or have
27 been interrogated.

28 So this is the least that I can say but, as I

1 said before, it doesn't let the members of the community to
2 get engaged in -- especially in political levels. We have
3 organizations here that they don't have any relations with
4 the civic organizations in the community, with the cultural
5 organizations in the community like Tirgan civic association,
6 civic organizations like us or even political members of the
7 community like our Parliament member, Mr. Ali Ehsassi, but
8 they are everywhere and they get funded by -- unfortunately,
9 by our governments.

10 We have reports of some organizations that
11 have been funded by Department of National Defence or
12 Canadian Armed Forces. And these are the questions on the
13 table, that who are these people and what are intelligence
14 services organizations they know about because the
15 community's fearful to ask and to act because we know that
16 they have endless financial resources and they can initiate
17 lawsuits against everyone.

18 Even now, when I'm testifying right now, I
19 have to be very careful because we are ordinary people and
20 it's not easy to fight with some organizations that they have
21 financial resources and they know people and they get the
22 best support not only from Iran, from other countries like
23 Russia, China, the government of Russia, government of China.
24 And I hope that this Commission will start to add Iran to the
25 terms of references.

26 One of the other things that I have to say,
27 when we go to Department of Justice in United States, we go
28 to website, there's several people that you see that have

1 been charged with foreign interference, but we don't see any
2 Iranian name in Canada that have been pursued by Department
3 of Justice.

4 Recently, there was a person, Salman Salmani.
5 He was the Deputy Minister of Interior Affairs in Iran. At
6 the time of flood in November in 2019, 1,500 people got
7 massacred in the streets of Iran and this person came to
8 Canada and got -- obtained a visa and he was here.

9 Like fortunately, the Canadian government,
10 they found him, but now they're deporting him instead of
11 putting him on a trial for crimes against humanity. This is
12 what the families of the victims have asked for several
13 months and our association is supporting, too.

14 When they see there's no consequences, I
15 mean, the community doesn't feel safe and they're worried.
16 And when these -- you know, these names that I mentioned,
17 when these terrible people are here in this country and when
18 they see that some organizations are very active, that's why
19 the community doesn't feel safe to participate in lots of
20 activities.

21 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Thank you very much.

22 We'll now turn to our next panelist, Mr.
23 Yuriy Novodvorskiy.

24 Mr. Novodvorskiy, would you please describe
25 your community or communities?

26 **--- STATEMENT BY/DÉCLARATION PAR MR. YURIY NOVODVORSKIY:**

27 **MR. YURIY NOVODVORSKIY:** Bonjour, and good
28 afternoon, everyone. Thank you for having me here.

1 My name is Yuriy Novodvorskiy, and I'm here
2 to represent the RCDA, the Russian Canadian Democratic
3 Alliance.

4 I was born in Russia, but for the most
5 several decades have lived first in the U.S. and now as a
6 permanent resident in Canada. I have been opposed to the
7 Russian regime for many years, but only became involved in
8 activism in 2022 following the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

9 And in September 2022, we connected with
10 other Russian activists across Canada in different cities to
11 create the RCDA, an organization based on the values of
12 democracy, human rights, anti-imperialism and, in particular,
13 opposite to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

14 I'd like to thank the Commission for giving
15 me an opportunity to appear here and allowing our
16 organization to participate in this step of the inquiry.

17 So to describe our community, it is very
18 multi-faceted. People have come over from Russia to Canada
19 at different stages of their life, some of them coming as
20 economic migrants, some of them as refugees, students, work
21 visas, people who work in different professions, including
22 information technology, entrepreneurs, medical professionals
23 of many different religions, and also many different -- of
24 many different geographic origins. People who, of course,
25 come from the major cities of Moscow, St. Petersburg, but
26 also I have met people at events who are from Siberia, from
27 the far east who themselves are from or who have relatives
28 from the ethnic republics that make up the Russian

1 federation.

2 And this expands into also people having very
3 different opinions across the political spectrum.

4 We have people, members who have been opposed
5 to the Russian regime for years or even decades, some people
6 who only began to realize the extent of atrocities committed
7 by the Russian government after they came to Canada and were
8 exposed to different sources of media. And unfortunately, of
9 course, there are still some people who support Putin and his
10 regime.

11 When we organize our events, we try to make
12 them as open as possible to reach as wide an audience of
13 Russian Canadians as possible. We have letter-writing events
14 to political prisoners in Russia, events and fundraisers to
15 support Ukraine and many events that are focused on
16 supporting dissidents in Russia, the LGBTQ movement and other
17 politically repressed groups as well as other cultural events
18 that correspond to our values.

19 One of the key points we'd like to emphasize
20 is that in its propaganda, Putin's regime tries to emphasize
21 that Russian society is a monolith supporting the politics of
22 the Russian government, the atrocities it is committing, and
23 that is not true. With all the conversations we have, we see
24 that Russians have many different opinions, Russian Canadians
25 especially, and they are not always able to voice these
26 opinions because they fear retribution or because, after
27 decades of being exposed to Russian media, they have
28 retreated into a sort of political apathy or unwillingness to

1 voice their opinions. And this was one of the obstacles that
2 we seek to overcome.

3 Even with people who support Putin's
4 politics, very often this is not active support. It could be
5 the result of somebody immigrating to Canada at a later stage
6 in life and they remain surrounded by Russian news and so
7 they are not aware that any sort of alternative organizations
8 or alternative news exists that provides a different
9 perspective from what Russian propaganda is telling them.

10 We try to make it our goal to connect with as
11 many Russian Canadians as possible and our goal is to show
12 that there's an alternative Russian position, one that is
13 against the politics of the Russian regime.

14 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Please describe the forms
15 of foreign interference that your community experiences.

16 **MR. YURIY NOVODVORSKIY:** Thank you.

17 So in general, we see foreign interference
18 happening in one of two forms. The first is disinformation
19 and news manipulation, and the second is direct and indirect
20 threats against members of the Russian Canadian community.

21 Disinformation and news manipulation, partly
22 true news stories or completely false news stories, they are
23 generally spread over social media or Russian news platforms
24 or alternative news media sites, but it takes different forms
25 depending on who the target audience is, whether it's the
26 Russian diaspora in Canada or the wider non-Russian Canadian
27 audience. So ---

28 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Just a question I have.

1 To the best of your knowledge, is there any
2 specific social media that are used for that or there's many
3 of them that are used?

4 **MR. YURIY NOVODVORSKIY:** So I would say that
5 the methods of the Russian government involve spreading the
6 message across as wide an array of communications channels as
7 possible, meaning you can find their messaging on all social
8 media platforms. But there are definitely some social media
9 platforms that are targeted more, that have more channels,
10 more fake accounts, things like that.

11 So for the Russian diaspora, the main focus,
12 especially for the younger population, they get a lot of
13 their news from Telegram news channels, also YouTube channels
14 and Russian TV over internet, especially for some of the
15 people who are older. And for the non-Russian audience, I
16 would say Telegram is probably less a factor. More people
17 there would get their news from YouTube, Twitter, Facebook
18 and now TikTok especially.

19 So when targeting the Russian diaspora, the
20 focus of the news manipulation is -- pushes either Russian
21 news stories, stories that paint the regime in a positive
22 light, and also blame the west for any problems that exist in
23 the world. And also, there's a focus on conspiracy theories
24 basically promoting false science.

25 The purpose of these stories is to have
26 people trust government less and put less faith into actual
27 journalism, doctors, scientists, basically anybody who
28 actually has area expertise with the goal of making them more

1 susceptible to Russian propaganda.

2 When targeting the wider Canadian non-Russian
3 audience, as I mentioned, the social media, Twitter, YouTube,
4 Instagram, TikTok now, the focus is on -- less on pushing
5 pro-Russian news up front and instead first it's to prepare
6 people and put them in the position when they are more
7 susceptible to pro-Russian positions.

8 The focus is generally on divisive issues,
9 divisive Canadian issues to undermine faith in democracy and
10 increase political polarization.

11 What happens then is when somebody is exposed
12 to news sources like this, and especially coming from many
13 different channels, it creates an atmosphere of believability
14 where they feel that this is a commonsense position, that
15 it's coming from many different angles because it does seem
16 to be coming from many different accounts, but the source for
17 all these is usually the same. It's either directly
18 controlled by the Russian government or it might be some
19 marginal source that has been promoted by the Russian
20 government. And what this does is it increases social
21 division and dysfunction.

22 Until recently, there have also been two
23 Russian TV channels that essentially were -- there was
24 "Russia Today", RT, which presented itself as partly
25 independent from the government, and Sputnik TV, which I
26 don't think even tried to present themselves as independent.
27 But in both cases, they were essentially mouthpieces of the
28 Russian regime.

1 They were both sanctioned or banned following
2 the Russian invasion of Ukraine, but I believe they might
3 still be available over the internet.

4 And the purpose of this misinformation that
5 is targeting non-Russian Canadian audience, the focus on
6 divisive issues, the reason why the Russian government is
7 trying to increase social division and dysfunction is because
8 it makes the entire society and government more dysfunctional
9 and less able to react in terms of crisis.

10 We saw this with some other governments when
11 the pandemic was occurring, with COVID, and now with -- when
12 it comes to Ukraine support, where instead of it being a
13 medical issue in some governments, it became a political
14 issue due to increased polarization. And the federal
15 government was not able to achieve an effective response to
16 the crisis.

17 With aid to Ukraine, we see some governments
18 where the majority of the population supports sending it to
19 Ukraine, the majority of politicians support sending it to
20 Ukraine. However, the government is not able to actually
21 reach any sort of decision or action because of the increased
22 dysfunction in the system. And this is partially a result of
23 Russian propaganda efforts.

24 Another reason why Russia focuses its
25 manipulation efforts to create social dysfunction is that
26 democratic states present an attractive alternative to the
27 state regime that Putin has implemented, a criminal and
28 corrupt regime. And when democratic states become more

1 dysfunctional, it allows Putin and his regime to point to
2 them and show that -- well, make the case that things are not
3 any better there and that, at least in Russia, you have some
4 semblance of stability.

5 Finally, the other reason is that, compared
6 to authoritarian systems, democratic states are, in many
7 ways, more resilient to corruption, which means that they are
8 more difficult for Putin's regime to control. And by
9 increasing polarization, increasing social divisions, it
10 leads society in a direction where corruption becomes more
11 possible.

12 Moving to the other major form of foreign
13 interference I mentioned, direct and indirect threats against
14 members of the Russian community, some of this is similar to
15 what Dr. Hamed Esmaeilion mentioned with the Iranian
16 diaspora. Some of it might work a little different, but
17 there is a focus on harassment of relatives in Russia.

18 Many Russians who come here, they come with
19 families, but many of them still have parents or relatives
20 who still live in the Russian Federation. And we've had
21 cases where Russian activists have been identified here in
22 Canada and then police initiate some sort of harassment
23 actions against their family back home.

24 If you've ever walked by any Russian
25 Consulate in Canada, you'll see that it's surrounded by
26 cameras. And through identification via recorded video or
27 through following on social media, but they are able to
28 identify people here who engage in any sort of protest action

1 and they're willing to put pressure on completely unrelated -
2 - well, relatives in Russia who are completely unrelated to
3 any sort of protest activity.

4 Another form we have seen of pressure is the
5 refusal of constabulary services. There was a case
6 documented in the media here in Ottawa where a protestor,
7 somebody who was engaged in activism against the Russian
8 Government, they were refused access to the Consulate, which
9 means they could not renew their documents, could not provide
10 any forms they need from Canada. And this is a major concern
11 to people in the Russian Canadian community because not
12 everybody is yet a Canadian citizen. If you are here on a
13 work visa, student visa, even if you have PR, at some point
14 Canada will likely ask you for some documents from Russia,
15 whether it's just an extension of your passport or something
16 else, and a refusal of constabulary services essentially puts
17 people under the threat of potential deportation, and
18 especially when you've been engaged in political activism,
19 that becomes very dangerous.

20 Another form of threat against members of the
21 Russian Canadian community is the employment of criminal
22 charges in Russia, which is essentially a greater degree of
23 threat from the previous two situations I mentioned. But the
24 laws passed in Russia allow a criminal prosecution to be
25 opened against you if you engage in any sort of political
26 activism abroad, but even for something as innocuous as
27 having social media posts. And we've had cases where people
28 who have PR in Canada, are applying for citizenship

1 nonetheless because they posted something on social media or
2 engaged in some sort of activism against the Russian
3 Government, they have criminal charges laid against them, and
4 then this becomes an additional obstacle when they attempt to
5 gain citizenship. So it is a major threat.

6 And an extension of this is that it makes it
7 more dangerous to travel outside of the country. Many
8 countries still practice extradition to Russia. For example,
9 Turkey, which is a major transportation hub, extradites
10 people to the Russian Government, as does Thailand and some
11 other popular tourist destinations. So that all is an
12 additional danger if you have criminal charges against you.

13 Finally, there is always the risk of hacking
14 and electronic surveillance. It's well documented that the
15 Russian Government invests considerable resources into
16 hackers and ways of accessing electronic devices. And when
17 you engage in political activism, this becomes an active
18 threat. But not only members of the Russian community, this
19 is also a potential threat for the Canadian Government and
20 for Canadian Government entities.

21 As was documented in the -- in other
22 countries, in their investigations of Russian interference,
23 there were cases where Russian hackers got access to
24 political parties, which led to potentially compromising
25 situations.

26 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Please describe the impact
27 that foreign interference has had on your community?

28 **MR. YURIY NOVODVORSKIY:** So the overall

1 effect on the community that we see is that although many
2 Russians are critical of Putin's regimes, they see that there
3 are many risks to them speaking out in public about their
4 views. And what this does, it helps Putin to maintain an
5 image of a united and monolithic community that supports the
6 politics of his regime, when the reality is actually quite
7 different.

8 We've heard often, "Why don't more Russians
9 speak out against the war or participate in anti-Russian
10 activity if they are opposed?" And this is one of those
11 reasons, because there is a realistic fear of retribution.

12 I've spoken to many concerned people at many
13 of our events, and some people are very in support, some
14 people are softly in support, but for many of them, they are
15 aware that these threats are real, and so they always have to
16 make that calculation of how far they are willing to go,
17 because they are essentially putting themselves and their
18 families at risk.

19 Many other people retreat away from politics
20 entirely and hide behind apathy. Some people are truly
21 trying to, like, segregate themselves from politics
22 completely. But in many other cases, what we see is that
23 years of Russian propaganda has created this feeling for many
24 people where any sort of resistance is pointless. They feel
25 alone. They feel like they're the only ones who have these
26 opinions against a united Russian state. And this is the
27 goal of many repressive governments' propaganda: to make the
28 individual feel powerless and unable to accomplish anything

1 of value, which is something we try to work against, but it
2 is a difficult process to break through that propaganda.

3 One of the focuses of our activities is to
4 connect with such people and show them that alternative
5 organizations such as ours that value human-centred values do
6 exist.

7 One other question that came up as we were
8 preparing for this public inquiry is, "Why don't more Russian
9 Canadians participate in government inquiries or turn to the
10 government with any information regarding foreign
11 interference?" And it's more or less the same answer, that
12 they see that there are substantial and clear risks to doing
13 so, whereas there's not a clear safeguard that the Canadian
14 Government provides for those who put themselves at risk, or
15 risk losing their legal status, or have some threats against
16 their family.

17 I and other members of the RCDA and members
18 of our community are very grateful for the opportunity to
19 live in Canada as part of a democratic society that
20 emphasizes human and civil rights.

21 The one thing I'd like to bring up is that we
22 definitely want to see efforts to limit interference by any
23 foreign actor that can compromise the integrity of the
24 Canadian democratic process. But what we would like,
25 ideally, is a targeted and sufficient response, because in
26 our experience from the foreign interference that we have
27 seen, the actors are often based on foreign soil or with ties
28 to the consulates and the embassies, not necessarily members

1 of the general Russian Canadian community. And the concern
2 is that if the Commission recommends a sweeping response that
3 adversely affects the entire Russian Canadian community, it
4 may be limiting its own effectiveness, and in effect,
5 counterproductive. A heavy-handed response could impact the
6 civil rights of all members of our community, the vast
7 majority of whom are law-abiding Canadian residents and
8 citizens.

9 So we urge the Commission to recommend
10 targeted measures that focus on the specific sources of
11 foreign interference. Thank you.

12 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Can you just tell me,
13 maybe you said that, what is the size of the Russian
14 community in Canada?

15 **MR. YURIY NOVODVORSKIY:** So I'm not an expert
16 on the statistics, but from my understanding, ---

17 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Just a ballpark.

18 **MR. YURIY NOVODVORSKIY:** --- there's about
19 half a million people in Canada who have ties or origins with
20 Russia, but this is over many decades. Specifically
21 immigrants from the Russian Federation, I believe it is
22 around 80,000, as of the last census. However, I do believe
23 that that number has increased at a faster pace over the last
24 few years, as a lot more people have tried to find ways of
25 leaving the Russian Federation and moving to Canada. Some of
26 these people would probably not show up on censuses as they
27 may be here on work and student visas or PR. But those are
28 the numbers I have.

1 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

2 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** We'll turn now to our
3 third panelist, Mr. Mehmet Tohti. Would you please describe
4 your community or communities?

5 **MR. MEHMET TOHTI:** Thank you. Do I open
6 this, or?

7 **MS. GRACE DAI WOLLENSAK:** I think the mic is
8 ---

9 **MR. YURIY NOVODVORSKIY:** You have to bring it
10 down.

11 **MS. GRACE DAI WOLLENSAK:** --- off. You have
12 to -- oh, okay. Just ---

13 **MR. MEHMET TOHTI:** Well first of all, I would
14 like to thank my invitation and ---

15 **MS. GRACE DAI WOLLENSAK:** I think ---

16 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** One moment, sorry.

17 **MS. GRACE DAI WOLLENSAK:** I think you have to
18 turn it on.

19 **MR. YURIY NOVODVORSKIY:** It's already on, I
20 think.

21 **MS. GRACE DAI WOLLENSAK:** Just try it.

22 **MR. MEHMET TOHTI:** How about now? It is on,
23 actually. Hello?

24 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** It's sounding a little
25 quiet to me. I wonder if ---

26 **MR. MEHMET TOHTI:** I don't know, maybe we can
27 switch.

28 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Switch, yeah.

1 **MR. MEHMET TOHTI:** How about now?

2 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** That's fantastic.

3 **--- STATEMENT BY/DÉCLARATION PAR MR. MEHMET TOHTI:**

4 **MR. MEHMET TOHTI:** Thank you. And I believe
5 the success of this Public Inquiry on Foreign Interference is
6 crucial for the future of our nation and unless we study it
7 and figure out the loopholes and close it down, the stake of
8 inaction will be very high, involving future generations, and
9 for that reason, I really want this Commission to be
10 successful and serve the best interests of our nation.

11 For our community, Uyghur Canadians are, from
12 coast, to coast, to coast, approximately 2,500. And the
13 latest census from Census Canada is about 1,700 Uyghur
14 Canadians. At least 1,700 people identified themselves as
15 Uyghur Canadians in 2017.

16 As of February 2017, China's Government
17 confiscated all the passports from Uyghurs as part of this
18 genocide campaign. And so we haven't seen anyone escaping
19 from the country. And there is some international migration
20 from some countries, like Turkey or some central Asian,
21 countries to Canada. Maybe approximately a couple hundred,
22 maximum. But the newborns, and that 2,500 is probably the
23 maximum. It translates as three- to 400 families.

24 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Please describe the forms
25 of foreign interference your community experiences?

26 **MR. MEHMET TOHTI:** Just let me get a little
27 more, Uyghur Canadians as well?

28 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Yes, please.

1 **MR. MEHMET TOHTI:** Canada, we are small, the
2 community, but we have 13 members in the Canadian Armed
3 Forces and seven members in the police and RCMP and others,
4 and 23 nurses, seven family doctors, and 28 PhDs, 13
5 professors in Canadian universities, and 76 Masters. So
6 despite we are small, we are very vibrant, we are active in
7 our communities, and we are the first generation of Uyghur
8 Canadians and we're trying to integrate the society, at the
9 same time, contribute to society.

10 And in terms of interference, yeah, that is
11 the advocacy point of Uyghur organizations since maybe 20/25
12 years.

13 Personally, my first interaction with
14 Canadian Government started in 1998, as soon as I landed in
15 Canada.

16 Since then, I have had more than 100 meetings
17 and parliamentary briefings about interference of Chinese
18 Government to our family members, and the harassment, and the
19 threat phone calls from Chinese Police.

20 And I remember my first media report about --
21 this one was published in 2007, "Beijing is always watching".
22 It was published in Maclean Magazine in 2007 on May 14th.
23 And this article refuted three incidents. One in 2004.
24 Seven Uyghur acrobats brought by Chinese Government for a
25 show in Canada to celebrate Chinese New Year, they defected
26 in Canada and so they asked help from our organization, from
27 me, and I came all the way from Mississauga to Ottawa, just
28 picked them up, and then immediately there was attack from

1 the Chinese Embassy and the Consulate, and somehow accused
2 our organization, me, just hijacking them.

3 And so then the press and the -- declared
4 that they applied for asylum with their own will. And so
5 that story is closed, but the attack, never. And since then,
6 the Chinese Government constantly attacks.

7 And then April 2004, I was heading to Munich,
8 Germany, for the establishment of World Uyghur Congress. And
9 just before, one day prior my departure, I was called by
10 Chinese Police from Kashgar, my hometown, and they brought my
11 mother and one of my brothers on the side, just to force on
12 me not to go to Germany and not to participate in the
13 foundation of World Uyghur Congress.

14 And so this article is talking about that.

15 And other main -- the background of this
16 article is 2006, approximately this time. The Chinese -- the
17 Uzbekistan Government abducted Huseyin Celil, Canadian
18 citizen of Uyghur origin, when he visited his mother in-law
19 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

20 And within a couple of months, that gentleman
21 was smuggled to China by the Chinese Government, and he was
22 eventually sentenced for life. And still we don't know if
23 he's alive or dead. But his four children and the wife are
24 still living in Burlington, Ontario.

25 And I was campaigning for the release of
26 Huseyin Celli. And this article was published within that
27 context. At that time Chinese agents are very active and
28 they're just following me through various cars, and they're

1 visiting my home, and they knock on doors, and with the
2 Chinese language newspapers, and they sent me numerous
3 statements from the Consulate officials, even threats.

4 So this was the first report about the
5 Chinese interference or intimidation. It was 17 years.
6 Seventeen (17) years I'm talking about. Two thousand seven
7 (2007).

8 And since then, another -- so probably it
9 highlights the interference of the Chinese Government. I
10 left my hometown in 1991. Since then, Chinese Government did
11 not allow any of my family members, including my mother,
12 siblings, or father, close relatives, did not allow any of
13 them to apply for a passport just to visit me. I cannot go
14 back, so it is also total isolation. Just for what? Just to
15 speak up about the rights of Uyghur people and the Chinese
16 human rights abuses. Just very simple exercise of our basic
17 freedom in Canada.

18 And for that reason, when we say
19 interference, and maybe many people may think that that is
20 not the proper word, or at least it is proper between state-
21 to-state relationship, for example, interference of hostile
22 government, for example, in Canada through misinformation,
23 disinformation campaign, or deception, or stealing property,
24 intellectual property and others.

25 But when it comes to individual level, it is
26 about threat. It is about hijacking of your family members
27 to force you or compel you to live within the rule of hostile
28 regime in a democratic country like in Canada and force you

1 to be an informant and use all of the arresting power, just
2 like proxies in institutions or covert legions underground,
3 just like police stations, just to chase you and put pressure
4 on you to stop what you are doing.

5 And so for individual level, the foreign
6 interference is totally different. And for that reason, just
7 I would like to highlight that one.

8 When we say the individual level, it is about
9 travel ban. For example, I cannot travel to Turkey because
10 of Chinese pressure. The Turkish Government put a travel ban
11 on me. Otherwise, I don't have any criminal record,
12 anything. I cannot go to central Asia because of the Chinese
13 Government's pressure. And some middle eastern countries,
14 where China has developed very strong relationships.

15 And it is smuggling of people, and it is
16 rendition, it is repatriation when we say foreign
17 interference in individual level. And it is the misuse of
18 INTERPOL system. Putting red notes on your name and so at
19 any time you can be arrested. It happened in our communities
20 many, many times.

21 And misuse of UN system and approach the UN-
22 organized institutions to provide, for example, if I go to
23 Geneva to testify, or just to campaign work, to talk about
24 Uyghurs issues, the Chinese Government just finds a way to
25 get my personal information beforehand. And it happened.
26 Many UN staff also testified about that. And for that
27 reason, the Uyghur situation is quite unique, not only in
28 China, at the same time in Canada as well.

1 For example, there are alliance Canadians, I
2 believe, in this room and if you apply for a Chinese visa,
3 you will be subject to different rules, different application
4 form. And if, as we were Canadian -- if I apply to visa for
5 the Chinese embassy or consulate, I will be subjected to
6 different formalities. And for that reason, our communities,
7 they don't go to Chinese embassy, they don't go to Chinese
8 consulate because there are some problem components of the
9 application. And for that reason, just the foreign
10 interference could be a broader language, but if you break it
11 down, there are a lot of components in it just I would like
12 to highlight.

13 And another form of foreign interference
14 which is unique for Uyghurs, it is transnational repression.

15 Transnational repression, I touched a little
16 bit, including the travel ban. But the many Uyghurs that are
17 members of exiled Uyghur communities in jail in many parts of
18 the world, including Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Turkey. They
19 don't have any criminal record. Just because China's
20 government wanted them repatriated back to China and so those
21 -- the host countries arrested them and, after the
22 interrogation, they couldn't find anything and so we have to
23 use the UN system, Committee Against Torture, to put pressure
24 on those countries to stop the extradition.

25 And so transnational oppression is very
26 important part of the foreign interference for Uyghur
27 communities and many Uyghurs cannot travel. Even with a
28 Canadian passport, we are afraid to travel in some countries.

1 And that is where -- for example, the people
2 are calling me from somewhere in Africa, Egypt. Egyptian
3 government deported more than 37 Uyghurs just upon the
4 Chinese request.

5 And Thailand, it happened for Thailand.
6 Kazakhstan and Pakistan and Afghanistan and those countries.
7 Even Turkey. And for that reason, transnational repression
8 is very big part of foreign interference when it comes to
9 Uyghurs.

10 I would like to -- I would like to highlight
11 a couple of individual stories. There's one, the lady in
12 Vancouver, Tornissa (phon.). She's a nurse and she was
13 protesting in front of the Chinese consulate in Vancouver and
14 she was harassed by the Chinese, the consulate officials or
15 any other, because she couldn't identify. Three or four
16 times even physically attacked in Canada. She's a Canadian
17 citizen.

18 And there are another gentleman, and -- in
19 Edmonton. His physician wrote a letter to the Minister of
20 Immigration and Public Safety a year ago, and he was about to
21 die. And the Chinese government isolated his own daughter
22 for 20 years without giving a passport or without responding
23 to the correspondence from Canadian Immigration.

24 And at the end, that physician wrote to both
25 the Minister of Immigration and the Minister of Public
26 Safety, at the same time forward that letter to Chinese
27 embassy as well, just asking them in humanitarian just allow
28 his daughter just to travel to Canada to say goodbye before

1 his final minutes. And the Chinese government did not
2 respond and the father, without seeing his daughter, just
3 died a couple months ago in Edmonton.

4 And so it is -- there are a lot of personal
5 tragic stories like this and so this situation of Uyghurs and
6 some of them already highlighted in our report. It should be
7 attached to the paper submitted to the Commission.

8 And there are individual testimonies and most
9 of them are Uyghur Canadians and the story of harassment,
10 intimidation and threat.

11 And not only -- it is not only from my
12 personal experience. Many Uyghur Canadians are experiencing
13 the same thing.

14 Just before any major campaign items we
15 launch or before finalize -- finalizing any campaign items,
16 for example, just before the Parliamentary hearing there were
17 some disturbing messages all the time I receive somewhere
18 from the cities in China are really ugly content. And I
19 think it is also in the report.

20 Then last year, January 16th, early in the
21 morning, just as soon as I got my office in Ottawa and I
22 received a phone call. The phone number was -- looked like -
23 - it looks like the Hong Kong number, not the Chinese
24 mainland, Chinese number so I picked up the number -- the
25 phone. And it was Chinese state police.

26 And they put my mother's brother or my cousin
27 on the side of the phone. Just -- it was just week away for
28 the Parliamentary vote on the M62 motion for the resettlement

1 of 10,000 Uyghurian refugees. And just openly they say that
2 my mother was dead and the two sisters were dead, and I ask,
3 "How about my brothers and their spouses and the childrens?".
4 They send me a message.

5 And later on, I confirm it through third
6 party that my mother was dead in a concentration camp at the
7 age of 76, but still I don't know when, even she has any
8 grave, which date, what time, which year, even. I don't
9 know.

10 And my two sisters, I don't know. And how
11 about -- my two sisters, I don't know when exactly, which
12 date they were killed.

13 And so basically, sending that kind of
14 message and implying me that this was the cost you have to
15 pay if you continue to advocate. And so yeah, the cost for
16 the advocacy here in Canada, it is really high for some
17 communities. It is unfortunate.

18 And also, there's a lack of protection in
19 Canada as well. And the most disturbing thing is that we --
20 we wanted to have a legal summit in last year from July 3rd
21 to July 6 in Alma, Quebec -- that is small town, lovely town
22 -- with legal professionals. And July 2nd, in Montreal we
23 dined in a restaurant. And are we finished, we were heading
24 to hotel and I invited one official from Global Affairs to
25 the dinner and he was there.

26 As soon as I left, within two, three minutes
27 I received a call and he -- that official from Global Affairs
28 told me that, "Mehmet, two cars are following you. Be

1 careful".

2 And so I made some sharp turns and I got my
3 hotel and I immediately called back. And he said that he
4 tried to intervene and those two cars, the licence plate,
5 plates are covered and so just one person could not catch up
6 to and basically, they escaped.

7 It is happening here in Canada, in Montreal.
8 Not in somewhere else. The people are watching you,
9 following you.

10 It happened in 2006 when I campaigned for the
11 release of Huseyin Celli. Three SUVs just -- I didn't know
12 and my neighbours reminded me, "You know those cars, whenever
13 you come, they will come. Whenever you leave, they are
14 leaving just behind you".

15 And then I called some security department
16 just asked help. Just I don't know who they are, but just I
17 really afraid about my safety. And a couple days disappeared
18 and so now, more than ever, we see reports that Chinese
19 military members with fake ID just coming to Canada and
20 living with us. And police stations -- we identified --
21 actually, the one human rights organization in Spain
22 identified number of them in Montreal and Toronto and others.
23 We don't know how many.

24 We don't know how many are walking on the
25 street right now, put together. And so this is real danger.

26 And in 2018, when I was in Italy, in Rome, I
27 saw the Chinese police with the uniform. I scared. And now
28 we are read in the news that they are a number of police

1 stations in Canada.

2 And so the function of those police stations
3 is not here just to go to party. They collect information.
4 They monitor your schedule and they send that information to
5 the Public Safety in China and they coordinate together. And
6 then in China, reach out to your families, family members,
7 and take hostage of your family members and they force you to
8 do something against your will in Canada. And they work in
9 coordination, they are a piece of the whole integral part of
10 the government body, and there a number of names they are
11 being called, United Front, and community organizations, or
12 the provincial organizations. But if you dig deep, they
13 function basically on the name of providing services for the
14 Chinese communities, just getting some information,
15 extracting information, spying, collection of intelligence.

16 So it is really an important issue that has
17 not been touched in Canada since long, since 2000. And for
18 that reason, it is really important for this Commission just
19 to dig deep, just to find out the loopholes in the system, if
20 you have any faulty line in our system, just to close it down
21 for the safety and the security of Canadians in the future.

22 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** You touched on this topic
23 in your previous answer, but would you please describe the
24 impact that foreign interference has had on your community
25 here in Canada?

26 **MR. MEHMET TOHTI:** Okay. It is really tough.
27 Last summer I travelled some provinces and cities and I
28 visited our community members, because I have been going

1 through the same tough situation. Just imagine you have some
2 joyful event in your family. You cannot share that event
3 with your family members back home. You cannot send texts to
4 them, you cannot call them, and you cannot share photos, and
5 all communications are cut off.

6 And it is the same situation for all Uyghur
7 Canadians all across the country. They don't know even if
8 their family members are alive or dead, because Chinese
9 Government just blocks the whole communication. And using
10 their own, what is called in China, the 50 Cent Party, or
11 specially trained propogandists, just to send the propaganda
12 about how Uyghurs are happy, this and that, but in reality,
13 none of them can freely communicate with their family members
14 because since 2017, Chinese Government arrested if anyone
15 back home has any history of communicating with people abroad
16 or visiting certain countries, just that became a reason for
17 detention and for internment in concentration camps. And so
18 many people disconnected from their loved ones here and
19 abroad, or Canada, and many Uyghur Canadians are afraid to
20 call them in fear that they may give them trouble.

21 And so basically the Uyghur Canadians live in
22 total darkness without getting any information about their
23 family members, whether they're alive, and also family
24 unification. I know some of them sponsored their family
25 members to come to Canada and the Chinese Government refused
26 to issue a passport, or sometimes if they -- when they
27 receive any constabulary news from the Embassy in Beijing,
28 they cannot go to Beijing, or there are certain time windows

1 for applicants to fulfill certain procedures and it is not
2 that easy because of that environment, the police state, and
3 in the midst of active genocide.

4 And for that reason, this impact is huge on
5 the community and they developed kind of -- all of them, they
6 have the same problem, just the stress and kind of
7 depression, and low productivity, and some uncomfortable
8 situation families as well, and they lost the joy in the
9 family and they lost that kind of family environment and they
10 lost the connection, and from their -- back home.

11 Usually we, Uyghurs, are a family-loving
12 people and we count previous ancestors and reconnect. So
13 even someone died, weekly basis, we used to visit the
14 cemetery and tell our younger generation, "Here's your
15 grandma. Here's your grandfather," and the name. The
16 connection was established through that culture, but now the
17 Chinese Government also destroyed all the cemeteries and the
18 cultural and the religious shrines and sites, and the people
19 lost that connection as well.

20 And so here in Canada, we double lost that
21 connection. And for that reason, we are trying to survive,
22 the Uyghur Canadians are trying to survive, and I'm truly
23 grateful for our communities, despite this tough situation
24 they are going through. Solidarity and help among them is
25 really -- that spirit is really high and we just come
26 together on a weekly basis and share the pain and the console
27 one another. Just we became just like family members, and
28 there's no city boundaries. And we have social media groups,

1 and we chat, and we establish online schools for our kids to
2 learn about the tradition and the mother tongue Uyghur
3 language, and we try to recover all the books and the
4 histories that Chinese Government destroyed and burnt.

5 And so as the generation is passing through a
6 critical moment, we try to connect our past to future in
7 Canada and elsewhere. That is despite this kind of heavy,
8 heavy, physical and mental situation.

9 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** I have a question for
10 you, Mr. Tohti. You mentioned that you have been threatened
11 actually many occasions, I understand. And do I have to
12 understand that you reported these threats to some
13 authorities?

14 **MR. MEHMET TOHTI:** Yeah.

15 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Yeah. And can you tell
16 us a bit about the support you have received, if any, from
17 these authorities? It's not necessary to identify the
18 authorities. Just to give us a bit of ---

19 **MR. MEHMET TOHTI:** Okay. So that is -- yeah,
20 just when we report, we expect something could come out after
21 the report, and there should be some mechanism in the
22 government when they receive that kind of serious threat for
23 someone, there's a mechanism which is triggered to action,
24 but we don't have in Canada.

25 And just to reiterate, the sad example is
26 just two years ago, we had a hearing with CBSA, we had a
27 lawsuit against CBSA. The Uyghur Rights Advocacy Project was
28 intervenor and we thought the CBSA did not fulfill its

1 jurisdictional duty not stopping the imports made by the use
2 of Uyghur-forced labour. And so just right before the
3 hearing, or just after the hearing started, both my phone and
4 my legal counsel's phones were hacked right at that point.
5 And at that time, my legal counsel is just sitting there, she
6 -- after she said, "Okay, it happened the same for my phone,"
7 and so she said, "Okay. I'm going to report to the police
8 and I'm going to go there, go here." I said, "Just you can
9 go. It is a waste of time and I have gone numerous times
10 about and we don't get any result." And it turned out to be
11 the same situation and my legal counsel spent a lot of time
12 and energy trying to get answers.

13 And similarly, a year ago, I think, JIAS, a
14 Jewish organization, they wanted to have a fundraiser to
15 sponsor six Uyghur refugees to come to Canada. Just as soon
16 as that fundraising event started, there was intervention by
17 a third party, and they inserted just pornography to that
18 webinar. So that fundraiser didn't happen.

19 The small debate, people are very -- they're
20 focused to disrupt the normal activities. And you may think,
21 "What is the big deal of fundraising?" Yes, it not a big
22 deal, but for some people, it is a big deal.

23 And as we work with the government, IRCC and
24 Government Affairs to resettle the 10,000 Uyghur refugees,
25 the Chinese Government assembled a delegation to delegation
26 to a number of countries where Uyghur refugees reside and
27 initially our government officials did not understand why the
28 Chinese Government is so busy. So just those Uyghur refugees

1 in third countries and we are helping them to resettle in
2 Canada, nothing to do with China, but that is the normal
3 thinking. But for Chinese Government, it is not normal
4 thinking. For Chinese Government, they would like to keep
5 the Uyghurs in those countries where they have full control
6 over. They don't want those Uyghurs to come to democratic
7 societies and receive education and after 10 years, 20 years,
8 to confront the Chinese Government in the international
9 arena.

10 And so if those Uyghur refugees live in
11 Turkey and some other places, at a maximum, if they do well,
12 maybe they can open one shop or restaurant, or do some small
13 business. That's it. For the Chinese Government it is much
14 better than they come into Canada and receive the higher
15 education and become a professional -- establish a
16 professional career that can be challenging for the Chinese
17 Government in the future. And for that reason, the Chinese
18 Government starts to intervene and put pressure on those
19 countries just to stop the exit of the Uyghur refugees.

20 And it happened in Kazakhstan, and their
21 global affairs and immigration had to wait for two years,
22 just work, just to get one family out, because of the Chinese
23 pressure. Otherwise, that family has nothing to do. And
24 those family members will receive an adjournment of refugee
25 status. Kazakhstan, by law, are obligated to assist them to
26 resettle in third countries, but because of Chinese pressure,
27 they blocked the exit.

28 And so this is what it means when we call

1 foreign interference. Just it touches your life. It touches
2 your safety. It touches your security. It touches your
3 family comfort. It touches your career. It touches your
4 future. You don't get sleep and you don't know what kind of
5 bad news you are receiving when you wake up tomorrow morning.

6 And so this is the exact situation of Uyghur
7 Canadians right now.

8 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

9 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Madam Commissioner, I
10 wonder if now would be an appropriate time for an afternoon
11 break?

12 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Yes, it's 2:20. So
13 we'll take a 20-minute break. So we'll be back at 2:40.

14 **THE REGISTRAR:** Order. All rise. The
15 Commission is now in recess until 2:30 -- actually, 2:40.
16 --- Upon recessing at 2:20 p.m.
17 --- Upon resuming at 2:42 p.m.

18 **THE REGISTRAR:** Order, please.

19 The sitting of the Foreign Interference
20 Commission is back in session.

21 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Before we turn to our
22 fourth panelist, I just wanted to follow up with you, Mr.
23 Tohti. We went for break in the middle of your answer, I
24 think. Was there anything that you wanted to add before we
25 move on to Ms. Wollensak?

26 **MR. MEHMET TOHTI:** The last thing I would
27 like to add is I would like to talk a little bit about the
28 2021 Federal Election.

1 When an election decision was announced, as
2 an organization, we developed a number of policy action items
3 and distributed that to all political parties. And we
4 received a response from the Conservative Party and NDP. And
5 also, we made a little pamphlet, brochure kind of, and we
6 distributed to all community members and supporters all
7 across the country and we asked them, "Okay. If someone
8 knocks on your door, these are the five items you ask those
9 candidates whether they support."

10 And so at the end, to make the long story
11 short, the Conservative Party adopted four of our policy
12 action items in their election platform and made public.
13 That is one of the important reasons the Chinese Government
14 went mad about it. They increased the campaign against the
15 Conservative Party.

16 And December 15th, 2022, I had the conference
17 in McGill University. I shared the stage with the Honourable
18 Erin O'Toole and I shared some of my personal thoughts how
19 the Chinese government interfered the 2021 election.

20 And so the number of the policy items we
21 proposed and adopted by the Conservative Party of Canada in
22 the election platform, I believe one is the acknowledgement
23 that we were genocide because Parliament voted and
24 acknowledged unanimously, but the Government of Canada did
25 not. And so we want the Conservative Party if they win the
26 election just as a government acknowledge the atrocity crimes
27 that Chinese government has committed against Uyghurs as a
28 genocide.

1 And second, there was a discussion at the
2 U.S. Congress to pass a specific legislation called *Uyghur*
3 *Forced Labour Prevention Act*. And we want the Canadian
4 government or Parliament to pass similar legislation and call
5 it *Uyghur Forced Labour Prohibition Act*. It was one of the
6 policy item we proposed and the Conservative Party adopted.

7 And the third one is, it was -- there are --
8 to the Parliamentary committee report what is subcommittee of
9 international human rights and the standing committee of
10 Foreign Affairs. Both committees adopted number of policy
11 recommendations when they issued the report on Uyghur
12 genocide to the government.

13 The one -- the common element of that report
14 was to create a special refugee stream to help those Uyghur
15 refugees stranded in unsafe third countries and help them to
16 settle in Canada.

17 So number third our policy item that --
18 adopted by the Conservative Party was to help Uyghur
19 refugees.

20 And the fourth one is the divestment because
21 Canada Pension Plan has investment in China and on Chinese
22 companies, either directly or indirectly, tied up with the
23 Uyghur forced labour or supply chain or directly or
24 indirectly tied up with what is called as Integrated Joint
25 Operational Theft Forum, IJOTF system.

26 The Chinese government created a system to
27 basically, from all street cameras or all surveillance
28 devices, whenever -- the number of Chinese high-tech

1 companies also developed the facial recognition technology
2 for Uyghurs, and they received a patent. Huawei is one,
3 Dahua is one, Hikvision, Alibaba, SenseTime.

4 They received a patent just to identify the
5 Uyghurs whenever they are seen on the street and it trigger
6 police alarm within 15 seconds, just allow police come to the
7 right spot to arrest them.

8 And Human Rights Watch called it Integrated
9 Joint Operational Theft Forum, so all data will be
10 centralized in that platform and then compared with the
11 personal ID of that individual and just to create the profile
12 of that person, that there's a score system in China
13 especially for Uyghurs, as you know, and then just immediate
14 arrest right after that.

15 That system is called IJOTF system.

16 So Dahua, Huawei, Hikvision, Alibaba,
17 SenseTime, Hitira, all of them part of that system. And our
18 Canada Pension Plan investment board invested on those
19 companies.

20 And so I'm a pension contributor. I don't
21 want to receive my pension from the money Canada Pension Plan
22 made for those companies when they are actively engaging or
23 involving or benefiting from Uyghur forced labour,
24 surveillance or genocide. And for that reason, that was one
25 of our campaign items.

26 And the Conservative Party of Canada adopted
27 that campaign as well to the election platform.

28 And last, the one was about foreign agent

1 registry. It was important for Canada to identify the
2 foreign agents or agents who are receiving money from foreign
3 hostile governments and working for the interest of those
4 governments. At least we should know. And for that reason,
5 that was one of the campaign items and the Conservative Party
6 of Canada adopted.

7 And after that and we have seen the increased
8 level of attack against Conservative Party and, from time to
9 time, I exchanged with former leader -- Conservative Party
10 Leader Erin O'Toole and Michael Chong and a number of other
11 Conservative colleagues as well as member of Parliamentary
12 Uyghur Friendship Group. So there are two election debate.
13 One is French, one is in English.

14 If you look back, Erin O'Toole during the
15 election debate on TV mentioned the Uyghur genocide and tried
16 to squeeze Right Honourable Justin Trudeau on the debate,
17 saying that he did not acknowledge the Uyghur genocide, and
18 he didn't do anything in that regard.

19 And so election is over two, three weeks, I
20 guess. I'm not going to name that MP because it was a
21 private conversation. I was called by one of the very
22 important MP who said, okay, there is an internal review
23 process that start just to figure out what is the issue, why
24 we lost election. We may not be that much vocal on number of
25 issues because the initial level, we are thinking that we
26 failed to communicate with the Chinese Canadians and some of
27 our messages regarded the puff and, for that reason, we
28 support the human rights and we understand the situation of

1 Uyghurs.

2 And so during that conversation, I told this
3 is wrong message. This is wrong message and this is wrong
4 message to other political parties as well. And if you take
5 a stand, then the message will be clear to other political
6 parties. If you talk about China, there will be a
7 consequence. You lose election.

8 So all political parties tend to follow the
9 same thing.

10 And secondly, this is kind of exactly what
11 the Chinese government wants. This is not the right policy.

12 So that is the end of the -- that
13 conversation.

14 And recently again with the same MP, I
15 exchanged a number of times and I said, okay, you should --
16 you should have stick on your point, highlight from the
17 election platform. Now you see the whole Canada, this is
18 part of our national conversation and we are talking about
19 the same issues. And somehow, you stepped back. That was
20 not a good message.

21 And so I believe Chinese government was not
22 happy about the Conservative Party that adopted the number of
23 our policy recommendations in the election platform,
24 including the acknowledgement of Uyghur genocide and
25 promising to pass the *Uyghur Forced Labour Prohibition Act*
26 and do something about the divestment of Canada Pension Plan
27 and university -- the fund -- we have a number of
28 universities. We identified nearly 119 -- 115 or 119 million

1 dollars investment from McGill University invested in Chinese
2 companies tied up with genocide.

3 We issued a report and so there are some
4 other universities are doing the same and we have the clean
5 universities initiatives and a number of university students
6 to work on it just to expose the investment portfolio.

7 And the Canada Pension Plan is the biggest,
8 and the provincial and the federal pension plan is the
9 biggest.

10 And so the -- just including that
11 recommendation in the election platform, the Conservative
12 Party of Canada could cause some sort of retaliation from
13 China, and that's my belief.

14 And also, if you look at the change of tone
15 in the Conservative Party, for example, if you look back at
16 the Erin O'Toole and the whole question period, Erin O'Toole
17 at least confront with the Prime Minister at least 10 times I
18 know during Question Period, asking questions about Uyghur
19 genocide and the government response to it.

20 With the new leader of Conservative Party, I
21 met twice, and I frequently meet with the Deputy leaders of
22 the Conservative Party all the time. They offer support, but
23 if you look at the specific performance at that Question
24 Period, and the new leader of the Conservative Party has yet
25 to mention Uyghur genocide in the Parliament. In compare,
26 Erin O'Toole.

27 And so you can see the difference, and as a
28 person advocating for this cause, as a person dealing with

1 high-level individuals from both parties, and especially
2 prior the 2021 election, and after 2021 election -- prior and
3 after the election, let me say like this, and if I look at
4 the actual performance and talking point and the issue that
5 they are raising in the Question Period, it was different.
6 That is just because of the internal review report after the
7 election and the Conservative Party and removal -- I say
8 removal of the Erin O'Toole from the leadership position, and
9 that is all something to do with the adaption of the five
10 points, the policy recommendation we offered, and that is
11 what I believe.

12 And I shared my thoughts with Erin O'Toole a
13 number of times. We exchange it. And he's a responsible
14 person and he did not -- he did not tell me exactly what he
15 thinks but at least he knows. And so I hope that he will
16 explain more during this Inquiry.

17 Thank you.

18 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** We'll turn now to our next
19 panellist, Ms. Grace Dai Wollensak.

20 Ms. Wollensak, let's start by making sure
21 that you've got access to a microphone so we can hear what
22 you have to say. Wonderful.

23 Would you please start by describing your
24 community or communities?

25 **--- STATEMENT BY MS. GRACE DAI WOLLENSAK:**

26 **MS. GRACE DAI WOLLENSAK:** Okay. Hello. Good
27 afternoon, everybody. My name is Grace Wollensak. I'm a
28 National Director of the Falun Dafa Association of Canada.

1 Yeah, I like to thank you for the Public
2 Inquiry Commission for organizing this panel; it's really
3 crucial and important. And I appreciate the opportunity to
4 speak today.

5 So about our Falun Gong community. I'd like
6 to start off by introducing Falun Gong, also called Falun
7 Dafa, as it probably is new to many people.

8 Falun Gong is a peaceful spiritual practice
9 rooted in the Buddhist tradition. It consists of five
10 meditative exercises, and the moral teachings centred on the
11 principles of truthfulness, compassion, and tolerance.
12 Falun Gong emphasizes morality and cultivation of virtue.

13 Falun Gong was introduced to the public in
14 1992 in China, and quickly gained popularity due to its
15 powerful effectiveness in helping people improving their
16 physical and mental wellbeing, and spiritual elevation, with
17 the number of participants growing to between 70 million to
18 100 million by 1999. The Chinese government praised and
19 awarded the Falun Gong for its health benefits and the moral
20 teachings before the persecution began. A high ranking
21 Chinese official once stated that Falun Gong could save
22 billions of yen, the Chinese dollars, on healthcare costs in
23 China each year.

24 Falun Gong is open to everyone with no
25 membership enrollment. People can come and go at their will.
26 It is a way of life. Learning and practising Falun Gong is
27 free of charge. There's no clergy and no temples. All
28 relevant materials and the information, including audio,

1 video and the books available with translation over 50
2 languages on the internet for the public at no cost, and all
3 community events and activities are organized and run by
4 volunteers.

5 Today, Falun Gong is practised by people of
6 all ages and all walks of life with different ethnicities in
7 over 100 countries, including Canada.

8 The Falun Gong community hosts events, mostly
9 in public spaces in various cities across Canada. Since
10 COVID-19 pandemic, some activities have gone online. In
11 Canada, our community include the people from different
12 ethnic groups, like Chinese, Irani's, Vietnamese, Korean, and
13 the local Canadian communities from different professions,
14 you know, just like as normal, like, society members.

15 So anybody can start learning Falun Gong by
16 visiting the website of learningfalungong.org. Each year
17 thousands of people in Canada attend the free online classes.

18 Because there's no membership enrollment so
19 we don't know the exact number of people who practice, and so
20 maybe, like, thousands, or 10 thousands; that's a big range.

21 So China's continuing to eradicate the Falun
22 Gong. In July 1999, the Chinese Communist party launched a
23 nationwide eradication campaign against Falun Gong in an
24 extrajudicial manner. Largescale arrests, detentions and
25 imprisonments, accompanied by brutal tortures and inhuman
26 treatment were reported by human rights organizations, like
27 Freedom House, Amnesty International.

28 The persecution is considered one of the

1 worst human rights violations since the Cultural Revolution
2 in China.

3 The practitioners have experience with over
4 100 torture methods, including electric shock; rape and
5 sexual abuse; sleep, food, toilet deprivation; being exposed
6 to extreme cold or heat; and being forcibly sent to
7 psychiatric hospitals where they are injected with unknown
8 psychiatric substance; like, each day, like, 16 to 20 hours
9 of false labour in extreme poor hygienic conditions,
10 sometimes toxic environment without protection; mass killings
11 and the largescale false organ harvesting has been happening
12 over two decades, supported by the evidence from China
13 Tribunal and other credible sources.

14 There's also disappearance and displacement,
15 harassment, and social exclusion and discrimination are other
16 widespread phenomena experienced by Falun Gong practitioners
17 in China.

18 So millions of families have been torn apart.
19 The state-orchestrated systematic human rights violations
20 constitute crimes against humanity and potentially genocide.

21 The CCP also wages a mass hate propaganda,
22 and disinformation campaign demonize Falun Gong and its
23 practitioners with thousands of state-controlled media
24 outlets and internet in China to incite the hate and to
25 justify the persecution.

26 So most frequent asked question is; why are
27 Falun Gong being persecuted in China? So there are four key
28 reasons:

1 Falun Gong is a massive popularity and the
2 rapid growth outnumbering CCP members, which is about 60
3 meeting at a time over the persecution started.

4 Second, completely independent of the Chinese
5 government control. The Chinese government want to set up a
6 Communist Party branch in Falun Gong and also charge fees,
7 which got rejected and so they were not happy.

8 The Falun Gong's the guiding principles
9 incompatible with Communist ideology.

10 Number 4, former CCP leader, Jiang Zemin's,
11 jealousy and the political motivation also plays a large
12 role. Jiang views Falun Gong as a threat to his power.
13 While Falun Gong has no political pursuit, it's the
14 spiritual.

15 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Yeah, thank you.

16 Would you please describe the forms of
17 foreign interference that your community experiences?

18 **MS. GRACE DAI WOLLENSAK:** Okay, yeah.

19 So the persecution has not only been confined
20 in China but also been expanded worldwide, including Canada.
21 There are well-documented directives from the CCP top leaders
22 to extend the persecution of Falun Gong to beyond China. The
23 objective is to stifle and marginalize Falun Gong adherence
24 and impede human rights advocacy.

25 The Falun Gong community in Canada advocates
26 against CCP's persecution of Falun Gong practitioners in
27 China, Canada, and elsewhere in the world. The community's
28 efforts in Canada, including combating disinformation about

1 the Falun Gong and the increasing awareness of the CCP's
2 crimes against humanity.

3 This is achieved through outreach and true
4 collaboration activities. For example, displaying banners,
5 the boards, in public places, distributing flyers, collect
6 petitions, protest at the Chinese Embassies and the
7 Consulate, or the performance by Shen Yun, and other
8 initiatives, and also through seeking the support of
9 politicians and governments.

10 In the course of this carrying out these
11 advocacies, the Canadian Falun Gong community has witnessed
12 and experienced extensive foreign interference and repression
13 in the past two decades by the Chinese Communist Regime.

14 So actually, in the -- recently, we -- the
15 Falun Dafa Association issued a report with 130 pages
16 documenting this 20 some years of foreign interference with
17 over 90 examples and cases to show -- actually, that's just
18 the tip of the iceberg. What we have experienced is so much
19 and in the wider range of spectrum of tactics and the
20 strategies they used in this prosecution overseas.

21 So yes. So, like, this report covered the
22 tactics used by the CCP's interference in Canadian elected
23 officials and the different sectors of society to marginalize
24 or suppress public support of Falun Gong. The tactics include
25 political infiltration, manipulation, intimidation, hate
26 incitement, disinformation, assault, harassment, cyber
27 attacks, and surveillance. They are not used only by the
28 Chinese Embassy and the Consulate, but also by the CCP agents

1 and the proxies on Canadian soil, the United Front Work
2 Department, the Communist Party's primary tool for foreign
3 interreference, plays a key role in spreading CCP
4 interference in Canada.

5 The report also documents the CCP's
6 interference towards Canadian communities, business,
7 festivals, and other art and cultural events, et cetera, to
8 exclude the Falun Gong community from participation.

9 The campaign of coercion and manipulation
10 harms Canadians' interests and erodes Canadian values as
11 well.

12 We also experience persistent physical and
13 verbal assault and the harassment, surveillance, and cyber
14 attacks against Falun Gong practitioners in the public space,
15 and there's a continued systematic control of the Chinese
16 community, media, and the digital space in Canada to promote
17 the CCP's narratives and silence the voice of the Falun Gong
18 community.

19 So I'm going to elaborate more hate
20 propaganda and dissemination in Canada.

21 The PRC seeks to interfere with Falun Gong
22 and those practicing it in Canada by demonizing them through
23 the spread of hateful disinformation about Falun Gong and its
24 practitioners within the Chinese Canadian community by
25 Chinese language media, internet, and otherwise, to the
26 Canadian public more broadly, and to elected political
27 representatives.

28 Over the 25 years, hate propaganda against

1 Falun Gong was disseminated in Canada by the following ways.

2 One, the Chinese Embassy and the Consulate
3 via anti-Falun Gong displays, rallies, websites, and the
4 dissemination of propaganda material to Chinese media and to
5 all levels of Canadian Government officials, as well as
6 Canadian media outlets.

7 Second, the vast majority of Chinese Canadian
8 media and social media is controlled by the CCP to replicate
9 anti-Falun Gong articles and the information in Canada,
10 including the local community papers across Canada, and also
11 international major daily newspapers, like Sing Tao and Ming
12 Pao.

13 The Court's documents revealed that a
14 Montreal-based Chinese newspaper was founded by the 610
15 Office in China to produce anti-Falun Gong leaflets for
16 distribution across Canada. The 610 Office is an
17 extrajudicial body that is responsible for the persecution of
18 Falun Gong and other dissident groups in China.

19 Number four. CCP controlled WeChat, like
20 we've seen, and local Chinese media platforms, tightly
21 monitor chats, and delete any posting -- any positive
22 postings related to Falun Gong while allowing anti-Falun Gong
23 posts to stay.

24 And I've personally experienced that because,
25 like, if I post anything, not only the post will be deleted,
26 my account would be also removed and my IP be blocked for
27 many years. And, like, it's very severe. Also in all across
28 Canada, the Chinese platforms.

1 The CCP deploys internet police, or 50 Cent
2 Party, those paid commentators, to reproduce anti-Falun Gong
3 views and post the CCP's narratives consistently and widely
4 in every internet, 24 hours, seven days per week.

5 Some CCP Chinese leaders, reporters, and the
6 publishers were invited to attend briefing meetings at the
7 Chinese Embassy and the Consulate and also in mainland China.
8 It was reported by the National Post that the Chinese
9 Ambassador visited their office to distribute anti-Falun Gong
10 materials and they -- and also they also pressured the CBC
11 not to air documentaries on the topics of the persecution of
12 Falun Gong and the forced organ harvesting.

13 Many of the -- well it's no exception that
14 the western media here in Canada reports often quoted the
15 CCP's slanderous words and accounts in their reports related
16 to Falun Gong, which lent a hand to the CCP in its
17 disinformation campaign.

18 So after we protested and clarified these
19 issues to the media and it's getting better, but at the
20 beginning, like, they all quoted those slanderous words. And
21 that's also, I think, helping to spread the hate.

22 So next is about physical and verbal assault.
23 Instances of rampant harassment and assault have been
24 persistent in different cities over the years, including
25 practitioners held at gun point during a protest at the
26 Chinese Consulate in Vancouver.

27 Another example is a Toronto practitioner who
28 was outspoken because her brother in-law was tortured to

1 death in China and her sister disappeared for many years, and
2 she was threatened by a stranger who knocked at their home
3 door and threatened to take their kids away. On another
4 occasion, her car window was smashed and her balcony was
5 spread by human excretions all over the balcony.

6 And there's many instances of practitioners
7 got assaulted while they are in a public place at Toronto
8 City Hall and at the Provincial Queen's Park, and, like, the
9 CN Tower, because that is the place that usually we raise
10 awareness, like collect signatures, tell people what's going
11 on in China, the persecution, and to tell the Chinese people,
12 "Don't believe the lies."

13 But, like, this activity has been monitored -
14 - there's monitoring, surveillance, and intimidation has been
15 also going on. Practitioners raising awareness in public
16 places are subjected to constant monitoring through being
17 photographed, videotaped, and receiving intimidation phone
18 calls, interference with family members in mainland China
19 persists.

20 For example, a man followed a female
21 practitioner to her home and stopped her to tell her that he
22 knew her name, and her father's name, and home address in
23 China, and demanding her stop going to the Chinese Consulate
24 for protests.

25 Many practitioners have experienced similar
26 threats. Basically all the practitioners who joined these
27 public activities, they are black-listed. And so, like,
28 subsequently, they're denied -- it's possible they're denied

1 a visa, or, like, even if they visit their families, they got
2 arrested at the border. So, like, at the beginning years of
3 the persecution, so now we stopped going to China. So, like,
4 over 20 some years, many of our community members have never
5 seen their families, be able to visit China.

6 And also, the digital and cyber attackers.
7 Falun Gong practitioners not only being compromised for their
8 online presence, they also face the cyber threats directly
9 from China, including attacks on Falun Gong websites, email
10 viruses spread all over the place, and hacking over the 24
11 years.

12 So that's the consequences, like, we lost
13 data, important files that disrupt our work, advocacy work.

14 And also now come to the important aspect of
15 the interference, is the political interference. PRC's
16 efforts to spread hateful disinformation to elected political
17 representatives included providing such disinformation to all
18 politicians in all levels of government, impersonating
19 members of the Chinese community, and sending politician
20 members that echo or repeat inaccurate and harmful
21 disinformation about Falun Gong, often insulting and
22 threatening, and impersonating Falun Gong practitioners and
23 sending messages to politicians designed to make the PRC's
24 information about Falun Gong appear credible.

25 Tracking the IP address of some of those
26 emails show that they originated in China. And it's a global
27 phenomenon highlighting the involvement of the communist
28 regime. Identical or similar emails have been sent to

1 politicians in various other countries, including the United
2 States, Australia, New Zealand, and beyond.

3 The hate campaigns have become more active in
4 the past of the election and politicians send supporting
5 letters to the community. This effort has led to 13
6 politicians to refrain from supporting or interacting with
7 Canadian Falun Gong community without knowing that's hate
8 campaigns behind it to manipulate them.

9 So for example, there is one -- there is a
10 bogus email that an individual claimed to be a colleague of
11 Ms. Grace, referring to me, to an unknown number of elected
12 MPs after 2015 election. And shortly after, I ran into this
13 MP in an event, and after introduction and she heard my name,
14 Grace, and Falun Gong, she immediately became upset and she -
15 - because she said she received aggressive and rude emails
16 from Falun Gong and Grace. And after I clarified with her
17 the situation, that is CCP's plot to sow discord, she
18 understood. She forwarded me the email she received from the
19 CCP agent and the email chains and it was really rude and
20 offensive.

21 And so, like, we have documented many such
22 emails in our report. There's -- they sent such fake emails
23 to MPs, to the MPPs, to the city councillors, to also the
24 theatre managers, and all levels, and around.

25 And so we have been trying to clarify this,
26 but we have limited resources to be effective.

27 And so these impersonation emails were
28 effective as a method of disinformation.

1 There's another example of the political
2 interference.

3 So our practitioners have been holding daily
4 visual protests in front of Chinese Embassies and Consulates
5 in all, like, the cities, like in Toronto, Ottawa, Vancouver,
6 and Montreal, like, daily, more than 20 years. And the
7 Chinese Government is really, like, annoyed, and they tried
8 to get rid of us from the practicing side. So they pressured
9 the different cities to try to remove us. And so there were
10 incidents that happened in cities like Ottawa and Vancouver,
11 attempted to restrict our daily protests in front of
12 embassies and the consulates.

13 So from the CCP's inference and the demands,
14 the Vancouver Mayor, in 2011, ordered the removal of Falun
15 Gong 24-hour protest site outside the Chinese Consulate in
16 the city. The site had been there for a decade at that time.

17 It's sad. It's so sad to see this.

18 Something similar since happened in Ottawa.
19 In early 2000, one day I received the permit in front of
20 Chinese Embassy. They put restrictions like we're not
21 allowed to hold big banners that is visible from far. We
22 were restricted with a small board this size and it has to be
23 handheld. Like, I was really puzzled why they put this after
24 years of we were in front of Chinese Embassy without any
25 incident, without anybody complaining. And so, like, why
26 they restricted us?

27 And I talked to the permit office, they said,
28 like, "It's not my decision, because we received the

1 complaint." I said, "If the complaint is from the Chinese
2 Embassy, that should not be valid. That's not a legitimate
3 request or complaint. But if there's any legitimate
4 complaint, you should forward it to us. We will improve,
5 like, what the issue is. We can address the issue."

6 And so, like, he said, like, he got this from
7 his superior. So I had to talk to the City's officers and
8 the policemen, and it's all, like, City Councillors, and many
9 of those people tried to ask them to give me explanation.
10 And also eventually I talked to the City's lawyer, and I
11 said, like, "Why do you put this" -- like, they used a bylaw
12 to restrict it. I said, "Why do you have to use a bylaw?
13 You have to go that far to restrict us? You're not using the
14 law in good faith, because you are supposed to -- that law is
15 supposed to maintain a good order and for good service of the
16 public, but you are restricting the freedom of speech in
17 Canada and assisting the Chinese Communist Party while we are
18 calling for the end of the killing. And so what are you
19 doing here?"

20 So we sent an appeal to the City Council and
21 to the Transportation Committee. Fortunately they
22 unanimously passed the motion to remove the restrictions on
23 this.

24 By the way, we did not have to go through
25 this. We did not have to face this. And that suggests an
26 example of the foreign interference of the Chinese Government
27 to our local authorities.

28 Sorry for getting emotional. I have gone

1 through many of these things that we don't have to.

2 Yeah, the same, like, in Vancouver. They had
3 to bring to the court in order to remove our display board,
4 which is calling for the stop of the killing.

5 You know, this happened after, you know, the
6 free trip to China, the Vancouver Mayor's free trip to China,
7 and where they treated him like emperor. And he came back
8 and ordered to remove the board. And this was the campaign
9 by the Chinese Consulate. That has been documented and
10 reported by the media and many evidences showed that.

11 This is the corruption of politicians with,
12 as I said, consequences of the foreign interference.

13 Okay. So then the next example. There's
14 RCMP actually when they contacted me after some MPs felt
15 offended and made complaints about the emails they received.

16 And after I clarified to the RCMP officers,
17 two of them, and they understood what's going on. I said
18 this is the systematic attack orchestrated by the CCP agents
19 or CCP themselves, you know, try to discredit the Falun Gong
20 practitioners for our politicians.

21 And so when I asked them to help, to stop
22 this campaign, an RCMP officer said that they were tasked to
23 protect the Parliamentarians and they suggest that we took to
24 other routes for help. So actually, I reported to the
25 police, Ottawa Police, RCMP, CSIS and the Minister of Public
26 Affairs and also talked to Global Affairs over the years with
27 all these issues, but really have no idea what has been --
28 what measures, actions have been taken. It seems nothing has

1 been done.

2 The PRC's efforts to interfere with the
3 Canadian politicians also includes threatening or offering
4 the potential -- the potential loss or gain of business
5 opportunities as well as votes from the Chinese community.

6 For example, the city mayors withdraw the
7 proclamation of Falun Dafa Day after trips to China. That
8 happens, I give examples, in Ottawa and Port Moody.

9 In 2010, May -- in May 2010, Ottawa's Citizen
10 reported that the mayor of Ottawa, upon return from a
11 business trip to China, refused to issue a publication to
12 recognize Falun Dafa Day as he had done in previous years
13 because he had -- he said he had made a commitment. Later,
14 we learned that he made a commitment with the Beijing mayor
15 upon request during the business trip and not proclaim Falun
16 Dafa Day.

17 Fortunately, the Ottawa City Council later
18 bypassed the Mayor to issue a proclamation of Falun Dafa Day
19 in June 2010, and so like since then like the City of Ottawa
20 has issued every year.

21 Another case was reported by Global News,
22 like stating that seven mayors from the Vancouver area were
23 invited an all expenses paid trip to Beijing in 2007 by
24 billionaire real estate developer and former People's
25 Liberation Army officer who has official connections to the
26 United Foreign Works Department.

27 Following the trip, the then Port Moody
28 mayor, who had proclaimed the Falun Dafa Day from 2002 to

1 2007, ceased issuing the proclamation. According to a
2 profile story in the People's Daily, that businessman came to
3 Canada with the intention of using his real estate business
4 to persuade Canadian politicians to view China more
5 favourably.

6 As an example, Chinese consulate in Toronto
7 threatened the city -- the Toronto City Council not to
8 proclaim Falun Dafa Day in Toronto by writing to all of them
9 and threatened with the business ties and the relationships.

10 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Ms. Wollensak, I do
11 apologize for the interruption. I'm just mindful of the
12 time.

13 And I know that you have covered some of this
14 question already in the information that you've shared so
15 far, but I wondered if you wanted to briefly address the
16 impact of foreign interference on your communities before we
17 turn to our next panelist.

18 **MS. GRACE DAI WOLLENSAK:** Okay. So can I
19 have the last piece of ---

20 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Yes, please go ahead.

21 **MS. GRACE DAI WOLLENSAK:** I will skip some,
22 but the last one is important because it just -- something
23 happened the last weekend.

24 So like because the Chinese government also
25 systematic try to sabotage Shen Yun. Shen Yun is a classical
26 dance company. Its mission is to restore the lost heritage
27 destroyed by the Communist Party in China.

28 Chinese government afraid of Shen Yun because

1 that's a challenger to Chinese Party's legitimacy of ruling
2 China and with -- because the traditional Chinese culture is
3 in conflict with the Communist culture so they write warning
4 letters to politicians asking them not to attend the
5 performance. They call, email those elected officials who
6 attended the show to pressure them with defamation to Falun
7 Gong and the Shen Yun.

8 A city councillor in Ottawa watched the show.
9 Following the show, his office started to receive emails non-
10 stop with offensive and lewd content claiming to be from
11 Falun Gong practitioners. With the help of technical support
12 at city hall, the office managed to block the emails. Only
13 after the councillor complained to a local practitioner, the
14 practitioner had the chance to explain it.

15 Such interpersonal emails pretend to be Falun
16 Gong also sent to a theatre manager in Calgary with insulting
17 wordings and tried to attempt to sabotage the relationship
18 with the local presenters.

19 Theatre -- they also threatened the local
20 business sponsors to withdraw the sponsorship to Shen Yun.
21 They slash the tires of Shen Yun bus -- tour bus in Canada
22 and U.S. happening multiple times.

23 In just the most recently, last weekend, on
24 Sunday a bomb threat email was sent to the Queen Elizabeth
25 Theatre in Vancouver while the performance was being shown in
26 the theatre. The same threatening emails was sent to the
27 theatres in the U.S. at the same time, showing it was
28 deliberate and a vicious attack on Shen Yun. Only the CCP

1 had such motive and matches with their previous behaviour.

2 Yeah. So I will move to next -- the impact
3 to our community.

4 I mentioned briefly earlier the impact of our
5 community was for the threatening the safety and the security
6 of our members here and our family members in China with the
7 visa denial, the passport denial and arrest upon return to
8 China and et cetera and the window slash, the tire slash.
9 You know, but that's the personal -- personal experience.
10 It's on the surface, but the impact is more profound and
11 deeper.

12 So I give you a few points here.

13 Falun Gong practice in Canada have sought an
14 end to the persecution and the crimes of humanity that are
15 part of the ongoing eradication campaign against Falun Gong
16 in China. In response their effort, actions and, in fact,
17 their social life have been profoundly disrupted and
18 challenged by the foreign interference and the repression
19 carried out by Chinese diplomats and their agents and proxies
20 in Canadian soil.

21 Not only does the CCP's extension of the
22 persecution of Falun Gong to Canada threaten and undermine
23 the safety, security and the liberty of Falun Gong
24 practitioners seeking -- okay.

25 The CCP's interference also adversely impact
26 the Canadian society as a whole, creating a climate of
27 indifference in the face of the CCP's mass killing and the
28 torture in the PRC and the breeding intolerance and the

1 discrimination towards the Canadians in contradiction to
2 well-established Canadian values.

3 You know, the foreign interference and the --
4 and the repression is multifaceted. Falun Gong practitioners
5 face the most brutal suppression by the totalitarian
6 committee in China. The overseas Falun Gong community has
7 been tirelessly working to raise awareness and call for the
8 end to the persecution which is already itself a challenging
9 task.

10 The difficulties and the challenges they face
11 are compounded by experience of political interference,
12 demonization, spying, bullying and abuse perpetrated by the
13 CCP in Canada. Support and protection have been lacking and
14 are urgently required from Canadian institutions and the
15 government agencies.

16 There's a limit in what the Canadian Falun
17 Gong community can do. At the Chinese government, they are
18 up against the near unlimited resources at its disposal.
19 Navigating the legal process is also difficult, costly and
20 time consuming, as seen in Tribunal case that lasted for a
21 decade and drained considerable resources and time.

22 Also, CCP's continuous hate propaganda and
23 the disinformation campaign against Falun Gong has
24 responsible for creating indifference, apathy, and even
25 marginalization and discrimination towards the Falun Gong
26 community within Canadian society.

27 The CCP's unlawful dissemination of hate
28 speech and the disinformation against Falun Gong in Canada

1 must be addressed. In early years, anti-Falun Gong hate
2 campaigns that the Chinese Embassy and the Consulate
3 instigated and participated in were direct and visible.
4 After hating sentiment, the case involving Chinese diplomats
5 were brought and the police investigation into Canadian
6 courts and tribunals as well as the public attention, these
7 CCP activities became more subtle and covert, carried out by
8 more hidden agents and proxies, which are no less harm --
9 damaging and harmful.

10 The network of this covert agents has grown
11 and has become deeply integrated and involved, embedded into
12 Canadian society, creating an invisible but a persuasive
13 hand, controlling Canadian communities to serve the CCP's
14 interest, eroding Canadian values and the sovereignties.
15 Canada must take effective and urgent measures to respond to
16 this phenomena before it is too late.

17 Of particular note is this malicious email
18 campaigns. The important aspect of CCP's interference is use
19 of enticement, inducement, and the material incentives to
20 influence the behaviour of Canadians in key positions or
21 roles in Canadian society to act in the interest of the CPP,
22 and to align themselves with Communist regime's agenda.

23 This enticement include free trip to China;
24 lavish hospitality; promising while threatening the business
25 perspectives, as well as some material incentives.

26 You know, the CPP's infiltration into
27 Canada's political system and the institutions is extremely
28 concerning as it is otherwise affecting the proper

1 functioning of the Canadian governments and undermines the
2 very ability of the Canadian institutions to address and
3 rectify this issue itself.

4 There is a clear pattern and organization to
5 simulate random and sporadic acts of assault and attacks
6 perpetrated against the Falun Gong community. Canadian law
7 enforcement and authorities needed to conduct deeper
8 investigations to unravel and address the potential
9 systematic causes of these apparently individual cases,
10 including of dealing and treating those cases as isolated
11 individual incidents; an approach likely to have limited
12 effect.

13 The CCP has successfully instilled fear in
14 the minds of many, not only within the Chinese community, but
15 also among the non-Chinese populations of the world. Many
16 individuals and organizations fear the CPP, and they give
17 credence to the CPP's threats, coercion, and retaliation,
18 which the CCP exploits to control them.

19 Chinese nationals fear the possibility of
20 being barred from visiting China, or having their families in
21 China implicated if they do not comply with the CCP's
22 demands. Business fear losing business opportunities in
23 China and the government, the fear otherwise impact on their
24 relationship with China if they do not follow to the CPP's
25 transgressive demands.

26 Scholars who study China fear research
27 opportunities or denial of visa to China. Some community
28 event organizers fear losing sponsorship by the Chinese

1 Embassy or Consulate. And the politicians fear of losing
2 votes, even that's baseless, like, for they would lose votes
3 if they support the Falun Gong. But that's the rumours has
4 been spread among the communities to the politicians, and
5 that's the way to control and manipulate our politicians.

6 And in a similar vein, although the CPP's
7 interference and repression targets the Falun Gong community,
8 its measures encompasses effects and involves all sectors,
9 and indeed, the fabric of Canadian society. The objective is
10 to suppress voices advocating for an end to the human rights
11 abuse in China and conceal the CPP's crimes against humanity
12 committed against the Falun Gong. But at the same time, this
13 coercion and the manipulation continue; also harms the
14 Canadian interests and erodes Canadian values which endangers
15 this country. As such, the victims of this interference are
16 not just the Falun Gong but also Canadian society at large.

17 Thank you.

18 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** We'll turn now to our next
19 panellist, Mr. Jaskaran Sandhu.

20 Would you please describe your community or
21 communities?

22 **--- STATEMENT BY MR. JASKARAN SHANDHU:**

23 **MR. JASKARAN SANDHU:** Yeah. Look, the Sikh
24 Canadian community acts as almost a beacon on the hill for
25 other Sikh diaspora communities around the world. The
26 community in Canada is about a million strong at this current
27 juncture, and that makes it the largest concentration of
28 Sikhs outside of Punjab, which is considerable when you also

1 consider the fact that Sikhs in Canada make up over 2 percent
2 of Canada's population. And I stress that point because as a
3 portion, that's greater than the Sikh population in India,
4 which comes just around or shy of 2 percent.

5 Sikhs are a part of Canada; this country is
6 theirs. They have come here in mostly three waves of
7 immigration. The first and foremost happened over 100 years
8 ago as pioneers to this country, mostly to Western Canada.
9 And you have communities in British Columbia, especially
10 around lower mainland but also in the Okanagan, as far up as
11 William's Lake and beyond, that have been there for many
12 generations.

13 You also have a sizable Sikh community that
14 came during the eighties and nineties, and this is important
15 to remember for the points that we'll be making later. The
16 eighties and nineties saw Sikhs come here as they fled
17 persecution in India; that was the time of the Sikh genocide
18 when India was attacking, killing not only Sikhs but also
19 their institutions -- and forms a large part of the Sikh
20 diaspora that you see today.

21 The population from the eighties and nineties
22 settled across the country, but that is when you started
23 seeing a lot of Sikhs settle down in places like the greater
24 Toronto area, Brampton, as well as other parts of the
25 country.

26 The third wave, which we're probably
27 currently going through right now is a Sikh population that's
28 coming via things like point system, international students,

1 which is a pretty large body. That have added to the
2 tapestry that is the Sikh diaspora.

3 The Sikh community has been incredibly
4 successful. It has established itself across many different
5 industries, industries that are critical to the success of
6 this country. It has made significant cultural impact. You
7 know, just the other day, a Punjabi Sikh artist won a Juno
8 award. That again is a testament to the impact the community
9 has culturally as a soft power emanating out of Canada.

10 And probably most importantly for the
11 dialogue and the conversation we're having here today, it has
12 immense success in politics. I think we can be very frank
13 about that. We have over a dozen MPs, across party lines;
14 your leader of the opposition party, the NDP, comes from the
15 Sikh community, visibly Sikh; practices it as an Amritdhari
16 Sikh, or an initiated Sikh. You have Ministers within the
17 Liberal government, at one point four Ministers from the Sikh
18 community. You know, Prime Minister Trudeau at one time
19 famously said, "I have more Ministers than the Modi
20 government does from the Sikh community." And, again, we'll
21 touch on that a little later because that probably caused
22 some of the backlash that we're seeing from India, but it
23 ties into a lot of other things.

24 The Sikh community also enjoys senior posts
25 in the Conservative Party; for example, the Deputy Minister
26 of the Conservative Party at this time is also a visible
27 Sikh. And that also trickles down to other levels of
28 government. Provincially you see Sikhs succeeding in many

1 different provincial parties; you see Sikhs succeeding at
2 provincial politics. In fact, the Mayor of Edmonton and the
3 Mayor of Calgary are both Sikh, so the Sikh community has
4 definitely punched above its weight politically.

5 The other thing to remember about the
6 community is, just like any other community -- and I think
7 this will be true of my friends here sitting alongside me --
8 that there's a diversity of thought within the community.
9 The Sikh community, I think, differs from other communities
10 that hail from the Indian subcontinent in that it is
11 ethnically homogenous.

12 The community, like myself, is almost
13 entirely Punjabi. There are obviously other groups, but it
14 very much is a Punjabi Sikh community here in Canada.

15 There is still a diversity in political
16 opinions, on thoughts, on the news of the day, current
17 affairs, history just like every other community. It does
18 not act like a monolithic on every aspect of life, but it is
19 very much united. It is a community that mobilizes together,
20 that works with one another and that shares in one another's
21 successes. And I think that's a really bright spot about the
22 community.

23 It's also what scares the Indian government.
24 It's also what strikes fear in their hearts because this is a
25 community that cares very deeply about back home, about
26 Punjab, about India, about South Asia in general. It's a
27 community that is tied to Punjab and it's -- the fact that a
28 lot of them still have ancestral land and holdings in Punjab,

1 a lot of them still have family and friends in Punjab, a lot
2 of them still care about the politics of Punjab and of India
3 and, most importantly for the Sikh community, have deep ties
4 to faith.

5 The land of Punjab is the birthplace of the
6 Sikh faith. It is where the fountains of Sikhi that we
7 understand and see today first blossomed. It's where
8 Amritsar or the land that is -- in which the Harimandir
9 Sahib, the complex, the Golden Temple exists, a site that was
10 invaded and almost partially destroyed by the Indian
11 government again as part of the eighties and nineties
12 persecution.

13 It is the land where the Akal Takht stands.
14 The Akal Takht is the temporal seat of authority for the Sikh
15 people. It's -- and I hate making this comparison, but it's
16 the closest one I got and it's the only one that seems that
17 everyone kind of understands. It's the closest we have to,
18 let's say, something like the Vatican or Mecca for the Muslim
19 community.

20 It's the centre of our political existence
21 and our spiritual existence so, obviously, Sikh Canadians,
22 people of faith, have a deep connection to what's happening
23 there.

24 And I only mention this again because the
25 diaspora community, the Sikh diaspora community, doesn't
26 exist in a vacuum. It's very much a transnational people,
27 very much that it's still connected with their land in Punjab
28 for a lot of different reasons and, most importantly, I would

1 argue, faith.

2 This is something we need to keep in mind
3 when we talk about the community. As of today, the three
4 largest centres of the Sikh community here in Canada are
5 Brampton, which exists inside the Greater Toronto Area.
6 There's also large communities in places like Mississauga and
7 also in the GTA.

8 There's growing communities, obviously, in
9 Quebec outside of Montreal. There's growing communities in
10 Windsor and other places like that. Winnipeg has a growing
11 community. The second-largest community, though, after
12 Brampton, is in Surrey in the lower mainlands and adjoined
13 with that Abbotsford and Delta, obviously, have very large
14 communities of Sikh people.

15 And then the third-largest hub of Sikh
16 population is Calgary, but there's also a sizable population
17 in Edmonton, so this is a community that is fairly
18 centralized and dense in their community pockets. They enjoy
19 a lot of success in the cities in the places that they call
20 home and they care deeply about what's happening in Canada,
21 including foreign interference.

22 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** On that note, would you
23 please describe the forms that foreign interference takes in
24 your community?

25 **MR. JASKARAN SANDHU:** So the one thing I
26 really want to make clear is I appreciate and understand that
27 this inquiry is looking at a snapshot in time. I appreciate
28 that. I understand that of the terms of reference. You're

1 looking at a specific snapshot in time.

2 But you can't talk about foreign interference
3 and how it has impacted the Sikh community in Canada if you
4 don't go back to the eighties because that is when it
5 started.

6 The Sikh community has been facing
7 transnational repression in clear terms since the 1980s. And
8 you don't have to take my word for it.

9 RAW and IB agents, what are the external and
10 internal intelligence agencies of India, have literally
11 written books about this of how they, in the 1980s and
12 onwards, have infiltrated Sikh institutions and bodies,
13 including gurdwaras, which is our places of worship, how they
14 have threatened and coerced actors within our community,
15 including within spaces like ethnic media, how they have
16 worked to not only infiltrate, but destabilize and undermine
17 the ability of the community to mobilize.

18 And part of that is a fear of the Sikh
19 community gaining success in the political space and the
20 political theatre and electoral politics and the hallways of
21 powers.

22 The foreign interference story truly, truly
23 starts then. And it hasn't changed. It has just evolved.
24 And it has maybe got more sophisticated and advanced since
25 then, but its roots were settled in the 1980s to the point
26 that, in and around the mid-eighties -- and Canadian media
27 has reported about this. They've reported about all of this,
28 in fact, that at one point Canada actually expelled members

1 of the Indian consulate engaging in foreign interference in
2 the eighties, which ties into another important point of how
3 the foreign interference happens.

4 Indian consulates act as a hub for espionage
5 and foreign interference and transnational repression
6 targeting the Sikh community and they will target anyone
7 who's vocal. That goes for individuals that talk about human
8 rights issues in India. That goes to people talking about
9 historic and existing democratic backsliding in India, one of
10 the fastest autocratizing nations on earth. That goes to
11 people who talk about local issues and political issues in
12 India and it goes to people who talk about Khalistan or Sikh
13 sovereignty issues.

14 They'll target everyone, and they'll target
15 them for various reasons, again which we'll talk about when I
16 think we handle the third question about what the impact is.

17 The point is, though, the consulates are a
18 hub for this activity and the consulates are made up of, in
19 large part, RAW agents and IB agents. They have stationed in
20 Canada intelligence officers whose sole purpose is to monitor
21 and target the Sikh community.

22 Now, how they do that and what forms that can
23 take, we saw that in the eighties and we see that continue
24 today, is, you know, things as simple as visa denials. You
25 know, good luck visiting India.

26 Now, you may ask, well, why does one want to
27 visit India or why would one want to go there, and I go back
28 to my initial answer to your question about what the

1 community makeup is. If a Sikh -- and I really want people
2 to really understand this of how frustrating this is for
3 someone from the Sikh community.

4 If a Sikh speaks about a Sikh issue that is
5 important to the Sikh community, that is not controversial
6 within the Sikh community, which is a conversation that we're
7 allowed to have as a people and the debates we're allowed to
8 have as a people, we risk having our visas denied to visit
9 our religious and ancestral homes in Punjab.

10 What other community would experience that
11 type of heavy-handed transnational repression and foreign
12 interference for merely practising -- and I want to stress
13 this point -- merely practising legal protected *Charter*
14 rights and international norms?

15 This is -- this is something as crazy as,
16 let's say, folks in the Catholic community having debates
17 about issues that are hot topics within the community that
18 don't align with maybe what the Vatican's saying and are now
19 barred from entering Italy or Vatican City. That is
20 literally what is happening to the Sikh community. And it
21 goes on across a whole host of different issues.

22 So that's one way the consulates do it and
23 that's one reason why they have agents within their
24 consulates.

25 Other forms that foreign interference take,
26 and this is a -- definitely a proper one nowadays with the
27 advent of social media and everything else that comes with
28 it, and it's probably going to get scarier with AI. As we're

1 already seeing, deep fakes are very easy to do and there's
2 been advancements in that already in the last week.

3 Disinformation is a critical tool in
4 amplifying and escalating foreign interference against target
5 communities. And this is true for the Sikh community, it is
6 true for my friends here in the communities that they come
7 from. We're seeing it only grow more alarming and I fear
8 even scarier with the advent of things like AI.

9 There's a real possibility what I am saying
10 right now, which is being streamed, can be modified literally
11 by tomorrow and say something completely else, and what are
12 people supposed to do about that?

13 Now, India is seen -- and again, this is
14 something -- you don't have to take my word for it. This has
15 been reported by international media from the likes of BBC.
16 It's been documented by major institutions that look at these
17 issues like the EU Disinfo Lab. It has been examined by The
18 Fifth Estate recently. The CBC launched a documentary that
19 was, in fact, banned in India after it came out.

20 India is a hub for global disinformation.
21 The ability for India to spread disinfo is second to none,
22 and they'll target everyone and anyone that they see as a
23 threat to their interests. And it just happens to be that
24 the Sikh community is at the top or almost at the very top of
25 the communities they target.

26 And what does that disinfo do?

27 That disinformation in the case of Canada
28 maligns the Sikh community, undermines the Sikh community.

1 And again, when I say Sikh community, I'm talking about the
2 Sikh Canadian community. I'm born and raised in this
3 country. I'm born and raised in the city of Brampton, spent
4 my whole life there.

5 We're Canadian, right. I grew up playing
6 street hockey on my court shouting "car" every time something
7 drove by and then we get right back to it. We grew up on
8 pads wearing -- goaltending pads. Patrick Roy was one of my
9 favourites, him and Felix Potvin.

10 We were -- we used to play with pads one size
11 too small. My knees are a mess. They still are.

12 We are Canadian. We're as Canadian as maple
13 syrup. We just -- we are Sikh, though, as well. That faith
14 is very important and integral to my identity. We're also
15 Punjabis. That history, my ancestors who fought day and
16 night and martyred -- and achieved martyrdom at various
17 points of our history so that I can sit here and speak to you
18 as a Sikh, is very important to me.

19 But what's happening is we're getting
20 targeted by disinfo. We're getting maligned. We are victims
21 of lies. We are the victims of an attempt to foster discord
22 in our communities, to polarize our communities. And I'm
23 talking about multiple diaspora communities that come out of
24 the subcontinent.

25 In a way, building this -- a term that's
26 often used in the Indian context of communal tensions, right,
27 tensions between different communities, whether it be the
28 Sikh community, the Muslim community, the Hindu community,

1 what have you.

2 These are -- this is discord and tensions
3 that are being exported out of India and undermining our
4 community's institutions here in Canada. That's incredibly
5 dangerous, especially if you understand what's going on in
6 India.

7 So that disinfo happens via social media.
8 And Your Honour was asking about, you know, what type of
9 platforms that happens on.

10 In India's case, you know, there's two
11 avenues in that disinfo is spread. One is WhatsApp, which is
12 more internal community facing, ethnic media. There are some
13 ethnic media outlets that are known to be very close to India
14 and the consulate and have different reasons why they might
15 comply with demands from Indian government or Indian
16 government officials. That happens. And Indian national
17 media.

18 Indian national media will spread
19 disinformation. Like it is known. It has been covered.
20 It's been reported. It's a reason why India currently on
21 Reporter Without Borders index on press freedom ranks 161 out
22 of 180 countries.

23 Now, human nature being what it is, those
24 numbers don't mean much unless you anchor with something.
25 India ranks below Afghanistan. India ranks below -- I'm
26 pretty sure it was in the previous iteration. I don't know
27 about currently. But I think it actually ranks below Russia.

28 India, though, unlike those other countries,

1 likes to tell people that it's a pluralistic, democratic
2 nation that shares values with the likes of Canada and the
3 United States and the UK and et cetera, et cetera.

4 So this is how disinfo is being disseminated.
5 On social media, aside from WhatsApp, the platform of choice
6 for Indian disinfo is Twitter, and there's a reason for it.
7 There's a very specific reason for it.

8 India understands that Twitter is where your
9 politicians are sitting, your decisionmakers are sitting.
10 India understands that journalists sit on Twitter. India
11 understands that think tanks and institutions and NGOs all
12 operate on Twitter.

13 Their goal is not just to directly malign
14 Sikh actors or Sikh activists or the Sikh community. Their
15 goal is also to influence western actors to silence Sikh
16 activism in the diaspora. So the role of disinfo is to make
17 it so that decisionmakers think twice before listening to,
18 quite frankly, their own constituents because of noise coming
19 out of India that they can't find the signal through.

20 The examples are multiple. You know, look at
21 -- look at the NDP leader, Jagmeet Singh. Look at Liberal
22 Ministers. Look at members of the Conservative Party at
23 senior ranks within the party. Look at any time they ever
24 Tweet anything or say anything or do anything. You will see
25 underneath accusations of them being terrorist sympathizers,
26 extremists, you name it. Just absolutely bonker accusations.

27 If you go read Indian media -- I'll give you
28 an example from the 2008 trip to India that Prime Minister

1 Trudeau and his entire team went on. The Minister of Defence
2 at that time, Harjit Singh Sajjan, was accused of being a
3 terrorist and an extremist. Think about that for a second.
4 That makes absolutely no sense. We know that's ridiculous.

5 The leader of the NDP Party at that time was
6 also accused of such things. Prime Minister Trudeau was
7 accused of being in bed with terrorists in Canada.

8 Again, none of these things are ever proven
9 and they're not going to be proven because they're false.
10 But the point is to attack and undermine and cast a cloud of
11 suspicion on the Sikh community.

12 And in February -- I think it was February
13 2018 at the time, it worked. India was able to achieve their
14 goal. There were, at one point in February, 150 negative
15 articles -- I'm not talking about news reports, radio,
16 whatever -- 150 mainstream articles that were negative and
17 parroted unverified, quite frankly false, accusations about
18 the Sikh community, its political aspirations and its Members
19 of Parliament.

20 That's one snapshot in time. That's been
21 happening since the eighties.

22 So that disinfo is also meant to shape the
23 manner in which Canadian media reports on our community.

24 Now, back then there was huge feelings over a
25 lot of advocacy from Sikh community, including a World Sikh
26 Organization campaign called "Ask Canadian Sikhs", including
27 the efforts of Gurdwara associations like the OGCBGC as well
28 as just grassroots organizing, attempts to talk to

1 journalists and media to educate them on what's actually
2 going on. And Canadian media actually has grown leaps and
3 bounds since then and hasn't necessarily fallen victim to
4 these disinformation networks like they did back in 2018.

5 But that doesn't mean it's not happening
6 still and there are other people platforming this
7 disinformation who I can only term, unfortunately -- and
8 don't mind my language -- useful idiots from the far right,
9 especially on platforms like Twitter, that are more than
10 happy to parrot and push nonsensical, outlandish disinfo from
11 India.

12 Another form that disinformation -- sorry,
13 foreign interference happens is through proxies. And we've
14 heard that used -- that term used here quite a few times.

15 There are organizations and groups that are
16 close to either the Government of India, that are either
17 close to political parties in India primarily at this time,
18 just because they've been in power for a while, the BJP, or
19 are close to the consulates that are used for various tools
20 of foreign interference -- for varying methods of tools of
21 foreign interference, sorry.

22 They're used to lobby Government of India
23 interests. They are used to support and fundraise political
24 parties. They are used -- and I'll get to this as well.
25 They're used to gatekeep the community from decisionmakers
26 and politicians. And, quite frankly, they're used in
27 nominations and leadership races to funnel membership and
28 cash to candidates of their choice that will propagate and

1 uphold, in this case, Government of India interests, which
2 typically is targeted towards a Sikh community that has a
3 history of raising grievances with the Indian State, whether
4 that's because of the Sikh genocide, whether it's their right
5 to self-determination, or whether it's to various human
6 rights or other causes, including, and we'll get to this when
7 we talk about impact, extrajudicial actions by the Indian
8 Government.

9 So the proxies are important, the
10 disinformation is important, the media, how it works, is
11 important because it gets to, again probably more relevant to
12 the conversation we're having here, the other form of foreign
13 interference, which is interfering in the electoral process.

14 The theatre in which foreign interference
15 happens on the electoral process is actually, quite frankly,
16 not necessarily general elections, which I know is kind of
17 the scope of what we're discussing here. The first phase at
18 least.

19 Where foreign interference really happens at
20 a much more successful and consistent manner is nominations
21 in leadership races. And there's a reason for that. Those
22 are closed universes. So for those that are not aware how
23 nominations in leadership races work, unless you're a party
24 member, you don't -- you can't vote in that process.

25 So, you know, I'm a member of, you know, the
26 Brampton riding and I can't vote for my candidate of choice
27 unless I first purchase a membership by a certain deadline,
28 and then go vote on a nomination date, and at the result, one

1 of the many candidates that stood for the race will get a
2 ticket to run.

3 That's very easy to manipulate. It's very
4 easy to mobilize. It's very easy to give cash to candidates.
5 There's very little oversight on how nominations are done in
6 this country. Political parties are essentially clubs and
7 they can, for lack of better terms, or going into details, do
8 whatever they want.

9 And so it's easy to insert yourself into
10 those processes, especially if you're a powerful government
11 that everyone wants to get cozy with because of trade deals.

12 So you have an easy time of getting into the
13 process at the nomination of leadership race because of that.

14 Now, there's been some reporting recently
15 that one federal party, and again, these folks may not even
16 know that it's happening, have been a victim of foreign
17 interference by proxies and the Indian Government in their
18 leadership race, and it was done by withholding and
19 gatekeeping community events; right? So that's put on and
20 attended by Canadians, membership sales, and general
21 fundraising, to undermine or stop a candidate they didn't
22 like because they had raised issues that were important to
23 the Sikh community that the Government of India didn't want
24 being discussed.

25 That's happening everywhere. Right? That
26 happens at the provincial level, it happens across party
27 lines. This is not necessarily an issue specific to one
28 party. I want to make that very clear. The nominations work

1 the same way.

2 So this something that we need to really keep
3 in mind when we talk about foreign interference in elections,
4 because a lot of it actually happens before the generals.
5 It's harder to interfere at a general election because, you
6 know, people are voting, because of the way they're voting
7 for multiple different reasons, there's a lot of different
8 external and internal factors at play. That's not the case
9 with nominations of leadership, where you can control a lot
10 of the levers.

11 Interference also happens in things like
12 candidate selection. And so a party before they allow
13 someone to run in a nomination, will go through a process
14 where either they're red lit or they're green lit.

15 If you're someone who has actively spoken
16 about Sikh issues, and Sikh causes, and Sikh concerns, I
17 guarantee you the Indian Government is telling those parties
18 to red light them. Those conversations are happening. Those
19 correspondences are happening with one another. And it's
20 done through Consulates and High Commissions.

21 That is a very real form of foreign
22 interference that is happening, again, across party lines
23 across every level of government. Again, because it's easy.
24 Every political party is going to, one way or another, say
25 they want to have close ties with India, again for trade, and
26 they're willing to, quite frankly, look the other way on
27 human rights violations and transnational repression against
28 their own citizens to pursue those trade deals, minus one

1 exception, which we'll get to.

2 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Sorry to interrupt, but I
3 am mindful of time, because we do have one more panelist.
4 You've mentioned several times that you will talk to us more
5 about some of the things you'd mentioned when you discuss the
6 impact, so I wonder if you can turn your mind to moving on to
7 the impact once you finish?

8 **MR. JASKARAN SANDHU:** Yeah, look, impact,
9 they literally killed a guy. Right? They killed Hardeep
10 Singh Nijjar, a president of a major gurdwara in Surrey, in
11 the parking lot of said gurdwara in broad daylight. A leader
12 of the Sikh community slumped over his steering wheel,
13 bleeding out because he was shot multiple times, as part of a
14 transnational repression assassination program.

15 And the scary part was he was only one of
16 many people on that list, as per the U.S. indictment on
17 Nikhil Gupta, which should really shed more light on this.

18 And I look forward to the day that the RCMP
19 lays charges and arrests the people that were involved in the
20 Canadian example.

21 Like how is that for impact? That's the cost
22 of foreign interference in this country and not taking it
23 seriously.

24 What surprised us about Prime Minister
25 Trudeau's message in Parliament back in, what was that, six
26 months ago, seven months ago now at this point, what
27 surprised us as a community was not the fact that India would
28 go to the lengths of assassinating someone in Canada.

1 Canadian citizen, mind you. What surprised us was that Prime
2 Minister Trudeau would stand up in Parliament and confront it
3 head on and that at least that day in Parliament would be
4 echoed by all major opposition parties, from the NDP, to the
5 Conservatives, the Bloc Quebecois. And that surprised us as
6 a community because the impact of foreign interference on the
7 Sikh Canadian community has been largely ignored over the
8 last 30/40 years. The community has felt that it's been up
9 to us to defend ourselves, that there is essentially nothing
10 the government will do to protect Sikhs, out of fear of
11 embarrassing India, a country that likes to advertise itself
12 as the world's largest democracy, but quite frankly isn't,
13 and the trade deals that it comes with.

14 The reality is, the impact of foreign
15 interference has had a major chilling effect over the last
16 30/40 years and Sikh Canadians enjoying Charter protected
17 rights and the full glow of liberty and freedom that this
18 country is supposed to stand for. We have allowed the Indian
19 Government to dictate the terms of how fellow Canadians look
20 at us as Sikh Canadians. The impact has been we have largely
21 allowed India to describe us and describe us practicing our
22 Charter Rights as extremists or terrorists.

23 In fact, me speaking here right now, under
24 Indian definitions, would be considered an act of terror and
25 extremism. I'm just telling you the truth of what happens to
26 our community. That's how freely they throw that word
27 around.

28 And the impact of that is not just a chilling

1 effect within the community, but casting a cloud on the
2 manner in which government, government officials, party
3 members, MPs, agencies, talk to us and deal with us, because
4 they don't want to be caught up in the whole disinfo
5 networks, they don't want to get the gatekeeping from proxies
6 of the Consulate, they don't want the angry phone calls and
7 meetings that the Consulate ask for, because, again, the
8 reputation on The Hill is India is a very insecure country
9 and throws a storm about everything.

10 The reality is that that is what the impact
11 is.

12 Aside from the community and the chilling
13 effect it has on us, it has also led the government to make
14 some really profoundly problematic decisions. Because of the
15 disinfo that was being leveled against its MPs and the
16 community back on the 2018 trip that Prime Minister Trudeau
17 took, Canada, at the end of it, signed a document which was
18 hailed as a major policy victory for India. They signed what
19 was a security sharing framework with India.

20 And I'll tell you right now, the only
21 community that India cares about is the Sikh community. So
22 essentially, as far as the Indians are concerned, they are
23 working with Canada to spy on us, conduct espionage, but to
24 use and fish for information so that they can harass and
25 bother not just activists that may be operating out of
26 Canada, but their families and loved ones back home.

27 Now, a security sharing framework of this
28 type did exist at one point, but Canada pulled it decades ago

1 because they realized that India was using information, even
2 just basic information that doesn't actually amount to any
3 kind of guilt of anything of that sort, to engage in
4 extrajudicial murder, torture, seizure of properties, et
5 cetera, et cetera. And Canada, to its credit, has, over the
6 years, not fallen under the pressure to bring that type of
7 framework back, until foreign interference worked like a
8 charm for India and they were able to get it done. It has
9 dictated the type of people that run for positions of, like,
10 MP, or MPP, or whatever, or MLA in this country. It has
11 stopped certain folks from engaging or speaking freely about
12 issues because of the fears of the retribution.

13 India has effectively exported autocratic
14 despotic extrajudicial measures that are normal in India to
15 Canada. That is what we have allowed. And the murder of
16 Hardeep Singh Nijjar is just one really drastic example of
17 that. May not be the last one.

18 Now, aside from the community, the impact is
19 that it undermines the ability of our community, of
20 Canadians, to make free decisions, decisions that are not
21 tainted by foreign interference. It stops Canadians from
22 engaging with the democratic institutions without the stain
23 of disinformation and misrepresentation casted from India.
24 It robs Canadians of making really informed decisions because
25 of the types of attacks that are being leveled against the
26 Sikh community, and, you know, it formats discord and
27 polarization within our community as well, who are happy, in
28 some segments of the community, happy to jump and bandwagon

1 on disinformation from India if it means that they can attack
2 certain political parties and certain politicians they don't
3 like for other reasons or whatever it may be.

4 The impact -- you know, I'll give you another
5 stark example. You know, back in 2010, Canadian visa
6 officials rejected visas to former and current Indian
7 paramilitary, military, and police officers from visiting to
8 Canada because they had been implicated in extrajudicial
9 murder and torture, particularly against the Sikh community
10 in India.

11 The Indian Government, after an outcry, and
12 pressure, and complaining about, the Canadian Government
13 reversed their decision and allowed those actors who had a
14 history of conducting torture and extrajudicial murder
15 against our people into the country.

16 That has continued to happen to this date and
17 those people, quite frankly, live amongst us.

18 That is something we're allowing because of
19 foreign interference and that is something that is going to
20 increasingly happen if we don't wake up. And if we believe
21 that, well, India is, again, a pluralistic liberal democracy
22 just like Canada and the U.S., so therefore we can interact
23 with them just like we do with, you know, allies like the
24 U.S. and the U.K, we're in for a really rude awakening.

25 India is a hostile state. India is not --
26 well, depending on what ranking you look at, if you look at
27 the V-Dem Institute, or the Freedom House, it is the fastest
28 autocratizing country on earth. It is now what is referred

1 to as an electoral autocracy. It is what is referred to as a
2 partly free country. I already referenced the rankings of
3 press freedom there. Institutions like the judiciary is
4 falling apart. They've literally just arrested one of the
5 major opposition leaders right before the election and they
6 pulled the funding of another major opposition, again in the
7 lead up to an election.

8 This is the state of India, and it's been
9 like this for a very long time, and it's the Sikh community
10 that's facing the brunt of this hostility.

11 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Thank you very much.

12 We have one final panelist who is joining us
13 remotely. So I'm just going to wait until she appears on our
14 screen.

15 Ms. Winnie Ng, thank you for joining us
16 today. Would you please describe your community or
17 communities?

18 **--- STATEMENT BY MS. WINNIE NG:**

19 **MS. WINNIE NG:** Yes. Thank you very much for
20 the invitations. My name is Winnie Ng. I'm the co-chair of
21 Toronto Association for Democracy in China.

22 And I just want to start off by sending
23 regrets on behalf of our other co-chair, Cheuk Kwan, who has
24 taken ill and lost his voice. So I'm here to speak on behalf
25 of our group.

26 I would start off by talking -- saying a bit
27 more about TADC and then go into the broader Chinese Canadian
28 community.

1 TADC was founded on the eve of the 1989
2 Tiananmen Square massacre. It has been a human rights
3 organization for the past 34 years, organizing an annual June
4 4th candlelight vigil to commemorate the victims of the
5 massacre. It's -- in a sense, it's our way to preserve the
6 truth of what has taken place and to stop any rewriting and
7 erasing of this chapter of the atrocity.

8 Right now, there is a disinformation
9 campaign, a counternarrative that's going on that June 4th
10 never -- massacre never took place. And that's why we
11 continue to organize and make sure that the truth will never
12 be forgotten.

13 In addition to the annual event, we also play
14 an active role in advocating and lobbying efforts in Canada
15 and abroad, including appearing before the Canadian
16 Parliamentary Standing Committees and the U.S. Congressional
17 Hearings.

18 TADC is also a founding member of the
19 Amnesty-led Canadian Coalitions for Human Rights in China.

20 During the -- after the June 4th Tiananmen
21 massacre, TADC, along with Chinese Canadian National Council,
22 the umbrella organizations representing activists across the
23 country, we actually lobbied and got amnesty from the Federal
24 Government and got amnesty for 5,000 Chinese scholars and
25 students who then were stranded in Canada.

26 And then as you all know, the 2019 anti-
27 extradition bill protest movement took place in Hong Kong,
28 and as a result, with the political crackdown and the passing

1 of the national security law in Hong Kong by Beijing on June
2 30th, 2020, it has a devastating sweeping impact on the
3 rights and freedoms of Hongkongers.

4 So TADC has initiated a project since 2020 in
5 assisting some of the former protestors and pro-democracy
6 activists in resettling in Ontario.

7 That's sort of the gist of our work.

8 And I just want to also want to echo some of
9 what the previous speakers have said, and I want to introduce
10 myself on a personal level.

11 I was born and raised in Hong Kong and came
12 to Canada in 1968 as an international student. I went to
13 Montreal and then moved down to Toronto in 1975 and worked as
14 a community organizer right in the heart of China Town. So
15 I've been involved in the community for over 45 years.

16 And I think just like the Punjabi
17 communities, it's -- the Chinese Canadian community, it's
18 diverse, it's complicated and it's non-homogenous.

19 We had different waves that have come in and
20 bringing in new diversity, new ideas as well as new
21 challenges.

22 I was -- you know, after the -- in the
23 seventies, we worked on the Southeast Asian boat people's
24 movement. In 1975, there was the campus giveaway, the W5
25 movement, and that sparked the whole anti-racism movement
26 within the Chinese Canadian community.

27 And to me, I think what we have been saying
28 is then, in 1989, with the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square

1 massacre, this is where the turning point is that we -- you
2 know, I'm hoping the Commission would look beyond the
3 elections of 2019 and 2021 and take a broader and long-range
4 view looking back and the insidious way the Chinese PRC has
5 been influencing and interfering with not just the elections,
6 but in terms of controlling our media, in terms of usurping
7 our organizations. And these are all part of the pieces that
8 has shaped to bring it to this point.

9 In that sense, it's also -- I mean, in the
10 past it has been -- the United Front's work has been more
11 quiet, more under the current, more hidden. Now, it's a
12 whole lot more emboldened and they have taken a free range in
13 doing a lot of the intimidations and interference into our
14 own Canadian politics.

15 So this is where I'm coming from from briefly
16 describing what TADC is as well as the broader Chinese
17 Canadian community. It's diverse, it's complicated. And you
18 know, with the influx of different waves of newcomers, and
19 particularly with the last four years through the grace of
20 the Hong Kong federal government's Hong Kong Pathway program,
21 we now have a new generation of young Hong Kongers that come
22 in and it's also creating more dialogue and more providing us
23 with more evidence on the whole scheme of the influences and
24 interventions of the People's Republic of China.

25 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** When you talk about the
26 People's Republic of China becoming more emboldened, you talk
27 about influences and interventions, can you give us some
28 examples of what that looks like?

1 What kind of forms does foreign interference
2 take in your community?

3 **MS. WINNIE NG:** Yeah. And just to reinforce
4 some of the points that Mehmet and Grace have made, the
5 pattern is quite similar to all the other groups as well.
6 And I think I just want to start off by saying, you know, a
7 lot of these actions and, you know, campaigns and schemes are
8 orchestrated by none other than the United Front Work
9 Department, the UFW, which is headed by the chief of the
10 Secretariat of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee.

11 And part of that whole -- I think, you know,
12 what the whole intent through the -- you know, through the
13 PLCs and its proxies is to create and cultivate an atmosphere
14 of fear that would stop and dissuade Chinese Canadians from
15 speaking out against the PLC.

16 These means include, one, by usurping
17 legitimate Chinese Canadian organizations, you know, by co-
18 opting, by repurposing. And I'll go into a bit more detail.

19 Two, it's by influencing people in power
20 directly or indirectly. Three, it's by criminalizing certain
21 acts extra-territorially. Four, it's through Chinese
22 language media and social media. And then last, but not
23 least, by threatening individuals directly or indirectly who
24 speak up against the PLC.

25 And part of its -- these means are made more
26 complicated and more difficult to counter because PLC does
27 not abide with the regular, the ordinary rules of engagement,
28 right. The overarching purposes of PLC's foreign

1 interference strategy is to silence the critic, to suppress
2 any dissent and force the loyalty among people of Chinese
3 descent or the heritage of PLC. And so in that sense,
4 nationalism, patriotism trumps over human rights, democracy
5 and freedom.

6 So I will go into a bit more detail and give
7 some examples, one on usurping, co-opting legitimate
8 organizations.

9 This is a very common political tactics,
10 strategies that's used by the United Front. You know, it's -
11 - in their way, it's called entryism. It's using -- you
12 know, the PLC encourages members -- its members or
13 supporters to join an organization locally. It could be a
14 community service agencies, associations, whatever means
15 possible to permeate and perpetuate these organizations in an
16 attempt to expand influence and expand their ideas and
17 programs.

18 So they might not be -- you know, it appears
19 to be so innocuous, but the hidden agenda is it's trying to
20 persuade these organizations to remain, quote unquote,
21 neutral and not to be, quote unquote, political, right.

22 Over times, these infiltrations, these
23 influences, the United Front has become a complex network of
24 organizations that would engage in various activity for CCP,
25 for Chinese Communist Party, at a whim and at a beck and
26 call.

27 So -- and so these -- that's one of the
28 pieces. And we have seen, you know, one of the first fight,

1 it's during the -- you know, it's the aftermath of the
2 Tiananmen Square massacre. CCP has also recognized they need
3 to -- they need to counter our narrative, they need to
4 counter our community-based organizations such as the Chinese
5 Canadian National Council that came about from a whole anti-
6 W5 movement in pushing for equality and access to positions
7 and outcomes.

8 What they have done is using their power
9 brokers to create a counter national umbrella organizations
10 that would espouse the ideas and act as the mouthpiece of
11 CCP. So this umbrella organizations was formed in 1992. And
12 while it professed to be a community national organization,
13 it actually carry out the work to counter criticisms in
14 Canada by local organizations.

15 And one example to cite is the whole head tax
16 redress campaign, which we took on as community activists. I
17 remember I was signing -- interviewing head taxpayers in 1984
18 and CCNC took up the fight and we got an apology in 2006.
19 But the path to that apology was fraught with challenges and
20 counter-diversions and confusions that was instigated by this
21 counter-umbrella organizations.

22 And they took different stands to the point
23 that it divided the community efforts and we end up not
24 having the strongest solidarity in pushing for more changes
25 within the government.

26 At the end, the head tax redress campaign, we
27 got the apology and we got compensations for the head
28 taxpayers or their, you know -- their spouses. But when the

1 other counter organizations was pushing for this apology and
2 no compensations, these are -- we fall into the divide and
3 rule context -- divide and rule tactics, and this is just one
4 clear example.

5 The other, it's influencing -- the other
6 strategy is influencing people in power.

7 You know, the community leaders, elected or
8 non-elected as long as they're a high profile, they're deemed
9 as the opinion leaders. PRC, through the United Front, would
10 try to approach them, try to -- and you know, get them to go
11 travel to China. To wine and dine politicians at all level
12 was rampant over the last 20 years, you know, with the aim to
13 -- for them to achieve -- you know, to shape and influence
14 the opinions of these elected politicians that they would
15 take a pro-PRC policy position, including funding trip to
16 China.

17 And I mean, it's -- to me, I think this is
18 really quite counterintuitive when we have Parliamentarians
19 who embark on exchange programs with the -- with PRC's
20 National People's Congress. What kind of -- to me, I think
21 it's what kind of exchange program would that be coming from
22 an autocracy system, coming from a system where the National
23 People's Congress only meets 10 days a year and they have
24 never voted anything down.

25 I believe these are charades, these are
26 influences at the very top level of our Canadian democratic
27 institutions.

28 So -- and then the -- in terms of the

1 influences of people in power, it include, you know, the
2 Confucius Institute -- the presence of Confucius Institute in
3 our public school board system to the public post-secondary
4 institutions. These influences have repercussions. These
5 are soft ways of entries, but if carried on, have severe and
6 long-term impact on our intelligence, on our informations as
7 well as the shaping the public opinions about PRC.

8 The other piece is on the -- it's on the
9 threat of accessing and weaponizing personal data. The PRC
10 collect datas as all the previous speaker has talk about, you
11 know, to collect data and informations that they can use as
12 part of their intimidation and interference strategies and
13 efforts, right.

14 It includes social media and, you know, our
15 technology that have us using information and data. It's
16 expand especially through banking institutions with
17 connections with PRC.

18 And to me, I think this is where Mehmet had
19 talked about it, too. The presence of six police stations,
20 Chinese police stations in Montreal, Vancouver and Toronto
21 are no coincidence. These are -- you know, much as they have
22 been shut down, we never know whether it's operating in
23 another form at -- on an underground basis or through other
24 social media and through internet.

25 So these are -- to me, I think we cannot
26 afford to be relaxed, we cannot -- we need to be stepping up
27 our vigilance as well as stepping up our measures in
28 protecting our Canadian democratic system.

1 The other piece -- and the fourth, which is
2 what's happening taking place, the real example is what's
3 taking place in Hong Kong right now, is the criminalizing act
4 within Canada. The Beijing controlled Hong Kong government
5 introduced various legislations such as, in 2020, the
6 national security law, and then, last Saturday, the Article
7 23 legislations took -- has taken effect in Hong Kong.

8 And this -- these legislations prohibit
9 activities by anyone, whether they are Chinese or Hong Kong
10 nationals or not, in speaking out, in criticizing, in
11 engaging in activities that seem as, you know, colluding with
12 foreign agents, seditions and subversions.

13 And you know, regardless -- and you know,
14 under this new law, Article 23, activities like what we have
15 been doing such as lobbying, which is normal -- a normal part
16 of life of Canada's democratic system, may be found to have
17 breached PRC's or Hong Kong's law. And both these -- these -
18 - that national security law and Article 23, I think one of
19 the damaging part is also they are retroactive and that an
20 individual or group can be criminalized for activities that
21 took place even before Article 23 has taken place.

22 And to me, this is all part of the
23 continuations to silence dissent, to get people to start
24 self-censoring themselves and to give up speaking out or
25 showing up in any of our activities outside Canada. And to
26 me, this is the last nail in the coffin in dismantling and
27 threatening the highly-built civil society of Hong Kong into
28 shreds.

1 Then the fifth one is the Chinese language
2 media and social media which others have also talked about.

3 I will just raise an example that, you know,
4 over our 34 years of organizing the candlelight vigil, June
5 4th candlelight vigils, prior to eight years ago, we have
6 always been able to get the cooperation of the Chinese print
7 dailies to give us a community wave, to put our ads in the
8 newspapers as a way of promoting the event. But from eight
9 years -- last eight years, that offer has been declined. We
10 do not -- you know, at this point we cannot, and the
11 newspapers have refused to put our ads in the paper.

12 And I think these are some of the pieces that
13 has dramatically shaped and polarized our communities as
14 well. I think this is where, you know, the influences have -
15 - you know, it's beyond just the 2019 and 2021 election.
16 It's these -- you know, the influences that took shape and
17 started back in the late -- in early eighties have now taken
18 shape and taken a strong hold within our Canadian democratic
19 system.

20 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** You mentioned goals of
21 silencing, dissent. You've talked about trying to impose
22 self-censorship. You talked about the impact of polarization
23 within our community.

24 What else would you like to tell the
25 Commissioner and the members of the public about the impacts
26 of foreign interference on your community?

27 **MS. WINNIE NG:** Yeah. And you know, I'm
28 going to elaborate about the impact with a few concrete

1 examples, right.

2 Last Saturday, March 23rd, the day when the
3 Article 23 legislation took effect in Hong Kong, we organized
4 -- we were part -- Toronto was part of the Global Day of
5 Action Against Article 23. We were one of the 23 cities
6 across the globe that did the protest.

7 And in the protest, we immediately saw a
8 number -- an increasing number of demonstrators or activists
9 who came out to the rally. They end up concealing themselves
10 by wearing heavy-duty head gear, and that wasn't the case
11 previous demonstrations. And to me, I think this is -- this
12 is part of that self-protections that they have to do.

13 After the -- the rally on Saturday, on
14 Monday, as organizers of this year, the 35th anniversary of
15 the June 4th candlelight vigil, we have -- you know, we have
16 booked Mel Lastman Square for our event. We have
17 commissioned -- we have contracted an AV technician company
18 to set up our stage.

19 Now, on Monday we just heard from that AV
20 company that they are withdrawing their commitment, they are
21 withdrawing their contract because our organization is deemed
22 as "Political".

23 These are real and, you know -- I mean, we
24 are not going to be, you know, deterred and we're going to
25 forge ahead. But these are concrete examples of how
26 insidious and how that element of fear sometimes have
27 overtaken our conscience, our commitment for freedom and
28 democracy.

1 The other piece -- and I think these are some
2 of the key pieces. The other it's -- you know, TADC has
3 launched a campaign, along with other groups, in pushing for
4 foreign agent registry. And for that, we were accused of
5 being traitors; we were accused of being racist. And these
6 -- I mean, for me, this is -- you know, as someone who has
7 been involved in anti-Asian racism, in human rights causes in
8 Canada for the last 45 years, I find this offensive, that
9 they told Beijing, politicians and community people,
10 activists, would brand this initiative as a racist, as
11 reminding of the *Anti-Chinese Exclusion Act*. To me, I think
12 this is farthest from the truth, what they have done. It's
13 using forced equivalence, conflating anti-racism, anti-Asian
14 racism and our desire to safeguard our Canadian transparency
15 and accountability within our political system. What's wrong
16 with us standing up as Canadians and saying that we need a
17 foreign agent registry to hold our government, to hold our
18 elected politicians accountable? And this -- and in
19 particular, this foreign registry, Asian registry is not just
20 singling out Chinese "Agents".

21 So I find these to be part of that
22 divisiveness that is taking place, trying to create a --
23 further polarizations between different groups within our own
24 community. And so I guess my sense is, you know, it's the
25 Commission's, as you -- later on you're going to be releasing
26 your initial report. I believe, you know, that would be one
27 of the counter-narrative that pro-Beijing people and pro-
28 Beijing people in Canada is going to characterize, using

1 anti-Asian racism, nationalism, and patriotism as a way to
2 counter and diffuse the recommendations of the Commission.

3 So it's a word of forewarning that that
4 should be -- that the Commissions needs to stand firm on
5 this.

6 And last but not -- I mean, you know,
7 previous speakers had talked about what has -- you know, some
8 of the personal impact and harassment, and very painful
9 stories and narratives. I want to add on, you know, through
10 the last -- you know, one add-on, a positive impact. It's
11 through the last 34 years of working on this issues,
12 staffing, and in particular through the China coalitions as
13 Amnesty International's-led China coalitions, it's one
14 positive outcome that came out from our organizing, is
15 getting to know more about the Tibetan struggle; more about
16 the Uyghur's struggles; more about the Taiwanese's struggle,
17 and what we are doing, it's the more China PLC, it's creating
18 this divide and rule through a united front, the more we are
19 standing in solidarity, and being united for our own common
20 goal to make -- ensure that democracy, freedom, dignity, and
21 human rights would appear, not just in Hong Kong but in
22 Canada, and in Chinas at one point.

23 I think my final message would be the only
24 way we can overcome fear -- and sometimes these fears are
25 legitimate, particularly for those who still have relatives
26 and family in Hong Kong and China. The only way we can
27 overcome such fear it's by putting out -- by showing up,
28 standing up, by giving that sense of hope. Hope would

1 overcome fear. Hope and solidarity and strength in numbers
2 would overcome fear.

3 And to me I think this is where, you know, we
4 would continue, and I appreciate the Commission's work and
5 I'm hoping that you would take also our advice into account
6 and say that look beyond the last two elections and look at
7 the long arm of China, PLC's influence in Canada over the
8 past few decades.

9 Thank you very much.

10 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Thank you.

11 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** I wonder if we might take
12 a brief break.

13 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Yes, we'll suspend for
14 about 10 minutes, just to review the questions that may have
15 been sent by the participants, and we'll come back.

16 **THE REGISTRAR:** Order, please.

17 This hearing is now in recess until 5
18 o'clock.

19 --- Upon recessing at 4:51 p.m.

20 --- Upon resuming at 5:07 p.m.

21 **THE REGISTRAR:** Order, please.

22 The sitting of the Foreign Interference
23 Commission is back in session.

24 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** We have very little time
25 left, and so here is how I propose we use it. We're going to
26 give each of you two minutes to either answer one of the
27 insightful questions that was suggested to us, which is to
28 share what, in your view, is the most effective protection

1 against foreign interference, or to share a final thought
2 that you would like to leave with the Commission and the
3 members of the public.

4 And we will proceed starting with Mr. Sandhu
5 and moving through to the left and we will finish with Ms. Ng
6 on Zoom.

7 So beginning with you, Mr. Sandhu, please go
8 ahead.

9 **--- FINAL REMARKS BY MR. JASKARAN SANDHU:**

10 **MR. JASKARAN SANDHU:** My hope is that we walk
11 away from today with an understanding of how foreign
12 interference is not something that's experienced by, you
13 know, random small communities off in the corner of Canada.

14 One thing that stood out to me from all my
15 friends up here on the panel is that how much of our
16 experience with foreign interference was shared, the manners
17 in which the Consulate operates, the manner in which
18 disinformation operates, the manner in which the chilling
19 effect it has on communities to participate themselves, and
20 the manner in which it -- we get misrepresented to others
21 outside of our community.

22 And that's a testament to how hostile states
23 act similar to one another. And in our instance with the
24 Sikh community, India is a hostile state. They're not a
25 friend that shares the values that we hold as Canadians. In
26 fact, they're stripping away any semblance of those as we
27 speak.

28 Foreign interference also impacts folks that

1 we would be surprised by. You know, MPs, Members of
2 Parliament have had their visas revoked to go to India
3 because of things they have called out, such as human rights
4 violations impacting Sikhs and other minorities. It's pretty
5 -- it's a pretty damning indictment of how far states like
6 India would go. And if they're doing that with MPs, what are
7 they doing with folks within communities that are unseen and
8 unknown to the general public?

9 So my hope here today is that what we stated
10 here is not just important for the second phase, but it
11 should really shape the way we understand and think about the
12 evidence that this inquiry is going to be hearing moving
13 forward and that the media and those in attendance thinking
14 about this and talking about it and reporting on it do the
15 justice that it deserves, and that meaningful efforts are
16 made to continue dialogue with community well after this
17 inquiry wraps up, because this problem is not going to go
18 away. It's just going to evolve and shape itself into
19 something more nefarious.

20 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Thank you very much.

21 Mr. Novodvorskiy?

22 **--- FINAL REMARKS BY MR. YURIY NOVODVORSKIY:**

23 **MR. YURIY NOVODVORSKIY:** I want to take a
24 moment to just thank the Commission again for giving us an
25 opportunity to appear here.

26 And I agree with Mr. Sandhu that it was very
27 helpful to hear how different forms of foreign interference
28 affect all of our diasporas, but it definitely seems like

1 there is substantial overlap.

2 And one item that caught my attention is that
3 it seems that for all of us, the consulates and the embassies
4 seem to be a core source of foreign interference. So we urge
5 the Commission to handle this matter with the seriousness it
6 deserves, as it affects not just our diasporas, but the wider
7 Canadian community, especially when it comes to
8 disinformation, hacking, and other forms of interference.
9 Thank you.

10 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Thank you.

11 Ms. Wollensak?

12 **--- FINAL REMARKS BY MS. GRACE DAI WOLLENSAK:**

13 **MS. GRACE DAI WOLLENSAK:** Hello. Yeah, I'd
14 like to take this opportunity to thank the Commission and
15 everybody working hard on this and to give us the opportunity
16 to give you a picture of how this foreign interference
17 impacts diaspora communities.

18 Actually, like as we have talked about today,
19 we gave the patterns of CCP's infiltration and interference
20 in Canada through our first-hand experience. We may not have
21 direct information on the two stated elections, but I believe
22 that we have -- through what we have witnessed over the 25
23 years in Canada that can provide a picture of the scope and
24 the depths of foreign interference by the PRC through the
25 tactics of mobilizing Chinese Canadian groups and
26 organizations to suppress. Furthermore, it helped the PRC
27 build infrastructure, and the mechanisms, and to form a broad
28 base to support the PRC's infiltration and interference in

1 the political structures of Canada, including elections.
2 Such infrastructure and mechanisms become most mature and
3 available discernably for the wider Canadian public of its
4 interference and in the recent two elections.

5 So I echo what other people mentioned. We
6 need to look beyond in the broader to see what the full
7 effect is capable and able to do in influencing Canadian
8 societies. And that's directly related to the election, what
9 they are able to do.

10 And so, like, for -- like, in our report, we
11 have 11 recommendations to counter -- to combat that
12 interference, but I'd like to especially mention about
13 enacting the foreign agent registry legislation not for
14 punishing those -- singling out those players, but to
15 function as a shield to protect the community members from
16 being coerced into playing for the Chinese Embassy or
17 Consulate or foreign factors, because a lot of times, many
18 people, they're not willing to do it, but out of fear or
19 other leverage, or fear of punishment, or whatever reasons,
20 they were forced to do the job that they were not able --
21 they are not willing to. And this legislation will help them
22 to be able to say no to the foreign factors.

23 So that's one thing I want to say.

24 And the last sentence is, like, we really
25 urge our Canadian Government and its agencies to be committed
26 to take effective measures and actions in responding to the
27 CCP's invasive and aggressive infiltration into Canadian
28 communities, institutions, political system, and beyond. It

1 is essential for Canada to safeguard its values, democracy,
2 sovereignty, and the rights and the freedoms of its people
3 against the foreign interference and the repression.

4 Thank you very much.

5 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Thank you.

6 Dr. Esmaeilion?

7 **--- FINAL REMARKS BY DR. HAMED ESMAEILION:**

8 **DR. HAMED ESMAEILION:** Thank you very much.

9 I want to thank you again for inviting me.

10 And the last thing I want to say, you asked
11 my friends here about the level of support they got from
12 different organizations here.

13 So we work and cooperate with the government
14 for taking the case of Flight PS752 to the International
15 Court of Justice. It was submitted last year. This year
16 they submitted another case in International Civil Aviation
17 Organization. Our request for supporting our case in
18 International Criminal Court is still pending. Our request
19 to put IRGC in the list of terrorist organizations is still
20 pending.

21 It's very important for the community to see
22 the entirety of this organization to be listed as a terrorist
23 organization.

24 If I go to RCMP, from what I heard from my
25 friends here and from our experiences, okay, RCMP didn't open
26 a criminal case for PS752, let alone protecting the activists
27 or really any Canadian activists. That's why I hear from
28 friends that they have turned their houses to fortresses with

1 cameras and, like, security tricks, because you're on your
2 own and there is no protection.

3 And the last thing, it's about IRCC. I
4 mentioned a banker, a chief of police, the Minister, the
5 current Speaker of the House of the Islamic regime. They
6 have -- they're already here, or they've been here, or
7 they're planning to come here. That's why we have deep
8 concerns that we don't have any political relationship.
9 These two countries, they don't have open embassies. But why
10 we see the flow of Islamic regime officials in this country?
11 And this is the reason that the community is not getting
12 involved in lots of activities.

13 I urge the Commission again that -- to add
14 Islamic regime of Iran to those rogue states that are in the
15 Terms of Reference here. Thank you.

16 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Thank you.

17 And turning to Zoom. Ms. Ng?

18 And it may be that she is not with us. And
19 by that, I mean she's no longer in Zoom.

20 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** I just want to make sure
21 that it's not a technical issue.

22 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Yeah. It seems that she's
23 no longer in the Zoom platform.

24 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Oh, okay. So we are at
25 the end of our day.

26 I want to thank you all deeply. Having
27 accepted to come forward and share your views, as well as
28 your community's views and experiences, in my mind, is very,

1 very important for the Commission. And honestly, I think it
2 took some courage, and I'm very grateful that you have
3 accepted to do that. And your contribution will for sure
4 inform the work of the Commission going forward. So thank
5 you.

6 **DR. HAMED ESMAEILION:** Thank you.

7 **THE REGISTRAR:** Order, please.

8 The sitting of the Foreign Interference
9 Commission has adjourned until tomorrow at 9:30 a.m.
10 --- Upon adjourning at 5:18 p.m.

11

12 **C E R T I F I C A T I O N**

13

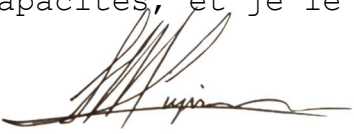
14 I, Sandrine Marineau-Lupien, a certified court reporter,
15 hereby certify the foregoing pages to be an accurate
16 transcription of my notes/records to the best of my skill and
17 ability, and I so swear.

18

19 Je, Sandrine Marineau-Lupien, une sténographe officiel,
20 certifie que les pages ci-hautes sont une transcription
21 conforme de mes notes/enregistrements au meilleur de mes
22 capacités, et je le jure.

23

24



25

Sandrine Marineau-Lupien

26

27

28