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Chair: Mr. Ken Hardie



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• (1835)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.)): Good evening, everyone. I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 15 of the House of Commons Special Committee on the Canada–People’s Republic of China Relationship.

Pursuant to the order of reference of May 16, 2022, the committee is meeting for its study of Canada–People’s Republic of China relations, with a focus on Chinese police stations in Canada.

Today’s meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

I’d like to make a few comments for the benefit of witnesses, particularly those joining us on Zoom.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. If you are participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mike, and please mute yourself when you’re not speaking.

For interpretation, those on Zoom have the choice, at the bottom of their screen—it’s the little earth symbol—of the floor, English or French. Those in the room can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

I remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

For members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. For members on Zoom, please use the “raise hand” function. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can, and we appreciate your patience and understanding in this regard.

In accordance with the committee’s routine motion concerning connection tests for witnesses, I’m informing the committee that all witnesses and members joining virtually have completed the required connection tests in advance of the meeting.

Today, MP Ehsassi is substituting for MP Dubourg, and MP Genus is substituting for MP Dancho.

I’d now like to welcome our witnesses for the first panel.

In order, we will hear from Dr. Roromme Chantal, associate professor of political science, Université de Moncton, by video conference; Dr. Christian Leuprecht, professor, Royal Military College of

Canada, by video conference; and, finally, Laura Harth, campaign director, Fundacion Safeguard Defenders.

Each of you will have five minutes for your opening comments. Keep an eye on the speaker. I’ll give you a sign when you’re getting close to your five minutes. That will leave us enough time for lots of questions, which, I’m sure, we will all have tonight.

We will start, for the first five minutes, with a commentary and introduction from Dr. Chantal.

Please proceed.

[Translation]

Dr. Roromme Chantal (Associate Professor of Political Science, Université de Moncton, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This is a wonderful opportunity for me to answer questions from your honourable colleagues and try to make my modest contribution to the current discussion about the China question. I am very glad of the opportunity and I sincerely thank the committee.

To begin, I have decided to focus on the subject proposed by the committee for this testimony. I am therefore going to address the issue of the allegations about the presence of Chinese police stations in Canada.

First, what is there that would prove that these stations exist in Canada and in the rest of the world? According to the report by the Spanish non-governmental organization, or NGO, Safeguard Defenders, there are as many as 102 overseas Chinese police stations in 53 countries, and three of those stations are located in the Greater Toronto region in Canada. More recently, however, the media also revealed the existence of two similar stations in Quebec: the Centre Sino-Québec on the south shore and the Chinese Family Service of Greater Montreal. The managers of those organizations have denied those allegations, however, and have asked that they be presumed innocent.

That said, some observers think that there might be even more overseas agents of the Chinese police. The well-known American magazine *Newsweek* is of that view. *Newsweek* says that in addition to those agents of the Chinese police, it has identified at least nine other Chinese support centres in the United States alone. It should be noted that according to the Spanish NGO, some of those centres have sometimes been established with the help of the countries where they are located, even if that is not the case in Canada.

Chinese authorities and the Chinese media deny these allegations; rather, they talk about sites that are operated, sometimes on a volunteer basis, by local Chinese communities to help overseas Chinese nationals. The *People's Daily*, a press organ of the Chinese Communist Party, stated that in certain places in the world where there is inadequate law enforcement, for example in Africa or South America, these stations offer security teams, firefighters and ambulance attendants. In Canada, for example, the embassy of the People's Republic of China has confirmed the addresses of certain similar stations named by the media.

Second, why would China set about establishing these overseas stations? Among other reasons often cited, there is the anti-corruption campaign carried on by President Xi Jinping since he came to power. It must be noted here that more than 900,000 members of the Chinese Communist Party have apparently been disciplined to date and 42,000 of them have been expelled and prosecuted.

The covert police stations attributed to China are also said to contribute to achieving the objectives of this anti-corruption campaign. The objective of those stations is said to be to force citizens to go back home to face the Chinese judicial system. It is important to point out that according to a Chinese vice-minister of public safety, in 2021 alone, Beijing was able to dissuade 210,000 individuals to return to China to face telecommunications fraud charges. In one case cited in some media, even a Chinese citizen living in Canada is alleged to have been pressured to return to China to face charges of embezzling Chinese public funds amounting to \$380,000 in Canadian dollars.

As a final point, why would the work of these covert stations be linked to the work of the United Front Work Department of the Chinese Communist Party?

• (1840)

That is a question I believe to be of great importance. Historically, China has always demonstrated a desire to maintain control over the Chinese people both within and outside the country. The party describes the work of the United Front as a way for the Chinese Communist Party to unite all the sons and daughters of the party and contribute to the work of national renewal. The police stations attributed to China would thus also be linked to China's broader strategy of national and international influence.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Chantal.

We'll now go to Dr. Leuprecht for five minutes or less.

[Translation]

Dr. Christian Leuprecht (Professor, Royal Military College of Canada, As an Individual): Thank you for inviting me to participate in this study, Mr. Chair.

I will be speaking in English, but please do not hesitate to ask your questions in the official language of your choice.

[English]

Beijing's espionage and interference is now the single greatest threat to Canada's democratic way of life. The PRC is intent on

gaining control of Canadian critical minerals and it is actively running influence campaigns over resource development. Balloons and election interference are merely the latest episodes in a long list of hostile hybrid warfare efforts perpetrated by the CCP against Canada.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's staunch refusal to convene a public inquiry is actively jeopardizing Canada's security and its bilateral relationship with its most important strategic ally. Beijing's corruption of Canadian business and politics poses a national security problem to the United States, in part because the U.S. shares intelligence with Canada.

Recent unclassified versions of CSIS annual reports repeatedly warned about the state capture and elite capture of Canadian political, business, financial, educational and societal elites and institutions. Beijing invests heavily to make influential opinion leaders beholden to the PRC, who are then induced to repeat and lend credibility to the CCP's political disinformation. I know of Canadian academics who have been offered thousands of dollars to co-publish articles with scholars from China. Others have received lucrative trips, with all expenses paid by the regime in Beijing. In the same way, the PRC pays off politicians. Since 2015, CSIS has called out select Canadian politicians by name.

Australia's experience shows that no government is immune. In 2016, Australia's Liberal trade minister, Andrew Robb, announced that he would not run again after having negotiated deals that were exceptionally favourable to China, including a free trade agreement. Robb then took up a \$880,000-a-year job with a billionaire closely connected to the CCP and its trade policy. As trade minister, Robb negotiated a 99-year lease for the Australian port of Darwin with that same Chinese billionaire.

In 2017, Labour senator Sam Dastyari quit the Australian Senate over accepting donations from entities with links to the CCP. The senator had even tipped off one such donor about being the likely subject of a counter-intelligence operation.

In 2020, the founder of a Chinese-language school in Canberra made an unsuccessful run at a seat in Australia's Senate. It turns out that he had a long history of activity with the PRC's United Front Work Department, which is tasked with mobilizing diaspora communities to meddle in foreign states.

UFWD's illicit activities have been called out by CSIS, the Privy Council and the federal court. Under broad guidance from CCP's consulates, the UFWD co-opts staff of targeted politicians, facilitates the clandestine transfer of funds, recruits potential targets, suppresses protests and supports ethnic Chinese under its influence in their election bids. The PRC maintains the second-largest diplomatic service in Canada for good reason.

Blurry lines between Beijing state organs, Asian-organized crime groups, and select members of Canada's mainland Chinese immigrant communities and business interests are the hallmark of the CCP's covert, coercive and corrupt influence, which has been systematically eroding resistance to the Chinese government from within.

Suspect activities by the CCP in Canada date back at least as far as the ill-fated Project Sidewinder in the late 1990s. This joint CSIS-RCMP investigation had been looking into the way Chinese intelligence and Chinese triads were collaborating on intelligence operations right here in Canada.

A Canadian prime minister's awareness that the fortunes of some of his party's candidates may have been aided and abetted by the CCP is all too ironic. Out of sheer self-preservation in any democracy, a ruling political party would have forced someone with as abysmal a record during his second term as Chinese President Xi Jinping's to resign. Xi never would have won a free and fair democratic election for a third term.

• (1845)

“Misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows”, reads the famous line in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. This refers to a man who's shipwrecked, and seeks shelter beside a sleeping monster. Politics makes equally strange bedfellows, and one would hope that Canadian decision-makers will finally wake up early enough to recognize the CCP for what it is.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Dr. Leuprecht.

We'll now go to Ms. Laura Harth, campaign director, Fundacion Safeguard Defenders.

Ms. Harth, you have five minutes or less.

Ms. Laura Harth (Campaign Director, Fundacion Safeguard Defenders): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

Good evening to all honourable members of this committee.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify on behalf of Safeguard Defenders. I also want to apologize to the francophone members of the committee, because I will be speaking in English. However, I will be happy to try to answer questions in French.

[English]

Thank you for allowing me to testify on behalf of Safeguard Defenders. Please allow me to express my sincerest gratitude to the Canadian journalists who have been shining a light on the PRC's transnational repression efforts in Canada, as well as, most importantly, to the activists and witnesses who have reported to the relevant Canadian authorities. We know the courage and sometimes very difficult choices it takes to come forward. Democratic societies owe it to you to ensure that those choices are not in vain.

I imagine members of this committee are well aware of the main findings of our September report “110 Overseas” and its December follow up “Patrol and Persuade”. I wish to highlight that everything in those reports is based exclusively on open source online statements by Chinese authorities and state or party media reports, which are available to all for independent verification.

Those sources openly describe how, starting in 2016, public security authorities from four local Chinese jurisdictions with large diaspora communities overseas established over 100 so-called overseas police service centres in at least 53 countries. At least five of those stations have listed addresses in Canada—three in the Toronto area and two in the Vancouver area. In addition, in “Patrol and Persuade”, we flagged the existence of so-called overseas Chinese service centres, two of which are located in the Montreal area and have been the subject of recent media reporting. Two more are listed by Chinese authorities, one in Markham, Ontario, and another in Vancouver.

While the origins of these organizations slightly differs—some of which, by the way, have linked subsidiaries across the country beyond the locations I mentioned—all of them share a direct and demonstrable linkage to the United Front Work Department. Understanding this linkage is fundamental.

The United Front is the prime influence agency of the Communist Party of China, which seeks to influence various public and private sector entities outside China, including but not limited to the political, commercial and academic spheres. To that end, on the one hand, the United Front promotes efforts that align policies and activities with CCP interests, while on the other hand, it seeks to divide and blunt CCP or PRC critics.

Within this sticks and carrots approach, which takes many different forms, all merit attention. As the CCP wages its hybrid war on liberal democracies and the international rules-based order, Safeguard Defenders focuses on the very extreme end of the Communist Party's transnational repression efforts.

In its so-called persuasion to return operations, the PRC uses clandestine means to coerce individuals overseas to return to China for persecution. The methods range from going after family members back home, to direct threats and harassment of targets overseas by consular or embassy personnel; proxies, such as individuals linked to the stations; private investigators; or even through the deployment of covert agents abroad. In the most extreme cases, the methods include the luring, or entrapment, of an individual in a third country, or even kidnappings on foreign soil.

While the People's Republic of China is far from the only authoritarian actor to engage in transnational repression, official numbers allow us to describe the PRC's efforts in this respect, which Freedom House defines as “the most sophisticated, global, and comprehensive campaign of transnational repression in the world.”

Staggering, and as brazen a violation of national sovereignty the overseas police service stations are, unfortunately, they're also but the tip of the iceberg. It will take a comprehensive whole-of-society approach to counter the gamut of efforts under way to actively undermine fundamental rights and freedoms, and democratic societies as a whole.

To that end, allow me to make some initial policy recommendations.

First, continued community outreach is fundamental to grow the trust needed for witnesses to come forward, and to receive timely insights into new developments and actors.

• (1850)

To do so, it is crucial to put an immediate and firm stop to the legitimization of networks and individuals engaged in transnational repression through their engagement with Canadian institutions and officials. In that respect, it is crucial that investigations cover the wider United Front activities on Canadian soil.

I have some more recommendations, but maybe we can get to those in the questions.

Thank you. I do look forward to your questions.

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

We'll go to our first round of questioning.

Mr. Chong, you have six minutes or less.

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

I have four very quick questions for Madam Harth, and then questions for Professor Leuprecht.

First, about the 102 overseas police stations located in 53 countries, how many deportations have these overseas police stations been linked to?

My second question is regarding persuasion to return operations. You state in your “110 Overseas” report that the PRC's Fox Hunt and Sky Net operations, which have claimed to return or coerce more than 10,000 people back to the PRC, are more “modest in scale” than the establishment of these police stations. Can you tell us in what ways the establishment of these police stations is a bigger threat than the persuasion to return operations, which have sent some 10,000 people back to the PRC?

Third, what steps can be taken to stop the co-opting of Chinese overseas hometown associations by the United Front Work Department?

Fourth, media reports from March, this month, indicate that the RCMP have begun investigating two police stations in Montreal and Brossard. Both of these stations are directed by Xixi Li, a municipal councillor for Brossard. My question is with regard to this particular municipal councillor working at this police station. How common is it for elected municipal councillors to work at these police stations, from the research that you've done?

Those are my four questions. I know that's a lot, but I wanted to get them out there.

Ms. Laura Harth: Thank you.

I don't know how much time I have to respond.

The Chair: You have about three minutes—

Ms. Laura Harth: Okay.

• (1855)

The Chair: —or maybe a little more.

Ms. Laura Harth: Thank you.

Thank you for those questions. Regarding the number of deportations and the persuasion to return operations that we've been able to link directly to some of these stations, that number is 83. That is the anecdotal evidence that we found linked to three of the jurisdictions. One of those includes, notoriously, even video evidence put online by the Chinese authorities demonstrating how such an operation took place in a station in Madrid. We know that there have been at least 83, according to the authorities.

Are these establishments a bigger threat than, for example, the operations Fox Hunt and Sky Net? Fox Hunt and Sky Net, according to the last numbers given by the CCDI in October 2022, have netted over 11,000 successful operations between 2014 and October 2022. Successful operations means that more individuals can be included for each of those operations.

I don't think the stations are necessarily a bigger threat. They're all part of the same pattern. I think what's important in them, though, is that these stations are directly linked to the United Front Work Department. The individuals and associations linked to them are manning these stations and may be engaged in transnational repression activities that go much wider than the extreme end of persuasion to return, but are also engaged in those influence operations. In that sense, they merit attention beyond what should be the focus of these persuasion to return operations.

What steps can be taken to stop co-opting by the United Front Work Department? I think in the first place it's publicly denouncing these activities and raising awareness not within the communities, because they know all too well what's going on, but within the wider society within the communities that may be targets of influence operations, be it political circles, academic circles, media, businessmen, and everyone who may be the target of those influence operations, and trying to promote people from the diaspora communities that are not linked to them and giving them a voice. I think for too long, for decades, the main interlocutors for officials and for many other private sector institutions have been exactly the people who are tied to these networks. We need to break that linkage. That will be a difficult and long process, and it will really take a whole-of-society effort, but it starts by very clear messaging about what's going on.

Your last question was on the municipal councillor. Now, obviously there's a presumption of innocence, so until investigations are concluded and we see what comes out of that...

To my knowledge, it is not necessarily common, but at Safeguard Defenders, we as an organization are looking at the global framework rather than single individuals or associations, so I may not be the best person to respond to that.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you for those answers. They're appreciated.

I have a question for Professor Leuprecht concerning the use of racism by the Chinese Communist Party to further its foreign interference operations.

Is it the case that the CCP's propaganda has a racial angle? In other words, does the CCP use race to convince those who are ethnically Chinese that they owe an allegiance to the motherland, as a way to further their foreign interference operations here? Is it part of the tool kit in their foreign interference operations here in Canada?

The Chair: Give a brief answer, please, Dr. Leuprecht.

Thank you.

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: The simple answer is yes.

There are some terrific people who have written about the extent to which the CCP systematically instrumentalizes racism, in particular to thwart policy action against it, such as foreign agent registries.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Mr. Fragiskatos for six minutes or less.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here tonight.

Ms. Harth, I'll begin with you.

In your organization's report, there's a detailed narrative of the allegations put forward. Can you go over the evidence again? What exactly is the report pointing to, in terms of evidence that shows these are, in fact, "police stations", for lack of a better term?

Ms. Laura Harth: Thank you for the question.

Again, everything is open source and online, and can be verified.

We call them "police stations", in the first place, because the PRC authorities that set them up do. These are, specifically, four public security authorities from four local jurisdictions in China. They vary a bit in the name they use, but they all call them "police linkage centres" or "overseas police service centres". That's the wording they use. Obviously, the fact that they have been set up by a police body within the PRC is why we adopted that language, as well.

Among the tasks we've listed continually across sources, including newspaper articles appearing online from Chinese Communist Party media, are so-called administrative and consular tasks, which, by the way, the Chinese authorities and even embassies across the world confirmed exist, obviously. They also include tasks such as monitoring and measuring the sentiments or opinions of the community, and resolutely cracking down on crime—assisting public security authorities back in China with cracking down on crime, which, again, leads to those persuasion to return operations. We found direct evidence of the involvement of some of these stations in executing those operations.

• (1900)

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: In asking the question, I wasn't trying to cast doubt on what's been put forward. I just wanted to know further detail about the evidence being used to put forward the conclusions the organization has drawn. I know you elaborated a little on that in your testimony, but I wanted to delve in a bit more.

What other leading democracies has China established such centres in?

Ms. Laura Harth: They're in all of them. This includes all G7 countries. Europe is very heavily targeted, which is not surprising, but we've seen this all over the world. I would say democracies are definitely bearing the brunt of the presence of these stations.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Is this something unique to China's approach? Is Russia employing similar methods? Is Iran, for example, doing this, as well?

Ms. Laura Harth: Transnational repression is definitely being used by all authoritarian regimes, and to a growing extent, which is another reason why we believe it's important to be very clear that this will not be accepted. We see countries learning from each other. Smaller authoritarian countries are starting to learn from those efforts and copying.

The scale on which the Chinese Communist Party is operating these is unparalleled, though. We haven't seen any other countries going to the extent of setting up overseas police service centres.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chantal, I am going to ask you the same question.

Is China's approach unique?

[*English*]

The Chair: You're still muted, sir.

[*Translation*]

Dr. Roromme Chantal: I'm sorry.

Thank you for the question.

I am of the same opinion as Ms. Harth. It isn't that China is the only country accused of conducting these kinds of operations; however, to my knowledge, it is perhaps the only power in the contemporary world that systematically engages in these kinds of operations in democratic societies as a way of controlling its nationals there.

As well, and as Ms. Harth also said, when there are demonstrations in some countries, such as the United States, agents identified as Chinese emissaries are said to be present for the purpose, for example, of physically assaulting or intimidating demonstrators. Given all the Chinese communities that potentially exist in these countries, China would be the only country that makes such systematic use of this approach.

I can't give any more details about that idea, but I believe it must be seen as linked to a new type of influence that China is now exercising, that is being called "nuisance power".

This is a multidimensional strategy that comprises numerous facets and does not solely involve establishing police stations; it also seeks to use China's economic power as a lever to muzzle a certain influential voice or certain organizations.

We saw this when a manager in the National Basketball Association, or NBA, took a position in support of Hong Kong. A player had taken a position, and the association was then obliged to retract and take a position in favour of China.

It is a much more multidimensional strategy that comprises numerous facets.

• (1905)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Chantal.

We'll now go to Mr. Trudel for six minutes or less.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks also to this evening's guests for being here with us.

I would like to start with a brief question that is for all three of you.

Yes or no: do you think China is listening to our discussions right now?

Ms. Laura Harth: Probably.

Mr. Denis Trudel: Ms. Harth says that is probably the case.

What do you say, Mr. Leuprecht?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: I don't doubt it, because one of the main objectives of foreign diplomats is to gather open sources, and our discussions this evening are open.

China has the second largest diplomatic corps in Canada, after the United States, so there is certainly a Chinese diplomat taking good notes right now.

Mr. Denis Trudel: Right.

Mr. Chantal, what do you think?

Dr. Roromme Chantal: I don't have the technological knowledge to testify to it, but it should not be ruled out.

Mr. Denis Trudel: Let us say good evening to Mr. Jinping, who is certainly nearby taking notes.

Mr. Chantal, you referred earlier to nuisance power, as opposed to the power of persuasion that China had relied on in the past. We heard Ms. Harth say that China is present in hundreds of countries in the world.

However, I believe that Canada is still a relatively marginal power on the global scene. Since I am a bit curious, I would like to ask you this question: why is China interested in Canada?

Dr. Roromme Chantal: Mr. Trudel, that is an important question.

Joe Clark, a former prime minister of Canada, says in a book that Canada doesn't maintain its place and its influence on the international scene solely because of its size and power in the traditional sense of the word and its special ties with the United States. Canada is also a member of the G7. We have seen how Canada used its relationship with the European Union very effectively when the two

Michaels, Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig, were arrested in China. Canada conducted a very effective campaign that involved demonstrating the extent to which China was engaged in hostage diplomacy.

Up to now, Canada has had an influential voice on the international scene despite a decline in the weight it once had. In addition, China places great weight on its reputation because the idea of a Chinese menace that is increasingly widespread in the west prevents China from projecting the image of a benevolent power, which is therefore different from the United States, for example. Its leaders make it a point of honour to portray China as a friendly power. A dispute like the one we saw with Canada caused considerable damage to China's image.

We have seen how, based on the information collected, China tried to prevent the election of the Conservative Party, which is perceived as being more critical or tougher on China, while at the same time trying to avert the election of a majority government.

For the moment, we don't know whether those efforts had very clear impacts, but it is all part of this strategy of using its nuisance power to pervert Canadian democracy in the direction, obviously, of the interests of China and the Chinese Communist Party.

Mr. Denis Trudel: Thank you very much, Mr. Chantal.

Mr. Leuprecht, this question is for you. In your statement when we began this evening, you said that Beijing's espionage and interference posed an existential threat to Canada's democratic way of life. That really is pretty strong language.

Can you explain your comments a little?

• (1910)

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: Yes, I am a bit worried about the fact that in the discussion we are having, we are still looking in a very isolated way at the various efforts to interfere and to violate Canadian sovereignty. We are focusing on certain points, such as police stations, or certain episodes of interference targeting a few candidates, instead of seeing the full scope of the actions carried out. Those actions lie in a grey zone where asymmetrical and hybrid wars on China's are waged, with China engaging its efforts on the diplomatic, economic, military, defence, social, and educational fronts, in information technology, and so on.

So we have to broaden our field of vision and realize that China is trying to threaten the democratic way of life we value in Canada.

Mr. Denis Trudel: So I understand that we have to have a comprehensive view of international politics.

In the same vein, we have learned that China is alleged to have intervened in municipal elections in Vancouver. It has not been confirmed, but it would seem that a municipal councillor in Brossard was elected thanks in part to the fact that people presumed to be working for the Chinese secret services posted messages on chat boards like WeChat.

What is China's interest in having representatives on municipal councils?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: China invests a considerable amount in interfering in democratic institutions. It is done on a scale that aims at acquiring influence at all levels of politics. It also invests in politicians who will then be better known and be able to run in other elections. This strategy is well documented in connection with China's efforts.

Mr. Denis Trudel: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Trudel.

We'll go to Ms. McPherson for six minutes or less.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of the witnesses for being here and sharing this information with us.

I also have a couple of questions I would like to ask all three witnesses.

First of all, this is very front and centre right now. The reports of the police stations are relatively recent; however, the idea that the Chinese government has exerted influence in Canada and has engaged in transnational repression is not new. This is something that Chinese Canadians have been warning us about for a very long time. They've been telling us that this has been happening within our academic institutions and our public spaces.

My question for you is: Why is there an increase now? I think I know the answer, but I would love to hear your perspectives on why there is an increased focus on this and increased implications from the Chinese government's interference in Canada. Also, you could touch on how you feel Canada's response to date has been and whether or not that has been a factor in why there may be a perceived or real increase in Chinese interference.

Perhaps I will start with you, Ms. Harth.

Ms. Laura Harth: I think, unfortunately, that you are right. None of this is new. This has been going on for decades. We've definitely seen an increase when it comes to transnational oppression since Xi Jinping came to power. This has been going on for a long time and will only keep growing.

Why is there this attention now? I think a lot of activists and dissidents who have reported for a long time are very frustrated. Safeguard Defenders itself was a bit frustrated, because we had reported on those operations before. I think the brazen violation of national sovereignty with the police stations is what got attention. It's quite sensational. Again, it is but the tip of the iceberg of what's going on.

In terms of responses, I think Canada, as any other democracy in the world, has for too long a time closed its eyes to everything that's going on, maybe hoping that it would go away if we just didn't look at it. That has obviously only allowed these operations to grow and is putting us today at increased risk.

I think it's good that everything is coming to the surface now. It is painful. It is going to be hard getting through this. It's important that this be out in the public and that society can take stock of ev-

erything that's going on, because awareness is the first step to addressing the issues. I hope we can move forward.

In that respect, I do have to say that, when it comes to the police stations, the response we've seen from the RCMP, from what we can gauge from media reports and so on, has definitely been among the best in democracies across the world.

• (1915)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

Mr. Chantal, can I ask you to go next?

[Translation]

Dr. Roromme Chantal: Do you want me to say something?

[English]

Ms. Heather McPherson: Yes, please.

[Translation]

Dr. Roromme Chantal: I think my answer will involve examining three aspects of the issue.

Since Xi Jinping came to power, he has clearly put an end to what China had considered to be the "low profile" policy on the international scene since Deng Xiaoping. Xi Jinping thought that the time had come for China to claim a leadership role alongside the America superpower. He has even called for a new type of relationship among the great powers.

Obviously, the end of China's peaceful rise and the claim to a more active role led certain major powers to see a much greater Chinese threat. I am not saying that China was invading other countries around it in Asia. However, in response, Xi Jinping has tried to employ strategies that resembled public diplomacy, if you will, except that what China did, it did in secret.

The other thing, to finish, is that the world has very clearly fallen into a new cold war, even though some analysts refuse to use that term. Today, we very clearly have two models. On one side, we have the liberal democracy model, which brings together the United States, the American allies in western Europe and Canada, and on the other side, we have what is an authoritarian or neo-totalitarian model, according to some critics, proposed by China and Russia, for example.

Given all this, we must now expect that there will be a degree of aggression in the approach used by powers like China or Russia when it comes to the strategy we are discussing this evening.

[English]

Ms. Heather McPherson: I'm so sorry to interrupt you. I do want to just give a little bit of time to Mr. Leuprecht as well, if I could.

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: I'll be very quick.

I think what we have is a culmination of 35 years of efforts by China. We also now have a critical mass of elite capture in this country as a result, which China is capitalizing on.

I would say in response that to date, I cannot share my colleague's optimism with regard to the RCMP. Show me the last national security foreign interference or espionage investigation the RCMP completed to the point where we actually had a prosecution and successful conviction in this country.

I think the Chinese regime operates with impunity. Canada has not made any efforts to deter it, as we can see by the recent choice by Canada to stay out of, for instance, even something such as AUKUS.

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

We'll now go to our second round, beginning with Mr. Kmiec for five minutes or less.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to give Safeguard Defenders credit. I think a lot of the reason we're all here is the reports you've been putting out recently.

In November 2022, there was that update report. It mentioned that Ireland and the Netherlands have directed that these police stations be closed. Has any other government closed these stations?

Ms. Laura Harth: I would have to go back. There are some others that gave an order to close—for example the Czech Republic.

To be honest, we don't believe this is a full response. Ireland, for example, has not officially announced investigations, whereas the Netherlands has.

That's one reason why I said that we do commend the response so far by the RCMP on the issue of the police stations. They've been quite open about investigating, which I think is more important than just saying that they'll close a specific address, given that the organizations underneath will just keep running.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: The report also mentioned that 14 countries had launched investigations. Are there any new countries that have begun investigations?

Ms. Laura Harth: Some more countries have announced investigations. Not all of them are very open on the extent to which they are doing that.

• (1920)

Mr. Tom Kmiec: The PRC's United Front Work Department websites say that these are volunteers who work there. Some of the pictures provided by your organization, and online, show uniformed officers doing joint patrols in Italy.

Are these volunteers or are these employees?

Ms. Laura Harth: Those police officers in Italy were part of the joint police patrols. That was an agreement that Italy made with the Ministry of Public Security. It's an agreement that is still in place, although the execution of it is suspended because of COVID—not because of the police stations. Those were officials from the police in China. They are not the people manning the stations.

We're not sure, at this point in time, if the people linked to these stations are acting in a voluntary capacity or are hired. We've seen language about these people being hired by the public security au-

thorities in China, but we have no evidence of payments being made. That's an open question.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: In the Canadian case, do you have information about these people? Are they Canadian citizens or permanent residents who are being hired or who are volunteering to work? Are these people coming from outside the country and working or volunteering for these police stations?

Ms. Laura Harth: It's our impression so far from all over the world that the vast majority of these people are regular residents in the country where these stations are operated.

Again, the United Front link is important. One reason they've been getting away with this with such impunity is that these people have been engaged in influence operations for a long time. Usually, they're well established within those communities and have ties. We see regular photo ops with local politicians, academics, business men and so on.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Does your organization support the creation of a foreign agent registry act?

Ms. Laura Harth: I guess we would support that. Do I think that is a solution to the issue? No. It might be a start.

Let's be honest: These people are not going to register as foreign agents.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Would you support a foreign agent registry act that applies to all countries equally, rather than one specific to the PRC?

Ms. Laura Harth: Yes, of course.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Okay.

To Professor Leuprecht, through you, Mr. Chair, I wanted to ask if you support the creation of a foreign agent registry act.

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: I have called for that publicly and in writing, repeatedly, along with other measures. Yes.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: I needed you to say it on the record. Thank you for doing that.

I'm going to ask you for some conjecture here because you're an expert on this.

Is it possible that Canada's non-invitation to AUKUS is related to the amount of successful interference in civic society in Canada?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: That is difficult to gauge. It appears that this is more an elite process, on the one hand, of Canada's being left out of key conversations and, on the other hand, some Canadian elites having chosen not to participate in those conversations.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: On a foreign agent registry act, in order to identify the persons and organizations that should be on there, how much outreach should we be doing to diaspora communities in Canada that targeted by these organizations?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: I think we have some pretty effective models from both Australia and the United Kingdom on how we can effectively operationalize a foreign registry act. I'm not sure why it takes us years of consultations. Yes, we need to make it commensurable with the charter, unlike the U.K. and Australia, but I don't think this is all that difficult to do.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Professor Chantal, do you agree on creating a registry of foreign agents in Canada?

Dr. Roromme Chantal: I don't know whether that would provide a solution to the problem, but if a registry like that were considered to be useful, then that would be fine.

If you would allow me a few seconds now, I would like to say that the problem is much more complex. Chinese nationals who are supposed to be part of this strategy on the part of mainland China may be forced to participate in it, but there are also Canadian citizens of Chinese descent who are living here, or American citizens of Chinese descent, who identify, one way or another, with mainland China and may willingly participate in the objectives of the Chinese Communist Party.

It would therefore be difficult to put that kind of registry in place, in that these are much more open liberal democratic societies that consequently respect individual liberties.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We've been a little generous with time tonight. We do have a little bit of a pad leading up to the top of the hour, but, henceforth, to make sure everybody gets a fair shot, after this round, we'll start to hold you to your time.

Mr. Oliphant you have five minutes or a little bit.

• (1925)

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all of the witnesses. You're here tonight as experts, and it is very important to us to get your testimony.

This committee will most likely engage in writing a report following this study, and when we get into that closed-door, in camera session, we look at the testimony that you have given us. That is how it gets into the report. I for one will always try to ensure that it's substantiated testimony and actually based in fact, not just opinion. With that, I want to talk to Professor Leuprecht to ask a few questions.

In your testimony tonight, you said that international organizations are being suborned by the PRC to the detriment of Canada's interests. Can you name those and show us exactly how that is happening?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: Yes, one good example is the World Health Organization. Chinese influence and interference in the World Health Organization has been publicly documented since 1953. Those of us who understand how the organization works knew from the beginning that intelligence coming out of the World Health Organization with regard to the pandemic should be taken

with a grain of salt. If we had done that, I think our countries would have reacted differently.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: If you have others, we would be happy to receive them in writing.

You mentioned the balloons, which seemed to be a throwaway comment or rhetoric, or is there something you wanted to add about balloons to this testimony, in your expert opinion?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: You might have seen my opinion piece in *The Globe and Mail* on this. The balloons were effectively a test of NORAD's response system to objects in our airspace. What better way to understand how we respond and the characteristics of our response than to send different objects of different sizes?

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Is that an opinion, or did you have proof of that?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: If you look at testimony before the national defence committee and you ask some of the commanders involved with NORAD, I think you will get substantiation that this was a test of our system.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: You say Beijing invests heavily to make influential opinion leaders beholden to the PRC. Who, where, how much, when and have they had a chance to defend themselves?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: I think I've provided some evidence here from Australia that is publicly known. There are other cases—

Hon. Robert Oliphant: I meant in Canada. This is a Canadian—

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: —from other countries that I could provide to you, and I have first-hand experience as I provide in the testimony.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: You say that Canadian academics have been offered thousands of dollars to co-publish. Do you know of authors who have accepted that money and have been influenced to publish?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: I do. I will not name those individuals here publicly.

I would suggest that you look at people who copublish with people in China. That gives you at least somewhat of an indication of some of the individuals, and then look at their rather sympathetic views on China in this country.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: You say that “the PRC pays off politicians”. That is a very strong accusation. That is an illegal activity on both sides. Are you prepared to name them?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: I would have to say that we have evidence in Canada of flows of money to political organizations through questionable channels and particular candidates. These are patterns that are replicated in other allied countries.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: I would actually like to know which politicians are being paid off. You say, “In the same way, the PRC pays off politicians.” It is illegal in Canada to receive, to offer or to give. In three ways, it's illegal.

If you have evidence, have you taken it to the RCMP?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: I would suggest to you that, in my testimony, I provide two open-source cases from Australia—

Hon. Robert Oliphant: No, I'm talking about Canada. This is a Canadian House of Commons committee. Is it something they do in Canada?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: Well, if we had a federal police force that was effective in investigating this, I think it would see cases like this in this country.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Hmm. So, no. The answer you're giving me is that, no, you don't have evidence. That is fine.

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: We have institutions that do not follow through on their mandates for national security.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: There are aspersions dotted all throughout your testimony to us. I think it would be very helpful to know exactly what the effect has been, the success from interference by the Chinese government in Canada. What legislation, what policies, what regulations, what have...? If they have invested this much money, where has it been successful? Could you give me some examples of where they've been successful in their heavy paying out of politicians? Where has it been successful?

• (1930)

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: As I name in my testimony, it is with regard to some resource development in this country. We know that China is not the only actor that invests in information campaigns with regard to resource development in one way or another in this country. I also, again, provide evidence from Australia with regard to links that subsequently appeared that were proven so problematic that people opted out of public life.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

That's all I have.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Oliphant.

I'll now go to Monsieur Trudel for five—pardon me, two and a half minutes.

Mr. Denis Trudel: Two and a half minutes, *d'accord*.

Ms. Heather McPherson: You almost got five there.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Leuprecht, we get the feeling that Canada is an absolutely incredible Swiss cheese. In the last few weeks, a number of incidents have been reported. Balloons have flown over Canada and the United States. From what we know, one balloon was shot down, but we don't really know what happened in the case of the other balloons.

There is talk of direct interference in Canadian elections and of Chinese police stations set up in Canada. A few weeks ago, representatives of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the RCMP, told us that the RCMP was not aware that there were Chinese police stations in Quebec. Three weeks ago, before it was reported in the media, I asked a member of the RCMP a question, but his answer was that he was not aware of these incidents. Either he was lying or he really didn't know, which really is concerning.

There is also talk of the arrest of a spy at Hydro-Québec, who was working in the development of electrical technology such as

motors and batteries, a very important field that will be critical in the years to come. What we are hearing is incredible and concerning.

What is Canada not doing? Conversely, what could Canada do, right now, to make sure this doesn't happen again?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: First, the federal police would have to focus its resources on its federal mandate. At present, the RCMP dedicates 85% of its resources and efforts to provincial, territorial and local policing, at the expense of its federal mandate.

Second, Canada is the only G7 country that has no foreign human intelligence gathering service. There is a foreign intelligence gathering service provided by the Communications Security Establishment, or CSE, but there is no human intelligence gathering service. What that means is that we are virtually blind in one eye, because the foreign activities of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, or CSIS, are very limited.

To understand what hostile countries are doing in our own country, we must also necessarily understand their activities outside Canada. At present, there are no such measures in place. Over the last 30 years, it seems that no government was prepared to make that kind of investment.

Mr. Denis Trudel: Mr. Chantal...

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Trudel. You are out of time, I'm afraid, sir.

Ms. McPherson, go ahead for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Harth, you spoke about the fact that while this has been going on for a very long time, there is now an awareness of it and it has come into the public eye. Do you think that the value of trade with China has blinded countries like Canada to the interference that has been going on?

Ms. Laura Harth: Yes, absolutely, and it continues to do so.

Ms. Heather McPherson: When we look at how the Government of China is influencing Canada and other countries, can you talk a little bit about what that might look like in non-European, non-North American contexts? What does that look like in sub-Saharan Africa, for example?

Ms. Laura Harth: It depends on the country. This is not necessarily my expertise, but we see, obviously, that they are using their economic weight or the promise of economic investments, infrastructure and so on to try, let's say, to co-opt certain governments. We see them being particularly effective in countries where that same government might have authoritarian streaks or be very eager to remain in power. We see them corrupting governments, very often in countries that are not exactly democratic or not stably democratic, and it's all toward the same aim. Especially over the past years, Xi Jinping has launched a couple of so-called global initiatives. We see them very heavily investing in the so-called global south and trying in a way to align that global south with its interests, with its new design for the future world order, which is radically different and alternative to the international rules-based order based on fundamental human rights, as we understand them.

• (1935)

Ms. Heather McPherson: I guess the real answer now is that we see this happening all over the world. We see this happening in multiple countries, not just with China but with other countries as well.

What are the lessons, the best-case scenarios, the best lessons learned from other countries? How are they responding to this appropriately?

Ms. Laura Harth: Do you mean to the Chinese threat? I don't think we've seen a complete comprehensive response from any country so far. Obviously, the United States is the country that has woken up first to the threat. They are also obviously the prime enemy of the Chinese Communist Party. It's not hiding that.

In that sense, I think it is important to see that when the PRC targets a certain country for influence operations, similar to Russia, it is not looking at influencing only that particular country; it's also trying to chip away at existing democratic alliances, defence alliances for when it plans to make its next move, for example, on Taiwan. That is something very similar to what we have seen Russia do and still see Russia doing, for example, with its disinformation campaigns or by creating those kinds of dependencies. It was energy dependencies with Europe. For Russia we see the PRC heavily investing and quite openly talking about wanting to enhance economic interdependency of other countries on its economy, all the while working to insulate its own economy from external shocks.

There are a couple of things going on, and I think we have only recently begun to actually be aware of that issue. It is high time. This is not any individual country's individual issue. This is a big threat to the democratic alliance as a whole, to the international rules-based order, so we need to coordinate on this and really start responding.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Mr. Genuis, for five minutes or less.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

In our Canadian debate about foreign interference, I would say that there have been two predominant views expressed. One has come from many in the government, which is to say that they view

the purpose of foreign intervention as being to create chaos and undermine trust in institutions in every case, and therefore they think that we should avoid talking about foreign interference too much because the discussion of it undermines trust.

On the other hand, my view would be that foreign interference is sometimes about undermining trust in institutions but it's more fundamentally about trying to advance the interests of a foreign power through whatever means. That could involve weakening trust, but also electing more pliant candidates, stealing technology, breaking alliances or stifling criticism.

My view is also that we need to talk about this problem in order to resolve it. That includes holding institutions accountable for their failures.

I'd like to hear briefly from all of the witnesses. What do you think is the purpose of foreign interference? In other words, which of the two views do you identify with more? Should we be talking about it or not?

Ms. Harth, we'll start with you.

Ms. Laura Harth: I think the aims are very often both. It's my impression that the Chinese Communist Party mainly invested in the first place in trying to advance its interests, and other witnesses have said that this has been going on for decades. They've been laying the foundations for a long time. At the same time, obviously we see their trying to undermine the allure of democracies on a global scale, trying to say that democracies can't deliver and can't work.

There's a bit of both going on. I do agree with you that the more we talk about this problem publicly and raise awareness across society, the better to start tackling it.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

We'll go to the witnesses online.

[*Translation*]

Dr. Roromme Chantal: I would say that China is doing something that all the major powers do, which is that it is trying to change international opinion to suit its interests. However, most of the major western powers use public diplomacy, while China, thinking like Sun Tzu, one of the great Chinese strategists, is trying to win without fighting. That means that China is using much more subtle means, given that it obviously does not attract a consensus in a large segment of western opinion. This is obviously a question that should be examined further.

However, I believe that the West is starting under a handicap in addressing the China question. For example, the discussion of the Chinese threat in recent years in the West has essentially revolved around issues relating to nuisance power or persuasive power.

• (1940)

[*English*]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'm sorry. Can I just...?

[Translation]

Dr. Roromme Chantal: However, there has rarely been discussion of China's nuisance power: that country's ability to infiltrate societies hostile to it in the West, and so...

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'm sorry to jump in, but—

[Translation]

Dr. Roromme Chantal: ...to try to change public opinion in its favour.

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you for your comments.

Because of limited time, we'll go to Professor Leuprecht.

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: I would say that sowing chaos and undermining trust is more a function of polarization, more closely associated with misinformation and disinformation than foreign interference. Although foreign interference can, of course, support it, I think that's obfuscating the problem.

Look at Australia. Australia reorganized its national intelligence community precisely because of its understanding of foreign interference as advancing the interest of a foreign power, and Australia's perceiving itself as not having been postured adequately in its intelligence structure and posture. The United Kingdom has organized its community. In Canada, we have not, and I would say this is related to a misunderstanding of the objectives of foreign interference. A rereading of annual CSIS reports might be in order.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

I have a brief follow-up question for Professor Leuprecht. You talked about how our failures on this issue are affecting American security. We've seen with AUKUS that a lot of the functions of intelligence-sharing that are supposed to be happening through the Five Eyes are now happening effectively through three eyes.

I wonder if you could just bluntly tell us if we are seen by allies as being more vulnerable and therefore less trustworthy? Do you think that's a contributing factor to our not being part of AUKUS?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: I provide a link to a U.S.-sourced intelligence assessment that now expresses precisely these concerns about Canada as a national security problem to the United States. I believe that a public inquiry in Canada peeling back the onion would reveal this to a point where I think even the current government would not have an interest in having this out in public.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

Could any follow-up information from witnesses be provided in writing?

Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, you are out of time, sir.

We will go now to Mr. Cormier for five minutes or less.

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier (Acadie—Bathurst, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chantal, thank you for being with us, live from the Université de Moncton in New Brunswick. The university may be getting a new name in the next few weeks or months. We never know.

This evening, other witnesses and yourself have told the committee that foreign interference was not something new. We have been hearing about interference by China for years. Some people seem to be saying that this has only been going on since the government was elected in 2015, but I don't think that is the case.

What do you see as the reason why we are seeing a resurgence of interest in this subject at present, and what has prompted the public to take much more of an interest in this problem?

Is there something that should be done to demystify it all and explain that this is not a new phenomenon and that the government is making all the necessary arrangements to put measures in place for preventing it from happening?

Dr. Roromme Chantal: Mr. Cormier, that is an important question. The rise in public interest in the subject of interference is connected with the change in the western paradigm since the election of Donald Trump in the United States, in particular. He himself broke with the idea that the emergence of China could be something beneficial, and he tried to impose a set of sanctions, thereby succeeding in bringing about a paradigm shift.

The connection must also be made with what is perceived as the aggressive stance taken by Xi Jinping toward Hong Kong and Taiwan. Given his global ambitions, by launching a set of planet-wide initiatives, he has tried to shape global opinion in his country's image and thus in favour of China. In that sense, the rise in attention given to this subject is connected with the fact that he is seeking to reverse the negative trend in western public opinion regarding China that stems from what is perceived as its aggressive foreign policy.

• (1945)

Mr. Serge Cormier: Perfect, thank you.

Some witnesses have also addressed the subject of trade. As you probably know, we do a lot of business with China in the Atlantic provinces, especially when it comes to fishery exports.

How can we reconcile the two interests: still having a business relationship with China while at the same time ensuring that we preserve democracy and prevent this foreign interference at the highest level?

Can we find a balance between the two, do you think?

Dr. Roromme Chantal: That is a question that, again, is extremely important.

My position on this subject is not the most popular, since there are growing numbers of voices calling for a virtually total uncoupling of western economies from China's. I don't think this strategy serves Canada's national interest.

Today, we need to be responsible, even if we have convictions. China is a major power on the Security Council. You can't do anything about climate change without cooperating with China. On poverty-related problems in Africa, for example, you have to collaborate with China.

Despite China's unpopularity, and even a certain hysteria when it comes to China that sometimes leads to irrational policies, I would propose that we keep a certain perspective. Yes, we have to address the challenges posed by China, but without necessarily breaking off all ties with China, because, to my mind, that would not be in Canada's national interest.

Mr. Serge Cormier: Thank you, Mr. Chantal.

Ms. Harth, feel free to answer in English, but I thought your French was impeccable. On this International Francophonie Day, it would be fine if you wanted to answer in French.

On the subject of the police stations, how did you manage to discover that they exist, whether in Canada or elsewhere?

Can you explain the process you followed, to the public who are listening to us? What information enabled you to make that discovery?

[English]

Ms. Laura Harth: I apologize. I will respond in English, because it's easier and I want to make sure that I'm very precise on this.

We came across the police stations when we were tracking how, exactly, Chinese authorities managed to return—according to their own statements—230,000 individuals through clandestine means between April 2021 and July 2022 alone. As we tracked these operations, we came across two jurisdictions in particular, which are the ones mentioned in “110 Overseas”. Together with some chatter among dissidents and activists on social media channels, in looking at these two jurisdictions, we came across statements on the websites of the public security authorities themselves, as well as confirmation of those reports in PRC state and party media.

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

We'll now go to our third round. We'll get into it a bit.

We have Mr. Chong for five minutes or less.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a couple of questions for Ms. Harth.

First, do you think Interpol has lost its usefulness because the PRC has used it as part of their persuasion to return operations? How do governments and law enforcement in countries like Canada prevent the abuse of Interpol by the PRC?

Ms. Laura Harth: The abuse of Interpol by the PRC and other authoritarian regimes is a big issue for that organization. I think democratic nations, one, need to step up to the plate again in international organizations such as Interpol, but also others. For too much time we've kind of let countries such as the PRC get away with a lot. We may need to think about alternative means of working.

That includes, by the way, if you'll allow me to say, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, which has a standing memorandum of understanding with the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, kind of the Chinese Communist Party internal police, and has appointed that organ, which is in charge of all of these transnational policing operations, as the focal point for all work under that convention. That is a big issue that we need to deal with urgently.

• (1950)

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you.

You mentioned earlier that some 11,000 people have been forced to return to China under these persuasion to return operations. Can you tell us how many from Canada you estimate have been persuaded to return?

I have a second part to that question. Last fall an indictment was unsealed in a Brooklyn, New York court stating that the Chinese government, from Toronto, was trying to coerce persons in the United States to leave the United States to go to Toronto for more intensive interrogations rather than doing those more intensive interrogations on U.S. soil. Is it the implication that Canada has become somewhat of a safe haven for these persuasion to return operations, for this kind of foreign interference threat activity, when you read that kind of evidence that the U.S. justice department has outlined in the unsealed indictment?

Ms. Laura Harth: It's very hard to look into individual operations. There's not a lot of evidence on individual operations. We do have some larger numbers that are put out there by the PRC authorities, but we do see the use of third countries happening not only with Canada but also in other places.

I would say, though, that it might be a very good indication that the actions the U.S. authorities have been putting in place in a cross-departmental fashion over the past two or three years are effective, at least to the extent of maybe scaring them a bit more, so trying to conduct those operations on foreign soil where that attention was just not as present.

When it comes to individual operations, though, we have big numbers. It's very hard to find those individual cases. I can tell you that anecdotal evidence, again open source, indicates that at least three persuasion to return operations have taken place on Canadian soil. There's likely many more, but those are the numbers we can get from the evidence.

Just to be clear, the PRC authorities state that they conduct these operations in over 120 countries around the world. That is virtually every single country in the world, be there a police station or not.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

We'll now go to Mr. Ehsassi for five minutes or less.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will start off with Mr. Leuprecht.

Mr. Leuprecht, I was listening to what you had to say. I think you were insinuating that the Americans are very disappointed that Canada is not vigilant enough. Am I correct in that assumption?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: Of course we want to conduct our own and sovereign foreign policy, but yes, I think we can see concerns on national security, intelligence and defence matters across the spectrum, including by the U.S. ambassador.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Okay.

With respect to these balloons that you're very much concerned about, did you see much of a divergence in the manner in which the Americans dealt with them and how Canadians dealt with them?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: Well, as I pointed out in my op-ed in *The Globe*, in the U.S. the Secretary of State very clearly called out the violation of international law and unacceptable conduct. In Canada we called in the Chinese ambassador, and that was everything we heard about it. The official word—

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: But in terms of actions, you would agree that we both dealt with them identically. Is that correct?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: I think I lay out considerable differences in the way we dealt with them in the two countries publicly.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: No. We both used NORAD and we shot them down. Is that not correct?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: The public communication was very different in the two countries by—

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Okay. So that's the first issue.

With respect to these police stations, have you seen a huge divergence between how Canadians have dealt with them and Americans?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: There is certainly a more robust capacity in the United States to investigate such matters.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: But in terms of how the two countries have reacted to these so far, have you seen a divergence?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: We see actual investigations in the United States and unsealed indictments.

• (1955)

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Are you saying there aren't investigations here in Canada? Is that what you are suggesting?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: I would like to see some indictments. We have been investigating the Winnipeg lab for three and half years.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: No, seeing is one thing; are you suggesting that there aren't investigations going on in Canada?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: We can have investigations for years it seems in this country and they never seem to lead to any successful conclusion.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: No, but you just implied that we do not have investigations here in Canada.

Do you know that to be true?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: Investigations are only useful if you can actually prosecute in the end.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: No, no. You suggested that there are no investigations going on here.

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: That is not what I suggested because the RCMP has publicly stated that there are.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: It is what you implied; it is absolutely. You said in America they were investigating, which implies that we're not investigating these cases here.

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: We have evidence of indictments in the United States. I would like to see evidence of indictments in Canada and successful prosecution. That's the litmus test.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: That's very different. No, no, now you're going from investigations to indictments.

Again, I really have to say this is very frustrating. This is a very serious issue. We want to deal with this in a very serious manner. Insinuations don't really help the members of this committee.

Is it your assertion, sir, that the U.S. entered into the agreement with Australians and the Brits on the submarines because they had lost faith in Canada?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: The object of criminal intelligence is to lead to successful prosecution. We would like to see more—

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Mr. Genuis asked if you thought the Americans were concerned and whether that is part of the reason we're not part of the AUKUS agreement. In response to his question, you referred to some report you had seen that suggested there may have been some concerns.

But that had nothing to do with AUKUS, did it?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: It appears that the government does not seem too concerned about being left out of AUKUS.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you. You essentially answered that question as well by saying "it appears". Thank you for that.

If I could to Ms. Harth, thank you very much for your testimony.

We were talking about the reaction of various countries to these police service stations. I think two countries stood out. I think it was Ireland and another country.

In your opinion, what is the right way to react to these secret police stations?

Ms. Laura Harth: The first one is obviously what a lot of countries have done, which is calling out publicly and immediately the fact that these are illegal. That is something Canada has done.

The second is to launch investigations, which may take some time. This is again what is happening in Canada and a growing number of democratic nations around the world. As was pointed out earlier, some of them have ordered the closure of these stations. Again, while we think that in terms of public messaging that is very valuable, it does not solve the actual issue.

In terms of policy recommendations beyond the ongoing investigations, one is to look beyond the addresses. This is not just about a single address. This is about the networks of individuals and organizations running these and similar organizations running similar operations even if there is not officially a police station. It is crucial that all investigations really go into the wider United Front activities, both to counter transnational repression and also those other influence operations.

We really call on allied democracies to face this common threat together. This is pretty new for most countries. We need a coordinated framework, for example, to start from the G7 to define transnational repression, share intelligence and best counter-practices. It could even include the potential adoption...because the issue of indictments and prosecution was pointed out. That is an issue that, for example, the U.S. authorities are also dealing with. Just this week a bipartisan proposal for a legislative framework on transnational repression was put forward exactly to adopt the kind of criminal clauses and legal framework that may be necessary to counter that repression.

These are some of the steps to be taken.

My apologies.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Harth.

I know it's difficult to hold answers to the time, because there's so much information brimming up inside.

We have a little bit of extra time in the second panel, so we will conclude this round first with Mr. Trudel for two and a half minutes and then with Ms. McPherson for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Trudel, the floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel: Thank you.

I would again like to thank all the witnesses for their testimony. The discussion is extremely interesting.

I am going to put the same question to Mr. Leuprecht and Mr. Chantal.

For the last two or three weeks, we have been witnessing a sad spectacle. The government is playing for time while everyone in Canada—parliamentarians, many journalists and opinion makers—are calling on the government to institute an independent investigation to get to the bottom of things, in view of everything we have learned.

Do you think the government is playing for time by appointing a special rapporteur who is close to the government and close to China?

Don't you think it would be preferable to institute an independent inquiry immediately?

• (2000)

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: It seems to me that before announcing that a rapporteur had been appointed, the government could have made sure that all parties in Parliament agreed on the choice of the rapporteur and all agreed on the rapporteur's impartiality.

Unfortunately, the government chose to do things differently, as was the case for the study done by the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, or NSICOP.

The government could make an exception and say that NSICOP could present its study not to the executive but to Parliament, and Parliament could decide the content of the study and the scope of the report to be presented to Parliament.

I believe the government has means available to it to ensure impartiality, apart from a public inquiry.

Mr. Denis Trudel: Mr. Chantal, what is your opinion on this question?

Dr. Roromme Chantal: It may be that the government is trying to gain a bit of time. However, there is also no assurance that if a public inquiry were instituted, it would produce the right result. I think that on this question, we also have to allow the authorities here in Canada time to do their work. When the time comes, we will be able to determine what kind of additional decision to make.

As well, Canada is being pressured by the United States, which is in direct competition with China. There is a danger here, however. We have seen it in the past, for example in the case of Iraq in 2003. Colin Powell, as the representative of the United States, went to the United Nations, the UN, to say there were weapons of mass destruction. We later realized that there were none. So there is a tendency to exaggerate the Chinese threat and not give the authorities in place time to act. The threat exists, but we have to be careful to make the right decisions.

Nor is hysteria about China what is going to enable us to address the Chinese threat properly.

Mr. Denis Trudel: Thank you.

[*English*]

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

Now we go to Ms. McPherson for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Harth, I want to dig in a little bit more into what our next steps should be and give you a little bit more time there. Before I do that, I want to point out, which I think is important to get on the record, that when we hear the phrase “police stations” or “overseas Chinese police stations”, perhaps that's a misnomer. I think you brought that up. It's not an address. It's not a location. It is a bigger thing. They've been described to me as “clandestine hubs” for foreign influence activities, as these locations should not be understood within conventional understanding of policing activities.

You spoke about the registry's not being, perhaps, a useful mechanism. You've spoken about the need for community outreach and the adoption of a framework. Are there any other things this committee needs to hear from you about what we should be doing next?

Ms. Laura Harth: I actually have one last initial recommendation listed—

Ms. Heather McPherson: There's time.

Ms. Laura Harth: —so I thank you for giving me the opportunity to point it out.

Let me just point out that I don't want to say the registry might not be useful. I just think that, as a stand-alone solution, it's not a solution, right? It must be part of a wider framework of options.

My last recommendation would actually be, aside from those already said, that together with allies.... This also goes back a bit to the questions asked by Mr. Chong on international institutions. Canada has the Magnitsky human rights act. Together with allies, you should consider sanctions on the PRC institutions and officials responsible for these transnational repression efforts, starting with that Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and the Ministry for Public Security, recalling that these two institutions are responsible not only for these transnational repressions and illegal policing activities on foreign soil, but also for crimes against humanity and even genocide inside China. It's high time that we started holding these individuals and institutions to account, and definitely interrupt all co-operation, be it with international institutions or at a bilateral level.

• (2005)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. McPherson.

That brings us to the end of our first panel.

I would like to thank our witnesses.

Dr. Chantal, Dr. Leuprecht and Ms. Harth, you've been very generous with your time late into the evening. We appreciate that very much.

We will now suspend for five minutes while we get the next panel ready to go.

• (2005)

(Pause)

• (2010)

The Chair: Thank you, all. We're back in session.

We would now like to invite the two panellists for our second round. Unfortunately, Mr. Juneau-Katsuya was unable to make our session tonight. There was a family issue he had to deal with, and we can certainly understand that.

We are joined by Gloria Fung, president, Canada-Hong Kong Link, by video conference, and Henry Chan, co-director, Saskatchewan Stands with Hong Kong.

We will begin with statements of five minutes or less by each of our guests.

Ms. Fung, given the testing we did on your microphone, I'll ask you to use your "big voice" so everyone can hear you.

Ms. Gloria Fung (President, Canada-Hong Kong Link): Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: All right. You have five minutes or less.

Ms. Gloria Fung: Mr. Chair, thank you for inviting me to testify before the committee.

I'm Gloria Fung, president of Canada-Hong Kong Link, a community organization established 25 years ago to promote democracy, rule of law, freedom and human rights in Hong Kong and to encourage the full participation of Canadians of Hong Kong origin in all aspects of Canadian society.

For decades, civil society organizations have reported foreign agents' intimidation of Canadians and meddling in our politics. Unfortunately, our government has not responded to these concerns. Therefore, a comprehensive network of pro-CCP United Front organizations has operated virtually unchecked, threatening our freedom of expression, national security and democracy.

The Chinese police stations are a collaborative effort of United Front organizations and the Public Security Bureau of China, enabling the CCP to stretch its arms far and wide. They repress Asian diaspora communities, collect civil intelligence, and harass and intimidate Canadians who are critical of Beijing's policies.

As a pro-democracy organizer, I have received threatening calls warning me to stop meddling in Hong Kong's affairs or face serious consequences. There have been numerous unsuccessful attempts to hack into my emails. When I was in Hong Kong speaking against the draconian extradition bill, there were attempts to track me down and likely abduct me.

In 2019, CCP proxies organized counterprotests to jeopardize Canadians' freedom of expression in many cities. Clearly, diaspora community members are victims of foreign harassment and intimidation. Above all, we are appalled by CCP proxies meddling in elections at all levels of government by spreading disinformation, manipulating party nominations and secretly funding candidates.

Therefore, the Canadian Coalition for a Foreign Influence Registry, comprising 33 multicultural organizations, urges the passage of a foreign influence registry act with Criminal Code application before Parliament's summer recess. This registry is supported by 88% of Canadians surveyed in two recent Nanos national polls. It would apply to individuals and entities working on behalf of any foreign country, not just China, and to people of every ethnic background, not just Chinese Canadians. It would place no restriction on legal co-operation or exchanges with foreign governments, but it would be a legislative tool to hold foreign agents accountable. The transparency it would provide is sorely lacking now.

There is no connection between the registry and anti-Chinese racism. The cloud of suspicion hanging over our community is not created by talk of a registry but by the covert actions of malign foreign agents. We need to know who they are and differentiate them from virtually all Chinese Canadians.

Urgent action is needed to address this threat to Canadian society. There should be an independent public inquiry. CSIS and the RCMP need enhanced capacity to monitor information and conduct investigations in Mandarin, Cantonese and Fujianese. Finally, Chinese diplomats attached to the Ministry of State Security or the United Front Work Department should be expelled.

Thank you.

• (2015)

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

We'll now turn to Mr. Chan for five minutes or less.

Mr. Henry Chan (Co-Director, Saskatchewan Stands with Hong Kong): Mr. Chair, thank you for the invitation to appear before you to speak on a matter of great gravity.

It has always been known that the United Front's workforce has been operating in Canada to intimidate and harass dissenters. Their work also includes repatriating Chinese nationals for corruption charges.

The same objective was true in 2019 when the Hong Kong SAR government introduced a bill to extradite Hong Kongers and Chinese nationals for corruption and political charges. Mr. Chair, four years ago Hong Kongers fought with their lives to defend themselves from such arbitrary actions by the Chinese Communist Party.

The Chinese police station is an extended arm that intrudes on Canadian sovereignty. It undermines our government, our law enforcement and our democratic institutions. The police stations are an extension of the United Front, and by ousting such operations it paints a picture in the minds of Canadians of just how far the CCP will go to assert its influence on foreign soil.

Mr. Chair, the CCP is testing our resolve, and we must take these threats very seriously.

Around the community I have been collecting testimonies from people who have experienced first-hand the brutal nature of the Communist regime. There was one gentleman I spoke to who left China after constant harassment from the regime, because he merely said a few words against the regime and was recorded by party members. His wife urged him to leave China, and then they settled in Saskatchewan. However, constant bombardments of phone calls and threats made against his extended family in China persuaded him to return. He was only allowed to come back to Canada after selling off most of his assets and handing a significant portion to the government. He was lucky to only lose money. We often hear of people who are persuaded to return and they disappear from the face of the earth.

Mr. Chair, we're here today not only to tell you that there are real people who are in danger of the extended arm of the CCP, but also to call for concrete and meaningful actions.

Since the founding of Saskatchewan Stands with Hong Kong in 2019, we have been calling for government to establish a foreign agent registry to expose those working on behalf of malign regimes. It is not the moon we're asking for. The U.S. passed it in 1938, Australia in 2018, and the U.K. currently has a government bill in session.

In 2020 we organized petition e-2835 to call for a foreign agent registry. Again last November we organized petition e-4172 to call for action to deal with foreign interference and for the immediate shutdown of the Chinese police station. Even before we were able to coordinate the petition, Ireland and the Netherlands had already ordered the immediate shutdown of such operations. On this, our government has been timid and slow.

There are lots of Canadians who care about this issue, and I'm one who does. I intend to share my real views with you this evening.

The news of foreign interference and meddling in our election is very concerning. In the community, I have already been hearing, "Who is running our government?" Many came to Canada because their country was no longer safe.

Now, seeing the overreach of regimes into our democracy is deeply troubling. The public trust has already been shaken. Therefore, there must be total clarity and sunlight as to what is happening and why it was allowed to happen.

My observations are that most of our policies dealing with regimes have been passive in response. I firmly believe that in developing our Canada-China policy, we must bear in mind three things.

One, China does not respect weakness.

Two, the CCP cannot be trusted. It's a regime that has been known to roll back on its own commitments.

Three, we are dealing with a regime that every day attempts to find cracks in our democracy, and we must suspect that they're looking for ways to undermine our stability.

If we keep these things in mind, I believe we will have a better chance of a China policy that is proactive, rather than reactive.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (2020)

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

We'll now go to our first round of questioning. We'll begin with Mr. Chong for six minutes or less.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank our witnesses for coming today to talk about foreign interference and these illegal police stations.

My first question is for both witnesses.

Would you say that the Chinese community is the biggest victim of the PRC's foreign interference threat activities, whether it be the establishment of these illegal police stations, the PRC organizing counter-protests to pro-Hong Kong democracy activists, or other meddling in our democracy?

Maybe we'll go to Madam Fung first.

Ms. Gloria Fung: I fully agree that the Chinese Canadian community is the biggest victim of Chinese foreign interference.

Over the past decades, I have seen our community being infiltrated and manipulated. Many of our community members who are outspoken about Beijing policies have been cracked down upon by some of these secret police or even the United Front organizations in peaceful rallies and other kinds of public forums.

If there's ever a cloud of suspicion being created by the recent discussions of the meddling into elections by the Chinese embassy or its processes in Canada, eventually Chinese Canadians are going to suffer, because there will be a cloud of suspicion. However, we have to be very clear about who has created this cloud of suspicion. It's not the talk or the suggestion of the passage of a foreign interference registry, but rather the actions. It is the infiltration and the meddling into elections by many of these processes that have created this cloud of suspicion. Therefore, even in terms of police stations, the mainland Chinese are by far the biggest victims of this operation.

I have reached out to different mainland Chinese pro-democracy groups, and I have had interviews with a number of people who are actively involved in the anti-CCP or pro-democracy movement in Canada.

• (2025)

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you.

I'd like to hear Mr. Chan respond to this question.

Ms. Gloria Fung: Okay.

Hon. Michael Chong: Is it the Chinese community who is the biggest victim of the PRC's foreign interference operation?

Mr. Henry Chan: In terms of CCP interference, I do think that the Chinese people are the first ones they want to attack, especially with the United Front workforce. It is basically towards the Chinese people.

Hon. Michael Chong: I'd like to ask a very personal question of both of you.

I'm a Canadian of Chinese descent. I was born in 1971 to a Chinese immigrant father who came here from Hong Kong. I was born in a country where non-whites made up a very small percentage of our country's population and where attitudes were substantially different from what they are today in a country that had only recently done away with its whites-only immigration policy. I know first hand what it's like to be the target of anti-Asian racism.

I find it beyond the pale when I hear those out in the public debate suggest that by raising questions about Beijing's foreign interference here in Canada by advocating for a foreign agent registry, we are somehow responsible for fomenting anti-Asian racism in Canada. I find it beyond the pale that people would suggest that.

I think we have to do both. We have to fight anti-Asian racism and discrimination and, at the same time, seriously counter Beijing's very real threats to our democracy. To do one and not the other is either to abandon our fellow citizens of Asian descent to

racism or, alternatively, to allow Beijing to continue to interfere in our democracy.

I wonder if you both feel the same way.

Mr. Henry Chan: I can go first.

The Chair: I'll ask for very short reactions, please.

Mr. Henry Chan: Yes, I feel the same way. I'll start at that.

Other witnesses can talk.

Hon. Michael Chong: Madam Fung, go ahead.

Ms. Gloria Fung: I agree with your sentiment.

Some people have been amplifying this anti-Chinese racism. They aim to create fear and division.

There's no evidence that there's a direct link between the passage of a foreign interference registry and anti-Chinese racism.

To the country, it is legislation protecting diaspora community members from foreign threats and intimidation.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Mr. Oliphant for six minutes or less.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: I'm just going to let Mr. Chan respond a little bit further, if he would like to, on Mr. Chong's question.

You didn't really get a chance. If you want to elaborate a little bit, I think that would be important.

Mr. Henry Chan: I'm guessing you're talking about establishing a foreign agent registry and what contributes to anti-Asian racism. I think it's actually a policy that would protect Canadians in the diaspora community because it targets those regimes that attempt every day to undermine our democratic rights.

I think we must also recognize that revealing people who are receiving funding or support from foreign regimes allows for transparency. Transparency and accountability have been long-standing policies in many democratic communities.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Thank you for that.

We'll continue a little bit in that vein.

Nobody believes China's assertions that their police activities were legal or appropriate. The RCMP, I believe, has acted appropriately and we have managed to change it.

I want to discern how much of the intimidation that you both have experienced yourselves, or have heard second- or third-hand from others, is related to those police stations. Are we getting a false sense of security by their removal? Will other activities continue because they weren't the only source—or even a primary source—of that regime's activity?

• (2030)

Ms. Gloria Fung: Maybe I can answer first.

I, personally, had direct experience of being intimidated and harassed—actually in Canada. I have, from time to time, received threatening calls. At the same time, there have been attempts to hack into my email. Every time we come to important days like July 1 or October 1, there are emails containing files that are tempting me to open them, so that they can hack into my computer.

The most serious case was the time I was back in Hong Kong. After speaking at an international press conference calling upon the international community to support Hong Kong people in the fight against the extradition bill, I received emails pretending to be from people from mainland China who needed my urgent help. I fully understood that this was an attempt to track me down and possibly abduct me. During my time in Hong Kong, I had to ask all my friends to accompany me back to the hotel every time I finished my meetings.

This is my personal experience. Maybe at another time I can also share cases of other people, particularly the mainland Chinese activists here, regarding their experiences of being intimidated and harassed.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Mr. Chan.

Mr. Henry Chan: On whether they are from the police station, I think it is very hard to say, as the previous witness said.

A lot of times we do see that this harassment and intimidation are not only about the police stations, but rather about a larger organization of the Chinese United Front Work Department, which coordinates these kinds of things on foreign soil.

I think that sometimes they're not even from the same place where it is conducted. They could be threatening your family elsewhere. That doesn't have to be done on Canadian soil. That can be done back in—

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Tell me what the nature of the threats are and whether or not you've reported them to the police.

Mr. Henry Chan: I have not received those threats myself.

What I've heard from other people, including the person I spoke about, is that those threats are like this: They would follow their family, their extended family or whatever. They would take pictures of them, send them to them and tell them to return. Their objective is to get them to return to China or wherever their homeland is. They take pictures of their extended family and send them to them in a way that is threatening them to return.

I think most of the time they're saying that if you don't do this, this and this, then something will happen to your family.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Do you know if they reported it to the police so that there could be a forensic trail?

I'll ask Ms. Fung that as well. I get threatening emails regularly. I get phishing expeditions all the time that are trying to get me to open things, but I've never felt threatened. People are feeling threatened. Have they reported them to the police? Have they been able to find out where they're from?

Ms. Gloria Fung: Yes. I have reported my case to the RCMP, because I believe this is not just about people making illegal threats in Canada. Unfortunately, the very first time I reported the counter-protests as well as my own personal experience to them, they said,

“Oh, this is concerning foreign interference. You may have to approach Ottawa to get help from them.” It was not until last year, when the integrated national security enforcement teams of the RCMP were formed, that they really started to take it seriously.

Very recently, I had the chance to have a long talk with Ontario officers of the same team. I presented my experience as well as other people's experiences, at the same time providing evidence of such intimidation and harassment. They are now following up—

• (2035)

The Chair: Ms. Fung, I'm sorry. We will have to interrupt at this moment. We do have to move on to our next questioner.

Mr. Trudel, you have six minutes or less.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the witnesses for being with us. It is very interesting to talk about their personal experience.

Ms. Fung, you have been the target of intimidation yourself.

Mr. Chan, you say that you have not suffered intimidation.

The report of the Fundacion Safeguard Defenders, which Ms. Harth represents today, is entitled “110 Overseas: Chinese Transnational Policing Gone Wild.”

That report says that as part of an anti-fraud campaign, the People's Republic of China says it has persuaded 230,000 of its citizens, worldwide, between April 2021 and July 2022, to return to the People's Republic of China to face criminal prosecutions. We are talking here about 230,000 people, which really is an astronomical figure.

My question is for both you, Mr. Chan, and you, Ms. Fung.

Are there people in your organization whom you know and whose story you can tell, people who were here in Canada and were persuaded to return to China?

How is it done? Where there threats, emails? Can you tell us more about this?

[English]

Mr. Henry Chan: With regard to the one I talked about in the testimony, when the threats were conducted he was actually in Saskatchewan. He later went back to China to sell off most of his assets. After he sold off most of his assets, he said that he had to give a significant portion to the government before he was allowed to leave the country again.

These are the kinds of things we're seeing.

Ms. Gloria Fung: I think the harassment and also the coercion for dissidents who return back to China have been a collaborative effort by both the public safety department or public safety bureau of China and the United Front organizations in Canada.

I'll cite you an example. One of the mainland Chinese dissidents I talked to has been under constant surveillance by CCP agents on Canadian soil. His family members have been shown photos of this dissident's family picture, and also showing him having dinner with his family in Toronto. He was totally shocked about this, because he thought he had come to a safe and free society. He didn't know that he was still under surveillance in Canada. He asked me why our government hasn't done anything to protect them from the Chinese Communist Party.

Actually, eventually, because he refused to self-censor, his brother got laid off. Then the parents of his wife, his in-laws, were put in jail. It shows the severity of this kind of coercion and also threats, intimidation and harassment of people in Canada.

• (2040)

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel: That is interesting.

You say that the government did nothing.

In your opinion, what could the government have done in this case to prevent people from returning to China?

[English]

Ms. Gloria Fung: I think that for a very long time Canadians didn't really know where to seek help whenever they were confronted with these kinds of foreign government threats, harassment and intimidation. I still remember some time early last year when we tried to find a number we could get in touch with, a hotline or maybe other ways of sharing the story with the RCMP and police.

Police definitely won't take care of these kinds of foreign interference cases, but still, I think the RCMP quite often previously were very slow in responding and quite often we are asked to provide evidence. But we all understand that it's really difficult for the people involved in these kinds of foreign threats and intimidation to provide very concrete evidence, other than their family members were being shown the photos and they also received phone calls like I did, but then Rogers and Bell refuse to provide the phone list to us, so there's no evidence we can produce.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel: That is interesting.

I referred earlier to the 230,000 people worldwide who have been persuaded to return to China.

Apart from the personal stories you have told us, Mr. Chan and Ms. Fung, have your organizations recorded information about those people?

Do you know people in your organizations who have returned to China, and can you tell us how many? Were there 350, or 500, or 1,000?

[English]

The Chair: Give a brief answer, please.

Mr. Henry Chan: I think for us in Saskatchewan, one of the things is that where I live there aren't that many Chinese people, and even so we've seen cases. I've talked to at least two or three who have these kinds of things, and this one was the most compelling, and that's why I decided to talk about it today.

Do you mind if I just take a stab at the previous question?

The Chair: Mr. Chan, no, perhaps you could incorporate your comments in the answer to another question—

Mr. Henry Chan: Okay.

The Chair: —because it is time to go to Ms. McPherson for six minutes or less.

Ms. Gloria Fung: Yes, I've been working mostly with Hong Konger Canadians within our community—

The Chair: I'm sorry, madam, but we're going to Ms. McPherson now.

Ms. Gloria Fung: Okay.

The Chair: All right. There we go.

Ms. Heather McPherson: It's very nice to know that our witnesses have so much to share with us. Thank you very much to both of you for being here.

What I'd really like to hear is some more information about some of the things I've heard from you, Ms. Fung, on the RCMP.

But before I do that, Mr. Chan, please, by all means, go ahead and take a stab at the answer.

Mr. Henry Chan: I think what I wanted to say in response to the previous question about whether the RCMP can do anything is that we're here to tell you there are no mechanisms to effectively counter these kinds of threats. That's why we're asking for a FIRA as the first step to counter foreign interference. There are probably other legislative tools we could use, but that is the first step for us to take.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much.

Ms. Fung—

Ms. Gloria Fung: My answer to your question is—

Ms. Heather McPherson: Yes, please go ahead.

Ms. Gloria Fung: I think the very first step the government can take is to pass a foreign influence registry, so as to provide a legislative tool for the RCMP to hold individuals and entities with a working relationship with a foreign regime accountable. I've been told by an RCMP officer that the law is not with them. It seems that, compared with other countries, we have very limited legislative tools for our enforcement department to work with. That is why it is so important for us to pass a FIRA as soon as possible.

Second, there should be other measures considered by our government to cover foreign interference in other aspects of society.

Third, I think the RCMP needs to be provided with more resources to enhance their investigative capacity. More importantly, they also need to enhance their understanding of malign foreign interference. In general, it's not only the RCMP. Many of our politicians and bureaucrats have very little knowledge about how foreign interference operates, how to detect it, and how we can come up with an effective strategy to combat it.

All of these take a collaborative effort by the enforcement department and the community, in order to enhance the exchange between the two and restore public trust in our enforcement department.

● (2045)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much, Ms. Fung.

I have a clarification question for you.

You are raising the registry as a tool that could be used by the RCMP. It is an important step, in your opinion. One of the witnesses we had testify, previously, made mention of the fact that the bad actors aren't going to put themselves in the registry. It would have limited ability to hold certain members to account.

How would you respond to that?

Ms. Gloria Fung: It is of the utmost importance for us to attach the Criminal Code to the future foreign influence registry. Without it, it's almost like a tiger without any teeth. We cannot oblige individuals and entities working for a foreign government to register themselves with us.

Let us take the Australian model as an example. As soon as the Australian Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme was passed in 2018, many bureaucrats and elected members resigned, and we all know the reason why.

I think it would serve as a very effective measure to force people who are truly agents to come forward and register with the government. If they do not comply with this requirement, they would be subject to imprisonment or a very heavy fine. That is something for our government to consider.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much.

One of the other things you talked about was the need for the RCMP to have more resources, in order to be able to do their work—more education and whatnot. We heard, from other people on this issue, that the outreach to the community was very insufficient. In fact, you even mentioned it today. You contact one branch of the RCMP and they say they can't help you. They send you somewhere else. We heard, in previous testimony, that the interaction between local police—city police, perhaps—the RCMP and CSIS was not very well articulated. Folks who were impacted didn't know which way to go. They were passed around. It was not very clear. That's your experience, I understand.

How could we fix that?

Ms. Gloria Fung: Number one, the RCMP needs to do more community outreach initiatives to build trust between the enforcement department and the community, and to conduct public education, so they know how to protect themselves—how to make use of all the existing help provided by our enforcement department to

protect themselves from foreign interference threats and intimidation.

At the same time, this is also a very good opportunity for the RCMP to get input from the community on how they can better improve their existing services. Say, for instance.... There wasn't a central hotline before, but I noted that it's now in place. That is a step forward, but it's still not enough.

The Chair: Ms. Fung, I'm sorry. I know that everybody is just so full of information, but maybe you can work some more of these points into some of the answers to your questions from Mr. Seeback, who is up now for five minutes or less.

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Great.

From the report by Safeguard Defenders, “110 Overseas”, I want to read this section and ask you if you agree with it:

Overseas hometown associations, while often providing genuine services to the community, have by now become overwhelmingly co-opted by the CCP's United Front organizations, which seek to increasingly control the Chinese diaspora.

Perhaps you could both quickly answer. Do you agree with that assessment in the report?

● (2050)

Ms. Gloria Fung: Absolutely. I agree.

Mr. Henry Chan: Yes. I do as well. To give an example, in those organizations other dialects were spoken in the past. Now it's just Mandarin.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: My next question leads off of that. Would you consider these police stations to enhance the ability of the United Front to, if I can use some of your words from today, harass and intimidate the Chinese diaspora here in Canada?

Ms. Gloria Fung: I agree. I think for lots of community members, the existence of police stations on Canadian soil is really appalling to them. As I mentioned—

Mr. Kyle Seeback: And intimidating?

Ms. Gloria Fung: Yes, it's very intimidating, because they don't feel safe anymore with this kind of CCP police station operative on Canadian soil. That's why the government needs to take immediate action to stop the operations of these police stations, just like other European countries have already done.

Mr. Henry Chan: It's not only some of the questionable behaviour but also just the terror that it paints in people's minds.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: The chilling effect.

Mr. Henry Chan: Yes. I think it thrives off of the fear of losing other freedoms. I think the freedom from fear is perhaps the most important. Once you are fearful, then other freedoms are taken away, or—

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I'm going to keep building on this. You've used the phrase “persuaded to return”. I'm going to suggest that a more accurate phrase would be “coerced to return”.

First of all, would you agree with that? Secondly, do you think, again, these police stations enhance the ability of coercive return?

Mr. Henry Chan: Yes, because they are threatening your family. There is really nothing you can do to save them. They are so far away and you're here. The only thing is to comply with what they want.

Ms. Gloria Fung: I think our government has not done enough to stop this kind of foreign government operation on Canadian soil. The RCMP needs to step up their actions to hold accountable these foreign agents, foreign police, and also people from the United Front organizations that have broken the law to jeopardize other Canadians' fundamental rights.

For people who are from abroad, they should be expelled right away. That should also include the diplomats who are attached to the ministry of state security and also the United Front Work Department. I think we have been too lenient towards this kind of malign influence in the name of diplomats.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I absolutely agree.

Mr. Chan, in your opening statement you said that the government's response to these police stations was too timid and too slow. I think you have about 45 seconds, so I'll let you expand upon that.

Mr. Henry Chan: Yes. For anybody, and I think a lot of you would agree with me, it looks like it is against international law and Canadian law. Before we were even able to coordinate the petition that was presented this morning, the Netherlands and I think Sweden already shut them down. We were still investigating, investigating and investigating. I think it's still investigating right now.

The Chair: That's your time, Mr. Seeback. Thank you.

We'll go to Ms. Yip for five minutes or less.

Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Thank you for coming to our committee meeting. I know it's late, but I'm very thankful that you are both here with us today.

A recent CBC article references Mr. Juneau-Katsuya. He was the witness who was supposed to come but, unfortunately, had pressing family matters. It is about the intelligence reports that suggest the criminal triads Beijing used to intimidate pro-democracy demonstrators in Hong Kong were also present in Canada since 1998. How far back have you heard about the tactics of intimidation and political influence happening in Canada against the Chinese community?

I'll go to you first, Mr. Chan, and then to Ms. Fung.

• (2055)

Mr. Henry Chan: Well, because I've only been in Canada since 2008, I can't speak that far back. From my research, I've been seeing the CSIS reports. Even back to the late 1990s, it's been warning about foreign interference. I'll probably let other witnesses speak on this issue.

Ms. Gloria Fung: Yes, intimidation and harassment operated by the CCP have been occurring for decades. I came to Canada in 1989, right after the Tiananmen massacre. Ever since then, I have continued to get myself involved here in the pro-democracy movement. I always participate in rallies and marches. Dating back to 1990, every time that we stage our peaceful demonstrations, maybe in front of the Chinese consulate, there are people taking photos of us from a very close distance. This is very intimidating. They are

actually sending a strong signal to us: "We are watching you. We are taking pictures of you. You'd better watch."

Then, in recent years, they have stepped up the level and magnitude of intimidation and harassment. On August 17, 2019, when we were hosting a peaceful demonstration, hundreds of mainly Chinese students and also members of the United Front organization surrounded us, blocking our way from starting our peaceful march. When we sang the Canadian anthem, they sang the Chinese anthem. They even tried to grab our flags and attack us. They've become more and more aggressive in intimidating and also jeopardizing Canadians' right of freedom of expression.

Ms. Jean Yip: Thank you.

Is there a difference in how the various Chinese communities—mainland, Hong Kongers, Taiwanese—feel impacted by foreign interference, Mr. Chan?

Mr. Henry Chan: In terms of the different Chinese diaspora communities, I think they do all have a sense.... If they're against the government, essentially, there is a terror that they're going to be attacked by the regime somehow. That paints, I think, a terror on people's minds, that, "I dare not say this in public. I dare not say this even on Canadian soil." It is, I think, very problematic that they're not even able to express their own views, when they're out of the country, to criticize the regime. Whenever they criticize the regime, they feel that there is a threat of probably never being able to return back to their country or of their family's being affected if they have family there still.

Ms. Jean Yip: Ms. Fung.

Ms. Gloria Fung: Among the various diaspora communities you mentioned, the mainland Chinese community members are, by far, the most vulnerable members of our community. They have been subject to very serious threats, intimidation and harassment from the CCP.

It's mainly because the national security and also public safety departments of China will hold their family members back home as hostages, forcing them—

Ms. Jean Yip: I'm sorry to interrupt.

How can we encourage the—

• (2100)

The Chair: I'm sorry, Ms. Yip. You are out of time.

We'll go now to Mr. Trudel for two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Trudel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We are learning new things every day about how the Chinese government does things. There is interference in federal elections, and we have learned that there was interference in municipal elections. I talked about that earlier. We don't know, but there has probably been interference in provincial elections.

We know that the Chinese police stations are often welcome centres for immigrants where various assistance is offered to immigrants. The representative of the Fundacion Safeguard Defenders told us about this. They are given food, clothing, advice, legal assistance, and so on. Bit by bit, it morphs into a police station and a Chinese government intelligence centre.

Three weeks ago, during a meeting of this committee, I asked a representative of the RCMP whether that organization had intelligence to show that service centres helping the Chinese population in Brossard or Montreal were police stations. We are talking about the Chinese Family Service of Greater Montreal and the Centre Sino-Québec on the south shore, which are centres that provide assistance to the Chinese community in Montreal.

The representative of the RCMP said that that organization had no information to say that those centres were Chinese police stations. That was unequivocal, three weeks ago. One week ago, it appeared on page one of the *Journal de Montréal*. Not only are these both Chinese police stations, but the person who manages those two police stations is now a municipal councillor in Brossard. She was helped by the Chinese government, which posted messages on the WeChat platform. That is a bit troubling.

Mr. Chan or Ms. Fung, have you heard about there being Chinese police stations in Saskatchewan, and that candidates in municipal elections supported by China have been elected in your communities?

[English]

Ms. Gloria Fung: Maybe I can start first.

I have been observing and collecting data on foreign interference in elections at three levels of government over the last three decades. I have also served as a political commentator on this particular topic.

I have witnessed a growing level of interference from CCP over the last 30 years. Now they have not only interfered with municipal elections, but it has also occurred in provincial elections and then, last of all, at the federal level of elections. I don't want to go into all of the details, because I believe that the CSIS report or many of the media reports have already covered it.

However, based on our observation, the United Front organizations have been playing a very important role in channelling financial subsidies from the Chinese embassy or maybe directly from the United Front Work Department of China to their preferred candidates. I have seen banquets being filled with all of these people. They ask their individual members to donate to the preferred candidates in order to ensure their winnability. A number of years ago—

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt, ma'am.

We have to now move to Ms. McPherson for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much, Chair.

Ms. Fung, you just spoke a little bit about the fact that you've been investigating election interference over the past 30 years. As you know, there's a large focus right now in this country on the 2019 and the 2021 elections.

Would it be your opinion that we should be looking further back than that? Should we be looking at elections prior to those two, at the 2015 election and previous ones?

Ms. Gloria Fung: I would say the United Front organizations started to be established under the help and the guidance of the Chinese embassy beginning in the 1990s. Then, I think up to the year 2000, when they had developed a good enough number of United Front organizations—and also with the growing, critical mass of mainland Chinese Canadians in Canada—they started to become more and more aggressive in infiltrating the elections of the three levels of government.

There's a gradual evolution of the magnitude of infiltration and manipulation. It's the same with the intimidation and harassment.

I think now we have already reached a point that our democracy is actually being jeopardized and compromised. If our government doesn't take immediate action and take this matter seriously, it's very dangerous, because it will also ruin our relationship of trust with our democratic allies.

Remember, we are part of the Five Eyes allies. We are also very close partners with the U.S. If our country has become compromised—

• (2105)

Ms. Heather McPherson: I'm very sorry to interrupt you. I'm going to run out of time.

Very quickly, did you let prior governments know about your worries, your concerns, about interference?

Ms. Gloria Fung: We've been talking about this threat for decades.

In 2017 and 2020—

The Chair: Again, Madam, I'm going to have to interrupt.

Maybe you can give a yes or no answer to Ms. McPherson's question. Did you let previous governments know?

Ms. Gloria Fung: Yes.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

Now we will go to Mr. Kmiec for five minutes or less.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My first question is on the police stations the CCP has here in Canada through these four subnational governments. Do any of your community members actually use these police stations in any way, or do you know of any members who do go to them?

Mr. Henry Chan: I don't know of any.

Ms. Gloria Fung: No. I haven't heard of anybody who has gone to the police station to seek services. I think that the so-called provision of services is just a camouflage.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Okay. I'm guessing you and your community members, though, are on WeChat and Weibo. You probably have community members—

Ms. Gloria Fung: No.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Don't you use them at all on your personal devices?

Ms. Gloria Fung: I think among Hong Kong Canadians, we are very cautious. Very few of us will use WeChat or TikTok, etc., because we all know that the CCP is behind them. We don't want to be tracked down where we are, particularly after the imposition of the national security law.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Mr. Chan, is that the same experience for your community as well?

Mr. Henry Chan: Yes, in the Hong Kong community, very few people use those devices.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: For those who are on it, do they sometimes save a picture and send it to you or to community members? I've had people send me posters of CCP events that have been circulated now. Unfortunately, it's all in Chinese, so I can't read them. I ask others who can read them. These are all very recent events. They're being put on to talk about very specific things that are being pushed around and have a very specific political message intended in them. Do your community members share that, or do they censor themselves?

I'll let Mr. Chan go first and then I'll go to Ms. Fung.

Mr. Henry Chan: I think one thing they saw in using those applications is that a lot of the people who use those applications only speak Chinese. They could only get news or whatever from those sources. Another benefit they have is that people who do not speak Chinese cannot oversee those.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Ms. Fung.

Ms. Gloria Fung: Yes, because of the language barrier, the majority of mainland Chinese Canadians get the information from WeChat or maybe their free community newspaper, or even some of the social media platforms such as YorkBBS or QQ, etc. It's exactly this pattern that gives the opportunity to CCP to manipulate, and to spread disinformation campaigns very effectively. This is something our government also needs to pay attention to.

Apart from banning TikTok, how are we going to deal with WeChat? This also becomes a means of spreading this disinformation campaign in Canada.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: In your interactions with the police services in Canada—whether it's provincial, municipal or federal—do you think they have the necessary language and cultural skills to understand information they're obtaining from community members who are reporting things like intimidation, bullying and random protests at their workplace?

I had a priest come up to me in Vancouver and tell me that he had whom he believes was a CCP agent come during mass service, taking pictures of parishioners and then leaving. That's technically not a crime. He didn't interrupt the service; he just took pictures. How would they report that?

Do you have confidence that our police services have the language and cultural skills to understand what's going on?

• (2110)

Ms. Gloria Fung: I think it's not only confined to the limits of language—

Mr. Tom Kmiec: I'm sorry.

Mr. Chan, I'll go to you.

Ms. Gloria Fung: I'm sorry.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: It's tough with the virtual and in-person switching.

Mr. Henry Chan: Regarding the priest you talked about, I actually went with him to see his MP. I think it was Kerry-Lynne Findlay. She asked the question of the public safety minister, and, if I remember correctly, he said to talk to the RCMP. The RCMP said there was really nothing they could do and directed us back to Ottawa. We go to Ottawa and they tell us to go to the RCMP. It's a loop.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Okay.

Ms. Fung.

Ms. Gloria Fung: I had exactly the same experience. I think it reflects a few problems here.

One is that our enforcement departments, including the police and the RCMP, do not have the necessary expertise and knowledge about foreign interference. Therefore, we need to make sure they are being educated. There probably should at least be some kind of exchange or training workshop to bring up their level of understanding, so they know exactly what to do when they are being asked to investigate these police stations.

Two is that the language skills are very limited. The majority of them do not speak Mandarin, Cantonese nor Fujanese. That's why I asked for the enhancement of the capacity.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Mr. Ehsassi for five minutes or less.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Allow me to thank the two witnesses. This has been very helpful.

I find it very disturbing, Ms. Fung, that you have been harassed on Canadian soil. That is truly unacceptable.

Was I correct in understanding that you said previously that it was very difficult to file reports and they would constantly ask you for evidence, but since the integrated team at the RCMP was established, things have improved...I hope?

Ms. Gloria Fung: Yes, but it was also because we took the initiative to ask Global Affairs Canada to arrange for an RCMP integrated national security enforcement team to meet with us.

I raised concerns. I also challenged why, after we have been complaining and complaining for decades, not even a single agent has been charged or convicted. It shows how ineffective we have been in combatting foreign interference.

Now I think the situation has improved a bit. It's a good sign, but it's not enough yet.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: That's absolutely understood.

I've also heard people say that maybe there should be dedicated lines, so that the same officials are receiving complaints from members of their community. Would that be, in your opinion, an effective initiative?

Ms. Gloria Fung: I think that is a good idea. The same principle should also apply to CSIS.

I have been meeting with CSIS to advise them about foreign interference. From time to time, new people are sent to talk to me and every time I have to restart the education process. This is unacceptable.

For the RCMP, I think you have raised a very good point. If there are a few people who are dedicated, for instance, to liaison with the diaspora community, they can build up their expertise and knowledge.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Absolutely. That's understood. Thank you very much for that.

Now I will go to Mr. Chan, if I could.

With respect to the gentleman that you cited in your opening remarks who had been coerced, we've heard they sent pictures. In that particular case of the gentleman who was in Saskatchewan—because I really find this riveting—do you know what kind of coercion was used to ensure he would return to China?

● (2115)

Mr. Henry Chan: There were two tactics that I cited. One was constant phone call bombardment, just calling you and telling you awkward stuff, probably even in the middle of the night. The second one is sending you pictures of your extended family. In his case, he was in China; therefore, his family was in China.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: That's understood. Thank you.

Towards the end of your opening remarks, you said that, instead of being reactive, our government should be proactive. What did you mean by that? Could you elaborate on that?

Mr. Henry Chan: If I may use a quote for that, I think somebody once said that the Communist wakes up early in the morning to further their cause, so we must wake up even earlier.

Before they even intrude on our sovereignty, on our democracy, we have to find a policy to basically tell them that they can't do that, or even just a show of force that we are not weak on this and that we will take action if they attempt to interfere in our elections or our democratic institutions.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you.

I understand, MP Yip, that you wanted the last minute.

No, okay. That's fine.

I was wondering if I could also ask for your comments with respect to the press and media as well. Did that also influence elections or politicians, in your opinion?

Ms. Gloria Fung: Is that a question for me?

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: It's for both of you.

Ms. Gloria Fung: The Chinese language media have been playing a very important role in exerting influence over voters in our Canadian society. As I mentioned before, because of the language barrier, Chinese Canadian voters get their source of information mainly from the Chinese language media. However, the majority, I would say, of the free community newspapers are under either the direct or indirect control of the CCP, because I understand that they get funding from the Chinese embassy. Sometimes we would call that the “social stability maintenance fee”. They use it to control the narrative, the message, being sent out through these media.

The other is WeChat and social media platforms. I think it's about time for our government to not just pass a foreign influence registry but also to consider other measures to be taken to combat influence in other aspects, including the media, which is a very, very seriously infiltrated sector.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ehsassi.

That's your time.

We'll go now to Mr. Chong for five minutes or less.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you.

I would like to continue with Mr. Ehsassi's questioning about Chinese language media.

We've had such witnesses in front of this committee previously, even in the previous Parliament. Victor Ho, the former editor-in-chief of the Sing Tao Daily, has indicated a very similar view to Ms. Fung's here today, that a lot of Chinese language media in Canada has been co-opted by the PRC. It's also something that CSIS noted in its briefing and assessment to the Prime Minister in documents that it released to another committee of the House of Commons, the procedure and House affairs committee.

I want to ask you a question by highlighting an allegation that I heard in the fall of 2021 that I've looked up. I took note of it at the time. I want to know if you've heard of similar things going on in Chinese language media.

I heard allegations that hosts on a local radio station in Vancouver, AM 1320, were instructed not to interview a certain Conservative MP or even refer to or mention that Conservative MP's name on air. One host subsequently did interview this Conservative MP and was terminated. Another host simply mentioned this Conservative MP's name on air and had his broadcast hours reduced as a result. I found this to be a shocking allegation for a regulated broadcaster in Canada. I referred the matter to the appropriate authorities in the federal government.

I'm wondering if you have heard of similar kinds of examples of Chinese language media, particularly CRTC-regulated media that have public licences, having been co-opted by the PRC in such a way.

• (2120)

Ms. Gloria Fung: This kind of situation is not confined to the west coast. This is also happening on the east coast.

Radio stations, TV stations, have all been infiltrated, or from time to time the management staff will be summoned by the Chinese embassy for advice to them as to what they should report on, or whom they should avoid interviewing.

In 2019, there was instruction from the Chinese embassy advising lots of the Chinese-language media to reduce their coverage of Hong Kong-related news because there were too many supportive actions going on in Canada. I personally have been blacklisted by a Chinese language channel, Fairchild TV, here. One of the managers who has already left told their reporters and editors that I should not be interviewed by them.

It is a very concerning situation we are in because they either exercise self-censorship or they kowtow to the so-called “advice” from the Chinese embassy—maybe because they pay more attention to who pays for the ads, but that shouldn't be the case.

The CRTC has not done a good job either because many years ago the CRTC approved nine mainland Chinese TV station programs in Canada, allowing them to spread the communist ideology and pro-Beijing programs on Canadian soil, but we have never been allowed to have our Canadian program in China, so why should we continue to do so?

I think it's about time for us to evaluate all of these policies.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you.

Mr. Chan, did you want to add anything to that?

Mr. Henry Chan: Yes.

There was actually another case that's widely known about in the community. It was a pro-democracy.... She had a program on that, I think, and at one of the Vancouver radio stations this announcer played a song that was pro-Hong Kong democracy. Subsequently her schedule was reduced to one day a week. I think that is a case we heard about and it's widely known in the community.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

I believe the Liberal side has asked all of the questions it wishes to, so in the time remaining we will give half of it to Mr. Trudel and the other half to Ms. McPherson.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel: How much time do I have, Mr. Chair?

[*English*]

The Chair: You will have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Denis Trudel: Okay, two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Fung, earlier, you talked about a very interesting subject, election interference. You say that you have been following what goes on at the municipal, provincial and federal levels.

In the House of Commons, as in the leading Canadian media, possible interference by China in the Canadian electoral process came as an electric shock. That was actually an important statement. You show how commonplace it is when you say you have been observing it for 30 years and you have seen others.

You seem to be saying that you know which municipal or provincial candidates have received assistance from China.

Can you tell us more about that?

[*English*]

Ms. Gloria Fung: Yes.

Even before I came to Canada—

Is the sound system not working?

The Chair: It's fine.

We can hear you well.

Ms. Gloria Fung: Okay.

Over the past few decades, I have witnessed the evolution of China's infiltration in elections. They have changed from a more reactive strategy to the current, very arrogant and active strategy of sending their own people to run for office, including some underground party members.

They have also broken a lot of Elections Canada rules and regulations, in order to provide donations from abroad. When we tracked down some of these donations a couple of years ago, before Elections Canada changed its rules and regulations, they came with decimal points. Why was that? It was because the donations were made in foreign currency. When transferred here, the amounts had decimal points. Apart from that, so-called volunteers—they were actually paid—were sent to help with their preferred candidates' election campaigns. I think some of the names have been disclosed recently, as part of the 11 MPs' names. They also got assistance from the embassy, through the United Front organization.

It is not confined to that. There are other tactics being deployed by the pro-Beijing camp and strong advocates who are very close to the Chinese embassy. I understand they have been using the “anti-Chinese racism” narrative to silence people who are critical of Beijing policies.

• (2125)

The Chair: Ms. Fung, we have to interrupt, now, to give the last two and a half minutes to Ms. McPherson.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Two and a half minutes is not very long, but thank you, Mr. Chair.

I also thank both witnesses.

As the last person asking questions, I will pass it back to both of you.

Ms. Fung, could you tell us the final message you'd like to give this committee on how Canada should deal with these police stations and with the foreign interference writ large in our elections? Could you give us a broad sense of that?

You have about a minute.

Ms. Gloria Fung: Canada has been under a very serious challenge from foreign interference. It's about time for our government, and all federal parties, to take this matter very seriously. What we need is immediate action to combat foreign interference instead of “forever” consultation. We cannot wait. Time is not on our side, particularly in terms of foreign interference in elections. We need to pass a foreign influence registry as soon as possible—hopefully, before the next election is called. We can then, at least, subject some of these agents and entities to sunlight, so our government, bureaucrats and elected members know exactly whom they are dealing with. It would also offer reference information for the RCMP to hold these people accountable.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Go ahead, Mr. Chan.

Mr. Henry Chan: In response to Mr. Trudel's earlier, question, when he asked me what's happening in Saskatchewan, one thing I want to put on record is that the Confucius Institute at the University of Saskatchewan is still there. I think a lot of people know that the Confucius Institute has been referenced by CSIS, the FBI and MI6 as a potential threat for espionage and academic espionage on campuses. That's what I want to say.

I also think, at the end of the day, that it goes back to my message from before: be proactive instead of reactive.

The Chair: Thanks very much to our two witnesses.

I would like to report something that was told to another committee by the acting commissioner of the RCMP: Apparently, acting on solid evidence, the RCMP put cruisers outside of these “police stations” in Vancouver and Toronto. That led to their being shut down. There was, in fact, some deviant work going on there.

We've also heard, especially from our two witnesses right now, many comments about things that are going on. The committee might value it if you were to follow up with written material naming names. We seem to be shooting at ghosts here, because there's an insinuation or a suggestion that this or that happened. It would be very useful to us to get some specifics, which we can turn over to the authorities, if necessary.

In any event, it is time to wrap it up for this evening.

I'd like to thank our two witnesses, our interpreters, technicians, analysts, our clerk and our staff who are here with us tonight. Thank you all for your time. It was a great session.

The meeting is adjourned.

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