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Chair

Mr. Anthony Housefather

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• (0845)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.)):

Good morning, everyone. Welcome to this meeting of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, as we resume our study on online hate this morning.

We are lucky to be joined by two very prestigious groups in Canada. We are joined by B'nai Brith Canada, represented by Mr. Brian Herman, who is the Director of Government Relations, and Mr. David Matas, who is the Senior Legal Counsel; and by the Presbyterian Church in Canada, represented by Mr. Daniel Cho, who is the Moderator. Welcome.

We'll start with B'nai Brith and then go to the Presbyterian Church.

Mr. Herman and Mr. Matas, please begin.

Mr. Brian Herman (Director, Government Relations, B'nai Brith Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We thank you and the committee for allowing us to appear today.

You know my colleague David Matas, our senior legal counsel, who will speak to some of the detailed aspects of the thoughts that I'll be introducing. We won't go into some of the broad comments about the serious nature of online hate. The committee members are well aware of it, and we know from previous testimony that you've heard about the challenges in this space.

One year ago, B'nai Brith Canada called for a national action plan to deal with anti-Semitism—not a federal one but a national one—and combatting online anti-Semitism was part of that plan. This has become all the more important, given one key finding of our annual audit of anti-Semitic incidents in Canada, which we released the other day here in Ottawa. It found that of the 2,042 recorded incidents in 2018—an increase of 16.5% over 2017—80% of those anti-Semitic incidents took place via online platforms. This underscores the challenge for the Jewish community in Canada.

We started our work long ago. In October 2017, David Matas authored a paper on mobilizing Internet providers to combat anti-Semitism. In November 2017, we wrote to ministers of the government regarding the European Union's May 31, 2016, code of conduct on illegal online hate speech. We suggested at that time that Canada adopt the EU's "trusted flaggers" approach as one measure in addressing online hate. Both David and I can talk about that, and we can share both of those documents with the committee.

In December 2018, we submitted a policy paper to the government calling for Canada to develop an anti-hate strategy, a strategy that would include confronting online content that reflects anti-Semitism, Holocaust denial and Holocaust distortion.

In Canada, we know there is a need to foster public debate. The work of this committee will contribute to that end. The public needs to understand the challenges and the role they play in countering online hate, including disinformation. We feel strongly that action cannot just be left to governments, platforms and content providers. We're not calling for an online hate strategy from you. We know that we have to contribute to what the committee and the government do with specific ideas.

It's not for social media companies alone. At the recent meeting of G7 interior ministers, we noted that public safety minister Ralph Goodale said, "The clear message was they [social media companies] have to show us clear progress or governments will use their legislative and regulatory authorities." We honestly feel that there is no need to reinvent the wheel if we can draw on useful work that is already under way.

Secondly, B'nai Brith Canada understands that in addressing online hate generally, we know that the scourge of anti-Semitism will be captured, as long as we mark anti-Semitism as a particular problem.

There were some thoughts that others offered last autumn. We don't claim authorship of them, but they are worthy of examination.

The federal government needs to compel social media companies to be more transparent about their content moderation, including their responses to harmful speech.

Governments, together with civil society and affected community organizations, foundations, companies and universities, must support more research to understand and respond to harmful speech.

There is an idea about the creation of a forum similar to the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council to convene social media companies, civil society and other stakeholders, including representatives of the Jewish community, to develop and implement codes of conduct.

We need to re-examine the need for a successor to section 13 of the Canadian Human Rights Act, and David will address that.

There are active measures that we can take. For example, in November last year, UNESCO and the World Jewish Congress launched a new website called “Facts About the Holocaust”, designed as an interactive online tool to counter the messages of Holocaust denial and distortion that are circulating on the Internet and social media. This is a useful tool that we think can be considered.

• (0850)

The United Kingdom, just a few weeks ago, released an online harms white paper, and we were very struck by a number of proposals in that document that set out guidelines to tackle content of concern. One proposal in that white paper is the idea of an independent regulator to enforce the rules.

The U.K. also now has a code of practice for providers of online social media platforms, which was published on April 8. These are all good ideas worth considering.

Here are some recommendations, just to summarize.

First, data is the key. The government should incentivize and encourage provincial, territorial and municipal law enforcement agencies to more comprehensively collect, report and share hate crimes data, as well as details of hate incidents. The online dimension needs to be addressed. We are, in fact, in dialogue with Statistics Canada's Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, which has a consultation exercise under way to see whether or not there is a capacity to record data, not only on hate crimes but on hate incidents, including the online dimension.

Second is to strengthen the legal framework. We feel that Parliament has an opportunity to lead the fight against cyber-hate by increasing protections for targets, as well as penalties for perpetrators.

Third is improved training for law enforcement. Elsewhere, B'nai Brith Canada has argued for more hate crimes units in major cities, or at the least, clear hate crimes strategies and better training.

Fourth is robust governance from social media platforms. Elected leaders and government officials have an important role to play in encouraging social media platforms to institute robust and verifiable industry-wide self-governance. That's already been addressed, but that needs to be the first step, followed by others.

Then, there needs to be more international co-operation. Canada should ratify the 2002 additional protocol to the Council of Europe's Convention on Cybercrime.

There are a number of ideas that we've submitted to the clerk that go beyond what I've said. One of our partner agencies, the Anti-Defamation League in the United States, has done a considerable amount of work on the challenge of online hate, and we've passed to the clerk a number of specific proposals that the ADL has put forward for consideration by industry.

Thank you.

Mr. David Matas (Senior Legal Counsel, B'nai Brith Canada): I realize that I don't have much time remaining within the 10 minutes, so I'll try to be brief.

I have some suggestions, first of all, about the Criminal Code. The consent of the Attorney General represents a problem because it's often arbitrarily denied. We do not suggest that it be removed, but there should be guidelines developed so that they are either followed or not, with explanation.

Second, the defence of religious expression represents a problem because often religious expression is used as a form of incitement to hatred. It should not be immune from prosecution.

• (0855)

The Chair: Sir, do you mean under section 319 of the Criminal Code, the exception under subsection 319(3)?

Mr. David Matas: Yes, exactly.

In terms of the Internet specifically, we need a modified safe harbour provision. Right now with respect to the U.S., they have a kind of complete immunity. What we need is in fact liability, the opposite of safe harbour, with a defence of innocent dissemination. Those are criminal law suggestions.

My colleague has mentioned the protocol that Canada signed in 2005, which addresses “criminalisation of acts of a racist and xenophobic nature committed through computer systems”. If Canada enacts a modified safe harbour provision that relates only to innocent dissemination, in my view that would allow us to ratify that convention.

The Canadian Human Rights Act's section 13 was good in substance but problematic in terms of procedure. The standard should be re-enacted but with procedural protection so it doesn't lead to harassment of the innocent. There needs to be the power to award costs, which the Human Rights Commission and tribunals don't have now.

The screening and conduct missions need to be decoupled so that screening should be in all cases, but the commission need not undertake itself any case it screens in and could allow for private individuals to take the case.

There needs to be a requirement of election of forums so that a complainant could not proceed in many forums simultaneously—federal and provincial—which is a problem now.

There needs to be a power to remove parties. The commission and tribunal can add parties but can't remove parties. That can become a problem for an improperly joining party.

There needs to be a right to know the accuser, because right now these commissions and tribunals can function on the basis of rumour only, without disclosing the accuser. That needs to be put in place.

There needs to be a right of disclosure of the complaint, because right now, if the commission takes on the case, they don't actually have to disclose the complaint. There needs to be this right of disclosure.

That's a quick run-through. The brief elaborates on all these recommendations in detail. The general approach is that we are obviously concerned with the right to be free from incitement to hatred and discrimination, but we're also concerned about the right to freedom of expression. We don't want these tools to be turned around and used to frustrate legitimate expression and, indeed, to harass people who are calling out hate promoters. All our recommendations are developed with keeping this balance in mind.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we'll go to Mr. Cho.

Reverend Daniel Cho (Moderator, Presbyterian Church in Canada): Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you for this special privilege to come before you today. I also want to thank my fellow witnesses here.

As moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, I represent many Canadians of all cultures and backgrounds who hold deep faith and commitment to helping shape a better world for all. On their behalf, I express gratitude to this committee for the opportunity to contribute to the discussion of online hate.

As members of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, we have as our core value care, love and respect for our neighbours. We hold to an unwavering commitment to working for just causes and outcomes and affirming the inherent dignity of all persons. In this regard we enjoy special partnerships with many of our faith-based groups in our common vision to foster compassion and understanding towards one another.

We have all been alarmed by recent events around the world of mass killings that have targeted specific groups, whether based on race, ethnicity, cultural background, religion, geographic origin or sexual identity. Tragically, as each week goes by it seems that yet another similar event occurs. Since we received this invitation to appear before this committee, there have been, at least as reported in the media, two additional mass shootings, at least one of which is by an alleged white nationalist.

Often, the perpetrators of this violence have been radicalized by online influences, or they have discovered a like-minded online community and through it find validation for their specific personal bigotry and hatred. Sadly, it is not difficult to countenance the cruel reality of religious, racial and gender prejudices, racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, Islamophobia and homophobia, and the online platforms designed to recruit and incite others.

If we consider for a moment the brazen van attack in Toronto last spring that resulted in 10 deaths and 16 injured, mostly women, it raises an important question. Who would have thought that there existed a fringe cybercommunity of misogynists bonded together around their collective and explicit disdain of women because of their social and sexual rejection? It is deeply troubling that online hate and the incitement to violence are so exacting in their allure and resonance.

In virtually all these hate crimes reported in the North American media we have come to learn that the perpetrators were, to some degree, influenced by online activity and affiliations. Some cases involve pre-existing mental health issues. This might lead us to the conclusion that it is those individuals who hold bigoted views, who

have a propensity for violence or who suffer from a form of mental illness who are susceptible to committing such crimes.

This may very well be true, but let us consider one poignant statement by this committee regarding the statistics on the rise of hate-related conduct. I quote from this committee: "non-violent crimes, such as public incitement of hatred, played a greater role in the increase than violent hate crimes". This shows, then, that people in general are more emboldened to act and speak out of their particular bigoted views at an alarmingly higher rate than are doing so by just violent acts. For them, the Internet can often be found to act as an open door of incitement to hate. The very fact that there are others online who share the same hate is what gives it a perceived legitimacy.

● (0900)

The Italian economist and philosopher Vilfredo Pareto, in his commentary on the problems of power and wealth in a society, introduced the concept of residue. This was at the turn of the 20th century. Residue is what lies in all people, according to Pareto, as political and social beings, and in this sense refers to our deep-seated motives. It speaks to a fundamental aspect of how we wish to behave and the way we structure meaning in our lives. A successful leader or demagogue will be able to masterfully reach and manipulate those residues and turn people or the government to their own good through justifications and rationalizations.

Interestingly, Pareto observed that people are persuaded toward something, not because of the reasoning but because they already believed it. It should come as no surprise then that Pareto had a deep and lasting influence on the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini in his fascist policies.

I use this as a motif for the purposes of this hearing. I don't wish to overstate this case, but let us consider the possible implications for today. If Pareto is even remotely accurate in his assessment, then it could stand to reason that some of us, as social beings, potentially have some deep-seated residual prejudice. The growing incidence of hate-based actions and crimes committed by all people of all creeds and backgrounds across the social demographic demonstrates that this is not only an issue involving fringe, vulnerable or mentally ill individuals. Rhetorically speaking, what lies residually in all of us can be awakened by demagoguery, other authority or, in this case, the legitimacy of hatred that comes via online. The resonance of hate among a growing number of people should alarm us all.

Technology outpaces jurisprudence. The interaction of law and social media is a clear example of the complexity of balancing democratic liberties—with respect to charter rights of free speech and freedom—with discrimination. It is our hope, from our shared concern to address online hate, that through this legislative process, the protections and redress for all Canadians would be fair, equitable and robust.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada is committed to combatting online hate and prejudice in all forms and continues to promote a culture of care, compassion and mutual responsibility as a faith community, as Canadians and as global citizens.

Thank you.

•(0905)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Cho.

We'll now move to questions.

Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for joining us today and sharing your perspective with us.

It's very troubling to be able to quickly recall a number of devastating developments around the world and here at home that speak to this issue: the recent introduction of unacceptable anti-LGBTQ laws in Brunei that carry the death penalty to be carried out by stoning; the aforementioned misogynistic van attacks that resulted in the death and injury of many people in Toronto; the Christchurch mosque shootings with a white supremacist motivation; the anti-Christian bombings in Sri Lanka, a massacre; the anti-Semitic shootings at a synagogue in California. We can just look at a couple of weeks of newspapers—we're not talking about my lifetime—and we've had many examples of that here in Canada.

To your point, Mr. Cho, the communities that these individuals all have in common are online. That is the real thread between this and it's coming from every walk of life, creed, colour and origin. The real common thread is that they're found online. It's undeniable that there is a terrible issue before us. How do we deal with it?

Mr. Herman, you referenced a safe flagging process, and I'm wondering if you could quickly tell us about that.

Mr. Brian Herman: Certainly. This is the trusted flagger.

•(0910)

Mr. David Matas: Yes, this process was developed with the European Union and four of the service providers. They negotiated an agreement with Google, Facebook, Microsoft and Apple whereby these four providers would work with trusted flaggers—NGOs that specialize in this area—and would quickly react to complaints and take down material quickly if it were problematic.

Of course, you're dealing with a wealth of material on the Internet. The people in charge are not specialized in this area so they often don't know of the problem and often don't see it as well. The idea with the trusted flaggers is that they would be people who would know the problem and could quickly bring it to the attention of the service providers.

That system is useful but it's not transparent. I know some of the people involved as trusted flaggers and I asked them what's going on, and their answer was that they couldn't tell me. The Internet itself provides what it calls transparency reports. You can see them on the Internet, but they're not transparent. They don't tell you very much. I think it's a good system but it can't replace legislation. I think you need both. You can't just say you'll leave it for the service providers to do, with the help of the NGOs.

Mr. Brian Herman: For those who may not be aware, I think it's a concept of pre-clearing groups or organizations that are regarded as somewhat expert in the field so that if B'nai Brith Canada, for example, is a trusted flagger and we go to a provider and say there is

anti-Semitic content here, it's not as if they have to ask who B'nai Brith Canada is and how do they know we're qualified in this field.

Mr. Michael Barrett: There was reference to section 319 of the Criminal Code and to subsection (3) on defences of public incitement of hatred, I think that concern has been raised that a good faith expression of an opinion based on a religious belief could create an environment whereby someone's legitimate religious beliefs are being suppressed because they don't conform to a narrative if we didn't have a transparent process, depending on the system we adopt.

What do you think the risks are to removing that exception to section 319? That's for any of you gentlemen to answer.

Mr. David Matas: I was involved with the litigation about the constitutionality of that provision. I intervened for B'nai Brith in the case of Keegstra, where it was declared constitutional in the courts, by four to three.

I acknowledge that there is a constitutional risk. If you remove any of the defences, it becomes subject to constitutional challenge again, and it was borderline in terms of constitutional acceptance.

My own view is that the environment has changed so substantially and you see so much incitement that is religious based and leads to extremely violent acts that the removal of that defence, in spite of the risk, would mean that the provision could still withstand a constitutional challenge.

The Chair: This will be the last question.

Mr. Michael Barrett: It's probably too long a question to ask in a short period of time.

If, for example, someone were to speak of Israel's right to exist and we had a group saying that was a suppression of the rights of the Palestinian people, we have what both groups believe are fair and legitimate claims to make. Should that discourse not be able to happen in the public space, and would removing that section not put at risk the right of one group or another to make their expression?

•(0915)

Mr. David Matas: There's no doubt that this law is problematic in the sense that many people, when they hear something with which they disagree, say it's hate speech and want it prosecuted. The way that is defended against is through the requirement of consent of the Attorney General, but what we've seen so far is that the requirement of consent of the Attorney General has been saying no to too many, rather than too few.

Our solution is to keep the consent, because otherwise the problem you pose would exist, but to have clear guidelines that could deal with issues such as that as well. All the hypotheticals you could imagine could be put into guideline form.

Mr. Michael Barrett: The fear is, of course, that a political motivation or changing governments would change what is acceptable and what is not, instead of just having a common standard.

Mr. David Matas: I would hope that wouldn't happen.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Right.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're now going to Mr. McKinnon and Mr. Virani, who are sharing this time.

Mr. Arif Virani (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. McKinnon has kindly given me his time, so thank you, Mr. McKinnon.

Thank you, to all of you, for being here. It's a very important issue. I know many of you have been speaking out about this issue for some time and your expertise is very well received.

Mr. Herman, I was taken by the statistics you started out with, about a 16.5% rise in incidents in Canada and 80% of incidents being online, as well as one of your opening comments that we need to collect more data.

I think there is absolute agreement from all parliamentarians in terms of what we've done thus far. The budget a year ago provided \$6.5 million to the Centre for Diversity and Inclusion so we can start collecting disaggregated data to do just that.

I have about four questions, so could you keep your responses somewhat brief?

We've also heard that people are more likely to come forward to people they trust. Are state actors the best entities to collect the data, or should we be relying more significantly on Jewish groups, Muslim groups, black groups, indigenous groups, and so on, that have the trust of their constituents who are experiencing these types of hatred?

Mr. Brian Herman: One thing we need to do is to look at a question that has been raised at this committee before, which is if you leave it to individual groups representing their communities to record and analyze the data, there is perhaps a chance that the data or the analysis will be somewhat skewed.

I think the important thing is that there be a way of collecting the data and sharing it both between government and affected communities and between all affected communities themselves, so that we can make sense of it. This is one reason we suggest that there could be an opportunity for a stakeholder forum or a council that involves government, parliamentarians, providers and affected communities.

In our discussions with Statistics Canada, for example, we've said that while they collect hate crimes data, we also include hate incidents or anti-Semitic incidents. Is there a way that they can also collect data on incidents? I know that they're discussing that with the Canadian Association Of Chiefs Of Police, as are we. Would police forces have the capacity to do that?

We have suggested that if police encounter an incident that falls below the threshold of a crime, they should be given advice to refer the person to organizations such as ours—in the case of the Jewish community—so that we can record the data.

I hope I'm not speaking out of line here. I know Statistics Canada is also looking at the option of perhaps including a self-reporting online portal on their site that would allow people who experience something that has perhaps not been reported to the police or another organization to go online and report it, so Statistics Canada can put it into their data.

Mr. Arif Virani: I have a few more questions. I'll let you answer both of them at once.

With respect to the standards, you talked about broadcasting standards and applying standards to the online space. Would it be sufficient to just translate the current standards that apply to TV and radio broadcasting to the online space or do we need to design new ones?

Secondly, Mr. Matas, you listed about five different flags on section 13 of the CHRA. If you have suggested language about what you would like to see in terms of a new, invigorated and redesigned provision of section 13, it would be helpful if you wanted to submit that as well.

● (0920)

Mr. David Matas: I could produce language, but I realize Parliament has its own drafters. They may have their own views on what the language should be, but I'm happy to do that.

In terms of what's in the Broadcasting Act, of course it gets us into the CRTC. I'm not so sure. I don't have any problems with the standards in the Broadcasting Act. I think we need to be sensitive to the nature of the phenomenon where you have so much going on with broadcasting. The broadcasters know what they're broadcasting. With the Internet service providers, they don't know what's there. You have to have a kind of notice provision and then reaction. You have to set up that mechanism. They've been told and they don't do anything, which doesn't exist in the broadcasting legislation.

In terms of the previous question, my answer would be both. The trouble with state reporting right now... I think you're right that the NGOs know it a lot better. If you don't have state reporting or reporting to the states... The problem right now is that very many of them don't know what hate speech is. If you cut off this reporting, that problem is going to be exacerbated. I think you need the mix of the NGO reporting—they know what it is—and the state reporting, so they can come to appreciate what it is.

Mr. Arif Virani: If you could provide the cybercrime protocol—the 2002 protocol—to this committee so it forms part of our evidentiary record, that would be helpful.

Mr. David Matas: My colleague, Brian Herman, was pointing out to me that there was actually a bill in Parliament to implement that protocol, which only went into first reading. We'll get you that bill as well.

Mr. Arif Virani: When was that? Do you know?

Mr. David Matas: I think it was 2005.

Mr. Brian Herman: I'm not sure, but the election might have gotten in the way of that. I noticed on LEGISinfo that it's there, and it just went through first reading. We certainly will provide the protocol.

Mr. Arif Virani: Thank you.

Mr. Housefather is going to cut me off.

The Chair: I was going to pass it on to Ms. Ramsey.

Thank you, Ms. Ramsey.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Thank you so much.

I'll actually pick up on some of Mr. Virani's themes.

When you're talking about data, it's so critical. I know you're doing an annual audit at B'nai Brith on anti-Semitic incidents. I think it's a challenge for a lot of NGOs and faith communities to have the resources to do this type of data collection, but I have read your report. When you're talking about anti-Semitic incidents rising to 2,041 in 2017, 80% of those were online.

Mr. Matas, you talked about the gaps in criminal law, the tribunal, the AG's powers and everything. If you could follow that up with some more detailed information, that would be greatly appreciated. When we're talking about the detailed accounting of incidents, it's very important that we understand what's happening across the country. I certainly hear, and I'm sure my colleagues do too, of people who receive a threatening message on Facebook or other platforms. They go to the police and nothing really ends up happening. Sometimes it's a threat to that person's life. It's quite serious. That person's worried and concerned, and nothing actually ends up happening.

The question I have for you is with respect to this incident breakdown that you've done. You have month by month in your report. Certainly all of them are very deeply concerning, but I just want to ask about one that happened in June because it seemed that you were able to get someone.... There was a Winnipeg man who received a Facebook message—it's quite vile so I won't read it into the record—from a fake profile that was later erased. When you're receiving the information that this has happened on Facebook, can you describe, then, what you're doing with that information?

I'm wondering how it is that you are successful in getting this erased. The people who we haven't had at the committee yet, who are a key part of this, are, of course, police services across our country and the RCMP. We want to hear from them about the way they're handling each of those cases and the way they look at them. Our local police, I feel, simply don't have the tools necessary to be able to address these complaints when they come in. You have done this accounting and looked at these cases, so I wonder if you can speak to what happens when someone brings something they have received or see on social media to you.

Mr. Brian Herman: We are a small organization relatively speaking, with modest resources, so we can't necessarily deal with individual complaints. We do have a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week hotline, which is how we record a lot of our data, together with reaching out to police forces across the country when we prepare the audit.

When someone brings something to our attention, we advise them if it's a serious matter to take it to the police. We have to trust them to do it. If there is something that is sufficiently egregious and serious—usually it's an act of vandalism—we take it upon ourselves to notify the local police force and to press them and say, "What are you doing about it?" This also touches upon the point I made earlier about the need for our police forces to have hate crimes units, if the cities are large enough, or at least have hate crime strategies and properly trained officers.

• (0925)

Mr. David Matas: I would just like to add this. If you look at the terms of service of the major Internet service providers, they all prohibit use of their service for hate speech. In theory they can deny

service, they can take anything down, in terms of the contract. It's a simply contractual arrangement. One of the things I often do—because I get these calls as well, I'm a volunteer—is to say, "Just contact the service provider and see if they'll take it down." Sometimes they'll do it if it's obvious. The problems with the service providers are their slow reaction time, there's no rationale when they do something and often they don't appreciate it. In theory it should work. The problem is that, systematically, it doesn't work.

When it comes to the police, it's also a problem of expertise and time. The advantage of the law is that the Internet service providers will always say, "We will respect the law", whether they think something is hate speech or not. As soon as the police get involved, they easily accede.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Thank you for that.

Part of your report also speaks about deterring people. Right now, if I were to go to my local town of Windsor and walk down the street, I see bus shelters that have a lot of information about marijuana because obviously that's something that's been recent. There is a lot of public outreach education that's happening around different topics, but not this. I don't see things that are addressed to people who are online on how to use it against hate, how to report hate, what to do if they see something but also what if something happens to them.

I wonder if you could each speak to how you think we can deter people by demonstrating that if you are involved in online hate, there are tangible consequences. Right now, to be quite honest, I don't think that a lot of people who are expressing this online are aware that what they're doing could be considered criminal behaviour.

How can we address that to the general public to deter people from sending these messages, being in these spaces and spreading this hate?

Mr. David Matas: One of the things that I was looking at when I was looking at the Canadian Human Rights Act in relation to section 13 is whether the Canadian Human Rights Commission has a public education function. It doesn't. A lot of the provincial human rights commissions do, but I didn't find it with the Canadian Human Rights Act. These provisions, as I said, exist with the provinces. You can just pick up the wording from the provincial legislation and add it to the mandate of the Canadian Human Rights Commission. This could certainly be a part of it.

Mr. Brian Herman: I think it is a question over education at all levels. That's why we constantly urge political leaders, community leaders at all levels of the government, to speak out and advise people about this.

Mr. Daniel Cho: Can I just add something? I agree with what's been said but that's the million-dollar question. There has to be an acknowledgement that there is something that was committed in order for that to be deterred, in order for that to act as a deterrent. There are very few people who would acknowledge that their actions or speech are motivated by hate. Very few people would acknowledge that. I think that's the problem. It's not just the explicitness of what is said or done.

There have been a lot of incidents that have been reported of people confronting a person of minority background and saying, “Go back” and “That’s my opinion”, but they would not acknowledge themselves to be a hateful person: “That’s just my opinion.” They’ve been bolstered and buoyed by the acknowledgement that there are other people in this world online who feel the same way. It’s very difficult.

I’m tempted to quote Dr. Phil, “You can’t change what you don’t acknowledge”. I think that is probably one of the most fundamental problems in this whole debate about online hate and that kind of bigotry that we all hold and is able to be expressed in some insidious and subtle ways.

● (0930)

The Chair: It’s probably the first time Dr. Phil has ever been quoted at the justice committee, so thank you.

Mr. Daniel Cho: My apologies to the committee.

The Chair: It’s always appreciated to draw him in.

Mr. Fraser.

Mr. Colin Fraser (West Nova, Lib.): Thank you very much to the witnesses for being with us today. I appreciate it.

Mr. Cho, I will start with you.

I thought it was interesting how poignantly you put forward the idea of people being radicalized online because they’re able to find like-minded individuals who share hateful views. When we talk about online hate though I’d like your view of what “online” means, because in certain circumstances we have things like the dark web where individuals can go and find like-minded individuals to communicate with each other about hateful sorts of practices and views.

Then in other circumstances you have much wider social media platforms where they’re able to perhaps radicalize individuals who have those deep-seated views perhaps as residual, as you had indicated, but maybe hadn’t necessarily turned their mind to that to the extent of going and actively seeking like-minded individuals online.

I’m just wondering if you could touch on the difference between the different media platforms and the dark web and what could be done in order to better understand how those different ways of people connecting actually happen.

Mr. Daniel Cho: That’s an interesting question. Thank you for that.

I’m not an expert in online communications. I’ve only recently become educated about the dark web. I would say that anything that allows people to communicate, transmit ideas and connect with any kinds of ideas or community would constitute online, anything that joins people together.

One of the essential points that I was making is that I think that, before the world of the Internet, whatever ideas we may harbour—be they prejudicial or whatever—we tended to keep them relatively private, understanding that there is a bit of unacceptability to some ideas that we may hold.

The reality of these online connections, I think, introduces a wave of legitimacy. I think that’s a very key problem. One discovers that there are hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, who agree with them. All of a sudden, what has been harboured in private now becomes almost acceptable, because it becomes validated by the mass understanding of so many people in agreement. It becomes normalized. Whatever flows through this online information highway becomes normalized.

I think that’s one of the problems that people... We have all encountered these terms about fake news. In a way, the public has been made to not be able to distinguish anymore, because whatever came on TV was considered real news back in the day, but now, since everything flows through the Internet, everything is on an equal playing field. It’s left to the individuals to determine for themselves what is legitimate and what is acceptable. If I don’t agree with something, I can just dismiss that, and I agree with these things.

The communication, the media, that form of communication and transmission is all on an equal playing field now, and I think it makes it increasingly difficult to distinguish between what is socially acceptable and what is not.

Mr. Colin Fraser: Thank you for that.

If I could turn to Mr. Herman and Mr. Matas, one of the things I think we’ve come to terms with and understand is that there are foreign actors at play, for perhaps geopolitical reasons, who are getting online in our social media platforms in western society in order to divide people against each other. Some of the hate propaganda that we see is certainly targeted at the Jewish community in order to divide Canadians or divide people in the western world.

I wonder if you have any comment on foreign influences on our social media platforms, in particular as they relate to anti-Semitic statements and what we can do to combat those foreign influences from having such a role in dividing people.

● (0935)

Mr. Brian Herman: I understand that, at the end of May, there will be an international parliamentary forum looking at disinformation and fake news that will be taking place here in Canada. We hope they will be able to address these sorts of things.

One has to be constantly on guard for this. We’re embroiled in a bit of a situation right now where we have been speaking out against Nazi glorification in countries of Europe going back to the experiences of World War II. There are signs that there are some countries that are taking advantage of those who speak out against this to try to divide us from one another, particularly NATO members from one another.

We have to be on guard for this sort of thing, but there’s no doubt that it happens, and there’s no doubt that we have to use these examples as a way of trying to educate ourselves to spot when someone is trying to use legitimate discussion to divide us. It’s a process of education.

Mr. David Matas: As a follow-up, I’m a member of the Canadian delegation to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance as a representative of B’nai Brith. That’s one of the subjects of discussion there.

There's this protocol we mentioned. Basically, when you're dealing with international phenomena, you need international assistance and international co-operation. There's always the possibility of blocking, at least in some cases. Something you might also consider is the use of the Magnitsky legislation, if you can find identified perpetrators. That might be useful as well.

Mr. Colin Fraser: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're now out of time. I'd like to thank the witnesses. I really appreciate it.

B'nai Brith, I want to thank you so much for your work on the audit. It was very helpful and informative. I certainly share your view that a national action plan on anti-Semitism needs to be coming out shortly.

Thank you also, Mr. Cho. I really appreciate your presence here today.

I'd like to ask the people from the next panel to come up as quickly as possible.

Thank you again to everyone in this panel.

• (0935) _____ (Pause) _____

• (0940)

The Chair: We will now resume.

Prior to our introducing the witnesses for the next panel, the clerk has reminded me that we have the budget for the online hate study, which we should be adopting.

Mr. Clerk, can you let everybody know what the proposed budget is?

[*Translation*]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Marc-Olivier Girard): Certainly, Mr. Chair.

The budget will allow the committee to reimburse the witnesses appearing as part of the current study on online hate.

The Chair: What is the amount, Mr. Girard?

The Clerk: It's \$39,650. The estimates are based on the list of priorities provided by the political parties.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): I so move.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. MacKenzie.

Does everyone agree to adopt the \$39,600 budget for the online hate study?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

It's now a pleasure to be joined today by the Ghanaian-Canadian Association of Ontario. We're joined by Mr. Emmanuel Duodu who is the Executive Secretary. He is coming to us from Etobicoke. Welcome, Mr. Duodu. From S.U.C.C.E.S.S., we have Ms. Queenie

Choo, the Chief Executive Officer who is coming to us from Vancouver. Welcome, Ms. Choo.

We're going to start, if it's okay, with the Ghanaian-Canadian Association of Ontario. Then we will move to S.U.C.C.E.S.S.

If the World Sikh Organization of Canada joins us, we'll move to them.

You have eight minutes, Mr. Duodu. The floor is yours.

Mr. Emmanuel Duodu (President, Ghanaian-Canadian Association of Ontario): Good morning, everyone. My name is Emmanuel Duodu. I'm the President of the Ghanaian-Canadian Association of Ontario.

Our organization has been in existence for quite some time. Just so you're aware, the Ghanaian community started coming to Canada sometime in the late 1970s. We got here and we built a very strong community throughout the country. We have a lot of our people here in Ontario.

I think with that came a lot of great things. We are very grateful as a community for the great country we are in here in Canada. We are certainly grateful for what we've been able to accomplish due to the inclusivity of this great Canadian community.

With all this, I think we are all very much aware of what is happening lately. For me as an African, I can always say that what happened in Rwanda is a classic case of hate. At that time it wasn't online hate. It was just a group of people saying that these are the groups that are the cause of people's problems. That was between the Tutsis and the Hutus. That led to about 1.5 million people being killed. It just started with that information, with a few people saying on radio that these Tutsis are the cause of the problems, and that led to about 1.5 million people dead, killed in a very brutal way.

Today, for me as a first-generation immigrant in this country, I would be doing myself a great disservice if I stand aloof when hate crimes are going on against people, especially the Jewish community, which I've seen lately. We have the evidence of that.

For me to say that a lot is happening to the Jewish community, and therefore, as a Ghanaian, as an immigrant, it's not close to my community, would be doing an injustice to something that can happen to anyone.

I feel strongly that, as a community, we have resolved that we are not going to stand for any online hate of any sort to any group at all. We have a lot of young people. Seventy per cent of our population is young people, and they are always online. The question is what we can do, or what we are doing, to make sure these young people will not stand indifferent to what is happening as far as hate crimes are concerned.

It's happening everywhere. I can attest to that. A month ago, we had someone from our community named principal of a reputable university, the first black to have that role. Guess what. The following day, there was graffiti saying that blacks are not welcome. This is someone who had been made a principal, or call him a chancellor. There was a desecration saying that blacks are not welcome on the campus.

These are some of the things happening. I feel that we want Parliament to do something to make sure we can combat online hate. We know what happened in Pennsylvania. Just last week, we know what happened in California. A lot of these things sometimes even go unreported.

As a community, as the Ghanaian community, we have resolved strongly that we want to make sure we partner within the group, so we can work with Parliament to make sure we can stamp out this menace that is going on throughout the world and is online. It's subtle, and in fact, the conduit to every house is through the Internet. You couldn't get this information out 20 or 30 years ago. Trust me, fake news is gaining strength every day. We know how it can destroy people. It can lead to young people even being abused, so the ramifications are huge.

I'm here this morning to testify that we as a community are here, arm in arm, with other groups. We've especially been working with CIJA, the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs. In our community too, we've been doing a lot of things to educate our people.

This morning I'm here to let you know that we want strong legislation to make sure we can stamp out this menace happening in the world.

• (0945)

This is my closing comment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we'll go to Ms. Choo.

Ms. Choo, the floor is yours. Please go ahead.

Ms. Queenie Choo (Chief Executive Officer, S.U.C.C.E.S.S.): Thank you so much for inviting S.U.C.C.E.S.S. to present before you today. We believe that this is an important topic of the study and we are honoured to provide our perspective.

To provide you with some context, for those people who are not familiar with S.U.C.C.E.S.S., we are one of the largest immigrant and refugee-serving agencies in Canada. We have 46 years of history. We provide a broad range of settlement and social services to more than 61,800 clients every year. Our clients come from diverse backgrounds and have unique settlement experiences in Canada. As such, my presentation today comes from the perspective of a settlement service provider for newcomers to Canada.

We believe that all forms of hate, including online hate, increase the exclusion, isolation and marginalization of members of our community. It is an attack to our values of being welcoming, open and inclusive, as well as to the safety of our communities, and it has no place whatsoever.

Online technology, which brings tremendous benefits in promoting knowledge and in sharing and facilitating connections, is being used to spread the messages of hate and to radicalize people. Online hate is touching many members of our community. I recall seeing statistics earlier this year from a national survey conducted by the Association for Canadian Studies. The survey found that almost 60% of Canadians have seen some form of hate speech posted on social media. We believe that strategies to combat online hate must consider the experience of newcomers, who also are significant users of digital technology as well as often the recipients of hate.

In our experiences with newcomers directly and through our work in community development, we find that many newcomers may not feel comfortable reporting any form of crime, let alone online hate, for various reasons. For example, they might feel that their engaging with enforcement in any way—even if it is a reportable crime—may jeopardize their citizenship application or PR status. They may not trust the police, or they may not understand what constitutes hate speech and not know that it is something that is reportable. They may believe that if hate speech is in a non-official language, it does not count as a crime in Canada and local law enforcement will not take it seriously. Some do not understand the process of reporting online hate and what happens afterwards. They may not believe that reporting it may make a difference, or they may feel that they are just causing problems by reporting a hate crime, especially if it is being perpetrated by a member of their own community.

While these issues are not unique to newcomers, they are often the barriers that prevent newcomers from reporting hate crimes. We believe that a national strategy to combat online hate is needed.

One of the first steps is to ensure broad and inclusive engagement across Canada, including population groups that tend to be under-represented when doing consultations—including newcomers—in order to understand their experiences with online hate. We need to ensure that the process is as accessible and inclusive as possible to engage diverse groups and that there is a safe space for more vulnerable people and groups to express their experiences.

For example, for newcomers, this cannot be just hiring interpreters to run several focus groups with newcomers. Instead, there need to be consultations, starting with the design process, to ensure that diverse newcomers are engaged and included in a meaningful way.

However, it is not enough to do consultation or make legal amendments. Laws around online hate need to be communicated to the community using language that is accessible and inclusive. The definition of what constitutes online hate versus offensive material needs to be clear.

● (0950)

All community members, not just the legal community or subject experts, need to understand what is online hate and how hate can show up online, whether it be under the guise of educational material or news; how to make a report; and what happens after reporting a hate crime. If the community does not understand the definition and process, they will be reluctant to intervene or make a report.

We also need to be better at tracking online hate experienced by different population groups, including newcomers. There needs to be a clearer definition and standardization of data collection and reporting so that there is more reliable data on the prevalence of online hate. We also need to do more community research to understand the prevalence of unreported hate crimes, as well as to understand which community groups tend not to report hate crimes and the barriers to doing so.

Open communication about the existence and prevalence of hate is also important, not only about the experience of hate against certain communities but also about how we all have a responsibility to do something if we see someone in our community disseminating messages of hate.

Online hate is something that can spread wide and fast, very quickly and easily. While we believe social media companies, law enforcement and policy-makers all have key roles to play, it is also the responsibility of all community members to take some type of action when they see online hate. We need to better educate community members on how to be allies and how to respond appropriately in this situation to ensure safety and promote reporting.

Education is particularly important to engage newcomer youth. They have unique and complex experiences and pressures. They have challenges in navigating a new social reality and have limited trust in authority figures, as well as feelings of being powerless and hopeless.

Dr. Ratna Ghosh, from McGill University, is currently doing important research about education as a form of soft power and a critical prevention tool in countering violent extremism, by supporting youth to develop values, skills, behaviours and norms that promote security and resilience. However, most community education and resources about hate crimes in Canada are created for the mainstream community and tend only to be available in English and French. We need to create linguistically and culturally inclusive engagement strategies and resources to engage diverse communities, including newcomers. At the same time, there needs to be more support to newcomers to enhance their media awareness and learn now to critically engage with media in order to assess information and news online in terms of whether it is credible or designated to incite hate.

We also need to build community resilience against hate by fostering diversity and inclusion. This includes building greater connection with communities, whether they are faith-based, ethno-cultural, indigenous, language-based, LGBTQ2S+, and so on, in order to foster greater intercultural awareness and understanding, break down the fear of others and understand how our experiences are similar. These connections strengthen our communities so that we will stand up and be each other's allies in combatting hate.

Of course, meaningful action to combat online hate must come with an adequate level of resources. There must be sustainable funding investments across Canada into community outreach, education, training, reporting, prevention and enforcement dedicated to combatting online hate.

Thank you again for providing the opportunity to share our perspective with you today.

● (0955)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Choo.

We've been joined by Mr. Mukhbir Singh, who is the president of the World Sikh Organization of Canada.

Mr. Singh, the floor is yours for eight minutes.

Mr. Mukhbir Singh (President, World Sikh Organization of Canada): Good morning. Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for the invitation to speak to you this morning on behalf of the World Sikh Organization of Canada. We are a non-profit human rights organization established in 1984 with a mandate to promote and protect the interests of Canadian Sikhs, as well as to promote and advocate for the protection of human rights for all individuals.

Unfortunately, instances of hatred and violence are not new for the Sikh community. Sikhs are a minority around the world in every country in which Sikhs reside. This minority status, combined with an outward identity that is intended to stand out, has often made Sikhs a target of those motivated by hate and intolerance.

Just last week in Surrey, British Columbia, a man was arrested for public incitement of hatred following a Facebook comment in response to a news story about the record-breaking number of people who attended the Surrey Vaisakhi parade. Vaisakhi is one of the most important celebrations for Sikhs around the world, and the Vaisakhi parade in Surrey attracts hundreds of thousands of people from all communities and walks of life. The individual who was charged had commented that the failure to place a pressure-cooker bomb at the parade was a lost opportunity.

This was not the first time that a threat such as this was directed at the Sikh community. There have been a number of instances in which individuals on Facebook have threatened to attack areas such as Brampton and Vancouver due to their relatively high concentration of Sikhs. Though attacks such as this have not occurred here in Canada, six Sikhs lost their lives to a white supremacist shooter in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, in 2012.

With other attacks, similar posts on social media indicating a desire to harm a specific community have often been made just days or minutes before an attack is carried out. There is no doubt that in today's world social media is a primary tool chosen for spreading ideas and gaining support. Not only is information transmitted online not hindered by territorial boundaries but its origin also can be difficult to trace. In other words, the Internet allows individuals the opportunity to make hateful comments, undermining people's safety and security, all while hiding behind a veil of anonymity. This problem is compounded by the fact that social media sites such as Facebook attract millions of users and allow individuals to create private groups, effectively evading detection by users who are not members of that group.

Moreover, it is often the youth who are disproportionately impacted by the presence of hate-filled messaging online. This is due not only to the percentage of youth who use social media platforms on a daily basis but also to the vulnerability of young people, who are already faced with bullying at school and other forms of discrimination due to their Sikh identity.

In 2011 we undertook our first survey of over 300 students in the Peel region of Ontario and found that over 40% of them reported being bullied as a result of their Sikh identity. Allowing hate to be promoted online without consequences creates a situation in which many young people struggle to find a safe space to express themselves and grow, as they are faced with discriminatory and threatening behaviour both online and at school.

As an organization, we support the right of all individuals to exercise their freedom of expression, but we also recognize that there are instances in which expression may be used to threaten the most marginalized members of our society. We believe that an appropriate approach to curbing online hate would include a proper balancing of freedom of expression and the safety and security of those who are targets of hate speech. The creation of such an approach would benefit from consultation with stakeholders as well as social media providers, as they're able to provide a unique perspective on the issue.

Working alongside social media providers such as Facebook would allow the Canadian government to make better use of its resources and to address the challenge posed by the sheer number of people using these platforms. Indeed, Facebook has already shown its willingness to respond to the threat of online hate by banning prominent far-right groups in Canada from using its services.

We also support the establishment of uniform national guidelines and standards for the collection and handling of hate crime and hate incident data in Canada. We believe that the government must play a role to counter the proliferation of online hate material. It cannot be left up to private actors to voluntarily remove this material.

It will be useful to study Germany's network enforcement law act, given its inclusion of penalties for companies that fail to properly apply laws regarding the removal of hateful content. We also believe that law enforcement, provincial attorneys general and prosecutors must be provided with training and support to use the tools available to them under the Criminal Code, such as those in section 320.1. This section has not been used very often to date.

● (1000)

Finally, we recommend that one of the best ways to combat hate, online or otherwise, is to promote dialogue and engagement. Oftentimes, this hate is born out of ignorance or misunderstanding, and it may be prevented through community engagement and outreach. The World Sikh Organization has put on a number of events, such as Turban Eh!, in order to educate people about the Sikh faith so that we can build positive relationships and promote dialogue.

The government must also play a role by regularly engaging with community organizations and by hearing their concerns about what they are seeing on the ground. The proliferation of online hate and the link to actual attacks is worrisome. Canada must act to counter this threat with a meaningful and effective strategy. We hope that through co-operation with social media providers and government agencies, as well as increased dialogue and engagement, the danger that online hate poses to vulnerable groups can be mitigated.

Thank you so much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now move to questions, starting with Mr. MacKenzie.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses who are appearing before us today. I think we all recognize the importance of what this is all about. We've sat here and listened to a lot of providers, and one of the things that have come through clearly to me is that somehow we need to find a way to get all of the groups together and to sit around the same table. Probably we could have a solution amongst the groups that have presented before us—as opposed to us, who bring all of our prejudice to what we hear from you.

Having said that—

● (1005)

The Chair: I'm sorry. Unfortunately, we have bells, which means we have a vote in 30 minutes.

I will need unanimous consent to continue.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Are you sure they're not just waiting for quorum?

The Chair: No, there's a vote in 29 minutes and 41 seconds.

Can I make the suggestion that each party take three minutes for questions? We'll do one question from each party and then we'll go to the House.

Sorry, Mr. MacKenzie. Please continue.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Okay.

Having said what I already said, does that occur now? Do all of the groups get together, sit around the same table and come up with some suggestions on how we work towards this end?

Ms. Choo, maybe you'd like to start.

Ms. Queenie Choo: That's a very good question.

I think if it is done, it isn't done enough. In my presentation, I talked about creating dialogue and community engagement among particularly those people who are under-represented. Those are newcomers in particular. Those are the people in the community who usually do not have a voice. The faith-based and the language groups, the ethnocultural, indigenous people, LGBTQ2S—they are not the people who are usually asked to come to the table to talk about this.

I am really in support of this. I am very encouraged that the issue is being raised about engaging the community to create this dialogue. People would be allies and support one other and would be able to combat online hate or hate crimes collectively.

Mr. Dave MacKenzie: Thank you.

Mr. Duodu, do you have any comments on that?

Mr. Emmanuel Duodu: I would just support what Ms. Choo said. I totally agree that when we are trying to combat something of this nature and on that scale, it makes sense for all of us to be at the table. We can have some shared experiences and we can come up with some solutions that cut across all associations or organizations. I totally support that approach, because by so doing, I think the policies or initiatives would come from the ground up. That's when you get people collaborating and coming up with solutions. Yes, I totally support that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Considering I have only three minutes, I'll get right to it.

Mr. Duodu, in your testimony you talked about how we need to have stronger legislation to combat online hate. We've heard elsewhere, through briefs as well our research and the stats that we see, that the enforcement piece of it is the real big challenge.

Ms. Choo, Mr. Singh and Mr. Duodu, perhaps I could ask you to comment on what you think legislation would look like that would also have a stronger impact in deterring online hate.

Ms. Queenie Choo: As I mentioned before, I think the legislation needs to take the following into consideration: defining what a hate crime is and how to report it, what happens after the reporting, and what people actually need to do when reporting a hate crime.

For the education piece, the training piece, make sure people understand it, because even though in some jurisdictions there is a reporting mechanism, it's not widely known to people. Resources need to be put into education and training. Make this a known priority to people and the communities. It would help combat hate and online hate in the long run.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you.

Mr. Singh.

Mr. Mukhbir Singh: We made two separate suggestions for immediate legislation. We do believe that the government has a role in countering the proliferation of online hate material.

We think it would be useful to study Germany's network enforcement law act. Specifically, this law looks at social media providers with two million users or more, and provides instructions on how material that's reported must be removed within certain timelines. There are also penalties for companies that do not comply with the laws.

We also think that the Criminal Code, section 320.1, provides enough options for law enforcement to actually enforce the code, but it's rarely used. We would encourage that to perhaps be used more often.

Thank you.

• (1010)

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you.

Mr. Duodu.

Mr. Emmanuel Duodu: I agree with all of the above. I just want to add that for us to be successful in regard to any legislation that comes into place, we need to ensure that it has some community input. What I mean by that is that we should all know what is going into that legislation. Therefore, we can be the ambassadors of the law, to make sure communities are very much aware of their rights, in regard to the legislation. That would be my take on this.

Sometimes legislation is there, but people don't understand or even know their rights. We need to make sure that there is community input with any legislation, and at the same time, that we are empowered to share this with our communities.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Ramsey, you have three minutes.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Thank you, all.

There's a bit of a sense of urgency, given that we're up against the election coming this year. There have already been warnings about the play of anti-immigrant sentiment and white nationalism in the election process. We see this on the rise in Canada. It's extremely concerning, across our country.

Mr. Singh, you mentioned the anonymity that exists online. The Globe and Mail did an article this week that was shocking. It's about an app called Discord—I'd never even heard of it—following a white nationalist group that was arming itself, meeting and training. This is extremely disturbing.

Given that we're up against this kind of deadline, how important is it for us to act before the end of this Parliament, which we're quickly running out of runway on. Can you speak to the urgency to protect Canadians and the communities that you represent?

Mr. Mukhbir Singh: Thank you, Ms. Ramsey.

I would support haste in the timeline. I would think that for the community itself, there is definite concern about the perceived threat it faces.

I mentioned the case with the Surrey Vaisakhi Nagar Kirtan. There's a sense of questioning from the community. What do we do next year when we get together? With the elections coming up, there is that sense of fear that this is only going to ramp up. We would definitely encourage something to be proposed before the end of this sitting.

Thank you.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Ms. Choo.

Ms. Queenie Choo: Definitely, I support that, regardless of an election. I think that divisive.... You know, the opportunity for this hate crime online is only going to divide our country. It's not going to uphold our values of diversity and inclusion, regardless of government or election.

I think we need to forge ahead to ensure that hate crimes, whether online or not, have no place in Canada, or anywhere else.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Duodu.

Mr. Emmanuel Duodu: Yes, I think there is some urgency. What I mean by "some urgency" is that if you look at the stats on what is happening right now, this is something that is going on at a rapid pace. People are losing their lives. In fact, we cannot even say that in Canada we're immune. For us not to be proactive and not to do this as a matter of urgency, we definitely will be missing a huge opportunity.

My take on this is that I would recommend that this Parliament do something before the end of the session. I think there is some urgency to this, really.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Thanks to all of you.

The Chair: Thank you to all the members of the panel. We're really sorry to have abbreviated the questions. Unfortunately, we have a vote, but thank you. You were really helpful.

The meeting is adjourned.

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