



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

43rd PARLIAMENT, 2nd SESSION

Special Committee on Canada- China Relations

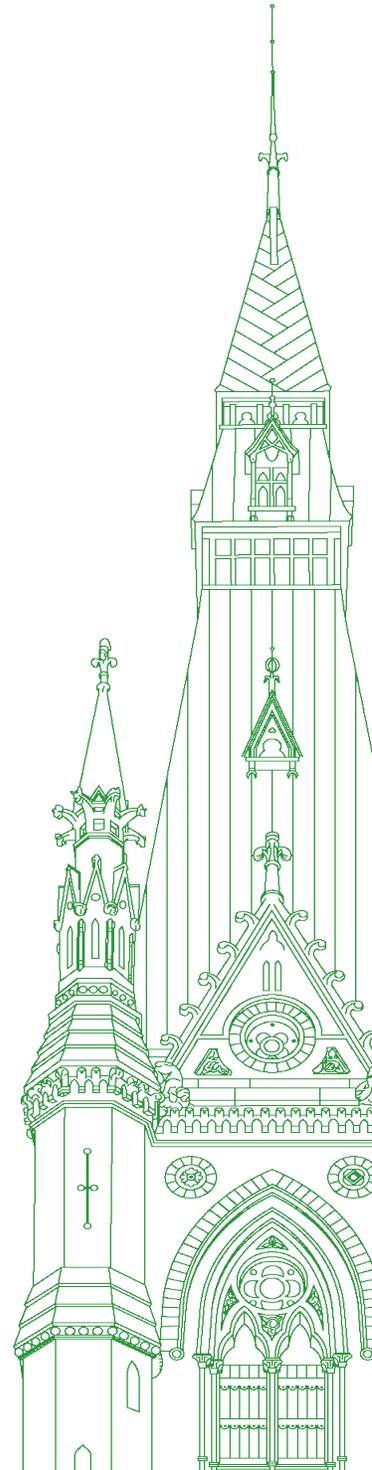
EVIDENCE

NUMBER 004

PUBLIC PART ONLY - PARTIE PUBLIQUE SEULEMENT

Monday, November 9, 2020

Chair: The Honourable Geoff Regan



Special Committee on Canada-China Relations

Monday, November 9, 2020

• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number four of the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations. Pursuant to the motion adopted on Wednesday, September 23, 2020, the committee is meeting on its study of Canada-China relations.

[Translation]

Today's meeting is in hybrid format, pursuant to the motion adopted by the House on September 23, 2020. The meeting is also televised and will be available on the House of Commons website.

[English]

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules to follow.

Members and witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You have the choice, at the bottom of your screen, of either floor, English or French. Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are participating by video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself.

However, when one of the members here at the committee is asking questions, don't wait for me to respond. I should warn you that at some point when a member's time is up, I have to cut them off—or cut you off as witnesses—at that time. I just wanted to let you know that ahead of time.

[Translation]

I remind you that all interventions by members as well as by witnesses must be addressed to the chair. Please speak slowly and clearly.

[English]

When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

I would now like to welcome our first panel of witnesses. We have, as an individual, Mr. Steve Tsang, director, SOAS China Institute, University of London; Mr. Adam Nelson, senior adviser for Asia-Pacific, National Democratic Institute; and, Ms. Mabel Tung, chair, Vancouver Society in Support of Democratic Movement.

Welcome, everyone, and thank you for being here.

I should let you know that Mr. Tsang has to leave at 11:50 Eastern Time.

We will start with opening remarks.

Mr. Tsang, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Professor Steve Tsang (Director, SOAS China Institute, University of London, As an Individual): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

In my five minutes, I would like to explain that the Chinese government's hardline approach toward Hong Kong now is not something that's totally unavoidable. They have chosen a hard line by a clear decision. We should not forget that in 2003, when there were also half a million people going out in the streets of Hong Kong to protest a national security law being introduced, the government at the time, in both Hong Kong and Beijing, agreed to pull back from that process. Hong Kong basically returned to normal.

So there was nothing inherent in the situation in 2019 through 2020 that required this very strong hardline approach by the Chinese government. It did so because things changed. Things changed in terms of China's leadership. Xi Jinping took a very different approach from his predecessor. Things changed also because, as a matter of reality, Hong Kong is not economically as significant to China as it was in 1997 or in the 1980s, when the Chinese government agreed to give Hong Kong its special status after 1997. Hong Kong now accounts for less than 3% of the Chinese economy. Back in 1997 it was something like 20%. In the 1980s we were talking about over 30%. This change made Hong Kong dispensable.

About two years ago, the Chinese government also changed, under Xi Jinping, the way they looked at Hong Kong's place in China. Instead of seeing Hong Kong as a completely unique place, as a Hong Kong special administrative region, they started to see Hong Kong as part of what they call the Greater Bay Area, which in fact has Shenzhen at the very centre of it. They wanted Hong Kong to be part of the Greater Bay Area and to contribute to the Greater Bay Area in ways that neither Shenzhen or Guangzhou could do, but Hong Kong was no longer seen as all that special.

You had the enormous protests in Hong Kong in the summer of 2019. The Chinese government under Xi Jinping essentially saw Hong Kong as rebellious and dispensable, and therefore things would have to change. As a result of this, they introduced the state security law this year. Under the Hong Kong Basic Law, Hong Kong's constitution, the Chinese government has every right to ask Hong Kong to introduce some kind of a national security law. It is provided for in the Basic Law in article 23. But instead of doing so, the Chinese government chose to have the National People's Congress standing committee impose an external state security law to Hong Kong. I think it was deliberately to intimidate people in Hong Kong to make sure they got the message and stop protesting—or, from their perspective, stop rebelling.

From their perspective, they have succeeded. The older-generation pro-democracy activists in Hong Kong have gone quiet or have chosen to retire. The younger people have been sufficiently intimidated that we are not seeing the kinds of massive protests and demonstrations in Hong Kong, even though this is going to be a major change to Hong Kong. The state security law also has this extraterritorial application built into it, reflecting that the Chinese government really is no longer all that worried about the international responses to how it deals with Hong Kong. I think we should bear that in mind.

Mr. Chair, I am aware that I have only about 22 seconds left. I want to underline that I used the term “state” security law deliberately, because what they've introduced is not really a national security law. Hong Kong does not face a national security problem. Hong Kong faces a regime security issue.

• (1110)

This is what they are looking at. This is what they are dealing with. Therefore, we can expect the Chinese government to continue to take a very hard line towards Hong Kong, with all its implications for friends of the Hong Kong people, like the Canadian government.

I will stop here and hand it back to you.

Thank you very much.

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

Now we'll hear from Mr. Nelson.

Mr. Nelson, you have five minutes. Please proceed.

Mr. Adam Nelson (Senior Advisor for Asia-Pacific, National Democratic Institute): Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

I'm Adam Nelson, senior adviser on the Asia-Pacific team at the National Democratic Institute, dialing in from Washington, D.C. I do want to acknowledge that Washington, D.C., is the traditional land of the Anacostan Piscataway people.

I am always happy to speak about the future of democracy and human rights in Hong Kong. The city is near and dear to my heart, as I spent nearly a decade living, working and studying there, primarily focused on democracy, human rights and social entrepreneurship in both mainland China and Hong Kong.

With offices in over 50 countries, NDI is a non-partisan, non-governmental organization that has worked for over 35 years to promote democratic principles of transparency, accountability and inclusion worldwide and to support the development of democratic institutions. We work closely with our sister organizations, the International Republican Institute, the Center for International Private Enterprise and the Solidarity Center, to do this work.

Along with many other global donors, Global Affairs Canada has been a strong supporter of our work, particularly in the Middle East and Eurasia, and we want to thank them for that support.

Before I speak about NDI's work in Hong Kong, I would like to note that in the realm of relations with China, NDI stands for pro-democracy, not anti-China.

Since 1997, NDI has worked with partners from across the political spectrum to help Hong Kong realize the democratic promises made in the Basic Law and the Sino-British joint declaration. We have done this by partnering or working with Hong Kong academic institutions and the entire range of political parties and civil society groups to advance non-partisan research, education and dialogue to support inclusive and citizen-responsive governance.

In addition, NDI has conducted regular comprehensive assessments of Hong Kong's democratic progress, including rule of law and protection of civil liberty, as part of our ongoing “Promise of Democratization in Hong Kong” series.

Clearly, our work has had an impact. Fearing our work, Beijing singled us out as an organization for sanctions—and NDI's president as well—to get us to stop doing our programs. We are not. In fact, we are looking for ways to expand and to continue supporting the people of Hong Kong in their democratic aspirations.

The fundamental challenge with Hong Kong's new national security law—barring succession, subversion, terrorism and collusion with foreign forces—is mainly that the law can be and is now being used for whatever Beijing or Hong Kong's leadership want it to be. They will fit any action, whether peaceful protest or criticism, into the law.

We have seen pro-democracy champions arrested and charged, young people grabbed off Hong Kong streets, legislators harassed and independent media attacked. Some have found the operating environment so fearful that they have fled the city to the U.K., Europe, Taiwan, the U.S. and, of course, Canada.

We also see Beijing's strident "wolf warrior" diplomacy in play when their ambassadors strike out and threaten the west in response to any criticism of China's abuses under the new law.

NDI itself is seeing a rising fear among our historic partners. Some partners fear the national security law enough to curtail their relationship with NDI, thereby having the intended impact: a chilling effect on democratic discussion.

- (1115)

Many pro-democracy groups, aside from certain key leaders, fear standing out in advocacy or statements for fear of their families being targeted back in Hong Kong or arrested upon return.

NDI will continue to support efforts on two lines: first, in supporting pockets of democratic resilience in Hong Kong's now closing space and, secondly, in international advocacy, by liaising with the international community on democracy and governance issues facing Hong Kong and primarily working to amplify the views of Hong Kong citizens themselves.

We are currently finalizing the report of our latest public opinion poll. In the last several years, we have conducted a series of surveys to engage Hong Kong citizens' perspectives on democratic development and political reform. The second survey was conducted in the fall of 2018, and the latest was done in the fall of 2019, which has provided a direct comparison on how the protest movement has affected people's attitudes. One notable result has been the prioritization of democracy over the economy, especially among young people.

We have also just begun a comprehensive remote analysis that will examine the political environment in the aftermath of the new law and the decision to delay the legislative council elections. We are working with Canadian partners to conduct polling and social media monitoring to look at the information environment and map the sources and proliferation of misinformation, work we are now doing strongly with civic technology partners in Taiwan. The polling is still in the field but shows some indication of lack of trust in a credible polling environment ahead of the legislative council elections next year and a strong desire for Hong Kongers to leave the city.

Canada has a long history of leveraging its moral standing within the global community to push and advocate on democracy and human rights. I'd be happy to speak about how the Government of Canada can continue to play a constructive role in light of this situation in Hong Kong.

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

Now, for five minutes, we have Ms. Tung.

Ms. Mabel Tung (Chair, Vancouver Society in Support of Democratic Movement): Thank you.

It is an honour for me to be invited and to represent my organization, the Vancouver Society in Support of Democratic Movement. It was formed in June 1989 after the June 4 Tiananmen Square massacre.

Over the past 31 years our organization has assisted and sponsored many Chinese democracy dissidents and activists to settle in

Canada. As Canadians with Hong Kong roots and connections, we have witnessed year-long anti-extradition law protests and thousands of arrests and police atrocities towards the peaceful protesters.

Ever since the national security law was passed, it has been used to crack down on the legitimate and peaceful expression of opinions. People have been arrested for possessing flags, stickers and banners with political slogans. The law is also used to prosecute pro-democracy political figures and activists.

Many Hong Kongers who participated in the movement fear they will face the same fate the student protesters in Tiananmen Square did 31 years ago. They look to western democracies for protection and safe harbour. Already 46 Hong Kong citizens, many of whom have taken part in past demonstrations, are seeking asylum in Canada, citing harassment and brutality at the hands of police, and fear of unjust prosecution. We expect this number to increase once our border is open to foreign visitors.

Over this last year we helped several young people seeking political asylum in Canada. Their situation is one of struggle and hardship. They're not able to study due to the high tuition fees for non-residents. They suffer from PTSD and yet they're unable to afford costly psychological treatment, which is not covered by refugee claimants' medical coverage and they're unable to find jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We urge the Government of Canada to expedite processing of these existing cases and to allocate resources in preparation for a large number of asylum seekers in the coming months.

Domestically, the Canadian political elite face a rude awakening to the true colour of a totalitarian regime that uses bullying and hostage diplomacy towards Canada, a state they see as lesser to them. Even as our politicians are scrambling to reassess and re-evaluate Canada's engagement with China, China has for years been infiltrating every corner of Canadian society. The infiltration is most prevalent within the Chinese communities across the country.

In the past 50 years, many Chinese have emigrated overseas to escape political prosecution, seek new opportunities or reunite with their families, but the CCP treats overseas Chinese as an intangible asset for trade, cultural exchange and technology and for importing know-how and influencing foreign governments. Many countries have the same attitude to their own people living overseas, but the CCP's use of overseas Chinese transgresses many moral and legal boundaries.

The Confucius Institute that we have in B.C. does not teach language and culture only, but also the CCP ideology and values, inside our Canadian education system. Also the “thousand person” scheme has been investigated by the FBI and found to be a scheme to access U.S. science and technology. A similar scheme in Canada serves the same purpose, to get Canadian science and technology. CSIS has already warned our universities about this issue.

The CCP also recruits overseas Chinese to serve its purposes and to speak out for the CCP by flooding social media with news and materials to advertise the achievements and the greatness of the CCP and China. These media include the Chinese and Hong Kong TV channels, WeChat and some productions made by Chinese language media in Canada.

A good example is that recently many local Chinese organizations, including the Chinese Benevolent Association and the National Congress of Chinese Canadians, put out an advertisement in local newspapers in support of the national security law, to create the illusion that local Chinese communities support the law, even though the law is against our Canadian values of freedom of speech and expression.

• (1120)

We urge the Canadian government to ban the Confucius Institute from our schools, monitor the activities of the United Front Work Department, ban Huawei, ban WeChat, and impose the Magnitsky sanctions against Chinese and Hong Kong officials directly implicated in human rights abuses in Hong Kong, Tibet and Xinjiang.

Thank you very much.

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

[Translation]

I now give the floor to Mr. Paul-Hus for six minutes.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

I'll start with you, Ms. Tung. You wrote a letter in the Vancouver Sun where you mentioned that once the Chinese regime has your picture, they can use facial recognition technology to identify you when you cross the border. You also talked about harassment.

You also just told us about it in your testimony. You tell us that we should be concerned about the technological means available to the Chinese regime and its ability to follow citizens even here in Canada.

Technologically speaking, can the Chinese regime follow citizens who are on Canadian territory?

[English]

Ms. Mabel Tung: Yes. Yes, I do. It has happened so many times. When they take your picture, they put it into their system. When I go back to Hong Kong, I think once I enter the Hong Kong airport they already have my face in their recognition technology. They know who I am and what I have done in Canada.

• (1125)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Thank you, Ms. Tung.

My next question is for you, Mr. Nelson. You lived in Hong Kong for about 10 years. During the years you spent there, considering the fact that the Chinese regime can track your every move through facial recognition, were you worried, not about your personal safety, but about the security of the information you were transmitting about yourself or other partners? Should we be worried about Canadian companies based in Hong Kong? Should contractors be concerned about the security of the information they transmit?

[English]

Mr. Adam Nelson: I would note that when I lived in Hong Kong, it very much felt, as Professor Tung noted, like a safe city. I moved there in 2006. Things changed drastically when Xi Jinping came to power.

I would travel to mainland China, and when I came back to Hong Kong it felt like a place where one could be particularly free. That is not what Hong Kong is today. For example, on my last trip to Hong Kong, I was there with NDI's president, Derek Mitchell, and our regional director, Manpreet Anand. We were followed from their arrival at the airport. People took our pictures. They took our pictures as we were having meetings around the city and as NDI's president was meeting with other ambassadors and folks in the city. They would put those into mainly Beijing-run newspapers. It was done in an effort to scare and intimidate along with the sanctions that have been forced against us.

In addition, I do think that the environment in Hong Kong under the national security law, in terms of data and the presence of mainland security forces, is very difficult. It's quite scary. I myself, given the work I'm doing—even the fact of joining this meeting, which is illegal under the national security law and, I believe, prosecutable—do not feel safe going back to the city. I would fear what Beijing might do to target me.

Finally, on your question of Canadians in the city, I think we can't ignore the fact that the Chinese ambassador to Canada did overtly threaten the 300,000 Canadian citizens sitting in Hong Kong. We've seen that they have followed through with those threats in the past. If I were a Canadian company executive or a citizen sitting in Hong Kong, I would also be nervous.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Thank you, Mr. Nelson.

Mr. Tsang, in August, you said in the Globe and Mail that you expected a strong reaction from Canada and a response from the Canadian government to the actions of the Chinese government.

Are you satisfied with Canada's response or should much more be done?

[English]

Prof. Steve Tsang: I think the Canadian government has done well, but I think there's always scope for the government to do more. What we're dealing with in Hong Kong is something that I don't think any single western democracy can take on and can deal with on its own and be successful. If we all work together...and there's no reason why Canada should not take a lead in such a matter, since Canada has the second-largest group of foreign nationals in Hong Kong, the first one being, of course, the United Kingdom.

The United Kingdom citizens in Hong Kong are the BNO passport holders. They are not U.K. passport holders. Looking at the full national passport holders, Canadians, in fact, number above everybody else in Hong Kong, which gives a very good reason for Canada to take the lead in such a matter and to co-ordinate with the other democracies and other countries that have significant number of citizens in Hong Kong, to make it very clear that if something happens to them, then the governments will act collectively to help them.

The Chinese government under Mr. Xi Jinping does behave a bit like a schoolyard bully, and we know how schoolyard bullies behave. When they meet with serious, real strength that can cause them serious damage, they usually back off. If they don't do so, they will push.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you Mr. Tsang.

Thank you Mr. Paul-Hus.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Now we'll hear from Mr. Fragiskatos for six minutes.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the witnesses.

My first question is for you, Mr. Nelson.

Let me make it clear at the outset that I do not subscribe to this view, but I think it's important to put it on the record, to put the question and then get the answer on the record. The National Democratic Institute has engaged in democracy work throughout the world in places such as the Ukraine, the Arab world during the time of the Arab Spring, and now in Hong Kong.

There will be those who try to spin your appearance here today into something it's not: speaking on behalf of the organization that

does the bidding of the U.S. government on matters of strategic interest to Washington. How would you respond to that?

Mr. Adam Nelson: This is something that we hear quite a bit, so thank you for the question.

First of all, I would note that we do get competitive U.S. government grants. We get competitive private grants. We also get a lot of funding, as I noted, from Canada, from the British DFID, the Australians and others to do the work that we do around the world.

The work we do is about strengthening global democratic institutions: free and fair elections, political party and civil society development. The work we do is about supporting the partners on the ground. We do nothing except at the invitation of those who we work with.

In Hong Kong, all of the work that we did was because a university wanted to do one of these research reports. A civil society organization wanted to focus on women's political participation and wanted to know how to do some of that work better. They wanted to have youth debates.

We are always happy to step in, as we do anywhere else, and provide the more technical assistance that we've gathered from our 35 years of work, transferring some of that knowledge from other places that face similar challenges, but in some places, of course, there is financial assistance so that they can pay to have the meetings and can pay to produce the reports. We stand by that as well.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much. As I said, it's certainly not a view I subscribe to. In a prior life, I taught international relations for many years at Western University, and one of the areas that I focused on was democratization. Your organization is held in high esteem and deservedly so.

I also want to ask you, Mr. Nelson, what is a general question but with applicability. The answer, at least, has applicability to Hong Kong and Canada's view or approach to the Hong Kong challenge, and it is about the upcoming Biden presidency.

I think it's fair to say, as we've heard at this committee before from expert witnesses, that Canada is caught between a Trump administration that has a particular approach to China generally, and vice versa on the part of China towards the United States. What does a Biden presidency hold? How do you think Mr. Biden and his administration will approach China and what might that mean for a middle power like Canada?

Mr. Adam Nelson: I wish I had more of an answer on that. It's a question that I hear a lot of people asking: What is the future of U.S. foreign policy on China? I can't speak for the Biden administration. I don't have any contacts with them, personally or professionally.

I will say this. In the U.S., the focus of democracy and human rights on China has been bipartisan. In Congress, we have the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, which is chaired by a senior-level Republican and a Democrat. The recent Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act was a fully bipartisan effort that was put forward.

I would say that I have very little doubt—but I don't know the future—that the focus of continued support on democracy and human rights for both China and Hong Kong and future support for Taiwan will also continue to be bipartisan.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much.

My last question is for Professor Tsang.

Professor, you just mentioned in the previous questioning that when a bully is basically stood up to—if I understood you correctly, at least—they back off. Because Canada cannot lead this effort, how can Canada and other like-minded countries coalesce around a certain set of issues to pressure China on matters of concern? What are the pressure points that the Xi regime is likely to respond to?

I've asked the question before of other witnesses, but I think it's quite crucial as Canada evaluates its relationship to China and begins to think about working with other like-minded allies, including middle powers, on how to approach China going forward.

• (1135)

Prof. Steve Tsang: That is one of those few cases where doing the right thing is probably also the good international move. What I'm talking about is to make it very clear that you really will—and have a plan to—help and protect your nationals in Hong Kong. Three hundred thousand Canadians is not a negligible number.

If you tot up the Canadian and BNO passport holders and the American, Australian and New Zealander passport holders together, you are talking about the bulk of Hong Kong's economic lifeline. If they all left Hong Kong because of what China's government policy is, then they would have to think hard about that.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bergeron, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My first question is for Mr. Tsang.

As someone who is familiar with the history of Hong Kong and the handover from the United Kingdom to the People's Republic of China, would you say that the administration that was in place at the time of the handover was already anticipating a possible strengthening of power over Hong Kong, or was it the arrival of Xi Jinping at the head of the Communist Party that brought about this change in the People's Republic of China's attitude towards Hong Kong?

[*English*]

Prof. Steve Tsang: Whether China has Xi Jinping or not, it will tighten up control over Hong Kong at some stage. The promise of

50 years of no change in Hong Kong always implied that, by 2047, the Chinese government expects Hong Kong to be another Chinese city.

The extension of the arrangement for the 50 years was never really on the agenda, but we are talking about 22 and 23 years into the 50-year period. There is, therefore, no need for Hong Kong to have reached the point that it has reached now. That is the result of Xi Jinping's change in his approach, but even without Xi Jinping, at some stage we will get to where we are now.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Let me play devil's advocate and ask the following question: in the face of such an implacable situation, how relevant is it for western states, including Canada, to demand respect for the democratic rights of Hongkongers and the principle of “one country, two systems” when, in your opinion, in the more or less long term, Hong Kong will in any case be part of the territory of the People's Republic of China under one and the same system?

[*English*]

Prof. Steve Tsang: First of all, 50 years or 23 years, it's a big difference. Second, it's the right thing to do. Canada believes in human rights and individual freedom, and this is one of those issues. We are talking about 300,000 Canadians who are being caught up in this as well. It is a matter where, if we don't do it, things will change and it will have much wider implications beyond Hong Kong. I think we should do what we can about the situation in Hong Kong.

We should also hold the Chinese government to their international treaty obligation of keeping Hong Kong as it was for 50 years. If we don't do that, the Chinese government will get the sense that they are not required to honour their treaty obligations. That will not be good for anybody, including Canada.

• (1140)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you very much for your response. The other witnesses may want to add something.

On this point, the PRC government keeps repeating, in a somewhat cavalier manner I must say, that it is none of our business and that we have no business interfering in its internal affairs. We know that the People's Republic of China is trying to isolate western states from each other. I had little hope, under the Trump administration, that we could create some sort of alliance of western states against the People's Republic of China to get it to change its attitude.

What arguments do we have to counter those of the People's Republic of China that this is none of our business? What hope do we have of being able to create this alliance of western states against the People's Republic of China in order to make it respect its legal obligations?

[English]

Prof. Steve Tsang: The reality is that China exists. Xi Jinping exists. We have to engage with this government as a reality. The only way we can engage with them is to hold true to our values without being provocative unnecessarily. When the Chinese government is being unfair, when they say it's interference in Chinese domestic affairs when what we are all doing is holding the Chinese government to its international treaty obligations, as we do with other countries, then I don't think we are interfering with their domestic affairs. We should hold to that.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Is there anything else other witnesses would like to add? Is there enough time left, Mr. Chairman?

The Chair: There are only 15 seconds left, unfortunately.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: In that case, I might get a 15-second response from one of the other two witnesses.

[English]

The Chair: Does anyone have a thought for 10 seconds?

[Translation]

They might wait until the next round to answer.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Very good, Mr. Chair.

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

[English]

We will now have Mr. Harris for six minutes.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Thank you very much.

Thank you to all the witnesses. Of course, we have three witnesses and, as you just found out, six minutes, so I will try to be succinct.

Professor Tsang, you were on record in 2016 as saying, “A strong and well-articulated international response that brings the matter to [President] Xi’s attention may persuade him that it is in China’s best interest to put a stop to this process of undermining the ‘one country, two systems’ framework.” From hearing what you said today, I think you believe that’s still the case. At the same time, you’re also quoted as saying that it would be preferable to continue the one country, two systems model with a “tolerable” erosion rather than having it completely lost, and talking about the greater bay initiative.

Is there some contradiction between these positions, or could you clarify that for us?

Prof. Steve Tsang: You're actually right. That sounds like a bit of a contradiction. I think I'm just trying to be a pragmatist here. We need to acknowledge that in Hong Kong we are doing a holding operation. The travel is moving in a direction we don't like, and it is going to continue. Xi Jinping will be able to take a lot of international negative responses before he will make any response to that.

It doesn't mean we don't hold to it. We also have to be realistic and, therefore, hold on to as much as we can, rather than simply go out and ask for something that we simply cannot hold and he will

not concede, with an even faster erosion of individual rights and individual freedoms in Hong Kong.

We want to keep that for as long as we can. Hopefully, things in China itself will also change.

Mr. Jack Harris: There is an expectation or at least a possibility that in 15 years' time there may be a different approach being taken by China, partly as a result of international action. Is that what you're saying?

• (1145)

Prof. Steve Tsang: That's one possibility. Another possibility is that things will change in China. The way Xi Jinping is governing China in the short term makes the Communist Party much stronger, much more powerful, much harder, but it also makes the regime much more brittle. Xi Jinping himself knows that. If we go back to what happened with the pandemic in China in February and March, when they were talking about a Chernobyl moment in China, they were seriously frightened of the regime's instability. They are constantly worried about regime security. If they are so worried about it, there is usually a reason.

If Hong Kong still has something like 26 or 27 years left, let's keep that for as long as we can. If things change, Hong Kong may still stand a bit of a chance.

Mr. Jack Harris: I take it, then, that regardless of the scenario, it's a worthy thing to pursue right now as strongly as we can.

Are there any specifics you would suggest as part of that collective action?

Prof. Steve Tsang: I think I will go back to the point about coordinating with all the other democracies with a significant number of the nationals in Hong Kong, because that is one thing that will really get them to take notice more than anything else. Individually, none of us will be able to persuade the Chinese government to make any change. At the moment, the Chinese government does not believe any of these governments will stand by their nationals in Hong Kong, who are mostly, in fact, dual nationals. We have to persuade the Chinese government that, yes, we really mean it, and for them to take it seriously.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you.

Ms. Tung, I would like to ask you a couple of questions. First of all, thank you for your presentation. There are two questions I'm interested in. I will ask you both of them, and hopefully you can touch on both.

In terms of Chinese nationals, or Chinese Canadians, shall we say, is there fear amongst the Chinese population in Canada that they may self-censor or behave in a different manner in their activities as a result of what's going on in China today and in Hong Kong in particular? Do these advertisements you are talking about—the Chinese benevolent society and others—have a following at all among the Canadian Chinese?

Second, you talked about Canada helping the Hong Kong Chinese with a lifeboat. How do you envisage that taking place?

Ms. Mabel Tung: Actually, a large number of Canadians, on our Canadian soil, were kind of scared right after July 1, 2020, because of the national security law. Some of those who attend our rallies and activities wear not just masks, but they do everything to cover their face and even the gestures of their body. Some are really doing self-censorship. They are not attending and they are not speaking.

The Chinese government has a lot of history of intimidating not just the people here but also their families in China. We have a lot of stories from Amnesty International reports about harassment that has been done to our Canadians on Canadian soil. Even some organizations or radio stations stay away from talking about the topic. For a few months the topic has been really gentle about the pandemic and not about anything happening in Hong Kong. You can see that—

The Chair: Ms. Tung, I'm sorry to interrupt, but Mr. Harris's time is up.

Ms. Mabel Tung: Okay.

The Chair: Hopefully, you will have others who will ask you questions that will draw out the rest of that.

We'll go now to the second round.

First, for five minutes, we have Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses.

In particular, Mr. Nelson, your discussion about having cameras follow you in Hong Kong reminded me of an experience I had in Hong Kong as far back as 2017, when I was there on a parliamentary committee trip and had dinner at Jimmy Lai's house. A car followed me all the way back to my hotel, and someone jumped out to take photos. It was quite a striking experience for a relatively new member of Parliament, so thank you for sharing your experience on that score as well.

My first question is for Mr. Tsang.

During his questioning, Mr. Fragiskatos made a sort of side comment and said that Canada cannot lead this effort. It struck me, because I don't think I agree. I think Canada could play a unique leadership role on the issue of Hong Kong. I think we're uniquely positioned. We don't have the same colonial history in Asia, we don't have the same sort of superpower baggage and we have deep ties with Hong Kong.

Do you have thoughts specifically on the leadership role Canada could play in response to what's happening in Hong Kong?

• (1150)

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Marie-France Lafleur): Mr. Chair, I am very sorry. Mr. Tsang had to leave.

Maybe I can forward your question to him by email.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Genuis. I did mention that earlier, but it's not surprising that you would think he would be able to answer now. I'm going to give you a bit of time for that, so perhaps you could start with another question for someone else.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay, Mr. Chair. It may be that someone else wants to weigh in on that point, but I'll put another question out there.

Ms. Tung, you spoke about infiltration in every part of Canadian society, including within the Chinese community. I also think I heard you say that you recommended banning WeChat. WeChat is used quite extensively within the Canadian Chinese community. It's also used by a lot of politicians who wish to stay in touch with people who are on that platform, and it's led to problems in the past, where one politician's WeChat group was involved in fundraising, I think, for a lawsuit against a journalist.

How would you recommend that we use or not use WeChat? Also, what are the implications for the Chinese Canadian community if WeChat were to be banned as you suggest?

Ms. Mabel Tung: You have to understand that WeChat is controlled by the Chinese government. A lot of information that we're getting from WeChat is generated in China to deal with some other issues and status stuff as well.

WeChat is also a propagandist for the Chinese government. A lot of people from mainland China are not getting information from our western media. They are getting information from WeChat. For whatever the Chinese government wants to tell or have considered by their overseas Chinese or their own Chinese citizens about how great China or their leaders are, they always put it in WeChat. Also, they monitor all the items in WeChat, so it's an infiltration of Canadians on Canadian soil.

Instead of WeChat, there is a lot of other social media out there that they can use.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: All right. Thank you for that.

Ms. Tung or Mr. Nelson, do either of you want to comment on the question about Canadian leadership specifically and whether Canada is well positioned to lead the global response to what's happening in Hong Kong?

Mr. Adam Nelson: I would. I think that's a great question.

Professor Tsang has spoken about refugees and alliances. There's one thing I would note on the alliances. Number one, I would point particularly to pursuing alliances in Asia-Pacific itself. We see a lot of movement in Japan and South Korea.

For example, Mr. Genuis, I know that you're on the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China. I think the development of that group—and the more Canadian members of Parliament can take leadership to be able to work with other parliamentarians worldwide—will be particularly helpful.

Finally, I would say that the Chinese Communist Party doesn't like sunshine on these issues. They don't like transparency, so even things like these sorts of hearings help, where people can speak and submit papers for the record, or there's what the Government of Canada could do to provide funding, maybe through Global Affairs Canada or other things, to Canadian NGOs and Canadian universities, to be able to continue to highlight these issues and do fact-finding to get more on paper.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

I have one quick final question I want to ask Ms. Tung. There's a story just out on the BBC looking at the significant threat that Hong Kong international students studying abroad would be under as a result of the extraterritorial application of this law.

Could you give us your thoughts on the situation of international students from mainland China, from Hong Kong or from other places, who are in Canada and the ways in which foreign intimidation may threaten their ability to have the normal free-inquiry university experience we would expect, and what we can do to push back and protect the integrity of our academic institutions and the rights of international students in Canada?

• (1155)

The Chair: You have five seconds, I'm afraid.

Ms. Mabel Tung: Our government should help the international students from Hong Kong, especially because some of them have already put a lot of effort into helping Hong Kong and they certainly will be charged under the national security law when they go back to Hong Kong.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

Ms. Zann, you have five minutes.

Ms. Lenore Zann (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Thank you for all of your passionate witness testimony. I'm sorry that the other gentleman had to leave. I actually had some questions for him.

Ms. Tung, you mentioned that you also have some sympathy for the Chinese people who are pushing back on the democratization and all of the different things that people are doing that would be in contradiction to the Chinese government. You said that they have been indoctrinated or that they are being educated in a different way.

Could you expand on that a little, please, to make us see where you're coming from on that particular issue?

Ms. Mabel Tung: The Chinese government is very controlling. It controls everything. From the very beginning, in childhood—I'm talking about the mainland Chinese in China—they are kind of brainwashed. They have to praise their leaders on and on, and they have to follow the instructions, so from then on they always think that China is the greatest country in the world and that they shouldn't allow the separation of any part of the Chinese land by anybody.

That is deep in their minds, and then they also try to influence a lot of Chinese outside of China. That's why some of the students, the international students, once they are able to get an education in the western world and they understand what democracy really means, they kind of object to what they have been learning since childhood.

In the past we provided a lot of support to some of the students, especially after June 4, 1989. We've been helping quite a few people to settle in Canada for that reason. Also, we are really passionate about some of the mothers of the Tiananmen Square students who died, because those mothers are still not able to openly remember their children and how they died, and they didn't even know at all. We are really passionate about that, and that's what has kept us going for the last 31 years.

Ms. Lenore Zann: Thank you so much.

It looks as though Hong Kong's annual June 4 Tiananmen Square memorial will likely be banned because of the national security law, and I'm noting charges against 24 high-profile activists who attended that memorial this year. You stated that in Vancouver a more prominent public memorial to the massacre is necessary now more than ever.

Why do you believe it's necessary for Vancouver to have a memorial to the Chinese citizens killed in the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre?

Ms. Mabel Tung: Hong Kong is the only city that is still able to remember those children who died in the Tiananmen Square massacre, and it is the only prominent city with lots of candles lit on June 4, although every year the number is diminished. That's why Vancouver, with one of the largest populations of people of Chinese origin in North America, should continue to remember those students who passed away and what happened on June 4, which shaped the world over the last 31 years.

• (1200)

Ms. Lenore Zann: I'm sure there are a lot of citizens also living in Australia. Do you have any activity planned with them at all?

Ms. Mabel Tung: We have connections around the world, especially after last year. We have 36 cities around the world with the same goal, to protect democracy and the democratic movement in Hong Kong. All of us feel connected. Every year, on June 4, we will have candlelight vigils around the world to remember those events.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Zann.

Ms. Mabel Tung: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Tung.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bergeron now has the floor.

Mr. Bergeron, you have two minutes and thirty seconds at your disposal.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: My question is for Ms. Tung first, but of course our other witness can contribute if he wishes. In fact, perhaps he would like to answer my last question, which the chair did not permit, given the very limited time that would have been allowed for the answer.

In any case, the Canadian consul general in Hong Kong told us that so far no one has made a claim for asylum and that given the current conditions no one would be granted any kind of asylum. That is why we are looking into this issue in particular.

Under the circumstances, what would you recommend to pro-democracy activists in Hong Kong who would like to leave the territory to ensure their own safety?

[English]

Ms. Mabel Tung: We've done it in the past.

Right after the June 4 massacre, not just Canadians but those in other countries around the world helped dissidents from China to leave China and leave Hong Kong, through Hong Kong mostly. They provided essential resources for them to travel and leave Hong Kong. I think we can do the same thing here and provide essential resources. Some of the protestors are in a lot of danger. They are being followed by the police and intimidated by the police. I think we can do that as well.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Nelson, would you like to add something?

[English]

Mr. Adam Nelson: The only thing I would add to that is to have the Government of Canada come up with a lifeboat scheme. That's one of the number one recommendations for Hong Kong pro-democracy groups.

One thing to remember is that Hong Kong society is not entirely wealthy. It has one of the largest income divides in the world. Not everybody can afford to leave. Yes, you have U.K. passport holders and Canadian passport holders but a lot of young people aren't going to have the means to make it to Canada, the U.K. or the United States. A lifeboat scheme that particularly looks after them because of their participation would be very welcome.

Ms. Mabel Tung: I also want to add that a lot of Canadians of Hong Kong descent would love to help. We have a lot of capacity here. We have a lot of volunteers who are able to help them when they arrive.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Thank you very much, Mr. Bergeron. I've given you the 10 seconds you had lost during the previous turn.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Ha, ha!

[English]

The Chair: We'll now go to Mr. Harris for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Harris, go ahead, please.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for those questions.

I was going to ask similar questions regarding what a lifeboat policy would look like and how you would envisage that.

Could you explain what type of special visa you were referring to, Ms. Tung, that would be possible? We were told by the consular official that it was not possible for visas to be granted to non-passport holders.

• (1205)

Ms. Mabel Tung: They had a special visa in the past; we're talking about 30 years ago. They had a special visa that was issued by the embassies of a lot of countries, which was granted to past protesters so they could leave. Of course, I'm not going to discuss in public the kinds of details of those visas. That was done in the past, and I'm sure there are records about how they were able to do that.

Mr. Jack Harris: You've talked about the concerns of Canadians of Chinese descent in Canada who are Canadian citizens, and you have said that they have fears. I want you to let us know that this is from your own personal experience of talking to people, people you encounter in the Vancouver area, who are, not just by rumour, actual.... This is something that's very real in terms of people in the Chinese community.

Ms. Mabel Tung: Yes. A lot of times, people talk to me during our rallies. We've had over 20 rallies in the last two years. They will say, "I'm sorry, but I can't come next time. This is my last time, because I have family in Hong Kong and a grandmother in China and I don't want them to be intimidated by the police or anybody in China."

This is a real thing that is happening in Hong Kong for people who live in Canada. I'm sure it has happened before, because in the Amnesty International reports a lot of Chinese from mainland China are kind of quiet because their families are in China. The agents—or whatever they are—talk to them, to some of the people, and say, "Oh, I know you have two daughters, and how are they doing?" That is really to threaten them. They will keep their mouths shut and not say anything.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Ms. Tung.

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

Thank you, Mr. Harris.

This concludes our first panel. On behalf of all members, I'd like to express our thanks to Ms. Tung, Mr. Nelson and Mr. Tsang, who was not able to stay for the entire hour.

We very much appreciate your testimony. Thank you very much.

Ms. Mabel Tung: Thank you.

The Chair: Madam Clerk, how long will we have to suspend in order to set up for the witnesses in the next round?

The Clerk: Maybe just for two minutes. It's just a matter of bringing them in and doing a sound check with them.

The Chair: Thank you.

The meeting is suspended for two minutes.

• (1205) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1210)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

Welcome back to all members.

Welcome to our new witnesses.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the new witnesses.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. When you are ready to speak, you can click on the microphone icon to activate your mike. However, once members are asking you questions, you can respond immediately. You don't have to wait for me to recognize you.

At the end of the time, I will intervene. I'm afraid I may have to interrupt sometimes to go on to the next member.

[*Translation*]

I remind you that all interventions by members and witnesses must be addressed to the chair.

[*English*]

Members and witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of either floor, English or French.

[*Translation*]

Please speak slowly and clearly.

[*English*]

When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

I would now like to go to our witnesses. We have with us, as an individual, Mr. Bill Chu, founder of Canadians for Reconciliation, and, also as an individual, Mr. Victor Ho, retired editor-in-chief for the Sing Tao Daily, B.C. edition.

Welcome.

Mr. Chu, please proceed with your five-minute opening remarks.

Mr. Bill Chu (Founder, Canadians for Reconciliation, As an Individual): Chair Regan, I am most honoured to be part of this discussion.

Imagine if thousands of little green men arrived from Mars. Perhaps Canada would have taken this threat assessment more seriously. However, while China is obviously not Mars, it is no longer Pierre Trudeau's notion of China either. Through the previous witnesses and recent global events, I am sure we realize that Canada needs not just some fine tuning with China but a brave, new and comprehensive strategy to face a rising new world order that seems to be bent on changing the global understanding of law, human rights and values. Therefore, it is for the future and soul of Canada that I am sharing my experience as a Hong Kong Canadian in Vancouver.

My awakening to the PRC's undue influences in my own activism began in June 1989, when I participated in organizing a memorial service in Vancouver for the martyrs of Tiananmen Square. Soon after June 4, the Chinese Benevolent Association of Vancouver, abbreviated CBA, joined hundreds of organizations in publicly condemning the CCP's bloody suppression of peaceful students. The Chinese consulate was quick to get the United Front working and "unified" the CBA board to stand in line with the CCP. The switchover enabled the PRC to inherit the same name recognition as an old Chinatown organization and to use it to further its influence in the Chinese community. The CBA soon became one of the key PRC intermediaries in B.C., which wove together an ever-expanding network of clans, diaspora, business, cultural, educational and media groups, a task made easy with identity politics and CCP being the only party in contention.

With PRC's suppression of Hong Kong protesters last year, CBA took on a more visible role, buying front page ads in local Chinese newspapers to defend the national security law and to propagate China's condemnation of Hong Kong protesters seeking the universal values of freedom and democracy. It purported to represent the Chinese community at large, despite the countless Chinese who have migrated to escape the CCP's tyranny. CBA's ads included the names of a few hundred local Chinese organizations and clans. This was ironic since CBA also had been funded generously by Canadian Heritage to host Canada Day celebrations.

In October 2019, rallies were held across Canada to protest the proposed extradition law for Hong Kong. Simultaneously pro-PRC counter-protesters organized efforts to disrupt these rallies. At the symbolic Lennon Wall in Richmond I witnessed a loud and intimidating confrontation involving the words on the wall being torn down and loonies being thrown at a protester. The RCMP who arrived did nothing to the assailants. As a formal complaint to Richmond's RCMP was filed by the victim and was not responded to, I requested a meeting at the RCMP detachment. During our meeting the constable turned out to be no more than a PR man, one unfamiliar with the Chinese Canadian community. Despite his promise, no one received any word back about the case.

• (1215)

Unsettled by the RCMP's indifference, I arranged a meeting with a CSIS officer. He was candid and revealed that, unlike the FBI or MI5, CSIS mainly does research. Their officers do not carry guns and any necessary enforcement or arrests are done by the RCMP. Furthermore, though CSIS prepares national security reports, those reports are sent on an advisory basis to only the few within the federal government's national security committee.

To my surprise, those contents were never shared with other MPs, never mind the thousands of MLAs, mayors and councils.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chu. I'm sorry to interrupt, but you were over your five minutes. Hopefully, members will have questions that will draw out more of that.

Now we'll go to Mr. Ho, please, for five minutes.

Mr. Victor Ho (Retired Editor-in-Chief, Sing Tao Daily, British Columbia Edition, As an Individual): It is a great honour for me to present the journalistic experiences and personal observations of foreign government influence on our ethnic Chinese community and especially how the United Front strategy of the Chinese Communist Party, the CCP, is being executed in the Chinese-language mass media circle.

When it comes to foreign government interference in our ethnic Chinese society, the latest case I want to talk about is the Chinese consulate general's radio speech regarding the national security law, the NSL, of Hong Kong.

Ms. Tong Xiaoling, the Chinese consul general in Vancouver, released her half-hour announcement on this issue on a local Chinese radio station on July 23, 2020. It was programmed in newscast airtime. She simply asked Chinese Canadians to support NSL Hong Kong and said that there are a very few people in Canada trying to slander the NSL and attempting to cause trouble overseas as well. Ms. Tong then elaborated that some local Chinese Canadians pose a threat to those who really love Hong Kongers here and make personal attacks on them.

But the consul general did not mention that the NSL Hong Kong is totally contrary to Canadian core values. She treats Chinese Canadians as Chinese nationals, when of course they are not. She seems to challenge the political allegiance of our ethnic Chinese citizens. Also, she exploits the free airwaves of our broadcaster to convey the political propaganda messages of the Chinese government. To meet diplomatic protocol, she should have made it a paid advertisement.

This event indicates that some of our Chinese-language news media assist in spreading propaganda for foreign governments. The code of ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists states:

Distinguish between advocacy and news reporting. Analysis and commentary should be labelled and not misrepresent fact or context.

I would like the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, the CRTC, to investigate such cases for the sake of protecting the public interest of Canada. Also, we need to safeguard the Chinese community from being infiltrated by political directives from a foreign government.

In regard to the United Front Work Department of the CCP, there are some pro-Beijing commentators of Chinese radio stations spreading one-sided stories, playing as kind of long-time apologists for the Chinese regime. This seems like an orchestrated effort of the UFWD, with the ultimate goal to brainwash or to at least influence our Chinese Canadian audience into accepting the policy from the CCP.

Another obvious result of the UFWD is to establish many overseas social organizations to propagate or to carry out pro-China poli-

icy. Local United Front organizations of the CCP are being weaponized to publish newspaper ads, showing the political muscle of the Beijing regime.

Last year, we saw Hong Kong's young people protesting on the streets against the amendment of the fugitive offenders ordinance. They were beaten brutally by the police force. Over 50 local Chinese social groups published a joint statement ad in Chinese newspapers to condemn the Hong Kong protestors. The leading organizations, to name a few, are the Chinese Benevolent Association, the CBA; the Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Vancouver, the CCC; and the National Congress of Chinese Canadians, the NCCC. Some of the leading figures in such social groups are playing the role of volunteer ambassadors for the Vancouver consulate of China.

● (1220)

As you have just read from news stories, the first person charged under Australia's foreign interference law is a well-known member of the ethnic Chinese community—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ho. I'm sorry to interrupt, but you're over your time.

We will now go to members for questions and comments.

We'll begin with member of Parliament Kenny Chiu for six minutes.

Mr. Kenny Chiu (Steveston—Richmond East, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, gentlemen, for coming.

Mr. Ho, the Chinese definitions of “nationality” and “citizenship” include many ethnic Chinese who are residing in Canada right now. As we heard from you, in July the consul general of Vancouver from PRC did assert that. What is your proposition for the committee and for the Government of Canada to reassure Canadian citizens of Chinese descent that they will be protected and shielded from any persecution or threats?

● (1225)

Mr. Victor Ho: I think Canada should consider introducing a foreign interference offence law like the Australian one, and use it to restrict foreign governments from mobilizing local social groups to address foreign interests.

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Thank you, Mr. Ho.

Mr. Chu, we know that in Canada, discrimination, hate and racism have long been in existence. Many in the community have felt that the criticism of the People's Republic of China or the Communist Party of China has actually resulted in much of the hate and discrimination. What is your view? What do you propose that the Government of Canada can do to reassure citizens and prevent them from being manipulated by the weaponization of nationalism?

Mr. Bill Chu: That's an excellent question, as I have been involved in resisting racism for a number of years, mainly in trying to research it as well as to lobby for the recognition of that long history of discrimination against Chinese in B.C., for example. Through public knowledge, all three levels of government expressed formal apologies towards that. All of a sudden I dropped that subject, because I noticed that China was also using that subject to try to propagate their narrow sense of nationalism.

In other words, they are trying to project the image that the Chinese have been victims. They're using some sort of identity politics, as you mentioned in your former question, to try to invite the local Chinese Canadians into their embrace, trying to refer to them as Chinese "nationals". That is done rather subtly. In my opinion, it is rather ironic, because if you look into the nationality law of China, it actually stipulates that it does not recognize dual citizenship. In other words, once you emigrate from China, technically you are no longer a Chinese national, but somehow, I guess they don't care about their laws. In recent years they have tried to make a new definition of it.

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Thank you.

I have a follow-up question on that. As a result of the shadow cast by the citizenship act from the China side, taking people in Canada of Chinese descent into account as their own citizens, as well as the potential for discrimination, racism and hate, there is a significant amount of self-censorship, from the media to community leadership. What's your view on how we combat that from the government, citizen and community levels?

I'd like a brief answer from perhaps Bill first.

The Chair: If I could interrupt for just a second, Mr. Chu, could you please lower your microphone below your mouth a bit? It's just a bit too close. Thank you very much.

Please go ahead.

Mr. Bill Chu: Thank you. I didn't realize it had slipped.

Well, I think on the part of Canada it can help by acknowledging the history, because I think that in popular opinion that history has not been well understood, at least in school textbooks and public discourse. With Canada being a country that's famous for social justice as well as respect for human rights, we should try to make sure that China would not use that as an excuse to say that Chinese here would need protection from China.

• (1230)

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Thank you, Mr. Chu.

Chair, I'd like to pass my remaining time to Mr. Ho for an answer.

The Chair: Mr. Ho, you have 40 seconds.

Mr. Victor Ho: I think Canada should consider introducing some kind of foreign missions act similar to that created in the United States in 1982. This could help to control the political infiltration by foreign countries. The main purpose includes, but is not limited to, the regulation of the activities of foreign missions in Canada in a manner that would protect the foreign policy and national security interests of Canada and the protection of the Canadian

public from abuses of privileges and immunities by members of the foreign missions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ho and MP Chiu.

[Translation]

Mr. Dubourg now has the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Thank you very much...

The Chair: I apologize, it's Ms. Yip's turn.

[English]

Ms. Yip, you have six minutes.

Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Chu and Mr. Ho, for coming and giving your testimony today.

Mr. Ho, in your opening statement, you mentioned that there were a few groups. I was actually quite alarmed to hear about some of their actions. What further actions can we take towards these groups such as the United Front and the CBA, the Chinese Benevolent Association?

Mr. Victor Ho: First of all, we should recognize that there is a freedom of assembly for the social organizations here in the Chinese community. The focus should be on the foreign government interference and not on our Chinese society. The point is that we have no adequate policy or suitable method to prevent the foreign government's influence on this society. They have used a lot of United Front strategies to usurp those leaders of these organizations to take the political viewpoints of Beijing and then use these organizations to propagate the CCP's message here.

The second thing is that the foreign government treats Chinese Canadians as Chinese nationals. They use identity politics, so I guess our government should take a look at how these foreign agents, or simply the foreign government's ambassadors or countries generally, could have such influence and power to mobilize the local organizations to say the political viewpoints of China, but not to protect the national interests of Canada.

Ms. Jean Yip: Do you feel that the Chinese press in Canada is also threatened or compromised in what it can report?

Mr. Victor Ho: I think the people here in the Chinese community are wondering which channels we could report through. Would it be CSIS? We don't have any FBI reporting line, and CSIS is not a kind of active government agency to tackle this problem. They are gathering information about some activities in this society, but they are not an active agent to do something. They just transfer the message to some government officials but not to MPs.

I recommend reforming the CSIS system.

• (1235)

Ms. Jean Yip: My next question is for Mr. Chu.

Over the past summer there have been many public demonstrations here in Canada in support of the Hong Kong protests, and we have seen how groups of pro-China counter-protesters show up at some of the same events. They've been described as carrying brand new Chinese flags with creases still visible and photographing pro-Hong Kong demonstrators. Just in the earlier hour we had a witness, Ms. Mabel Tung, mention that photos were taken at airports and events and that there was fear that facial recognition technology would be used for intimidation.

Do you feel that these are the actions of some angry counter-protesters in Canada or is there some sort of larger coordination of interference by the Chinese government?

Mr. Bill Chu: It's too much of a coincidence that during the rallies organized by those supporting the Hong Kong community here, in just about all cases, counter-protesters appear. That would be a very strange pattern. They come at almost the same time and leave at the same time, which raises at least a suspicion, whether or not they are orchestrated by something or someone.

As far as the threat is concerned, I think Canada in recent years has been seeing more and more appearances of threats, even being raised in Markham and Vancouver city halls.

Ms. Jean Yip: Your organization has been focused on reconciliation. I'm wondering how we can reconcile those conflicting views towards China among the Chinese diaspora in Canada.

Mr. Bill Chu: One key thing about reconciliation is knowing the truth, because without the truth it would seem that no reconciliation is necessary. People will say things are fine, and then there's no need.

One of the basic things that we, as I mentioned earlier, are trying to do is to research and educate the public about the history of Chinese in B.C., just as it is with indigenous people; that's another area.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chu and thank you, Ms. Yip.

[*Translation*]

We'll continue with Mr. Bergeron for six minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We've talked a lot about the impact of the PRC's tightening control over Hong Kong on pro-democracy protesters. We have also talked about the impact of the People's Republic of China's new attitude towards Chinese nationals abroad. I think it goes even further than that, since someone mentioned that one of the previous witnesses had been denounced by PRC authorities.

So now we can expect the People's Republic of China to crack down on people who are not even their nationals. We have seen, as you evoked in your presentations, that the PRC is using groups in Canada to put pressure on opponents of its regime and is even engaging in some harassment. Some witnesses have told us in previous meetings that even in Canada, we should fear possible kidnappings by the People's Republic of China.

What measures can be put in place by the Canadian government to, firstly, control these groups that are literally harassing people and promoting the Chinese Communist Party regime on Canadian

territory, and secondly, to prevent possible actions such as kidnappings on Canadian territory?

• (1240)

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Chu: If I can try to answer this first, the government can do a number of things, because all the ministries at this point are operating without a good understanding of the national security risks to which Canada is exposed. At this point, as I described earlier, I seem to be running into a wall even when I try to lay a complaint at the right party, so never mind all the other ministries—for example, Heritage Canada. I mentioned that.

Also, then, there is multiculturalism, which has been made use of or exploited as a passport for expanding on the extension of certain messages. On immigration, we should start checking into the scholars or whoever is coming into Canada as to whether they have military backgrounds, as the U.S.A. has found out from the scholars who are from China.

There's a whole number of things that at the government level we can do, and we can stop funding organizations that on one hand receive funds from Canada and on the other hand are denouncing Canadian values. There's a whole number of things, but as far as kidnapping is concerned, that is out of my league. I don't know.... Until and unless CSIS is equipped to do more than just researching and there is some way of enforcing what they see as wrong...otherwise, that would be problematic.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: In the absence of an intervention from our other witness, I'm going to ask further questions.

We know that a site hosted by a Russian server called HK Leaks has already disclosed a fair bit of information about opponents of the regime, including 2,000 people considered guilty of various misdeeds against China.

Have Canadians living in Hong Kong also been subject to this type of Internet whistleblowing? What can be done to avoid such reports? We heard about WeChat earlier. Should we be concerned that Huawei could use this kind of thing on the Canadian 5G network?

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Chu: I will first jump in on Huawei. In my opinion, the risk posed by Huawei is far more than what people may think.

China's effort in recent years has been focused on collecting massive amounts of data. That data can be used for various purposes. Whether it is personal or commercial information and data secured by China, we don't know what they would use it for. That's the risk that China would take, and we would advise Canada not to engage Huawei.

As for WeChat, that is another platform that is doing a whole lot of monitoring on traces and terms, so it is not good.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much, Mr. Bergeron.

[*English*]

Now we go to Mr. Harris for six minutes.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Chair.

First of all, Mr. Ho, you mentioned, and I think it is perhaps important to reiterate, that the use of the term “Chinese nationals” by various people within Canada instead of “Chinese Canadians” is a very distinct thing and it's an intentional tool to perhaps undermine the notion of Canadian citizenship.

Can you affirm that is what you said?

● (1245)

Mr. Victor Ho: What I said is about the party politics by Chinese consulates or Chinese ambassadors here in Canada. They use so-called “Chineseness” to lobby or to persuade the local Chinese Canadians to take sides on the real politics of China, to support their policies. The best example involves the national security law in Hong Kong. They try to mobilize as many social organizations as they can to post political statements in the Chinese newspapers, the Sing Tao Daily and Ming Pao Daily. They try to create confusion to say that the Chinese people—and I am using the Chinese people here in Canada—are supporting the national security law in Hong Kong. The new law is totally contrary to our Canadian values. Those Chinese Canadians are supporting a foreign government but they are living in Canada. The consulate tries to use these ideas and politics to make clear that the Chinese people living here in Canada also support the Beijing regime or the CCP. This is very tricky, you know.

Mr. Jack Harris: Is it working?

Mr. Victor Ho: It works very effectively, because the people in Canada, especially the non-Chinese society, do not have enough knowledge to separate the Chinese nationals and the real citizens of Canada.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you. I have a further question for you on a related topic, but I would like to ask Mr. Chu a question first.

Mr. Chu, you gave a lot of information. We've been provided with something called speaking notes, which is actually 15 recommendations from you, and you didn't get a chance to talk about all of them.

Is there any one particular recommendation you would be sure to want to leave with us and leave with those who are perhaps tuning in to watch this event?

Mr. Bill Chu: I suppose the one regarding CSIS is high on my mind, because supposedly they are taking care of national security, or watching out for Canada anyway, and yet they are not empowered to do so. I think some vigorous changes need to be made. Otherwise, the way they are leaving the job to the RCMP to finish it is, to me, bad coordination.

Mr. Jack Harris: It may be that the national police force should have a different role or that CSIS should have a different role.

Mr. Bill Chu: Right.

Mr. Jack Harris: We should look into that question, of course.

Is there anything that Canadians might miss in dealing with the Canadian-Chinese relationship that's important to point out?

Mr. Bill Chu: There is more than one, but one is that in our pluralistic society it is kind of logical to assume that the Chinese Communist Party is just another legitimate political choice, particularly when we see all its economic improvements. However, such an assumption should be thrown out the window when we know that CCP is really a one-party system, as dictated in its own constitution. It does not tolerate political pluralism.

This is why it has been causing so much confusion for so many people, or for the Canadian public anyway. They are confused about this.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you. It's important to understand that this is a one-party state.

I would like to go back to Mr. Ho for a second.

As a newspaper man, Mr. Ho, you're very familiar with propaganda and all of that. In eastern Europe, particularly in the Baltic States, there's a lot of concern about Russian influence or Russia attempting to continue to have influence in the Baltic States. These countries go so far as to call it “information warfare”.

Is that too strong a term to use when you're dealing with the Chinese efforts amongst the Chinese community within Canada? Am I overstating that? If it is egregious and, as you say effective, is there something that should be done about it from a legal point of view?

● (1250)

The Chair: In 15 seconds, please. I'm sorry.

Mr. Victor Ho: Yes. You are totally right. This is a kind misinformation war that's happening and has happened for a few years in Canada, like WeChat and like the Chinese newspapers and the Chinese media here. They are propagating a lot of Chinese messages, but Canada's government does nothing to stop it.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we will go to Mr. Chong in the second round, for five minutes.

Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chu and Mr. Ho, thank you for your testimony.

I would like to focus on what has made Hong Kong different from mainland China. One of those things is freedom of the press. It was guaranteed in the international treaty, the 1984 joint declaration, and it's guaranteed in article 27 of the Basic Law and article 16 of the Hong Kong Bill of Rights.

My question is for Mr. Ho. As a retired editor-in-chief of the B.C. edition of Sing Tao Daily, do you think freedom of the press in Hong Kong has changed? If so, how?

Mr. Victor Ho: The answer is that it absolutely has changed. It changed to the opposite side of what was promised by the Sino-British joint declaration.

Hong Kong is now essentially one country and one system, but the government, the Beijing regime, still calls it one country and two systems, making a false statement to make their political agenda still work, because they try to trick the international society.

Hong Kong was the same as 1997, but totally changed after last July. The national security law is overriding all common laws in Hong Kong—overriding—with no more validity for Hong Kong law to execute if the officials use the national security law. It is supranational.

Hon. Michael Chong: How is freedom of the press being limited in Hong Kong? Is it self-censorship, such as avoiding the coverage of topics like the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre? Is it moving coverage critical of Beijing to the back pages, away from the front pages? Can you tell us a little bit about how this freedom of the press is being limited?

Mr. Victor Ho: The limitation is so obvious. You cannot publish work or news reports contrary to the new SL. Take journalists like Ms. Choy at Radio Television Hong Kong. She was just arrested a few days ago because she made a documentary on the police where, again, the police were against us in a collaboration to beat ordinary citizens in Hong Kong last year.

The RTHK journalist's arrest gives a chilling effect to all the other journalists: Don't do such things to disclose negatives about the government or the officials.

• (1255)

Hon. Michael Chong: Has the change in ownership in newspapers in Hong Kong affected freedom of the press? In particular, I'm thinking about the South China Morning Post. It was purchased by Alibaba, a mainland company, in April 2016. Has that change in ownership changed the editorial independence of the South China Morning Post?

Mr. Victor Ho: The answer is yes. This was a long-time change since 1997. My ex-boss is Sing Tao Daily's president. The Hong Kong Sing Tao Daily chairman is a very important political consultative member in China.

They changed the boss. They changed the news manager of the editorial department. Then the whole thing changed. The pro-Beijing message became the mainstream message of the newspaper. This is a very effective and very normal mode of business in Hong Kong. Change your boss, change the investor, and then the editorial line changes accordingly.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Ho and Mr. Chong.

[Translation]

We will now continue with Mr. Dubourg for five minutes.

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I'm very pleased to have the floor.

Mr. Bill Chu and Mr. Victor Ho, thank you for being here and participating in our committee meeting.

I'd like to direct my first question to Mr. Chu, since he is the founder of Canadians for Reconciliation. I am currently in Montreal, in the province of Quebec. Here as well, there is a large population of Chinese-Canadians.

Does your organization have contacts with these persons in Quebec? Do they inform you of security problems? Are there any members from Quebec in your organization?

[English]

Mr. Bill Chu: Thank you for asking. We are a very small group, and have been active in B.C. only. Our focus, as I mentioned, is more than just the Chinese. We actually devote a lot of our time to the indigenous community. That is fairly well known by the media as well as, I guess, observers out there.

In terms of our concern in all this, really, China's bottom line is not just about Canada; it's about imposing a new world order around the world. I think we need to bear that in perspective. Although we are probably from different provinces, we need to take a bigger picture and understand why China behaved the way it did. Some of the things we are seeing have been progressing quite severely, in our observation. This is why hopefully we can together make some changes.

[Translation]

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Thank you very much.

I know you were with Mr. Ho in July 2020, when you made this statement and presented its recommendations. In fact, you sent us a part of your statement and its 15 recommendations. You mentioned Huawei and the two Michaels, among other things. You listed a number of measures.

First, what impact might these 15 recommendations have on the current situation in Hong Kong?

Second, you leave me with the impression that Canada is not doing enough to take leadership in this crisis. Am I right?

• (1300)

[English]

Mr. Victor Ho: What I recommend is mainly with regard to the Chinese media and the political interference by foreign governments. My main concern is with our Canadian values and whether these Chinese media uphold our universal values. My concern is with media professionals in Canada in terms of our national interests.

We speak out regarding a government other than Canada's. This is my main point. So what is our audience? Our audience should be in Canada, in our society. We have to think of their right to information and then exclude any government directives or interference, because we are serving Canadians. That is my concern. The government should try to make it very clear that whether you are ethnic Chinese or ethnic Syrian or ethnic French, it doesn't matter, but if you live here, please do things that Canada appreciates.

I tried to alert Ottawa to do something, to prevent our national interests being captured by other governments.

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Thank you so much.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I will now give the floor to Mr. Bergeron for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I want to begin by thanking the people here today for their insightful comments and for their courage in testifying before our committee. I am very grateful to them.

I want to come back to the matter of the Internet. We spoke about Huawei and the 5G network with Mr. Chu a few moments ago. We also talked about WeChat, which is apparently controlled by China.

I'd like to talk about HK Leaks, which reveals information about opponents of the Beijing regime and is apparently hosted on a Russian server. Perhaps you don't have this information, but the question is, first of all, whether Canadian citizens living in Hong Kong have been the subject of such denunciations on this site and whether Canadians, on Canadian territory, have also been denounced on this site.

What do you think of such a tool? Do you think there will be more of them? What can be done to limit the scope of such a denunciatory tool from the Chinese regime?

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Chu: I'm just trying to see whether the question is about the security of some of the platforms used by some of the Hong Kong protesters. Is that the question?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: No. On the contrary, my question was about the platforms used by the governments of Hong Kong and the People's Republic of China to denounce the protesters.

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Chu: I'm not familiar with the one you mention, but obviously on the Internet we see all kinds of information, misinformation or disinformation, irrespective of whatever platform it is. This is the period, I feel, where the government can do more education for Canadians. Hopefully, the information you gather will be shared, not just among those in Parliament, but also with the general public, because the risk is certainly widespread.

• (1305)

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

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much, Mr. Bergeron.

[*English*]

Now we have Mr. Harris for two minutes and 30 seconds.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to return to Mr. Ho for a moment.

You talked about the direct voice of the ambassador and other spokespersons on behalf of Beijing. Another vehicle used, apparently, to influence actions within Canada by China, according to some of the witnesses, is the United Front Work Department. Is this something that you can tell us much about in terms of its operations, based on your experience as a newspaper editor for many years? Is that something you've investigated or written about or that your papers have written about, and what can you tell us about it?

Mr. Victor Ho: Yes. One of the aspects is that the Chinese government united a lot of organizations here in Canada and even some new societies and some organizations. They have created a lot of names like "All Canada" or "Greater Vancouver", the biggest names to post for these organizations, to make them a total voice from Canada's Chinese community and to create these societies. They then control the leadership of those societies, no matter if they're old societies or new societies.

The second thing is that the Chinese government tries to influence the journalists here, especially the Chinese ethnic ones, to take the line of Beijing policies. The method they use is to send the press release and then gather the news managers to the consular office to have a so-called news briefing, and then they use all their chances to persuade or influence the editors to publish or voice government policy.

The third thing is that they just send out some so-called underground CCP members here to make friends with journalists. They also try to persuade the journalists in Canada, especially the ethnic Chinese ones, to take trips to China, so-called free trips, in order to influence their mindset.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ho, and thank you, Mr. Harris. This will conclude our second panel.

On behalf of the members, I want to express our deep gratitude to Mr. Ho and Mr. Chu, our witnesses today. We very much appreciate your joining us and sharing your thoughts and your views with us.

Mr. Victor Ho: It was my pleasure. Thank you very much.

Mr. Bill Chu: Thank you.

The Chair: Now I want to ask members of the committee a question. We don't have time for a deep discussion, but we've received a proposed calendar. Does anyone have a problem with the proposed calendar?

Mr. Genuis, please.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have no objection at all to the proposed calendar. I had understood that there might be a possibility for us to extend briefly with an in camera discussion about the press release as well. Is that possible today?

The Chair: Let me ask the clerk: Are we able to do that for perhaps 10 minutes?

The Clerk: Absolutely. We do have the room for another 20 minutes or so. We would need to change to go in camera, and I would need to provide members with a new link and a new password.

The Chair: Okay.

Do other members have a problem with that? If they do, hopefully they can advise.

I don't see anyone raising their hand.

So we'll have to conclude this, log off and then come back in camera.

Yes, Ms. Zann.

• (1310)

Ms. Lenore Zann: Mr. Chair, I'm so sorry. I have another meeting right now. I'm actually 10 minutes late for it.

The Chair: We understand, Ms. Zann. Thank you very much.

Well, I think we can at least have a discussion in camera. We'll try that. Hopefully we can do that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Chair, I don't have much time, but I'll be able to join you very briefly.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

[*English*]

We'll suspend and come back momentarily for the in camera discussion. The clerk will send us the information.

Thank you so much.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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