



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

# **Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development**

---

SDIR • NUMBER 161 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

---

**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, June 18, 2019**

—

**Chair**

**Ms. Anita Vandenbeld**



## Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Tuesday, June 18, 2019

• (1200)

[English]

**The Chair (Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.)):** Good afternoon. Welcome to what is for this parliamentary session the final meeting of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights.

Today we have a two-hour meeting on the global human rights situation of Christians.

We have with us four witnesses, one in person and three coming to us by video conference.

In person we have Dr. Mindy Michels, who is the director of the emergency assistance program for Freedom House. Then by video conference we have Floyd Brobbel, who is the vice-president of international operations for The Voice of the Martyrs Canada. He's coming to us from Oakville, Ontario. We have Anna Lee Stangl, head of advocacy for Christian Solidarity Worldwide, who is coming to us from Washington. We also have Lily Kuo, who is the Beijing bureau chief for The Guardian. She is coming to us by video conference from Irvine, California.

Welcome to all of our witnesses.

Committee members, because we have three witnesses by video conference, when you are posing questions, it will be helpful to indicate which witness you're posing the question to. That way we know which one we're actually going to be putting up on the screen.

With that, we will ask each of our witnesses to start with about 10 minutes of testimony, beginning with Ms. Kuo from The Guardian in California.

**Ms. Lily Kuo (Chief, Beijing Bureau, The Guardian):** I'll start with a report I reported myself. It will sound like a newspaper story. Forgive me, but that's the format I'm used to.

In October of last year, Pastor Wang Yi, who is the head of the Early Rain Covenant Church in southwestern China, asked his audience a question: Have we made a difference? If tomorrow morning the Early Rain Covenant Church suddenly disappeared from the city of Chengdu, if each of us vanished into the air, would the city be any different? Would anyone miss us?

As of December of last year, Pastor Wang and the other congregants of his church have had a chance to answer that

question, because starting on December 9, police rounded up and arrested more than 100 church members including Wang and his wife, who was also a key leader in the church. The church was shuttered and many members went into hiding. About half of those arrested were released and more than 50 continue to be held.

**The Chair:** I'm very sorry. It appears that there's a problem with our interpretation. I'm actually going to suspend for just a moment. My apologies to you but you'll probably have to start over when we come back.

We will suspend for one moment.

• (1200)

(Pause)

• (1200)

**The Chair:** We will resume.

I'm very sorry, Ms. Kuo. We're having difficulty with the sound quality, so the interpreters have not been able to interpret. We're going to go to the other witness first. Then when you come back, we'll try to bring you back through a teleconference. Hopefully the teleconference will have better audio quality.

We're very sorry about that, but we have to have everything bilingual, as you know. We'll actually now start with Dr. Michels for 10 minutes. Hopefully by then we'll be able to bring you back by teleconference. Thank you, Ms Kuo.

We'll start with Dr. Michels.

• (1205)

**Ms. Mindy Michels (Director, Emergency Assistance Program, Freedom House):** Thank you for inviting me to join you today. It's an honour to be here.

Last year, Freedom House recorded the 13th consecutive year of decline in global freedom and shrinking of civil society space. Connected to this trend, we also witnessed the deterioration of religious freedom. Over 80% of the world's populations live in a society with substantial restrictions on religious practices.

I direct our emergency assistance program. Through this program, we provide small grants to human rights defenders and civil society organizations under threat, as well as to victims of persecution based on belief.

We have supported 1,145 cases of persecution based on religion or belief since 2011. Of these cases, 58% or 662 individuals have been Christians.

Over the past 12 months alone, Christians have comprised 67% of the survivors that we have assisted, totalling 270 people. Over half of them were from Egypt or Pakistan. This is in line with data from multiple reports that Christians remain one of the most persecuted religious groups in the world.

The persecution of Christians takes many forms, including the destruction of churches, forcible conversion to Islam in Muslim-majority areas, being jailed under blasphemy laws or through other legal or extra-legal means, and, in extreme cases, mass killings. Nearly half of the cases we support involve physical attacks, such as sexual violence, murder and kidnapping, and attacks on property.

Non-state actors are the primary source of threats in around 60% of our cases, while state actors are the primary persecutor in around a quarter of our cases. Overall, state security forces, non-state armed groups, non-Christian neighbours and, in the cases of conversions, even family members have been implicated in severe violations of the basic freedom of Christians. The severe and ongoing nature of the repression often leads to Christians having to flee from their homes and from their communities. In many cases, we are supporting relocation.

I will first outline some of the broader trends we see in different political and cultural settings and provide case studies to illustrate the impact. These are case studies of situations in which we have provided support. I will not be providing names because of confidentiality. In some cases, we have provided funding to help these survivors relocate to safer areas, access medical treatment or receive legal support. I will conclude with recommendations to help in addressing these abuses.

Under Communist governments and other authoritarian regimes, Christians' freedom of worship is often restricted through onerous registration laws for religious organizations, state co-optation of Christian groups and mass state surveillance of churches.

For example, last year, a Protestant leader in Vietnam was detained by the authorities numerous times due to his church's independence from the regime. His church was targeted under the guise of state unification policies, which seek to place all religious groups under strict government control. Fearing imprisonment, he was forced to flee his village and find a new home.

Our 2017 report, "The Battle for China's Spirit", documents the persecution of Christians and other believers in China. As I'm sure you'll hear from one of the other witnesses when the teleconference comes on, the report found a high level of persecution for Protestants and a moderate level of persecution for Catholics, a trend that has appeared to intensify in recent months with China's attempts to "contain the overheated growth of Christianity"—that was a quote from a Chinese official.

Since early 2014, Protestants in China have been particularly affected by the removal of crosses and church demolition campaigns, punishment of religious leaders and the arrest of human rights lawyers defending cases for Christians. In some recent cases, Protestant preachers have been detained and sentenced to prison because their activities are conducted through unregistered social organizations.

Meanwhile, in countries facing armed insurgencies and violent extremism, Christians are frequently assaulted by militants on multiple sides of the conflict, often with the tacit acceptance of the state. Last year, extremist attacks in the Minya area of Egypt killed and severely injured dozens of Christians and decimated several churches. The limited government response to the attacks means that Christians in this region of the country continue to face insecurity and routine violations of their religious freedom.

The recent church bombings in Sri Lanka are another instance of terrorist violence against Christians for openly practising their faith. The attacks in Sri Lanka also highlight how violence can exacerbate tensions with other groups, as many Muslims are now fleeing the area.

● (1210)

In many of the same countries racked by overall extremist violence, we also find cases of kidnappings and forced conversions of Christians, especially targeting women and girls. For example, in Nigeria last year Muslim radicals abducted a teenage girl, forced her to convert to Islam and married her to an older Muslim man. When the girl's father began working with a lawyer to recover his daughter, local extremists assaulted him and other members of his family, forcing them into hiding.

Blasphemy laws are another tool of repression against religious minorities, including Christians. The Canadian government generously provided assistance in the high-profile case of Asia Bibi, which brought international attention to this type of persecution. We frequently see these pernicious laws being abused to settle personal vendettas against Christians. In Pakistan, for example, a Christian family was charged with blasphemy and sentenced to prison, following a dispute with a local Muslim vendor. After four years of prison, when the family members were finally released they continued to be targeted by extremists who refused to believe in their innocence.

Even in some democracies Christian leaders face an environment of insecurity and attacks on their places of worship. In India, as Hindu nationalism continues to rise, Christian pastors have become key targets for Hindu extremist groups. Anti-conversion laws and direct violence are often used to pressure Christians to remain silent about their faith and to falsely accuse pastors of conversion to shut down their ministries. In one case a Christian pastor was falsely charged with forced conversions, simply for holding normal prayer services. He had to fight the legal charges against him and his church was shut down by Hindu extremists.

When Christians seek, through the legal system, restitution for persecution, they often encounter a criminal justice system that is biased against them and supports impunity for perpetrators of religiously motivated violence. For example, last year in a rural area of Egypt, when survivors of an anti-Christian attack went to the police, authorities ordered them to participate in a reconciliation session with their attackers, during which they were forced to agree to not pray in church and to give up their claims for compensation.

Finally, I would like to touch on the heightened threats faced by human rights defenders and lawyers who protect the freedom of Christians. In some countries, regardless of the faith background, advocates who defend the basic rights of Christians are viewed as traitors to their nation and are targeted both by their government's security services and extremists in their country. For example, in the case of Asia Bibi, her lawyer, a Muslim, received death threats from militant groups due to his work combatting the blasphemy charges, forcing him to flee the country. More recently in Sudan, human rights lawyers who defended Christians in court were detained and tortured following the outbreak of anti-government protests last December.

With this widespread persecution in mind, there are several concrete steps that the Canadian Parliament and the Canadian government can take.

First—and I know this has been done already but I'm encouraging the continuation of it—take strong and immediate action against violators of religious freedom through the use of the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act, the Magnitsky act. Targeted sanctions against foreign officials who have committed gross violations of religious freedom is an important mechanism in holding state actors accountable. This act is a tool that we recommend Canada increasingly use to help limit impunity and also to continue to demonstrate Canada's strong commitment to protecting religious minority groups.

Second, engage in public and private diplomatic efforts to increase state capacity to respond to instances of religious persecution inside the country. By working with countries to bolster their own response mechanisms to religious freedom violations, Canada can increase state accountability and the rule of law, and improve protections for all minority faith groups, including non-believers.

Direct more funding to support victims of religious persecution and organizations that work on religious freedom issues. Supporting courageous grassroots activists and civil society organizations can lead to long-term reform, especially through support for organizations focused on areas such as interfaith mediation and legal advocacy. To be very clear, in this recommendation I am not advocating calling for more funding for Freedom House in particular. There are many excellent organizations dedicated to improving protections for freedom of religion or belief.

Fourth, Canadian MPs can consider adopting a religious prisoner as a form of advocacy. In the U.S., members of Congress who support the cases of individual prisoners of conscience bring attention to their plight, potentially resulting in releases or reduced prison terms.

Finally, the Canadian government should consider adopting its own list of countries of particular concern, CPCs, to highlight the most egregious violators of religious freedom. In the U.S., the CPC list has been an important tool for bringing attention to countries and implementing targeted sanctions in places where the rights of religious communities are most frequently abused.

● (1215)

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for your testimony.

We will now go to Floyd Brobbel from The Voice of the Martyrs Canada.

You have 10 minutes.

**Mr. Floyd Brobbel (Vice-president, International Operations, Voice of the Martyrs Canada):** Thank you, Madam Chair and honourable committee members, for this opportunity to speak to the global issue of Christian persecution.

I believe this is an important topic that demands our attention and understanding if we are to sort through the other difficulties that intersect religious persecution and effectively advocate on their behalf.

The Voice of the Martyrs Canada defines Christian persecution as a situation in which Christians are repetitively, persistently and systematically inflicted with grave or severe suffering or harm, and deprived of or significantly threatened with the deprivation of their fundamental human rights because of a difference that comes from being a Christian, which the persecutor will not tolerate.

To distinguish Christian persecution from other forms of religious repression, it is helpful to ask whether, if a person had other religious beliefs, or would change their religion to the majority religion of the region, things would get better for them. If the answer is yes, then the potential for persecution on religious grounds becomes a probable motivator.

Studies conducted by the Pew Research Center and the International Institute of Religious Freedom stress that three-quarters of all religious persecution is perpetrated against Christians, making this a significant religious-liberty violation globally today.

Basic human rights that are being infringed upon include the freedom to an education, the right to own property, the right to dignity and respect, the right to life, liberty and security of the person, the freedom of religion or belief, and the freedom to change one's religion and to manifest their religion or belief.

As a Christian organization, The Voice of the Martyrs Canada believes in the biblical basis for human rights, being that all people created in God's image are worthy of dignity and respect regardless of their religion or belief. We further regard the freedom of religion or belief as stated in article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as the underpinning of all rights and liberties. Having worked with The Voice of the Martyrs Canada for 16 years, I have travelled to numerous countries, profiling cases of persecution and implementing projects to assist Christians in the context of their suffering.

Why are Christians persecuted?

The Voice of the Martyrs Canada, with nearly 50 years of engaging personally with persecuted Christians around the world and sifting through complicating factors that intersect religious persecution, has witnessed and focused on three leading causes of Christian persecution.

Cause number one is that Christians suffer because of their identity as Christians. These are Christians who have been born into a Christian family, identify themselves as Christian—whether Catholic, Protestant or evangelical—and are considered Christian by those within their social construct. Their desire is to live peacefully within their communities, raise families, obtain meaningful work that will provide for their families, and engage in activities that enhance their communities, all the while remaining free to practise their religious beliefs and customs. Sadly, these aspirations are denied to or withheld from Christians, who are seen as belonging to a western religion and are, therefore, treated with suspicion. As a minority, then, Christians encounter discrimination and are often deprived of the advantages and opportunities enjoyed by those of the majority.

Take, for example, the situation in North Korea. Being found to be Christian in North Korea results in a life sentence to a concentration camp in which the person will suffer due to mistreatment, hard labour and lack of food. A Christian will very likely die in these camps due to the harsh conditions or due to execution.

Take, for example, the situation in Pakistan. All Christians in Pakistan face some difficulty, discrimination and persecution because of their Christian identity. Several large-scale attacks have occurred in Christian colonies recently, including those during Christmas 2017 and Easter 2018. In general, Christians are trapped in a cycle of poor education and poverty. Many are employed as indentured servants in brick kilns or tree nurseries, as street sweepers and as sewage workers. A few Christians have been imprisoned for long periods, while many others cycle in and out of prison, charged under the country's blasphemy laws.

● (1220)

Take also Nigeria as an example. Boko Haram militants and Fulani Islamic militants have worked together to target Christian villages for destruction. They have attacked Christian villages for many years. In the last two years, they have committed more acts of extreme violence against Christians than any other group globally. Nearly all Christians in northeastern Nigeria have lost family members to Boko Haram and Islamic militant Fulani violence. Entire congregations have been displaced. Many pastors have been forced to leave the region. Thousands of Christians remain in camps designated for internally displaced people. Famine in the north has resulted from the ongoing jihad activities. Farmers aren't working because they fear attack. Food shipments are often stolen. Fulani Christians are often detained for short periods in community prisons based on Islamic sharia.

Second, Christians suffer because of their Christian witness and testimony. A vital aspect of the Christian life is to share the gospel with family, friends and neighbours. Christians know this to be the biblical mandate called the “great commission”, as found in Matthew 28:16 to 20. Christians believe that evangelism, therefore, is to be an essential component in practising their faith. Evangelism for the

Christian is a means of sharing the gospel—that is, the good news of Jesus Christ. It is our experience that much of the persecution in this area is as a result of church growth. In other words, the more the church is active in preaching the gospel, the more it grows, and the more it grows, the more it is persecuted.

For example, an estimated 27 million Christians live in India, but that is only 2.1% of the population. Christians in India are openly visible, but churches have been demolished and burned. Worship gatherings have been disrupted. Crosses and graveyards have been vandalized. Bibles and other Christian literature have been confiscated and burned, and more pastors are beaten and thrown into prison. Christians are often arrested and held up for weeks after being falsely accused of forced conversion of Hindus to Christianity.

Another example is Egypt. Egypt is home to the largest Christian population in the Arab world. Overt Christian activity can result in persecution. The Egyptian Coptic Church enjoys a fair amount of freedom to worship openly, as long as they keep their faith to themselves and do not engage in evangelistic outreach to the Muslim majority community. Christians who evangelize face tremendous opposition from Islamist groups, including radical elements within the government. Christian women and girls are frequently kidnapped and forced into marriage with their Muslim captors.

The last reason Christians are persecuted is that Christian converts suffer because of their decision to leave their former religion. Effective evangelism results in tremendous church growth throughout non-western nations. That has been the cause of backlash and persecution against Christian communities, but more often, converts to Christianity experience more significant human rights abuses. Anti-conversion bills and blasphemy laws are commonly used as a means of discouraging conversions as well as a means to apply pressure on converts to reconsider their conversions.

In some cases, conversions can result in lengthy prison sentences and even execution—in Iran, for example. The Iranian government is among the most repressive regimes in the world. It is illegal to leave Islam. Those who do leave face constant threat of imprisonment and being falsely charged with acting against national security. These Christians are routinely fired from their jobs. It is difficult for a known believer to find a new job. They are also often evicted from rented homes. Several Christians are currently imprisoned and many others are under house arrest awaiting sentencing. Bibles are highly restricted. It is illegal to import them and illegal to have a Bible printed in the country.

The last example is Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is one of the world's worst persecutors of Christians. The government delivers converts to Christianity to their families, assuming they will be killed according to the country's strict interpretation of Islamic law. These Christians are more likely to be killed by family members than to be imprisoned.

•(1225)

In conclusion, I realize that this presentation only scratches the surface of this critical issue but I hope it's given you a little more insight into some of the burdens faced by Christians around the world: difficulties in Communist and post-Communist nations, from the religious nationalists, under totalitarian or security states, and from Islamic extremists.

On the one hand, the Bible teaches that followers of Jesus can expect opposition and persecution in the world because of their identity as a Christ follower as well as their witness of Christ and proclaiming his message. On the other hand, Christians also believe that governments are instituted by God to ensure true justice for all people. Where governments fail to protect the rights and freedoms of Christians and other religious adherents, we must speak out for the oppressed and call for change.

I will close with the words from the Bible, which is a key verse for The Voice of the Martyrs. It is Hebrews 13:3: "Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body".

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Brobbel.

It appears that we have Lily Kuo back again. We understand the audio issues have hopefully been resolved.

Ms. Kuo, if you would like to begin again, go ahead.

**Ms. Lily Kuo:** Great. Thank you so much.

In October of last year, Pastor Wang Yi, the head of the Early Rain Covenant Church in southwestern China, asked his audience a question: Have we made a difference? If tomorrow morning the Early Rain Covenant Church suddenly disappeared from the city of Chengdu, if each of us vanished into thin air, would the city be any different? Would anybody miss us?

As of December last year, Pastor Wang and his church have been able to explore that question. Starting on December 9, police arrested more than 100 church members, including Wang and his wife, who was also a key leader in the church. The church was shuttered and many members went into hiding. About half of those arrested were released. More than 50 continue to be held. Wang's wife was released earlier this month, but her husband continues to be detained. He faces potential charges of inciting subversion, which is a crime that carries a penalty of up to 15 years in prison. Over the next month, more members of the church were detained. Students who had attended a seminary school affiliated with the church were sent back to their home provinces and were prevented from returning.

I visited Chengdu in January to see what had become of the church, which is one of the largest underground or "house" churches in that part of the country. I'd been told that access to the church, which occupied three floors of a commercial building in Chengdu, would be difficult, but I was able to walk into the building. I took the elevator to the floor of the main church hall and managed to get a few minutes in the former hall before plainclothes police came in and told me I had to leave. The church was bare aside from a dusty Ping-Pong table. The cross that hung in the back, that would be behind

Pastor Wang as he gave sermons, was gone. The police watched until I got in a taxi and left.

What happened to the Early Rain Covenant Church is a reflection of a broader campaign by Chinese authorities to sinicize religion in China. One part of that has been cracking down on these unregistered churches, many of which had been able to operate and were tolerated by authorities for years. In recent years, other even larger house churches, such as the Zion Church in Beijing, which had more than 1,500 members, have been shut down. Early Rain had more than 500 members. In January another church in Chengdu was placed under investigation less than a week after the mass arrest of the Early Rain Covenant Church members. A Sunday school in Guangzhou, in southern China, was raided. The previous November, another church in Guangzhou, called the Guangzhou Bible Reformed Church, was shut for the second time in three months.

Chinese Christians and activists say that what's happening now is the worst crackdown on Christianity since the Cultural Revolution, when the leadership under Mao Zedong vowed to eradicate religion. This effort to sinicize religion comes from concerns about western influence in China and systems of belief that connect Chinese citizens with international networks. The government says this oversight is necessary to prevent foreign forces from using religion to destabilize China.

Today there are an estimated 60 million, at least, Christians in China, in both rural and urban areas. This means that congregation-based churches can organize large groups of people across the country. Some do have links with Christian groups abroad. A church like Early Rain was likely especially alarming. Wang was a little different from other pastors. He was a civil rights lawyer before. He was a well-known public intellectual and essayist before he became a pastor.

While other churches tend to be apolitical, Wang's church was outspoken. They had advocated for the parents of children killed in the 2008 Sichuan earthquake—thousands of deaths that critics said could have been avoided had authorities not approved the shoddy construction of schools and other buildings. They also advocated for families affected by faulty vaccines that were approved by authorities. They also commemorated every year the victims of the highly sensitive June 4, 1989, crackdown.

As you know, this is not just Christianity that has come under pressure. All five government-sanctioned religions in China—Buddhism, Catholicism, Islam, Taoism and Protestantism, to which Early Rain belonged—are supposed to have these sinicization plans. We already know about the efforts to sinicize Islam, so I won't go into those, but one thing I was looking for when I was reporting in Chengdu on this church was any parallels or any techniques possibly being used on Christians that had been similar to those used on Uighur Muslims and other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang.

●(1230)

When they were arrested, a lot of the detainees—some 20 of them, I think—were sent to a legal education centre, so I wanted to know whether or not there were any parallels between these centres and the re-education centres used in Xinjiang.

As far as I could tell from the people I spoke to who were sent to the centre in Chengdu, there were not. These people were able to read the Bible and weren't subjected to any kind of political indoctrination. It seems to me that the most obvious parallels between the cases of Uighur Muslims and of Christians would be the use of technology to surveil and control the activities of religious believers.

Earlier, I mentioned the Zion Church in Beijing. One of the reasons why they were forced to close down was that they were ordered to install 24-hour closed-circuit television cameras. In a lot of mosques in Xinjiang, they've had to install cameras. When the church refused, the pastor and members of the church said that they were consistently and constantly harassed by state security. They eventually were shut down and the church was demolished. Other churches have been asked by police to hand over detailed lists of attendees and their ID numbers and phone numbers, which is another technique also used in Xinjiang, where people are tracked.

We also see similar efforts in regard to the outward signs of Christianity, as we have seen with mosques and other Islamic structures being torn down in Xinjiang and Ningxia. There was a statement signed by 500 house church leaders, who said that crosses have been removed from buildings and the authorities have forced churches to hang the Chinese flag or sing patriotic songs. They also have barred minors from attending church. This is also a rule in Xinjiang for minors.

Going back to the example of Chengdu, the Early Rain Covenant Church, since being closed and the mass arrests, has continued to hold meetings virtually, where people dial in to a live webcast. Others hold very small group meetings in their homes if they're able to. Others gather in groups in restaurants or parks. As I said, many have gone into hiding, so people communicate over encrypted chat platforms [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

**The Chair:** Ms. Kuo, we were not able to hear the last bit. Could you repeat that part? Hopefully, the audio will be improved.

●(1235)

**Ms. Lily Kuo:** Okay.

People have been dialing in to live webcasts of the Early Rain Covenant Church in order to hold prayer meetings and gather, but even some of these have been stopped. On June 4 of this year, Chengdu police went into the home of one congregant and told him and his family that they could not get online that day. Since December, authorities have arrested a total of more than 300 members of this church, according to Early Rain, including children. As of March 27, we're still under some form of police custody, with 16 released but still subject to investigation, and 11 still detained in prison.

The church continues to send out daily scripture and posts videos of sermons. In one from earlier this month, which I think Chinese Christians and activists would want expressed to an international

audience, Pastor Wang reads from the “Westminster Confession of Faith” about the role of the church and state.

Pastor Wang reads to his congregation and says that the role of Christ is as “the only head of the church”, and asks, “The government in China does not respect this stance of ours, does it?” He goes on to say that the government has not made laws ensuring “that all religious and ecclesiastical assemblies be held without molestation or disturbance”.

He adds, “The Bible says this is their responsibility. The Bible says that if a government does not fulfill this responsibility, it will one day be judged. They don't know, because they don't believe, but we do, so do we have a responsibility to tell them? Yes, we do.”

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. I'm very glad that we were able to get your testimony through all the technical issues.

Now we will go to Anna Lee Stangl.

You have 10 minutes. Go ahead.

**Ms. Anna Lee Stangl (Head of Advocacy, Christian Solidarity Worldwide):** Thank you so much, Madam Chair and honourable members, for this opportunity to speak to you today.

In the majority of countries around the world, Christians face restrictions to the free and peaceful practice of their religion. The Pew Research Center's most recent report on global restrictions on religion, published in 2018, states that Christians face harassment either from governments or from social groups in 144 countries.

Challenges faced by Christians include discrimination, harassment, violence by state and non-state actors, and imprisonment or death. Often in countries where Christians face violations of their freedom of religion or belief, they also face violations of other connected human rights, such as freedom of assembly, freedom of expression and the right to life.

In some cases, Christians suffer violations of human rights solely because of their beliefs, while other Christians are targeted for different reasons—for example, wider targeting of ethnic groups comprising various religious identities. The human rights situation for Christians varies according to context, as do the individuals and non-state and state actors responsible for the violations against them.

I'll start with China and then move eastward to a variety of our countries of focus.



The Pew report found that China had the highest levels of government restrictions on religion. While China officially recognizes both Catholicism and Protestantism as two of the five religious traditions overseen by “state-sanctioned” associations, many Christians in China belong to unregistered churches, which do not fall into this category. It is fair to say that some of those who belong to unregistered churches do so for reasons of conscience, as they do not want to belong to a church under the control and surveillance of the state.

Ever since revised regulations on religious affairs came into effect in February 2018, there has been a rapid tightening of restrictions on churches in China. Across the country, authorities have forced unregistered churches to close and have harassed leaders and members. Meanwhile, registered churches have been forced to remove religious symbols and have been prohibited from allowing children to engage in religious activities. In several parts of the country, churches have been demolished altogether.

As we've already heard today, one notable example is that of the Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu, Sichuan province. On December 9, 2018, police arrested over 100 members of the church, including the church's pastor, Wang Yi, and his wife, Jiang Rong. Many of those initially arrested have since been released, including Jiang Rong, but Pastor Wang and several others have remained in detention for over a year now.

Since the crackdown on the Early Rain Covenant Church began, families and individuals who attended the church have faced ongoing harassment from police and landlords under pressure from authorities. Dozens of church members have also been detained for short periods under administrative detention.

Moving east to India, while Christians account for just 2.3% of the population in India, this equates to a total of 28 million people, a population larger than that of many countries. As a religious minority, Christians face a range of violations of religious freedom and other human rights.

Concerns for the situation of Christians remain high in the aftermath of India's recent parliamentary elections, which saw Narendra Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party, BJP, retain power and make fresh progress in some states. During Modi's first term as prime minister, Christians faced increasing social hostility in the form of hate speech, attacks on prayer meetings, denials of access to basic services and violence.

Violence against Christians is a country-wide problem for India. Cases of such violence were reported in 13 different states in January 2019 alone. Often, these violations take the form of large groups of Hindu nationalists breaking up prayer gatherings held in private homes. Reports have emerged of Bibles being burned and Christians being beaten during such assaults.

Just two weeks ago, two Christian men handing out religious tracts were violently assaulted in Puducherry, in an attack led by the local leader of the BJP youth wing. An accomplice recorded and shared a video of the attack online. Despite the identity of the attackers being known and an official complaint lodged with police, the police have yet to take any action.

Moving further east to Iran, the Iranian Christian community, along with other religious minorities, has suffered multiple violations of religious freedom for years. Although Iran is party to several international covenants that protect religious freedom, religious minorities are viewed with suspicion and treated as a threat to a theocratic system that imposes a strict interpretation of Shia Islam.

Christian converts from Islam often face charges of “action against national security”. A notable example is that of Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani and three of his fellow members of the Church of Iran, who were arrested in Rasht in May 2016.

• (1240)

In June 2017, they were given 10-year prison sentences by the 26th branch of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran for acting against national security through propagating house churches and promoting Zionist Christianity. The group was released on bail pending appeal but were later informed that their appeal had failed, and they were subsequently arrested in a series of raids in July 2018 and taken to begin their prison sentences.

In addition to these cases, Iran has cracked down on Christianity through the forced closure of churches, arbitrary arrests, interrogation, detention and surveillance, and the delivery of excessive prison sentences. Often sentences are handed down by judges notorious for human rights violations and the trials demonstrate that due process has not been respected. This is particularly true for trials involving Christians and Christian converts.

Moving further west to Nigeria, the Pew Research Center estimates that Christians comprise approximately 40% of Nigeria's population, equal to over 80 million people. Despite this relatively sizable population, Christians in Nigeria continue to face violations of religious freedom in several parts of the country.

Twelve states in northern Nigeria have adopted a sharia penal code, which has effectively rendered Islam a state religion, in violation of Nigeria's secular constitution. In most of these states, the education of Christian schoolgirls is frequently curtailed by abductions, forceable conversion and marriage without parental consent. A notable case is that of Leah Sharibu, a Christian schoolgirl abducted along with 109 of her classmates by terrorists in Dapchi in February 2018.

While the government successfully negotiated the release of all of her surviving classmates, Leah has been denied her freedom because of her refusal to convert. She has spent over a year in terrorist captivity and recently turned 16 as their hostage.

Her case is just one of many examples. Also notable are the 112 Chibok girls who remain in Boko Haram's captivity since their notorious abduction in April 2014.

Christians also face violence in much of central Nigeria, where increasingly well-armed militia, composed predominately of members of the Fulani ethnic group, have been responsible for regular attacks on farming communities. Thousands of men, women and children have died and thousands more have been displaced in rising attacks, which local observers have described as a campaign of ethno-religious cleansing.

Now I will move to our own hemisphere. Despite the fact that Mexico is a majority Christian nation with Roman Catholics accounting for approximately 83% of the population and other Christian denominations accounting for a further 10%, Mexico has held the record for 10 years running for more Catholic priests killed than any other country in the world. In 2018, 10 priests were killed, part of a total of 26, documented by the Catholic Multimedia Center, in the past six years.

Church leaders are at particular risk in areas with significant presence of organized criminal groups where the message they are preaching often comes into direct conflict with the objectives of the criminal groups. Church leaders can be targeted for refusing to cooperate with criminal groups or because their ministries negatively affect the criminal groups' financial interests. In the majority of cases, the remains show clear signs of torture, an indication that they were intentionally targeted and were not victims of random crime as the Mexican government often tries to claim.

In November 2014, the body of Father John Ssenyondo, a 55-year-old Ugandan priest working in the state of Guerrero was recovered and showed signs of torture. He had disappeared about six months earlier after being kidnapped by a criminal leader who reportedly attempted to force him to carry out a baptism.

Currently, church leaders of different denominations in Uruapan, Michoacan, have reported receiving threats from criminal groups. Sadly a few weeks ago, Pastor Miguel Angel Bucio's body was found in Uruapan. He had been kidnapped just a few hours earlier and his body also showed signs of torture.

This weekend, two gunmen opened fire in a Catholic church in Chiapas state killing Margeli Lang Antonio, a children catechism teacher. Extremely high levels of impunity in Mexico mean that few if any of these murders are ever investigated, let alone prosecuted, leaving church leaders with little recourse if they come under threat.

In conclusion, Christians around the world face violations of religious freedom and other human rights, which vary in type and severity according to context. In some instances, Christians suffer as a result of restrictive policy and government repression. In others, they are targeted by non-state actors and members of other religious or ethnic groups.

It is important to note that the examples given demonstrate that Christians suffer human rights violations not only at the hands of Islamic extremists or in Muslim majority countries but also in secular nations, in nations in which other religions account for the majority of the population, and even in nations where Christians are the largest religious group in the country.

●(1245)

Sadly, we see few examples of parts of the world where the religious freedom situation is improving. It is vital that actions be taken to defend the religious freedom of Christians and of all of those who suffer for their religious beliefs.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Stangl.

Thank you to all four witnesses.

We'll now go to questions. The first seven minutes will go to Mr. Sweet.

**Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC):** Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses for some very disturbing testimony. I want to try to make an amalgam of some of the testimony.

Ms. Michels, you mentioned that, for the most part, it was non-state actors who were responsible for the persecution of Christians. However, from your testimony after you made that statement, and others did as well, it's clear that although there will be others who are the persecutors, in many cases those state actors who are charged with the security of their own citizens just stand by and allow it to happen. Is that a fair statement?

**Ms. Mindy Michels:** My colleagues might have opinions on it, but I will say that in our cases, because we document who the perpetrators are, that is where we are seeing the specific perpetrators. In all of those cases, though, impunity is a major factor in it. While we don't tag impunity as one of the actors in our cases, it is absolutely the case that these types of attacks couldn't continue to occur in the kind of consistent way they do if there weren't ongoing impunity and a lack of state involvement in terms of their responsibility for protection.

**Mr. David Sweet:** I also want to thank you very much for talking about adopting a prisoner of conscience. We used to do that here, in Iran Accountability Week. In fact, it was Anna Lee Stangl who mentioned Youcef Nadarkhani. I actually adopted Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani in the past as a prisoner of conscience, and he's now again in Evin prison. It's been a tragic situation with him for so many years, but I appreciate the fact that we are reminded of that.

I heard something off-line and I want to ask you about it. You're very familiar with Albania. How are Christians treated in Albania?

**Ms. Mindy Michels:** It's interesting in Albania. I will say first that this is just my commentary, because I lived in Albania for four years. This is not based on the work I do currently, and we have not had cases coming in from Albania. I just want to be clear about that up front.

Religion in Albania is a complicated thing, given that it was an atheist country for a very long time. A variety of actors are coming into the country now from all kinds of faith groups, whether it be Baha'is or Mormons or evangelical churches or Muslims who are vying for the faith of the Albanian people. There's a mix of skepticism about religion but also embracing of religion.

I don't have any specific research or anything other than my personal experience from living in the country, so I can't speak to that well, but there are certainly active faith-based groups there.

• (1250)

**Mr. David Sweet:** I have a motivation with regard to Albania. There's a special exhibit on Albania in Yad Vashem. At the time of the Second World War, it was actually a Muslim-dominated country. There were more Jews after the Second World War than before the war, because it actually protected them. In fact, a national kind of promise of faithfulness to your neighbour underpins Albania.

**Ms. Mindy Michels:** It does.

**Mr. David Sweet:** As well, a group we fought for here at this committee years ago, the MEK, were in Iraq and were assiduously targeted for killings, and we finally were able to see their release. Albania took the vast majority of them. I just wanted to see if they were continuing that behaviour with Christians. I understand you don't have any specific research, but I wanted to ask you since you had been there for a number of years.

**Ms. Mindy Michels:** Right. What you're saying is true. One of the cultural.... There's the notion of Leke Dukagjini and the guest and God. The view is that the guest is as close to God in the view of.... I've mangled the actual statement on that, but absolutely that's why the Jews were taken in. It went from I think 200 Jews to 2,000 after World War II.

**Mr. David Sweet:** Mr. Brobbel, I think you hit the nail on the head. For people who aren't in the Christian community—evangelical, standard Protestant or Roman Catholic—there's a.... You mentioned the DNA, that when someone converts to Christianity, no matter what “tribe”, if I may, they fall into, there's a dedication to them. They have the feeling that they've finally found the truth and that now they have answers for their own character strengths for this life as well as eternity. Embedded in that whole thing is that they have to tell other people, because it's the most phenomenal thing they've ever experienced.

That, in essence, is what ends up getting many Christians persecuted. You mentioned that and I'm wondering if you want to expand on that at all.

**Mr. Floyd Brobbel:** That's right. When they convert to Christianity, for many it is their baptism that seals the deal. They are significantly targeted now as Christian. Until the baptism takes place, they are often watched. When they are baptized, then more oppression and persecution is put onto them.

When they're baptized, though, they're also emboldened in their faith to witness. They find a new community. They're excited. They believe they've found some truth in life, and it's given them great comfort. They are learning through their local congregation and their pastors, and they want their families and friends to [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] the truth they've found. They are witnessing. They are sharing their testimony and their stories with friends and neighbours.

You're right that it often gets them into trouble. I was recently in Bangladesh, where we were talking to a Muslim convert. Just as he came out of the pond where he was baptized, over the loudspeaker of the mosque in his village his name was identified. The villagers were told that he was just baptized and he was no longer permitted to have access to the stores and to the local well. It meant he had to travel far distances to get even fresh water for himself. This is the type of pressure that many converts are under—as well as certain violence.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Tabbara, you have seven minutes.

**Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

Ms. Michels, in your testimony you touched briefly on Egypt and Pakistan. I want to focus attention a little on the Middle East. I want to give you a few numbers of the dwindling demographics in the Middle East for Christians. In the 20th century, the percentage was around 20% Christian. If we look at the 21st century, it's now anywhere from 10% to 15%. You can obviously note all the wars that have been happening and the instability. I will focus your attention on two areas. For example, Gaza had an estimated 4,000 Christians before the Israeli blockade in 2007. If you fast-forward 13 years, fewer than 700 Christians still remain in a population of 2.2 million. If we look at the neighbouring country of Lebanon, Christians were the majority in the country in the 1940s and 1950s. In 2017 it was roughly 36%. We're seeing dwindling numbers of Christians.

I would note that Lebanon has a confessional system. That's the political structure there. It's based on religion. The political structure is based on religion. The president would be a Maronite Christian, the prime minister would be a Muslim Sunni, and the speaker of the house would be a Muslim Shia. I spoke to my Lebanese colleagues and said if we ran there, we could take each position, because we come from different religious backgrounds.

Where I'm going with this is that if you look at a Middle Eastern structure and the instability that is happening there, and you look at a western structure, it's not perfect, but during the Enlightenment, the American Revolution and the French Revolution pushed for more equalities, freedoms and rights. They separated themselves from monarchies to a government that is for the people, by the people. This growth of democracies in the west saw a rise in secularism and secular national governance. Although the west is not perfect, if we separated ourselves from these political structures that I mentioned—for example, in Lebanon—do you feel that we would see less persecution and see a retention, if not increase, in the numbers of maybe Christian and other minority groups?

•(1255)

**Ms. Mindy Michels:** That's a big question. In terms of the work I do, I don't know that I'm qualified to fully say what is the best political structure. Obviously, from Freedom House we support the growth of democracy, but as I noted in my testimony, even in places that are democratic there are still challenges in the way in which minorities across the board, certainly Christian but also other religious minorities, can be treated.

I don't know that I have the research or political science background to be able to speak to the question as you've asked it. I'm sure there are many people who have written on it and who are far more knowledgeable than I am about that. I will say, in terms of western countries, that there has been at least some positive movement. As to where there is some positive development, Canada, Ireland and Malta, I believe, have recently rescinded blasphemy laws that were still on the books. They were obviously not being utilized in the same kinds of ways as in the testimony given by me and others on the panel, but that is certainly an example to be positive about.

Others on the panel might be able to speak to your question more significantly than I've been able to.

**Mr. Marwan Tabbara:** Thank you.

If I could, I'll turn it over to Mr. Floyd Brobbel.

I know it's a long question, but hopefully you can give us some insights.

**Mr. Floyd Brobbel:** Yes. I don't know if I could speak to that. Part of my question [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] why are Christians [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]. I think that they're [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Mr. Brobbel.

**Mr. Floyd Brobbel:** As a result of that, you see Christians leaving the country and finding other regions to live in.

As to your specific question, again, we don't necessarily focus on those aspects of Christians departing. We look for ways to help Christians continue to remain in countries. We believe that having a church in the country is positive for the country. We seek ways we can assist the church to continue to grow and to remain in the region even in the midst of difficulties.

I don't know if that fully answers your question.

•(1300)

**Mr. Marwan Tabbara:** For the witnesses, where I'm going with this is that I believe the political structures that are currently in place are infringing on individual rights.

It's not a stable structure, as I mentioned, the confessional system in Lebanon, where you can be given a position or you can run for a position, but it has to be based on your religion. It's not based on a secular system like we have in the west. I think that's the reason why we have these political wars and instabilities and these types of policies that unfortunately result in a system that is not stable.

Could I go on to the next two witnesses?

**Ms. Anna Lee Stangl:** It's a really fascinating question. I've worked with CSW for about 18 years now. One of my most memorable occasions is from the time when I was living in Brussels and working at our EU office. I was bringing to Brussels a delegation of Burmese nationals from different ethnic minorities to learn about the structures, and not just the European Union institutions but also the Belgian federal system and the way that was set up. They also went to Switzerland and saw that one.

I think that one good thing in the west is that we have so many different models of democracy. Each country has a model tailored to its reality and its history, and often taking into account minorities without doing quotas, like what you've mentioned.

I think one recommendation that I would be very much in favour of is that Canada invest in training and capacity building in that sense of exposing this to people from these countries, where religious freedom violations and other human rights violations are very high and are often linked to a deficit of democracy. It's about exposing them to other systems, so they can learn and take from Canada, the U.S., Belgium or the EU the lessons they've learned, the things that have worked and those that haven't worked, and devise their own democratic structures.

I do think that what you're pointing out is really important, in that in most countries with a high level of religious freedom violations you have a history that is not particularly democratic, does not have the rule of law and does not have a history of human rights respect. We often have to begin from the ground in terms of training people in basic concepts of human rights and democracy.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. That's the time, unfortunately.

We'll go to Ms. Hardcastle for seven minutes.

**Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you, everyone, for your intriguing testimony on this issue. I'm going to ask you about a couple of things that haven't been talked about here yet, but I'm thinking that this is extremely germane now and is a modern problem that we have. I know that it was brought up in terms of the rise of nationalism with Hinduism. I guess it's for all of you.

I want to start with you, Ms. Kuo. Can you talk a bit about how social media is contributing to how those narratives are set up? On the misinformation campaigns and mob violence, is there something there that we should be contemplating as a government? It is something that we're thinking about here in our country and in our legislative environment in terms of where social media fits in. I'd just like to understand how social media is actually a factor in these phenomena.

Could we start with you, Ms. Kuo? Then I'll give everyone chance to comment in my time allocation. Go ahead.

**Ms. Lily Kuo:** In the case of China, social media has been pretty tightly controlled but it is used as a platform for some of these churches. I mentioned that the Rain still holds their services and they still put out daily scripture and sermons. In the case of China, social media is usually in the hands of the people but it is highly censored, and it can also be used as evidence against people. Comments that people make in a WeChat group—WeChat is the messaging platform that a lot of people use—or posts can be used against them later on in court hearings, in their trials.

In terms of misinformation that goes around, in the last year there's been a big drive to talk about foreign forces by government media, state-owned media, to kind of give the public a sense that they're under siege. The enemy is foreign forces that are interfering in China, and we need to be wary of religion being used as a guise for those foreign forces. There's a lot of information or misinformation in that way.

• (1305)

**Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle:** Okay. Ms. Michels, do you want to...?

**Ms. Mindy Michels:** I can speak to that briefly. In the religious freedom cases that I know of—and I'm sure there are cases that this has been a part of, and I can get information on those for you if you want—we do work broadly across a whole suite. This particular fund is within a larger suite of emergency funds working on human rights across the board.

With regard to what you're identifying—the use of social media, governments targeting people based on their social media posts, and surveillance—one of the things we look at quite frequently is making sure that our communications are not going to be under surveillance. Doing that is quite challenging since the mechanisms that governments are using in order to surveil communication are evolving and adapting. Even as encryption evolves and adapts, so does the capacity to crack that encryption.

One of the things we've done, particularly on the protecting belief fund, is to try to make sure we're training the people we work with to be able to use more secure modes of communication. Quite often people in these situations don't necessarily have awareness of or access to ways to protect themselves from this type of surveillance even within the communications that we have with them, so we're quite aware of that.

**Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle:** Okay.

Mr. Brobbel.

**Mr. Floyd Brobbel:** That's a great question. I don't have a clear answer for you, but I think you've given me something to ask. When we're in the field, we often deal with Christians who are quite rural

and who don't have the technology or the wherewithal to use social media, so this is not an area where we really gain a lot of information. Certainly within our circles, within our work with the Religious Liberty Partnership and with other groups, I think this would be an intriguing question to put forward and to get more information on, so I thank you for that.

**Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle:** Okay.

Ms. Stangl, do you want to add anything?

**Ms. Anna Lee Stangl:** I think social media is a double-edged sword. We've seen a lot of really positive benefits from it in terms of groups being able to mobilize, share information and even meet online. In Cuba, it's been a real lifeline for human rights defenders and religious groups there.

On the converse side, we see examples like the one I gave from India, where two Hindu nationalists attacked two Christian men. Not only did they do it, but they filmed it and put it on social media, where they were clearly identifiable and there were no repercussions from that. We've seen many other cases like that in the past year or past couple of years, involving attacks not just on Christians but also on Muslims. I think there you see this issue with the rule of law going hand in hand with abuse of social media, and, in the case of the Indian government, with not cracking down even though it should be something that could be used as evidence since it's pretty easy to follow up.

Definitely social media has also been used to organize not just positive, peaceful demonstrations but also violent acts, so it's something to watch. Again, I don't know if I have the answer either—I'm not a tech expert—but I think you've brought up a very good point and it is something to be aware of.

**Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle:** Are any of you aware of any situations in which one Christian community that is sanctioned by the state helps or reaches out to another Christian community that isn't? None of you...?

**Ms. Mindy Michels:** I know about situations in which other faith groups do, but they may know more about the Christian groups helping.

**Mr. Floyd Brobbel:** I know that we had testimony a few weeks ago from our Sri Lankan friends who came in. They work with the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka, which is often helping not only other religions but other Christian denominations in their country in times of need.

**Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle:** Is that it?

**Mr. Floyd Brobbel:** That's it. Yes.

**Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle:** Okay. That's very interesting. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Ms. Khalid for five minutes.

**Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to all of the witnesses today for their very compelling testimony.

As we were talking about the very serious issue of Christian persecution around the world, I think a number of themes came up. We talked about the state. We talked about non-state actors. Then we talked a bit about what Ms. Stangl brought up on the need to build from the ground up.

I'll start with you, Ms. Stangl. I was in Ethiopia last year. That is a diverse community in and of itself, where there are Christians who live with other faiths as well. On the ground, as you know, as an outsider, I didn't really see the dynamics of how the locals and the people at the grassroots level interact.

Ms. Stangl, when we talk about persecution and discrimination against Christian minorities in countries such as Ethiopia and around the world, in the countries we've talked about, what is the relationship like between neighbours at the grassroots level? Do you think this is something that we need to address as well on a systemic level?

• (1310)

**Ms. Anna Lee Stangl:** Yes, I think it depends a lot on the country and the context. On the whole, I think we almost always see increased tolerance where you have that grassroots respect. Again, this is linked to rule of law and there being strong structures and also strong understandings, not just at the local grassroots level but at the local authority level, of what religious freedom is, what human rights are and what tolerance really means in terms of living together. I think it's something that needs to be worked on in almost all the countries we work in—definitely.

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** Thank you.

Ms. Kuo, you spoke about a number of different religious minorities being persecuted in China. Can you talk a bit about what the grassroots neighbourhood-level atmosphere is when it comes to minorities?

**Ms. Lily Kuo:** In Xinjiang, the minorities tend to be in certain areas, either in the southern part or in pockets in the north. For a long time, they were just among themselves. In that area of the country, though, Han Chinese is the dominant ethnic community, so they've moved in. Most Han Chinese are not religious. They're not Muslim, and most of them are not Christian.

In terms of any tensions, from what I've seen, there don't seem to be religious-based tensions, but there is an amount of mistrust and suspicion, and an amount of anger over policies whereby the Han Chinese feel privileged over the minorities. These can be policies about how many children they can have or policies about education and getting into universities. On the reverse side, in the minorities, there has been a lot of anger towards the Han Chinese moving in and taking jobs. Generally, they're dominant.

In terms of religious on-the-ground interaction between religious groups, I guess that because China has the largest number of people with no religious affiliation, that generally doesn't seem to be a large issue. People don't hide the fact that they're religious, but they definitely don't promote it. In conversations with people, it might come out that they do go to a house church. That's not always the case. That's why I mentioned in my testimony that for a long time these house churches were able to operate. The authorities just sort of looked the other way and the house churches didn't touch on political things.

I have had several interactions with people I've just met who would mention that they go to a church and ask if I would want to go to church with them, so it's not that they are really hiding it. It's also not the case that other people will persecute them for being religious.

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** Thank you.

Ms. Michels, we've also talked today about the role of the state and then governments. When we talk about the rule of law and we talk about minority rights, what do you think needs to happen in terms of protecting more minority rights? In areas where there are natural disasters and famine and there are power struggles going on, oftentimes it seems as if religion is being used. I know Canada does not use its blasphemy laws, and we were very glad to repeal them from our Criminal Code earlier this year, or last year.

What is the role of the state when it comes to really getting onto that ground and protecting the minority rights?

**Ms. Mindy Michels:** That's a broad question. I think there is the role of the international actors that have to be engaged there, but obviously the state also has an obligation to protect its citizens, and this unfortunately is an area where... I will speak about all marginalized groups, because this doesn't stay with just Christians or just faith-based minority groups. I think all marginalized populations are at risk when these types of things happen. Without the state as a strong actor enforcing the rule of law and ensuring that impunity doesn't take place...

Again, this is not my area of major expertise. I deal much more often with specific cases of violence. I was listening to your question about the neighbours and I thought, "We get only those cases in which the neighbours are attacking; we never see the positives." My work generally is not the positives but the negatives. I would say that in those cases the state has to be there, both locally and on the national level, to enforce human rights and the rule of law.

• (1315)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will now go to Mr. Anderson for five minutes.

**Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

I would like to start in the future and then work back to the present, so I'm going to ask you this. I think Ms. Michels mentioned that the last 13 years have seen a decline in religious freedom. Where will the hot spots be over the next two years?

I'll ask each of you, and if your answer is different from hers, then you can just add to that.

**Ms. Mindy Michels:** I don't know that I have an answer to that question because our work is really looking at the cases that come in. Obviously we're tracking the situations that are evolving, so certainly we're watching what is happening in India with the rise of Hindu nationalism. That is certainly an area that we are watching. Pakistan has been consistently an area from which we have received many, many cases, both of violence and also of the abuse of the rule of law.

I think any places where you're seeing the government really trying to restrict civil society in general, and as restrictions in civil society in general come in and the government tries to consolidate power or there is a rise of extremism—as I think I said in my testimony—whether the state is involved or not, we tend to see more cases coming in. I work on the direct emergency provision, but our research arm would also be watching those places as civil society becomes more restricted.

**Mr. David Anderson:** Does anyone else have a comment they'd like to make?

Mr. Brobbel, you look like you're jumping on the mat.

Go ahead, Ms. Kuo.

**Ms. Lily Kuo:** I'm a little bit biased, but I would say that China is a major hot spot and will be for a couple reasons. One is that even though the Christian population is probably 5% or less—I'd put it at about 67 million or 60 million, and that's a conservative estimate; other estimates are up to 200 million—if those estimates are right, there are more Christians in China than there are members of the Chinese Communist Party.

Another aspect that is interesting about the Christian movement in the last few years is that with pastors like Wang Yi of Early Rain, there is a growing sense of rights awareness, so there's a growing sense of the role that the church can have in public life and this idea of the church advocating for justice and social justice and being involved in society.

A lot of very prominent human rights lawyers in China now are Christians, so with that and with the numbers and that happening in the Christian movement and, at the same time, the controls by the government that we're seeing.... I was speaking with a human rights expert about this and she was saying how 10 years ago, the Chinese government didn't really care about what people believed internally, just as long as they lived normally and they didn't disrupt things, but there's a much more invasive approach that we're seeing under the current government. They want to change how people think, so with those two combined—

**Mr. David Anderson:** Can I interrupt you? They're going to take away my mike here pretty quickly, and I'd like you to comment on the social credit card, the ID card that is being required, and the impact that will have on the Christian community. I understand that it's tied to your activities, the choices you make, the comments you make online and those kinds of things. Can you address how that will impact the Christians in China?

**Ms. Lily Kuo:** It could impact the Christians in China if they are.... One of the people I interviewed was a student who had been sent away. He was a student at one of the seminaries. He had been sent out of Chengdu and he wasn't able to come back. What kept happening was that as soon as he would buy a train ticket or plane ticket to come back, he would get called up and asked where he was trying to go. If he tried to go to the airport or the train station, police would be waiting for him there.

In the social credit system, blacklists prevent people from travelling. The social credit system is a very complicated system. It seems to be operated through sort of disparate pilot projects across the country, so it's not really uniform, but the goal is to create a large

supersystem where people are tracked and all their behaviour is tracked.

• (1320)

**Mr. David Anderson:** I think the intent is to have it in place by the end of 2020 across the nations.

I think my time is probably up.

**The Chair:** You have 10 seconds.

**Mr. David Anderson:** Okay.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We'll go back to Ms. Khalid for five more minutes.

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you again to the witnesses.

I want to continue down my line of questions and talk about the role of the rule of law in holding to account the incidents of persecution and discrimination against peoples. Many of you have spoken about the Asia Bibi matter in Pakistan and the role that the Supreme Court of Pakistan played in finding that she was not guilty, ultimately, after her very long imprisonment. There have been other cases across the world.

I really am intrigued about what role a government can play in ensuring that minorities are protected. In Canada we're very blessed to have our Charter of Rights and Freedoms to ensure that our minority rights are protected. When it comes to Canada's role in the international community, what can we do to ensure that the rule of law and minority rights are upheld in sovereign states that experience religious discrimination of Christian communities?

Perhaps I can start with you, Ms. Kuo.

**Ms. Lily Kuo:** I would say that in the case of China, religious freedom has been enshrined in the constitution since 1982. There are protections for minorities based on their religious affiliation and ethnicity. I think Canada does have to tread a fine line in statements, because it could be portrayed as meddling with internal Chinese affairs, but I think highlighting Chinese law and the Chinese constitution in the protection of these rights would be one way to go.

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** Thank you.

Ms. Stangl.

**Ms. Anna Lee Stangl:** Again, I think Canada could look at potentially doing training or types of exchanges with governments from other countries, targeting not just the high-level government officials but also the low-level regional or local officials. In almost all of these countries, we see again and again that even where there are okay laws, at the local and regional levels the officials who are in charge of enforcing them often don't understand them. They're not educated or aware, but when they are, they sometimes improve. I think you could be sending people over there to train them, or you could be bringing them over here to learn about your systems and how you operate, giving them exposure to how the rule of law, with good laws, is supposed to function in practice.

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** Thank you.

Mr. Brobbel.

**Mr. Floyd Brobbel:** One thing we do in our work with Religious Liberty Partnership is that, when we put out statements on countries that deal with religious freedom issues, we highlight to the governments not only where we believe they need improvement. We also highlight the areas in which we think they are succeeding. I think if Canadian governments are able to reach into and meet with colleagues in other nations where there are issues of Christian persecution, or the topics that you're talking about here when it comes to blasphemy laws and the rule of law, it's important that they recognize the areas in which they are succeeding and the things they are doing well. I think that then opens the door to a discussion of challenging them on issues that may need improvement and bolstering in their nation.

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** Thank you.

Ms. Michels.

**Ms. Mindy Michels:** First of all, I think it's context-dependent, because different governments are going to react in different kinds of ways. Of course, that's the job of diplomacy, to know whether or not it should be public or private diplomacy or what types of interventions would happen in any particular situation.

I would say, first of all—as I mentioned in my recommendations—I think the Magnitsky act, for those cases with the most gross violations of human rights, is a useful tool for Canada and for other governments.

I would also say that in places where there is openness on the part of the foreign government to try to implement the rule of law in a stronger way, there are a variety of things other governments can do, including supporting the implementation of training for judges and prosecutors and helping to review discriminatory laws against Christians but also any type of discriminatory law. In general these would go across any type of faith-based discrimination or discrimination against any type of marginalized or minority group.

Then I would also say, in terms of what we talked about, with regard to state actors either being directly engaged in persecution or not allowing impunity, that there are often roles for diplomatic or other types of foreign intervention to be able to support states in taking a better role there.

Finally, as I also mentioned, with regard to funding for groups that are able to be engaged on the ground and to do things directly in communities when that's a safe thing to do, then the funding of those groups plays an important and powerful role.

•(1325)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Now we'll go to Ms. Hardcastle for five minutes.

**Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle:** Thank you.

I have listened to all of your comments. You have mentioned private and public diplomacy, and where the future hot spots will be. China and India are the two most populous nations in the world. Where does what's happening there fit in with Canadian diplomacy, when you look at issues as a matter of a state's capacity to deliver on human rights, such as religious freedom, and with the persecution of

Christians as something that people need training and education on or as a matter of will?

I don't know if that's too much for my five minutes, but aside from targeting sanctions at specific people, what can we be doing in terms of the public diplomacy? Do you see some opportunities there that we haven't maximized yet or that we could be doing a little better on?

Do you want to start, Ms. Michels? Go ahead.

**Ms. Mindy Michels:** As you noted, I think that's a really big question and also a question that has a lot of implications in terms of what the foreign policy needs of any particular country are. I think one thing I would say is that being able to engage with like-minded countries that are collectively looking at these questions and trying to answer with regard to what could effectively be done in any particular situation..... In both of those cases, it's obviously entrenched.

You raised China and India. I haven't said this yet—and I know it's been mentioned during this conversation—but I think that any conversation about China can't avoid looking at the question of what is happening with the Uighurs. As noted, there's not yet the same kind of evidence that this is happening to the Christians, but there is a lot of evidence that what is happening with the Uighurs has also come from a situation in which there was a lot of learning from the persecution of Falun Gong members before. I think, then, that without being able to address that kind of persecution and strongly address that kind of persecution, it's hard to know who comes next after that.

However, I think the diplomatic way to engage in both of those countries depends on various....

**Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle:** Thank you.

Ms. Stangl, do you want to add anything to that?

**Ms. Anna Lee Stangl:** Yes. I would again agree with Ms. Michels that it's context-dependent.

However, I would bring up this idea again of adopting a prisoner of conscience. I think that's a really effective way to highlight not just the profile of an individual but also, in the context of that individual, the broader situation. I think bringing them up at every opportunity with the counterparts, whether that's the embassy or a visiting delegation, and just making sure that the person's name and case are constantly on the agenda is a simple but effective way of doing that.

**Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle:** Thank you.

Ms. Kuo.

**Ms. Lily Kuo:** In the case of China and the Uighurs and what's happening to other Muslim minorities in Xinjiang, we did see a shift in the response from the Chinese government after months of more international attention, international criticism and coverage. I think the turning point was at a UN panel. I think it was—I'll get it wrong—a session on the convention on discrimination, I believe. It was at this panel that somebody said they had received credible reports that up to a million Muslims had been detained in Xinjiang.



That really raised it to another level. Up to that point, the Chinese government had mostly responded with a blanket denial that this was happening. The response since has changed, and it's about changing the framing of the narrative.

I just raise that, as it's able to show that as much as statements are made any time by other countries about what's happening, those statements are criticized but they do make a difference. Again, it's not my.... I'm a journalist, not an activist or an advocate, so it's not really my role to comment on diplomacy.

•(1330)

**Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle:** Mr. Brobbel, quickly.

**Mr. Floyd Brobbel:** The area of diplomacy is something that Voices of Martyrs doesn't get involved with.

**Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle:** Okay.

**Mr. Floyd Brobbel:** However, we do work with local leaders in-country to inform them of their rights and freedoms and equip them in that way so that they're better able to deal with those issues as they arise on the ground.

**Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

For the final round, we will start with Mr. Sweet. We'll go with four minutes per person.

**Mr. David Sweet:** Thank you, Chair. I have one quick question.

From the testimony, we see that one of the complexities of Christian persecution is that it comes from all sides, from secularism to Communism to extremism to just being different, with political reasons being used, or using pawns for political gain, and in the case of Mexico, it's gangsters. It even happens when well-meaning Christians.... Even outreach is misunderstood in many cases, isn't it? I'll just ask maybe one person, and then I'm going to turn over my time to Mr. Anderson.

Ms. Stangl, isn't even outreach sometimes seen as a devious way to convert people?

**Ms. Anna Lee Stangl:** Yes, that's a major problem. I think that's just an intersection of Christian aid organizations and humanitarian organizations that often don't engage in proselytism being accused of proselytism because they have a Christian identity. Sometimes they're targeted. Sometimes the Christians on the ground are targeted.

There was a case mentioned—I can't remember who mentioned it earlier—of a pastor in India who was not proselytizing but was accused of false conversions. That comes up again and again, and I think it's something that really needs watching and is worth being aware of.

**Mr. David Anderson:** Ms. Stangl, you mentioned the social media issue a little earlier, and I think Ms. Hardcastle brought that up as well. I'd like to talk to you about that, because I'm wondering if there's a way that this can be used well. When people have a video of others or themselves beating somebody down, isn't that something we can use to name and shame—I don't know if you want call it that—or to raise the issue and to begin to profile it? Is there anybody who's doing that effectively? Should we be trying to do that?

I would ask Ms. Kuo to respond to that, too, as a journalist. Is there a way in which we can use these kinds of social media contacts, the videos and those kinds of things, to actually highlight the issue and to name and shame—if you want to call it that—the Indian government into doing something on these...? Can that be done effectively?

**Ms. Anna Lee Stangl:** Again, I think it's a complex issue. You have the example of India, where the perpetrators uploaded and exposed it and were not ashamed at all. In fact, they were very proud, and that possibly has galvanized others to participate as well.

We are encouraging people on the ground to be citizen-journalists when they can and to record events when they see them and try to report on them, but it always brings in the question of the victims as well, and their consent, and that can often be a tricky thing to get. I would say that it can be a very useful tool if the victims in the video are in agreement with its use.

**Mr. David Anderson:** Ms. Kuo, do you have a reaction to that as a journalist?

**Ms. Lily Kuo:** A lot of activists in China—or regular citizens who might be speaking out about something—also use western platforms. They use Twitter, mainly, but now we're seeing those accounts taken down and those people being detained for using Twitter inappropriately—or whatever the justification is. I don't know if there's something that western governments can do to highlight those cases when that happens.

The other thing would be that I think the Canadian embassy is pretty active on social media platforms in China, and they've done some things to highlight certain anniversaries and certain cases. I think that's a positive thing.

•(1335)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We will now go to Mr. Tabbara for four minutes.

**Mr. Marwan Tabbara:** My question is for Ms. Kuo. Have interfaith groups been effective in having a particular dialogue and organizing multi-faith groups to come together to speak about some of the persecution that Christians are facing and, as well, similar discrimination faced by other groups? Has that been effective in many of the places you have visited or the places you have researched?

**Ms. Lily Kuo:** I don't know much about that.

In the case of the Early Rain church, I know that they and some Christian groups have spoken out about the case of the Uighur Muslims. I think that's important. That community often doesn't have a voice of its own within China because of the amount of suppression they're under. When these Christian groups can speak up for them, that helps amplify their voices and it extends that, because they're also facing religious persecution. I've seen some of that.

As to how effective that is, I can't really say. Maybe it has raised more attention and more people are concerned about it.

**Mr. Marwan Tabbara:** Ms. Michels, have you heard about interfaith groups working together to combat discrimination as a collective unit?

**Ms. Mindy Michels:** I don't know about interfaith groups broadly. I know that one of the things we supported, for example, through the program we do, was a group of a Christian pastor and an imam working together to look at ways to reduce pre-election discrimination and violence in Nigeria. I don't know that it would be considered an interfaith group writ large. I don't know that it's a group per se.

I do think that one of the really key pieces is trying to have organizations where people are working together or across faith lines. Among the work we do, that's some of the most inspiring work, when we see situations where human rights defenders and advocates or lawyers, or just groups in general, are providing support outside of their own faith groups.

**Mr. Marwan Tabbara:** I'll conclude with you, Anna. What types of support systems are needed by religious groups that are being persecuted?

**Ms. Anna Lee Stangl:** A voice, I think, is the main one, being able to report what's happening as it's happening and to get at least moral support.

In that sense, I think, going back to the diplomacy question, Canadian embassies can play a strong role if they are in touch with religious groups on the ground in the countries, not just with the main leaders but with minority groups and local churches in different regions. It gives the churches, as individuals, a lifeline, a way of communicating what's happening to them. The embassy may not be able to do much practically, but just being there and having that open communication is a huge thing.

**The Chair:** We'll now go to Ms. Hardcastle for four minutes.

**Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to go back to where there are some clear opportunities for Canada. If we are looking at the issue of targeted sanctions, are there areas or places where, in your studies of the situation, they probably would have the most ripple effect? Sometimes these individual actors are part of something larger. Strategically, what places would you see where this is better suited, where there are certain state actors that are enticing or where there is impunity with some non-state actors? How do you think that fits in?

**Ms. Mindy Michels:** You're looking at me, so I'm wondering if you're directing that to me.

**Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle:** Yes, I'll go to you, just because you're the.... It's hard to tell when you're looking at people on a monitor. It's very satisfying when you have actual interaction with people. That's why. It's not that I'm trying to put more pressure on you.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Ms. Mindy Michels:** That's fine.

If you're looking at specific people or recommendations for specific countries, I don't have those with me right now but we could definitely provide you that information.

● (1340)

**Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle:** Okay.

**Ms. Mindy Michels:** The use of the Magnitsky act is something that Freedom House has been very involved with, both in the U.S. and in co-operating with other governments.

I would be very happy to provide more information on that.

**Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle:** Ms. Kuo, on the issue of targeted sanctions, looking at the areas that you've studied and at state actors and non-state actors, where do you think we need to go? Is there an area in China or a specific person who you think would be a start?

**Ms. Lily Kuo:** There are officials who are in charge of religious affairs and there are officials who are in charge of policies in certain areas like Xinjiang, so there are people you could target if you wanted to, but that would not be—

**Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle:** It's someone who would be strategic and would have a ripple effect, not just for the sake of getting them out of circulation. That's what I am getting at. Impunity is one issue, but if you're looking at strategy as to how we can help turn certain things around, sometimes there are people who are more involved or influential. That's the point I was trying to make.

Ms. Stangl, do you want to add to that?

**Ms. Anna Lee Stangl:** [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] a country; however, I do think there are many countries where it would make an impact, not just in terms of the individual who is targeted but the other individuals who may work with them and see what's happening. It may serve as a warning to them that this is what could happen to them if they continue to engage in this type of abuse.

**Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle:** Yes.

We will wrap up with you, Mr. Brobbel, if you would like to add something.

**Mr. Floyd Brobbel:** I would only caution, as a practitioner, that sometimes sanctions actually hurt the Christians we're trying to help in terms of getting funding in there or getting actual work done, so we've had to navigate through some of those challenges. I'd just throw that out there for awareness.

**Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle:** I'll differentiate now, because I agree with that statement. We're talking about targeted sanctions on individuals, not necessarily....

Okay. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

I want to thank all four of our witnesses for some very evocative and very informed testimony today.

We now have committee business, so I am going to suspend for just a moment while we release our witnesses and go to committee business, so we'll have just a 30-second suspension.

● (1340)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

● (1340)

I would ask the members to please take their seats. We're resuming now.

As we are in public, the witnesses and others in the audience who wish to stay are welcome to stay.

Now we are in committee business, so we are open to any topic.

Go ahead, Ms. Hardcastle.

**Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair, for this opportunity at the last of our meetings and the mandate of this subcommittee of the foreign affairs committee in the 42nd Parliament.

It's been an honour to serve with everyone on this committee. Each of us has our own way of coming at the passion and the desire of this committee, and it's really touched me and helped me to grow as a social justice activist and somebody who wants to see Canada's place in the global meaning of human rights and the well-being of all of the planet's citizens. I think this committee's doing tremendous work on that.

It is also for that reason that I think it's important to go on record to say here today that we had a turning point, I believe, on this committee. When I first came here, there was great pride in the operation of this consensus model. I would like to differentiate, because there are people who follow this committee who do take a scholarly approach, and I think it's important in our public sphere to differentiate what is actually happening now. It's not a consensus model. We're operating on unanimous consent, and there is a big difference in that.

It started with the Uighur study, and then some of the tremendous latitude, as other members of the committee who have more history here have discussed, didn't happen towards the end. That is a concern to me, because I feel that this committee has a role and a responsibility that's higher than each of us. Even though we think we're magnanimous and our views are broad, we're always challenging ourselves to be broader. I think we do a disservice if we continue to call this consensus. I certainly hope that those who are returning for the next Parliament will take up that mantle and really truly consider what consensus versus unanimous consent means. The dissenting voices are not always evil and bad, or just people who don't want to get along. It's challenging us, which is why the consensus model was held up with such pride at one time.

The other thing I want to add is that we do have a little bit of unfinished business. I wonder if the rest of the committee has also thought about the recommendation from Dafina Savic to do a unanimous motion and a recommendation for the government with regard to having August 2 as an official day of commemoration for the Romani genocide.

I don't know if anyone else here had planned to do this, so if I may, Madam Chair, I will just read this motion, as per the request of our witness at the last meeting, to the committee. It is that the committee issue a recommendation for the government to adopt a unanimous motion declaring August 2 as the official day of commemoration of the Romani genocide and commit to combatting anti-Roma racism, discrimination and violence.

• (1345)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I have Mr. Anderson on the list.

**Mr. David Anderson:** I understand that Ms. Hardcastle's making a motion, but we haven't heard this before so I think we will defer on it for now.

I wanted to have the floor just to thank people. Since 2010, I've been focused on some of the freedom issues around speech and

belief and religious freedom. Starting in 2012-13, I was on the foreign affairs committee for a couple of years, and then since 2015 I've been able to be here to work on the projects we've worked on. I'm not coming back, so this is my last chance, I guess, to do that.

I want to thank the staff who have served us so well. There are our clerks and our analysts. We've gotten to be friends over the years and have done some travelling together. There are also the folks who work in the translation booth and the people who have had to put up with our coming in here at the end of one meeting and have then been expected to set up instantaneously for us. They've done so well on that. I want to just thank those people who have set up for their service.

I also want to thank my colleagues. We've had a good run here, and it's good that we can have the kind of discussion that Ms. Hardcastle is speaking about. I want to recognize that.

I also want to say that I was disappointed that this was not on TV. I know yesterday we made the decision given that there were challenges to it, but as I approached the whip's staff—not only ours but also those of some of the other parties—and tech staff, I was getting contradictory messages from a number of them. I think on issues like this one that are this important, and even for two hours on a subject, we should be trying to televise those. I'm not going to get into any more detail than that, so I will just leave it at that.

I want to thank you for your time and for the work that we have put together. I think we have made a difference. Even today, I think this is probably some of the most important work that's been done on the Hill today. We need to recognize that for what it is.

Thank you.

**A voice:** Hear, hear!

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I have Ms. Khalid.

**Ms. Iqra Khalid:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I too want to recognize the wonderful work we've done in this subcommittee over the past number of years, working with all parties and really making an impact. I think one of the most empowering moments was having human rights defenders come here and really recognizing and awarding.... I appreciate Mr. Sweet for really pushing that and for making that happen, as well as the rest of the committee. I really appreciate that. I think the work we've done here, in whatever small way, has made an impact and will continue to make an impact. I think what happened today and the testimony we heard today was strong and powerful. Obviously the two hours that we had on this is not enough. I think in the next mandate, those of us who return should be picking this up as a fulsome study to ensure that we continue this conversation.

Mr. Anderson, you will be very deeply missed in this subcommittee. You've played a very important role in religious freedoms. I appreciate all of the work you have done. I know that for you this is not the end of this work and that you will keep on doing it.

As for our consensus model versus unanimous consent, I was disappointed not to have unanimous consent on the Uighur study, for example, because I felt that our inability to really get across a strong report was to the detriment of Uighurs. That's why I think issues like the ones we've discussed over the past number of years are non-partisan. They are not political. They're something we must all come together on as human beings to really understand objectively the suffering that occurs around the world. I've seen in each and every one of us a lot of empathy and a lot of compassion, and I hope that continues.

I take the point Ms. Hardcastle has made over the past number of years that we must have a stand-alone committee on international human rights, and that is something I look forward to pushing if I return in the next mandate.

Thank you to all of you for making this an amazing four years.

• (1350)

**The Chair:** I have Mr. Tabbara.

**Mr. Marwan Tabbara:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for having been in the position you are in for the few months that you've had the privilege of doing so. Thanks also to our previous chair.

Thanks to my colleagues. I've enjoyed our time, which has been well spent. I've learned lots from the opposite side. I really paid a lot of attention to a lot of their questioning and really enjoyed taking part in a wholesome discussion and making a difference for a lot of the witnesses who came. We've been cautious in terms of whether or not their names should be made public. We were cognizant of that. They've been through a lot of things and their families continue to suffer, whether overseas....

It's been a privilege to be on this committee. I think we've shed a light on places that have not gotten some of the attention. We've been at the forefront, I think, of sharing information on a lot of the instability that's been happening around the world and the human rights abuses. I think helping to spread those voices is an honour.

In terms of Ms. Hardcastle's motion on the Roma, although we did hear testimony, I don't think going to the next level in declaring a genocide would be appropriate for this committee. I would defer that to foreign affairs. They've dealt with a lot of these situations in the past. It's good for us to always shed a light, but I think it's something that could be deferred to foreign affairs.

Again, I want to thank the analysts and everyone else who gets this committee going each and every week. It's been an honour to serve.

**The Chair:** Mr. Sweet.

**Mr. David Sweet:** Thank you, Chair.

I echo all the comments from everybody. Sometimes we worked through some tough issues and we managed to come out with some

good results. Probably if we took the amalgam of all the committees, I think it was quite good.

I'm going to move a motion to go in camera so we can discuss what Ms. Hardcastle said, because we weren't advised of it. I think we have about six minutes left, but before we consider going in camera, I want to say that our witness, who's still here, Ms. Michels, mentioned the Uighurs, the Christians and Falun Gong, but I need to add to that list the Tibetans. That's another group that for so many decades has been subjected to great persecution by the People's Republic of China.

I'd like to conclude with that and then ask my colleagues whether they're good to go in camera to discuss Ms. Hardcastle's motion.

• (1355)

**The Chair:** Before we go in camera, I first want to say that probably one of the most profound events of my last four years as a member has been chairing this committee. I have tremendous respect, especially for the long-time members of the committee.

Mr. Anderson, you will be missed.

Mr. Sweet, thank you very much. I know how many years you've been on this committee as well.

I want to say that I think, in this place, with the partisanship and some of the things that go on in other committees, having a committee where we know that we are making a difference every single day, that we are giving a voice to people in the world who have absolutely no voice, who have nobody to stand up for them.... I think this committee is doing tremendous work, every single one of you.

I also think that we've set a wonderful precedent with the recognition award.

Thank you, Mr. Sweet, for that idea. It is something that is going to carry on, I hope. I think we are all proposing to the next incarnation of this committee that this carry on.

I want to say a tremendous thank you to our clerk. We have subjected her, at times, to a lot of logistical issues, doing things that are not necessarily in the box. Also, there are our analysts, who have sometimes burned the midnight oil to make sure they got us the materials we needed.

As well, thank you to the technical support and the interpreters. We've had three-way interpretation. We've had video conferences with every part of the world. I know the challenges that we've put them through. Especially to our staff, thank you. They sit in the back. We often don't see them or don't think about them, but they are the reason we're able to do what we do. To everybody who supports the committee, the clerk and of course the former clerk, who is also here, thank you very much.

I'm assuming we have some support to go in camera so that we can discuss the remainder of our committee business.

Thank you.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*







Published under the authority of the Speaker of  
the House of Commons

---

### SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

---

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

---

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <http://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité  
du Président de la Chambre des communes

---

### PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

---

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

---

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante : <http://www.noscommunes.ca>