



House of Commons
CANADA

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

SDEV • NUMBER 005 • 1st SESSION • 38th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, December 2, 2004

—
Chair

The Honourable David Kilgour

All parliamentary publications are available on the
"Parliamentary Internet Parlementaire" at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

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

Thursday, December 2, 2004

• (0900)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. David Kilgour (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, Lib.)): Colleagues, we're delighted to welcome Madame Brunelle, la députée de Trois-Rivières.

You all know this, but I'd like to read you something that I believe is correct, just to start: The 20th century was undoubtedly the worst in history in terms of violence directed at believers of all faiths. It has been suggested that more —of one faith. I don't want to be religion-specific at the moment— were killed in the last century than in the previous 19 centuries combined.

One estimate of the number of human beings of all nationalities who died prematurely for their faith between 1900 and 2000 is a dismaying 169 million,

[Translation]

including 70 million Muslims; 35 million Christians;

[English]

11 million Hindus; 9 million Jews; 4 million Buddhists; 2 million Sikhs and 1 million Baha'is.

We're delighted that everybody has been able to come this morning.

Mr. Broadbent.

Hon. Ed Broadbent (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Chairman, I'm sorry to interrupt you at this stage, but I am not familiar with those figures. I don't know what the source is, but I'd appreciate getting a copy of that.

The Chair: Actually, it's an article I wrote, but I didn't want to cite myself.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Well, Mr. Chairman, especially if it was written by you, if you could at least send me a copy of it, I would be most appreciative.

Mr. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): I would also like to have a copy, please.

The Chair: Okay. Magdalene, I hope you heard that.

Thank you for your kind thoughts.

Who would like to go first? You all understand you have about five minutes each,

[Translation]

because we have many witnesses this morning.

[English]

Would you like to start, Mr. Tenzin, on behalf of the Tibetans? Would that be acceptable? Yes.

Mr. Tenzin Dargyal (National Coordinator, National Office, Canada-Tibet Committee): Bonjour.

On behalf of the Canada-Tibet Committee, the Tibetan community of Canada, and the millions of Canadian supporters of the cause of Tibet, especially the supporters of the message of peace and non-violence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, I'd like to say a warm *tashi delek*. That's welcome in Tibetan.

I thank you for the opportunity to present again before this committee today. It's been really an incredible year for our Tibetan community and our supporters across Canada. The visit of His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, this April in Canada clearly proved to our tiny community that Canadians really do care about Tibet.

A clear majority of the Parliament of Canada also took action then in support of an active Canadian role in the peaceful resolution of Tibet. The visit generated an overwhelming amount of sympathy and goodwill. But today, more than nine months after the visit, despite the clear message sent by the Canadian public and the Canadian Parliament, we continue to struggle to get concrete actions from the Government of Canada.

This is especially the case in the area of religious persecution. In 1971, the Government of Canada took perhaps its first constructive action when it welcomed Tibetan refugee families from India who had escaped the Chinese persecution in occupied Tibet. That included my parents, and as a direct result of that Canadian action more than 30 years ago, I, a Canadian Tibetan, born and raised in *la belle province de Québec*, am here today speaking before this committee.

To this day, hundreds of Tibetans continue to escape by foot, as my parents did in 1959, because of the continued oppression in Tibet. Religious persecution is one of the harshest realities.

Religion, or most specifically Tibetan Buddhism, is the core of everything that is Tibetan. It defines our culture, our arts, and even our music. It's the very foundation of every Tibetan's life. Simply put, Buddhism is our way of life for Tibetans.

The Government of China knows this very well. As such, they are strategically targeting every aspect of Tibetan religion. Since the illegal occupation of Tibet in 1949, China has destroyed more than 5,000 Tibetan monasteries. They've imprisoned, tortured, or killed countless numbers of defenceless monks and nuns. Even the simple possession of a picture of the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhist practitioners around the world is a state crime.

• (0905)

The Chair: Let the record show you're holding up a photograph of the Dalai Lama.

Mr. Tenzin Dargyal: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We'd just like to point out that the issue of religious persecution in occupied Tibet has been well documented by this committee in previous sessions. The Canada Tibet Committee, along with other organizations, including Amnesty International, Rights and Democracy, and Freedom Now, made presentations to the committee on May 5 and May 12, 2004.

So to continue to build on the work we achieved together in the last session, we'd like to request that the evidence we provided on those two dates be in the official appendix of today's evidence in the report to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Commons.

[Translation]

The Chair: Agreed.

[English]

Mr. Tenzin Dargyal: Also, for the Canadian public's interest, we'd request that the evidence of May 5 and May 12 be available on the parliamentary public website, as it is not available today.

The Chair: Will a member move to do that as well? Agreed.

Mr. Tenzin Dargyal: Thank you.

Today Tibetan Buddhism continues to be practised in a state of fear instead of a state of faith. This is despite the protection of religious freedoms that is guaranteed in the Chinese constitution. Perhaps the most urgent of these religious persecution cases is that of Tenzin Delek Rinpoche. He is a highly respected Tibetan Buddhist monk and a community leader in eastern Tibet. Today, December 2, marks the end of a two-year suspension on his death sentence. He could be executed any day now by the Chinese government for an alleged crime that is not even supported by credible evidence. He did not receive a fair trial, he did not receive an open trial, and it's widely believed he is being targeted because of his support for the Dalai Lama and his activities to promote and teach Tibetan language, culture, and religion.

So based on this immediate urgency, we call upon the Government of Canada to take direct intervention in the case of Tenzin Delek Rinpoche. He deserves to be either simply released or given a fair and open trial.

We also feel it's very important to remind this committee and the people of Canada that the hopes for betterment of the Tibetan people lie heavily with the goal of a negotiated solution on the overall issue of Tibet with representatives of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in China. So we, the Canada-Tibet Committee, as well as the Tibetans in Canada, feel that Canada is truly in a unique position, based on a

friendship with China, a relationship such as China has with no other country among the western nations. Canada can take action and serve as an honest broker to help realize these negotiations on the issue of Tibet.

Mr. Chairman, I've been advised that Mr. Broadbent, who is a long-time friend of Tibet and was part of His Holiness's visit to Ottawa, would like to table a motion. If so, I'd like to invite him to do so during the time allocated to my presentation.

• (0910)

The Chair: Does Mr. Broadbent wish to do that?

Hon. Ed Broadbent: It would give me a great deal of pleasure. I've had the motion circulated, because I don't want to use too much time. There are other presenters coming. Subject to your wishes, Mr. Chairman, I can just read the motion out or...

The Chair: We need to have unanimous consent.

[Translation]

The interpreters will translate it.

An hon. member: I already have it in French.

The Chair: Okay.

[English]

So would you read the motion?

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Yes. Thank you.

It is that the subcommittee, pursuant to evidence presented on December 2, 2004, in relation to its study on religious persecution in Tibet, and the goodwill generated by the visit of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to Ottawa last April, call upon the Government of Canada to use its friendly relations with China to urge it to enter into meaningful negotiations, without preconditions, with representatives of His Holiness the Dalai Lama to peacefully resolve the issue of Tibet.

The Chair: Is there unanimous consent?

Mr. Navdeep Bains: There is just one very small question. We discussed this in private, but I'd like him to clarify, if possible, the language used here. It indicates "without preconditions". What is the intent behind that?

The Chair: Mr. Dargyal.

Mr. Tenzin Dargyal: His Holiness's position is very simple. He's saying, let's focus on the future and forget about the past. Unfortunately, the Government of China has requested that His Holiness recognize that Taiwan and Tibet have always been a part of China. We believe, in the spirit of reconciliation and dialogue, there should be no obstacles and we should just come to the negotiation table and talk. That's what we mean by "without preconditions".

The Chair: Mr. Broadbent.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: That's perfect. Thank you.

The Chair: Would you like to move it?

Hon. Ed Broadbent: I so move, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Okay.

[Translation]

Is there unanimous consent?

(The motion is adopted)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[English]

Are you finished, Mr. Dargyal?

Mr. Tenzin Dargyal: I'm just closing.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Tenzin Dargyal: In closing, I'd like to quote from a great western nation renowned for its peacekeeping. This quote captures the spirit of what His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan people are hoping for in their request for the peaceful resolution of the issue of Tibet:

We believe that nations must accept their responsibility to protect their own citizens from ethnic violence and humanitarian catastrophes. If they fail or choose not to do so, the international community has a responsibility to find new and relevant ways to together act decisively and swiftly in times of crisis. For this reason, Canada is pushing for a new multilateralism, an initiative that will ultimately enable all nations to enjoy greater security in a more peaceful world.

This statement was made in Halifax by the Honourable Paul Martin, Prime Minister of Canada, just yesterday morning.

Tibet is now in its time of crisis. A nation, a culture, a people are dying. The international community widely agrees on the humanitarian and religious catastrophe happening in Tibet. There have been few movements and people more synonymous with the notion of peace than the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan people. Tibet does not need any more sympathy, it needs your swift and decisive action. The cause of Tibet must see concrete action from Canada. We are requesting a complete review of Canada's policies and actions on the issue of Tibet. It is Canada's responsibility to take action and ensure that peaceful movements prevail, not only for the Tibetan people, but for our hopes to end war and terrorism, also for our hopes for a more peaceful and secure world.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Perhaps Suzanne Tamas would like to be the next witness. I know you've had a great deal of experience with the Madras process and so on. Would you like to speak next?

Ms. Suzanne Tamas (Director, Office of Governmental Relations, Bahá'í Community of Canada): Good morning to the honoured members of the subcommittee. I apologize for my tardy arrival.

Thank you very much for inviting me to come to speak to you on the topic of the persecution of people of faith. I thought it might be helpful to begin by reviewing the international measures in place that protect freedom of religion and belief, because it is our efforts to have those applied and the need to do more work in that area that result in persecution continuing.

The right to freedom of religion and belief is protected in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in article 18. Under article 18, people are protected in terms of having their own faith, worshipping according to their faith, teaching their faith, publishing

materials of their faith, and abiding in peace in a larger community. Article 18 was embedded in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, in articles 18, 26, and 27, where the right to freedom of religion and belief was further elaborated. The right to freedom of religion and belief is also protected in article 14 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and then in 1981, with the adoption of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.

The General Assembly of the United Nations and the Commission on Human Rights adopt, each year, resolutions on the elimination of discrimination on the basis of religion and belief. The Human Rights Committee, a treaty monitoring body, calls states to account every five years for their human rights activities. One of the things it checks on is the extent to which the right to freedom of religion and belief is enjoyed or to which persecution takes place in the particular state.

The Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, appointed by the Commission on Human Rights, reports every year on the state of religion and belief in countries around the world, receives complaints on individuals' rights to government, and expresses his concerns. In his summing up of his 11 years of service last year at the Commission on Human Rights, he said it's not enough, that the level of persecution is really concerning, that religious intolerance seems to be on the rise, and that states have yet to do enough to protect people from persecution and to prosecute those who persecute. He basically called on states to take this obligation really seriously. To the extent that we don't, we suffer around the world the consequences of religious persecution in form of instability, insecurity, and the lack of prosperity.

So it's not simply a question of how it's nice to have religion and belief as a right; in fact it's a prerequisite to an ordered society. The attitudes of discrimination and intolerance that express themselves in religious persecution are the same attitudes that result in the inequality of women and the abuse of people of different ethnicities, and they need to be addressed.

I'd like to take a minute to offer to you the experience of the Bahá'í community in two countries, Iran and Egypt. There are 300,000 Bahá'ís in Iran, which is the birthplace of the Bahá'í faith. They are part of a world community of more than five million believers who come from 211,000 ethnic and tribal groups living in 116,000 localities in 188 independent countries. They were recognized by the Department of Public Information at the UN in 1948 as an international NGO with consultative status at ECOSOC, consultative status with UNICEF, and a long track record of cooperative, society-building interaction with international and national organizations and government.

The persecution of the Bahá'ís in Iran is only carried out because of their religion. There is no compounding factor of ethnicity, language, or race—nothing. It is purely a question of religious intolerance. There's no antisocial behaviour. In fact, Bahá'ís are called upon by the teachings of their faith to be obedient to their government and loyal to it, so there is no threat. Nonetheless, since its inception, Bahá'ís in Iran have faced persecution, particularly since the Islamic revolution in 1979.

●(0915)

In the beginning, there were massive executions and incarcerations, confiscations of property, and denials of passports. When the international community reacted, the form of persecution was mitigated somewhat, but it continues, and the objective remains the eradication of the Bahá'í community in Iran. Recently, then, we've seen a confiscation and destruction of Bahá'í sacred places—places sacred to the Bahá'í community around the world.

Since the revolution, academically qualified Bahá'ís have not been able to attend university because the national entrance exam application form requires that you state your religion. If a Bahá'í puts down “Bahá'í”, they're not admitted. If they leave it blank, they're not admitted to the exam. This year, in the face of international pressure from several UN bodies, the Iranian government announced that it would remove the requirement to state religion on the application form. More than 800 Bahá'í students applied and wrote the exam. One of them had the highest mark in the country, but when the students got their exam results, the cards said Muslim, Islam. They are not Muslim. They love Islam, they revere Muhammad, but they are Bahá'í. When they protested, the officials asked 10 of them to come to talk to them. When those Bahá'ís came, the officials said they would take Islam off and give them a card without religion. When they asked about the 790 others, the officials said they couldn't do that. So the Bahá'í students in Iran with high entrance exam marks are barred from the university.

Bahá'ís can't get employment in many fields in Iran, particularly in the public sector. They can't bury their dead in marked graves. They have no rights of inheritance. Before the courts, they are judged against and the court documents unabashedly say it's because they are members of a wayward sect.

In Egypt there was a thriving but small Bahá'í community until 1960, when Nasser adopted presidential decree 263, disbanding Bahá'í institutions, confiscating all of their properties and funds and outlawing any of the activities undertaken by those institutions. Now the Bahá'í faith has no clergy. We elect by secret ballot, without any nomination process, people at the local, national, and international level to serve our community. Without the ability to organize themselves, Bahá'ís are deprived of their spiritual leadership and their administrative leadership, and that is the case in Egypt.

Currently their situation is very grave, because Egypt has decided to computerize all of its identity cards. That makes sense. Whereas in the past Bahá'ís could put a stroke through the space for religion and sometimes an official would even let them write Bahá'í, they are now told that they must either be declared Christian, Muslim, or Jewish, the three recognized religions, or they don't get an identity card. For us, that makes no difference. We don't need ID cards for every transaction that we do. But in Egypt, if you want to go to a government hospital, if you want to draw a pension, if you want to go to the bank, all of the normal civic things that you might want to do and services you might want to access, you can't without an identity card.

Canada's Department of Foreign Affairs has been eminently helpful and very accessible, and we keep them apprised of things as they develop. But more is needed. What I'd like to suggest humbly is that this international policy review that is underway provides a

wonderful opportunity to take a good look at the extent to which Canada is actively pursuing the need to promote freedom of religion and belief. If we can promote freedom of religion and belief; if we can do what all the countries of the world agreed to do in Madrid in 2001, when they celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the declaration on the elimination of religious discrimination; if we can educate school children for religious tolerance; if we can change attitudes; if we can sponsor inter-religious dialogue that is substantive and that results in people respecting each other and accepting their differences of theology and cooperating in society, then Canada will have made a signal contribution to the world community. It's an urgent need. The consequences of religious intolerance and persecution go way beyond the particular religious community that is facing persecution.

I appreciate very much the opportunity to raise this matter with you, and I thank you for your time and for listening.

●(0920)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Tamas. Would you like one of the members to move that the committee recommend to the government that they look at this issue you've just raised?

Ms. Suzanne Tamas: Yes.

The Chair: Our ever-helpful researcher is just putting your words into a motion. Perhaps we can come back to it.

Ms. Suzanne Tamas: Thank you.

I brought background material for the committee members and research packages for your researcher and clerk.

The Chair: Thank you.

Time is going to be so short, so we'll go to the next speaker and come back to your motion, if that's acceptable.

Grace, would you like to be next? Grace Wollensak and Joel Chipkar, the two of you.

●(0925)

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Mr. Chairman, is there going to be any time at all to be able to ask any questions?

The Chair: Of course, I'm afraid if we don't get everyone through, then we'll run out of time. Can we question everybody at the end?

An hon. member: Sure.

The Chair: Next, on behalf of Falun Gong....

Again, to make a note, we have heard from you earlier. Perhaps you'd like to move, as Mr. Dargyal moved, that your previous testimony be part of this, as well.

Would somebody move that on your behalf, since you're not allowed to move? Would you move that, Mr. Bains?

Mr. Navdeep Bains: Yes, I so move.

The Chair: So moved.

(Motion agreed to)

Ms. Grace Wollensak (National Coordinator, Falun Dafa Association of Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, honourable members of the Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Development, and observers.

Could you please take a look at the pictures over there? We have the visual presentation over there, with some pictures.

This lady's name is Gao Rongrong, and she is 36 years old. She was arrested for her belief in Falun Gong and sent to the Longshan Forced Labor Camp in Liaoning province. On March 22, 2004, Ms. Gao was tortured with electric batons for six to seven hours at a labour camp, leaving her face charred and disfigured.

The next picture is of 32-year-old, Ms. Zhu Xia, who was detained in a brainwashing centre in Xinjin County, Sichuan province. She was repeatedly raped and humiliated during her detention, until she went completely insane. On April 2, 2004, she was released, but she was not the same person as when the police took her away. She often banged on doors and windows madly; she could not take care of herself anymore, was soiling her clothing uncontrollably, and even when at home at night she would often throw her arms around her head defensively, screaming, "Are you going to rape me?"

The next photo is of Ms. Wu Lingxia, 37 years old, shown with her son. She was later tortured to death by police.

All this happened in China because of the systematic state-sanctioned persecution of Falun Gong.

The books I am holding in my hands, a United Nations report, and reports from Amnesty International and other human rights organizations, or NGOs, are cases representing less than 1% of the reported cases, as posted already on the Internet. These cases include deaths; violence against women; psychiatric abuse; brainwashing; arbitrary arrest and detention; and torture, including rape, forced abortions, electric shock, freezing, burning, forced feeding, suffocation, and drug injections. The back of this UN report details, with pictures, many of the torture methods used currently in China against Falun Gong practitioners.

Mr. Joel Chipkar (Media Contact Person, Falun Dafa Association of Canada): For those of you who don't know about Falun Gong, it's a profound spiritual discipline that focuses on the principles of truthfulness, compassion, and tolerance, with the goal of cultivating mind, body, and spirit in order to assimilate to the principles and ascend back to our original true self, what western religions call heaven. Falun Gong has a very strong belief in the divine.

In 1992, Falun Gong debuted into China and was respected, supported, and awarded by the Chinese government. People from all levels of society and all walks of life inside China were practising Falun Gong until 1999, when a government survey showed that over 100 million people were practising Falun Gong inside China. Falun Gong was not governed by the Chinese government. Because of

insecurity and jealousy, the former president of China, Jiang Zemin, then issued a massive crackdown on Falun Gong.

In August 2001, *The Washington Post* published an article called "Torture Is Breaking Falun Gong: China Systematically Eradicating Group", targeting the number one weapon being used to eliminate Falun Gong, which is hate propaganda—just like every other genocide in history. In the first six months alone, inside and outside China, an estimated 300,000 attack articles were published, framing Falun Gong practitioners as mass murders, serial killers, suicide prone, and insane.

In March 2004, a *National Post* article here in Canada reported large-scale "hate mongering" by Chinese officials happening right here in Canada. I personally sued the vice-consul general of China here for defaming me in a local newspaper. Incidentally, I won the case; however, the hate still continues here in Canada.

● (0930)

Ms. Grace Wollensak: Jiang Zemin has stated that he will use all measures necessary to eliminate Falun Gong. Over the past five years, the persecution of Falun Gong and its associated hate campaign has deeply and systematically penetrated all corners of Chinese society. All levels of government and the police have engaged in the elimination of Falun Gong practitioners, or they would face losing their own positions.

The entire legal system is manipulated. Lawyers and judges are ordered to not defend but to criminalize Falun Gong practitioners. The entire education system forces students, from kindergarten to university, to condemn Falun Gong or face expulsion. State and private workplaces persecute the practitioners on the spot. They fire them from jobs, take away their housing, or send them to brainwashing classes. Citizens are rewarded for spying on and reporting on Falun Gong practitioners.

Mr. Lizhi He, who's sitting back there, was renowned in China. He suffered for three and a half years in Chinese prison for sending letters to his colleagues about Falun Gong. He was almost tortured to death. He experienced slave labour, electric shock torture, intense brainwashing, and mental torment. Amnesty International Canada considered him a prisoner of conscience and called for an urgent action campaign for his release.

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation has stated that "Falun Gong practitioners make up close to half the number of Chinese people being held in labour camps, a process that requires no legal or judicial ruling". There are more being held in detention centres, psychiatric hospitals, and other places of imprisonment across China.

Mr. Lizhi He is only one of 120 victims now living in Canada. The little girl in this photo is named Rongrong. She's the niece of a Canadian citizen. Her father was tortured to death in Wangcun labour camp. Her mother was abducted by police three years ago and has been missing since. She was only one of the hundreds of children, as documented in this NGO report, who suffered directly from this persecution. Rongrong's family is just one of the millions of families who have suffered in this campaign of crimes against humanity in China.

Ms. Wang Lixuan and her eight-month-old boy were kidnapped by police. Both were tortured to death. Bruises on the baby's ankles showed that he was hung upside down and beaten on the head.

In October alone, there were 42 deaths reported. Experts estimate that the current verified death toll of 1,140 is nothing compared with the actual number of deaths. We know that a majority of the brutal cases remain unreported, as the Chinese regime imposed an information block and cover-up. Anyone revealing these cases will be charged with the severe crime of "leaking state secrets". As documented by an NGO in one of their reports, 108 practitioners have been sentenced to prison for up to 12 years for using the Internet to accept and send Falun Gong information. Three of them have been tortured to death.

Mr. Joel Chipkar: We appreciate this opportunity to present our case in this short time. We would like to request a formal independent hearing on the persecution of Falun Gong due to its severity and extensiveness.

We also hope that the subcommittee will pass a motion to condemn the persecution of Falun Dafa in China, including the harassment and hate incitement being extended here into Canada, similar to the U.S. concurrent resolutions 188 and 304, which were unanimously passed in the U.S. Congress.

The Chinese Communist regime has tried extensively to silence governments and media by pressure and threats of loss of trade and business, and they have been very successful. We hope we have raised the awareness of everyone here today so that you will take action to break the silence and help stop these atrocities from happening.

Thank you.

• (0935)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll move to Janet Buckingham....

Do you wish to go now, sir? All right. I don't think there's any particular order we have to go in.

On behalf of the World Sikh Organization, Mr. Sahota.

Mr. Ajit Singh Sahota (President, World Sikh Organization): My name is Ajit Singh Sahota. I am president of the World Sikh Organization. This is my twentieth year of coming to this room on behalf of the organization, bringing in issues of human rights activists from India who have long been tortured, killed, disappeared. They're no longer there, but their struggle continues.

But I'm going to speak on a different matter today that affects us very much. I will use some quotes here.

Morality is religion in practice. Religion is morality in principle. Religious freedom is a right, not a privilege.

[Translation]

Religious freedom is a right, not a privilege.

[English]

A great writer, Ralph Waldo Emerson, said, "The truth, the hope of any time, must always be sought in minorities."

[Translation]

The truth, the hope must at all times be sought in the minorities.

[English]

Treatment of its minorities is the best measure of any democracy.

Honourable Chairman, Dr. Kilgour, honourable members of Parliament and fellow guests, I am very pleased to see so many warm and familiar faces and I'm grateful for this opportunity to reconnect with you to discuss important issues on human rights, religious persecution, and international trade and development.

There are many factors that determine Canadian responses to specific situations of need, hardship, oppression, and genocide around the world. Where diplomacy, policy, or science fail in preventing or alleviating widespread human suffering, Canada is typically among the first countries to step forward and offer assistance.

Sometimes Canada's genuinely noble efforts have provoked more fear, poverty, and oppression than we hoped to relieve. Canadians from all ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds are frustrated that their experiences of the world are not reflected in the foreign policy decisions that Canada makes.

Sikhs are not confident that Canada's direct support for development of foreign democratic institutions and practices is researched thoroughly or sufficiently. We know that Canadians would be outraged to know that documented human rights abusers who have consistently evaded legal and administrative accountability for atrocities committed against humanity in India have been awarded development assistance from the Canadian government.

As many of you already know, the Sikh religion enshrined in scripture a commitment to peace, equality, and justice 500 years before the International Declaration of Human Rights. Sikhs believe that all governments have not only an obligation but also a duty to remain the guarantor of freedoms. Sikhs continue to protect the rights of all faiths by promoting an inclusive and egalitarian definition of secularism.

In France and Quebec, Sikhs and Muslims find themselves in the unenviable position of having to educate and re-educate generations of their compatriots. Returning time and time again to the highest courtrooms in nations around the world, Sikhs strive to ensure that all religious practice is not only equally recognized and tolerated but also accepted and understood.

In France Sikhs are in a position where they have no means of redress left to pursue their rights at either the European Commission on Human Rights or the International Court, though legal professionals have prophesied little chance of successfully repealing the religious headgear ban once enacted. The French dispute continues unabated as turbaned Sikhs and even Christian nuns face equal persecution from the impending religious headgear ban. While the problems in France are not unique, they are symptomatic of generations of misinformation, fear, and ignorance.

● (0940)

A turban is not a symbol. A symbol is defined as “something that represents or stands for something else, usually by convention or association, especially a material object used to represent something abstract”. The Sikh dastar or Muslim hijab are similar. Asking a Sikh to remove his dastar is like asking a Christian to suspend communion or a Jew to give up the practice of Shabbat. It is equal, then, to asking any person of faith to remove their senses, their mindfulness, their whole identity.

Despite an exceptional history of non-violence, Sikhs have, without cause, become suspect. We can no longer travel on planes, trains, or boats with our religious identity intact, though we have committed no crime. Truck drivers describe to me how they are racially profiled and harassed at border crossings as “security procedures” continue to impede the free flow of ideas, ideologies, and trade. Children speak to me of the burden of enduring an extremely hostile environment at school, on the buses, even in the privacy of their own living rooms.

A good friend of mine once told me a story of a cartoon he saw that depicted the first colonization of the moon. He was amused to note that even when the first lunar colonists touched down they were surprised to be greeted by a Sikh taxi driver.

Yet the ubiquitous and visibly distinctive Sikhs are still asked to remove their articles of faith on official photographs for passports and driver's licences in many countries around the world, presumably in an attempt to make us more recognizable. Perhaps like France, Germany, Belgium, and Quebec, they seek for us an identity that is actually less distinct and therefore more recognizable. It simply doesn't make sense.

Canada has an obligation to provide leadership toward inclusive secularism. With our friends in nations all over the world we can demonstrate the same leadership as Sikh gurus when we recognize that all humanity is one.

I have listed some recommendations here, but I want to say that the other day I was talking to the ambassador of Turkey. They are trying to get membership in the European Union, and they are required to sign and ratify 16 human rights instruments before they can be admitted. They have done so, I guess. But France was a founding member of that European Union and formulated those human rights instruments, and strangely enough, they are violating the very principles they want other people to sign and ratify. This is very sad.

Our own Prime Minister, Paul Martin, just the other day wrote us a very nice letter. He said:

The task of ensuring that ours is an open society where people of all faiths and nationalities can come together and celebrate diversity is a responsibility shared by all Canadians. To that end, it is through the resolve of groups such as the World Sikh Organization that our core values, such as freedom of expression, and respect for human rights and diversity, are upheld and strengthened.

I would like to make a big recommendation, that when foreign countries are given any aid, it must be tied to human rights issues. Bill C-36 affects all of the legislation in many spheres. The other day we were talking to the justice committee. It's very strange that they're targeting charities that have sent funds overseas to a hospital where some terrorists were treated or something. And here our government is giving money to the states that are terrorizing their own people with torture and killing.

I'm sure, Dr. Kilgour, Mr. Broadbent, and Mr. Day, you already know many of the things that have happened in India. Now we are faced with a grave situation in France, where we don't find any solution.

Thank you for listening.

● (0945)

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

Would you like to file those recommendations with the committee as well, the ones you have on your sheet?

Mr. Ajit Singh Sahota: They are right here in the handout we gave.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to get a recommendation from every group, I think, this morning.

Mr. Bains, would you—or somebody else—like to incorporate the recommendation about tying aid to religious freedom?

We'll go on, then, because I know time's going to be short.

Mr. Bhatti, will you go next, please.

Mr. Peter Bhatti (Christian Liberation Front Canada): I am very thankful to the honourable chairman and the foreign affairs committee for giving me the privilege to talk about the Christians of Pakistan. CLF is the Christian Liberation Front and was founded in Pakistan in 1985, and in Canada in 2001. It is also a sister organization of the All Pakistan Minorities Alliance, and Mr. Shahbaz Bhatti is the founder of the Christian Liberation Front and the All Pakistan Minorities Alliance. The All Pakistan Minorities Alliance is the leading organization against religious intolerance and persecution for the Pakistani community.

The Christian community, since the inception of Pakistan, has always contributed toward the well-being, prosperity, security, and solidarity of their motherland. In the creation of Pakistan, the Christian leadership of those times voted in favour of Christians in Pakistan.

In the fields of education, health, and defence, the Christian community has contributed more than others. Christians are serving with all their soul and heart in all walks of life.

But in return, the Christians are being discriminated against both constitutionally and religiously. The statutory laws, articles, sections, and special amendments, such as the blasphemy laws, laws of evidence, and other discriminations, are incorporated into the constitution of Pakistan from time to time by the fanatic rulers—particularly in the martial law regime of General Zia Ul haq—which have downgraded the Christians, outcasts, and second-grade citizens of Pakistan. Due to constitutional and institutionalized discriminations, the Christians of Pakistan suffer many injustices. The basic rights of men and women belonging to religious minorities many times are infringed by the public authority only because they hold different faiths and creeds in the Muslim-dominated society. Due to religious discrimination, social subjugation, and economic deprivation, our people remain less privileged and have been forced to bear their phenomena since the creation of Pakistan.

The above-stated discriminatory laws have made the lives of Christians miserable. Many innocent Christians lost their lives when Islamic fanatics labelled them as blasphemers. Most of the cases under blasphemy laws were fabricated and registers against Christians due to religious discrimination.

Christian women and children have been kidnapped and brutally raped by Islamic fanatics. The misuse of these laws has created a situation of fear among Christians, and any individuals in the minority community are labelled as blasphemers and infidels. The minimum penalty for a blasphemer is death.

After 9/11, fundamentalist religious groups in Pakistan made the lives of Christians miserable through frequent attacks on churches, schools, hospitals, and other institutions.

We appeal to the human rights and international development committee, considering that Canada is a champion of human rights at the United Nations as well as in our own country. We would like to request the government to protect the basic human rights of the suffering religious minorities in Pakistan. As Pakistani Canadians, we would like to put forth the following recommendations.

First, abolish the blasphemy law and other laws that discriminate against religious minorities. These laws have no place in a pluralistic society and only serve to create tension among the various elements of society.

Protect the lives and properties of Pakistani Christians by taking meaningful immediate steps.

Constitute a judicial commission to review the cases of those Christians facing trial and are in jails on the basis of false acquisitions under the blasphemy laws, and take steps for their immediate release. The commission should also consult with the Christian and other impartial minority leaders.

• (0950)

Arrest and punish all those who are involved in attacking and killing Christians—raping, kidnapping, and torturing Christian women.

Ensure the safety and protection of minority leaders in Pakistan who are struggling on behalf of persecuted Christians and other minorities in Pakistan.

We honour the struggle in Pakistan. We prepared a booklet called *Our Struggle for Minority Rights*. We can provide that for you afterwards.

The Chair: Will those two documents and your recommendations be part of the record then, Mr. Bhatti?

Mr. Peter Bhatti: Yes.

The Chair: Could you get them for us?

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Mr. Chairman, does the representative have a copy for each member of the committee, by any chance?

The Chair: That's a good idea.

Mr. Peter Bhatti: Yes, I can make copies.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: I would like to get a copy.

The Chair: Yes, indeed. Similarly, if you have documents, if you can provide one to each member of the committee it would be very helpful.

Mr. Peter Bhatti: I have some copies of the recommendations.

The Chair: We can make copies.

Thank you very much, Mr. Bhatti.

We'll go to Janet Epp Buckingham and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada.

Are you by yourself, Dr. Janet Epp Buckingham?

Dr. Janet Epp Buckingham (Director, Law and Public Policy, Evangelical Fellowship of Canada): Yes, I am. Thank you.

Good morning, honourable members. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you this morning.

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada is a national association of evangelical Christians. Our affiliates include 40 denominations and over 75 ministry organizations. We established a religious liberty commission in 1997 to address religious freedom issues around the world. The EFC is an active participant in the World Evangelical Alliance, which is a global network of sister alliances to ours in 121 nations around the world and represents more than 335 million Christians worldwide. The World Evangelical Alliance has observer status at the UN Commission on Human Rights, and I'm pleased to represent the organization in Geneva at the commission each year.

We estimate that there are more than 200 million people in the world today who are being killed, brutalized, sold as slaves, imprisoned, tortured, threatened, discriminated against, and arrested solely because they are Christians. A further 400 million Christians suffer systemic discrimination and restrictions on their religious liberties. There are many countries where Christians are being persecuted, and you've obviously heard about some specific ones today, such as Pakistan. China, as well as Saudi Arabia and Turkmenistan, is also a severe persecutor of Christianity and Christians.

But I would like to step back a little bit and highlight two current trends that are of particular concern to us. First, we are greatly concerned about the rise and adoption of so-called religious ordinances or religion laws in several countries over the last several years. These laws are often touted as existing for the protection of religious freedoms but are most often used to repress religious minorities. Such ordinances often include anti-conversion laws and laws prohibiting proselytism.

Currently we are seeing this play out particularly in Sri Lanka and in Vietnam, and I'll very briefly highlight what is going on in those countries in a moment. This is just to say this trend is having an extremely chilling effect on the activities and freedoms of religious minorities. Anti-conversion laws clearly violate the human rights norms set out in international laws and treaties, which were reviewed very ably by Suzanne Tamas.

About 70% of Sri Lanka's population is Sinhalese Buddhist. The constitution guarantees religious freedom, but in July this year a private member's bill was introduced in Parliament that would have effectively banned religious conversions. The Supreme Court of Sri Lanka has ruled parts of this bill unconstitutional in accordance with the guarantee of religious freedom, and the bill has been withdrawn to be redrafted. But even if this redrafted bill does not pass, the minister of Buddhist affairs is expected to table a government bill with cabinet support that goes even further to ban conversions. With this introduction of the bill we have seen a rise in anti-Christian activity. At least 66 incidents have been reported this year alone. Over 140 churches have been forced to close down due to attack, intimidation, and harassment, but there has not been a single conviction for any of these crimes.

Turning to Vietnam, I'll point out that a new ordinance regarding religious beliefs and religious organizations came into effect in Vietnam on November 15 this year, just a couple of weeks ago. It binds all religious organizations to be submissive to the control of the state and entirely subservient to the state in their activities. The Government of Vietnam recognizes as legal only 20% of Vietnam's 1.2 million Protestants. The oppression of the majority of Protestant Christians in Vietnam, mainly minority Montagnards in the central highlands and Hmong and Dao in the northwest provinces, remains systemic and severe.

I'll turn to our second issue, which is the ongoing and increasing attacks on clergy and church leaders. In many countries where Christians are facing persecution, church leaders, including clergy, are targeted first and most harshly. Clergy are of course the most visible members of religious minorities, but in addition there is a perception that if the leadership of the church is imprisoned or threatened into silence, Christians will disperse and ultimately leave the faith.

• (0955)

One example of this is Eritrea. In May 2002 the Government of Eritrea called for the closure of all churches not belonging to the Orthodox, Roman Catholic, or Lutheran denominations. More than 36 churches have been closed, but the 20,000 displaced members have continued to gather secretly in homes. Over 400 evangelical Christians have been imprisoned for their Christian faith, and the chairman of my sister organization, the Eritrean Evangelical

Alliance, has been held without charge and without communication with his family for six months.

In conclusion, I can say religious freedom is the foundation and litmus test for all human rights. Where there is no freedom of religion, other fundamental rights are trampled as well. We appreciate that the Government of Canada co-sponsors the resolution on religious freedom at the UN Commission on Human Rights, but we also agree that more is needed.

We call on members of Parliament to express concern about religious persecution and call for monitoring of religious persecution and for action on behalf of the persecuted. Specifically, we would ask that you condemn laws that restrict religion, religious practices, and religious institutions, and we would also ask that you express your concern for the protection of clergy and religious leaders.

I think that echoes some of the other comments made, and I'm not sure if I'm asking for a specific resolution or perhaps some wording in another resolution on those kinds of general issues.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Would you like to draft some motions on anything—at a moment's notice?

In the meantime, perhaps we could hear from One Free World International and the Reverend Majed El Shafie.

• (1000)

Rev. Majed El Shafie (President, One Free World International): Good morning, and thank you for having me here.

Today I will not speak too much about the ministry or our organization. Our organization is called One Free World International and we are defending human rights, specifically focusing on persecuted Christians.

Let's get to the point. Around the whole world, one Christian is persecuted every three minutes worldwide. As we are talking now in this nice, peaceful place, there are at least over 160,000 Christians who will be killed this year just for their faith. From the time of the start of Christianity, now we have over 200 million Christians who have died for their faith and been persecuted for their faith.

If we give a small example, we find, for example, in Egypt a few weeks ago, on October 21, there were 22 Muslims being converted to Christianity, specifically Brother Yusuf Samuel Makari Suliman and Mariam Girgis. According to our document and our sources in Egypt, there are at least, while we are talking now in this nice place, between 6,000 and 7,000 Christians who are in jail right now, as we are talking, in Egypt just because they are Christians.

Eighty per cent of persecuted Christians around the whole world, surprisingly, are in Muslim lands. Basically, if we can also mention another example, on September 9, 2004, in Iran they arrested Pastor Hamid Pourmand and 85 other believers, all of them from ten assemblies of God.

In Sudan, three million Christians have been killed for their faith in the last 10 years. Even though there is a ceasefire and a peace agreement process, there is still a battle in Darfur.

In Saudi Arabia, you cannot have a church, you cannot have a place of worship in any place, and there are a lot of home churches in Saudi Arabia.

In China, the Chinese basically have a lot of persecution. They have the biggest number of persecuted Christians in that land. I will mention specifically, for example, SCC Church and Pastor Gong Shengliang. He has also been persecuted and arrested—he and his church.

Between China and North Korea, there are labour camps that have at least 200,000 politicians in them, tens of thousands of whom are Christians. Rising with the persecution of the Christians is the movement of anti-semitism in Europe and the Middle East and, surprisingly, as well here in Canada.

Ladies and gentlemen, let's get to the point. Surprisingly, after all of that, and after all the documents that I read, and after all the numbers that I read—and I only have five minutes, so I need to just mention small, little examples—the Canadian government is still dealing with these governments. The Canadian government is still dealing with the Chinese, they are still making business with the Chinese, they are still dealing with Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia, which persecutes Christians, and Egypt and Iran. I'm afraid in this case the black oil becomes more valuable than the Christian blood.

I need to mention something to you. Persecution, to me, is not a nice book that I read, and it's not a nice song that I hear, and it's not a nice movie that I watch. I faced persecution myself when I was in my country, Egypt. I was Muslim and I converted to Christianity because I have the right of freedom of religion according to article 18 of international law. But according to the Koran, specifically sura number 2, verse number 217, no Muslim can be converted or he will be an infidel.

• (1005)

I am not here to speak about persecution as a thing that I have studied. I'm here to show you exactly what has happened to a lot of people in our land. Allow me, please.

Members of Parliament, honourable members, this happened to me when I was in jail in Egypt. The officer who was torturing me, he crucified me and he put me on the cross for two and a half days. He made an open wound on my left arm and he put salt and lemon on the open wound. That's because I believe in Jesus.

I am not here to judge any group. My Lord, my Jesus Christ, taught me to love. He said, love your enemy, bless those who curse you, and he proved it on the cross when he said, forgive them, Father, they don't know what they are doing. I am not here to speak against a group of people. I'm here to ask for help.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are simple people. We have simple dreams. All we want is to worship our Lord. All we want is for our children to grow up having freedom of religion and choice. I expect from the Canadian government, before they speak about gay marriage and before they speak about the sharia law here in Canada, also to speak about the persecuted Christians.

I will close by saying one sentence. The persecuted Christians are dying, but they're still smiling. They are in a very deep, dark night,

but they still have the candle of the Lord. Our enemies have very strong armies, have very strong weapons, but we have the Lord Jesus Christ. We will not give up tomorrow's new day. They can kill the dreamer, but no one can kill the dream.

Thank you. God bless.

The Chair: Thank you, Reverend, very much.

The last witnesses, then, will be Dr. Anu Bose and Amar Chakraborty. You're together, I believe.

Where is Dr. Bose?

Dr. Anu Bose (Executive Director and Project Manager, Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council): I won't be presenting this morning.

The Chair: You're being shy this morning, Dr. Bose?

Dr. Anu Bose: No, I think you hear me so many times. You don't want a broken record here, do you?

The Chair: Then, thank you.

Dr. Anu Bose: But I will be sitting behind him, if he needs me.

Mr. Amar Chakraborty (President, Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council): Good morning, honourable chair, honourable members of the subcommittee, respected guests, and fellow human rights workers. I have come here all the way from Toronto to stand before the committee to express my deep concern about what is going on back home in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh I was a member of the civil service. I was a magistrate for 10 years. Then I had to leave the country. It's very painful for a human being to leave the country in which he was born.

My mission here is twofold: to apprise the committee of what is going on in Bangladesh with the religious and ethnic minorities, who are mainly Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, and other indigenous people, and to urge the Government of Canada to spearhead a movement, along with the international community, so that the minorities can live in their ancestral homeland with all dignity and equally with their majority partners, who are the Muslims. We know Canada is doing a lot in the international arena, especially in Sudan to stop persecution of Sudan's Christians. So we believe Canada, if it wants, can do the same for the minorities of Bangladesh.

It's very painful that the government itself is taking part in the orchestrated persecution of minorities, and the magnitude of the persecution is assuming the scope and magnitude of a campaign of religious and ethnic cleansing. How? I have a whole book full of documentation derived from nationally and internationally published news. Also, I want to say 2.5 million acres of land have been confiscated from the minorities. This I am quoting from the U.S. State Department's report on human rights practice for 2001.

In Bangladesh, the populations of the minorities and the majority Muslims in 1997 were about 15% and 85%. Now the percentage of the former has been reduced to 9%. Because of torture, rape, and all human rights violations, minorities are leaving the country.

I quote from *The Economist*, November 29, 2003: "Bangladesh's religious minorities: Safe only in the departure lounge".

I quote from the *Guardian*, July 21, 2003: "Rape and torture empties the villages".

Recently, on May 17, 2004, U.S. Congressman Frank Pallone, in his speech in the House, said this particular situation was reminiscent of the Jewish Holocaust. He said, "Hindu homes were marred by a yellow H, which in fact guided the pillagers to their homes". He also says, "In fact, Islamic extremists have routinely dispossessed Hindus and, for that matter, Christians and Buddhists, of their ancestral properties and land".

I quote from the national daily of Bangladesh, *The Daily Jankantha*: "An overwhelming 98.68% of the rape victims are minority, and rapists happen to be the cadres of the ruling parties, particularly of BNP".

I quote from *The Daily Star*, another national daily: Nearly "200 Hindu women were gang raped by Muslim men" in Char Fashion, Bhola, in one night at a single spot.

Then, 17 U.S. Congressmen, in a letter to the Prime Minister, asked the Prime Minister to stop her government's torture of the minorities, but unfortunately, the Government of Bangladesh didn't send any reply to the petition submitted by the Congressmen.

• (1010)

The Independent on August 29, 2004, wrote: "Similarly, on August 26, in Mahalchari Upazila under the district of Khagrachari, Chittagong Hill Tracts 10 hill villages with more than 360 homesteads, two Buddhist temples were burnt down".

That's what they're doing. They have been using rape as a tool to terrorize the people, because in a country like Bangladesh the shame of rape is always on the part of the victim, so the victim's family leaves the place and then the land is grabbed by the fundamentalist Muslims.

I know the Government of Canada is doing a lot for Bangladesh. It is one of the largest partners in development. Also, it has given Bangladesh some trade benefits, especially in the government sector. We believe that if the Canadian government, the Canadian people, stand beside us, we can stop this.

I urge the committee members, the honourable chair and the honourable members of Parliament, to influence the Canadian government so that it uses its economic and moral clout on the Government of Bangladesh to stop this torture so that the minorities can live in their homeland.

With that plea, I will stop here.

Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity.

• (1015)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Before we go to questions, Grace, would you like those documents to be part of the record here—and anybody else's documents?

Would you please give them to the clerk. Those will all be part of our record.

We'll go to questions.

Mr. Day.

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): We want to thank each one of you who has taken the time to present here.

I know some you have presented before. I'm sure from time to time it must cross your mind to ask if this is worth your while. It crosses our minds, as members of Parliament, when we are asked to meet with you individually and as groups. We feel the sense of frustration. Each time I've gone to speak to the followers, the practitioners, of Falun Gong and Falun Dafa when they are on the front lawn of Parliament, the same wave of frustration has hit me. The problem is still there. When we hear about what's happening around the world, when we see the pictures that you've put on the wall, when you tell your stories, when Majed shows us his scars, I want you to know that we brace ourselves emotionally, because these are overwhelming things that are happening in the world today, and to be effective as Members of Parliament in terms of action, while inside we are in turmoil, our minds need to be focused on what we can do to see a resolution of these terrible problems.

As we talk here, we know that Tenzin Delek may have been executed by now for the simple crime of believing something. He is just a symbol. Our chairman has produced numbers and Reverend Majed has produced numbers related to how many others of different faiths around the world may die, even today.

I believe there are answers. I have spoken in the last year, as my colleagues have—as a matter of fact, in the last few months—to more conferences on the issue of persecution than I have in the last 10 years. There is a battle that is coming to a head, and I believe Canada can lead in a breakthrough on this.

I'm going to take a suggestion that has already been brought forward by Suzanne Tamas of the Bahá'í faith. It reflects something. When the Dalai Lama was here—I think it might even have been in this room—one of the things I asked him was what hope he had that other countries would embrace religious freedom as a principle, and also as a practice. If you have freedom of religion, not just in the constitutions but in the practices of every country, then you have freedom of speech. It just naturally follows. If you have freedom of speech, you have freedom of association and you have freedom of the press. Sometimes as politicians we don't like freedom of the press, but we have freedom of the press because people can print and say freely the things they need to say.

I believe this is absolutely key and central when we talk about world peace—a key factor in peace in the world. But remember, it is not easy for us of different faiths. That means in your countries, in Canada and in the countries that you speak of, you're asking those governments to allow not just your religion but other religions also. And that is a big challenge, but it's what we have to see.

So I would like to propose a motion to my colleagues. First, I'll read the motion, and then I want to talk about how I think we can effectively do this. As you know, our government is coming out with an international policy review. That will give us a great opportunity to have some key things focused on, because we'll have the opportunity to respond to it.

The motion I'll propose to my colleagues is that the ongoing international policy review examine ways to which the Government of Canada can make the protection and promotion of the right to freedom of religion and belief a central element of its efforts to defend human rights internationally.

This has to be a central element. This can't be just a sidebar item in our international policy review. If you have freedom of religion in your constitutions and in your practice, it will do more, I believe, than any other thing to promote freedom around the world.

• (1020)

You know, as people of faith, we are accused of being the ones who cause the problems. We are being accused because, in our history, we have warred against each other. And so we have to set the example of saying, yes, in Canada a Muslim can build a mosque, and a Christian can build a church, and a Jew can build a synagogue, and a Sikh can have a temple.

In our parade in my city of Penticton just on Saturday, a young woman was walking along the parade route and had a little pamphlet with her about her faith. It wasn't my faith; it was another faith, but she had the freedom to do that. So we have to realize as we take up this cause that we, the people of faith, are accused of causing problems in the world because we want to take away the right of another to express their faith. So we have to keep that as a central issue.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to propose this motion, and I'd also like our friends to know, so they don't leave here frustrated, that at the right time, when we do this, if we can come to consensus once the government comes out with its international policy review, perhaps we will need to do this one more time—but with ambassadors and lots of media present. Maybe there won't be five-minute presentations, but a lot of one-minute presentations. But there will be pictures and there will be people talking. I believe we can have a great impact on the thinking here in Canada and in our government, and that Canada, because of your efforts and sufferings, can be a world leader in this.

So I'm proposing this motion now, but I'm giving our friends a sense of what we can do to really highlight this.

I put that motion before the committee. Have others seen the copy? We will also need the French.

The Chair: Yes, I think they have, but I think Mr. Bains has a slightly changed or different version.

Mr. Navdeep Bains: I'm sorry, but I just want to follow up on Mr. Day's comments.

I want to take this opportunity, first of all, to thank all of you for coming out today and sharing your remarks. I was deeply touched in many instances, as were all who were here today.

I want to elaborate on or extend what Mr. Day has mentioned. He basically ended his motion with the words, "and belief a central element of its efforts to defend human rights internationally". I want to continue on with that and say, "including in its international development assistance policy and programs", so that it speaks to making sure that we hold accountable ourselves and the other governments and nations and institutions we deal with to make sure

that in any assistance we provide, or any negotiations we engage in, human rights will remain a central theme.

So just to elaborate on your motion, Mr. Day, I would add, "including in its international development assistance policy and programs". That would be the final line there. So it follows the same theme.

The Chair: Would that be acceptable to you then?

Mr. Stockwell Day: I have no problems with that.

The Chair: Is that acceptable, Mr. Broadbent?

Hon. Ed Broadbent: I am entirely in the same vein of thought. I was looking at a proposed amendment that may go one step further, but along the same vein.

Perhaps I might just read it out to see if there could be acceptance of it. What I'm about to read, I think, embodies what has been said but, as I say, goes one step further. Where the motion now ends, I would replace the period with a semicolon and add the words, "and, in particular, look at ways of making the receipt of Canadian aid and development assistance conditional upon the absence of the systematic abuse of religious and other fundamental human rights".

The Chair: Do any of our expert panellists wish to make a comment on anything that's been said?

Mr. Chipkar.

Mr. Joel Chipkar: It's a difficult situation. I know that in China with the Falun Gong, as I'm sure with the Tibetans too, the regime has used or turned human rights around to say that in their crackdown on Tibet, the Falun Gong, and these religions that don't swear allegiance to the Communist Party, they are in fact protecting human rights in their country. We've seen this deceitful twist come about; so when you mention human rights, they will say, "Yes, this is exactly what we're doing when we crack down on the Falun Gong. We're taking care of our human rights". So they have this twist on things, and it's a very intricate and deceitful thing we have to work with.

That's why I'm thinking that in certain cases this might not—

• (1025)

Ms. Grace Wollensak: I understand what he said. He meant that what you said is good, but maybe mentioning specifically the groups who are persecuted will be particularly helpful. He said that if we say this only generally, they'll say, "Okay, this has nothing to do with me". They will not think it was addressed to them.

The Chair: Mr. Broadbent, I'm sure you appreciate what he's saying. Since we don't want to leave anybody out today, one proposal might be that we draft a longer motion at our next meeting and try to incorporate specifically what's been asked of all the witnesses today. In the meantime, we might pass this one, if you wouldn't mind, and then we'd have something else on the record today.

Mr. Navdeep Bains: Just very quickly, I'd like to mention that your concern is slightly alleviated in that Mr. Day's motion indicates that the protection and promotion of the right to freedom of religion is included. Freedom of religion is separated from human rights. Falun Gong would basically be protected under that element, I believe.

Mr. Joel Chipkar: Well, if it's religion and spiritual belief...

Mr. Stockwell Day: Actually, I just have freedom of religion and "belief".

I don't have to tell you that the followers of Falun Gong and Falun Dafa, being practitioners and believers.... I think religion and belief covers it.

Mr. Navdeep Bains: Yes, it's covered in the motion.

Mr. Stockwell Day: This actually speaks to and protects atheists also. In some countries, if you are an atheist you can be persecuted. I want all people's beliefs protected.

The Chair: We're going to try to put all these together.

Ms. Tamas, you've had huge experience in this area. Would you like to say something?

Ms. Suzanne Tamas: Huge experience? Really, you're very kind. Thank you.

With respect to mentioning specific groups, I think the list is quite long. There is always the risk that when you mention one, you will omit others. I know that at the General Assembly this fall there was considerable consternation about the inclusion of specific groups in the resolution on religious intolerance—what about the others; if they weren't mentioned, did that mean they weren't included?

So I think it may be safer to say religion and belief. As Mr. Day pointed out, they are both protected, as is atheism.

The second thing I would say is just a personal observation and perhaps a question. Whereas I think it would be fairly straightforward to get consensus on the resolution as it was read up to the point of conditionality, I think sometimes the lever of conditionality pushes buttons, and is perceived as those "with" imposing on those "without". It's such a charged atmosphere internationally, I just wonder if we couldn't accomplish the same purpose without being quite so bold.

The Chair: As was pointed out, Bangladesh is, I think, our largest recipient country, at \$50 million a year, more or less. Should we be giving ODA to the Government of Bangladesh when they're doing the kinds of things we heard earlier?

Ms. Suzanne Tamas: I guess the question that comes back is this: without it, what would be the consequences for the people themselves? The whole issue of "tied" is a very fraught one. I don't have a view about it, I just wanted to raise this, that it's fraught and it cuts both ways.

CIDA established with children, for example, that the rights of the child would be part of the program design and implementation mentality around programs affecting children. If we could have the same commitment in the area of freedom of religion and belief, then we would see progress, I believe.

The Chair: Thank you.

Tenzin Dargyal.

Mr. Tenzin Dargyal: Maybe this will be just a question I'm putting forth to this committee, but I did not hear the word "trade". I know it's a sensitive issue. I myself was a technology sales executive in China. I made some decent money while I was stationed there for three years.

This government has taken an integrated approach to its foreign policy. Is there a balanced approach that can be taken in this motion that addresses not only aid, but trade? As we all know, trade is what drives the relationships between nations, especially in the case of China.

The Chair: Mr. Sahota.

Mr. Ajit Singh Sahota: In India we've had anti-terrorist laws, TADA and now POTA, under which they were persecuting people. When they killed and tortured, nobody asked. After 9/11, almost all governments of the world have prepared anti-terrorist legislation, including Canada, and under that legislation, people are being persecuted. The laws are meant to be applied against terrorists, not ordinary people. Under section 35 of Bill C-36, when native Indians who have land rights and others come up for their rights, they are being persecuted.

So it's the application of that law that's very much at stake. There should be a sensitizing of those officials who are applying that law. Here I am talking about Canada; in Third World countries there's no such thing as sensitizing anyone. They just go and use those laws—he's a terrorist. They want to protect their power, that's all it is.

• (1030)

The Chair: I must apologize to Madame Brunelle.

[Translation]

Many people speak English. We apologize.

[English]

James Lunney.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): *Merci, monsieur le président.* That is it for French.

I am not a regular member of this subcommittee, but it has been a very moving experience being here today. I simply want to thank every one of the witnesses who came forward to share his or her story today. I am sure the committee has been moved.

I just want to express that as a Canadian who doesn't work on this file full time—I'll be going to the health committee shortly, where I am very much engaged—I feel, as do all members of Parliament, that in this nation of Canada particularly, we have had freedom. We have had the liberties. We have had so much given to us. I am mindful of an ancient proverb that says, when much is given, much is expected.

I think this nation has a role to play in actually addressing some of these concerns. We could be doing a heck of a lot more than we've been doing. We could learn to stand up as Canadians.

I applaud you, as some of you are newcomers among us who have come to share your stories in a very difficult circumstance and on behalf of those who suffer at the present time in all the countries that have been mentioned. I really believe this nation has a role to play in addressing these concerns and that more can be done, together. We really need your input, though, because for those who live at peace and at ease and who are engaged in all the pursuits that our rather affluent lifestyle, compared to most of the world, allows us, it's easy not to know. It's easy to dismiss a newscast, but when you come with your stories, when you show your scars, and when you speak on behalf of your countrymen, it makes it more possible for those of us who haven't the same experience to identify and to go with you into those concerns. Hopefully together we'll find the motivation to actually rise up and begin to do something about it.

I am encouraged by the motion. I certainly would be glad to support this. I think we're moving toward a consensus that Canada can do more.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Amar Chakraborty.

Mr. Amar Chakraborty: I have just one comment.

We have come here not to ask for any sanction to be imposed on Bangladesh, but the thing is that Canada is helping Bangladesh, and in that way it can certainly help us too.

The government does not include minorities in any development or any projects. So when implementing projects, Canada can have people oversee the project who can ensure that people from all spheres of life are included in the program, so that they also can participate. What the government is not doing, Canada can impose. Canada can ask the Bangladesh government to do that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Broadbent.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: Mr. Chairman, I would like to pick up on this point and on the related point that was made about conditionalities, to take a second to elaborate on my addition of words as an amendment. They are based on, if I may put it this way, six years of experience heading an international human rights centre on the one hand, and dealing with and trying to work with the Government of Canada, as well as other international governments, on the other.

On the trade issue, trade is not included in this resolution because I see this as hopeless in the foreseeable future, to put it bluntly, in terms of seeing our government or any other government making a specific linkage on the basis of unilateral action on trade, linking trade and rights. I tried for many years to achieve that in different forms, and I think that one day we'll get that achieved, perhaps when we have multilateral agreements like the WTO that, in themselves, on a multilateral basis link trade and rights.

Coming back to the points that have been raised, here the wording selected by me is what we can do on our own, I think reasonably. I want to speak to the words and in particular look at ways of making the receipt of Canadian aid conditional upon the absence of the systematic abuse of religious and other fundamental human rights.

That is to say, in terms of our aid policy toward Bangladesh, as well as other countries, there could be a phasing-in even in development of trade policy, a warning, if you like, in advance that there could be so many years. By that I don't mean decades, but there may be a two-year or a three-year suggestion that unless they, to put it bluntly, clean up their act in terms of the violation of fundamental rights, aid will be terminated. There has to be some flexibility in the implementation of policy.

I believe if we had a survey of a majority of Canadians and could ask them if they think we should be aiding countries that systematically abuse the religious and other fundamental rights of their citizens, they would say no. At the same time, I am sensitive to the impact that we can have on the citizens of these other countries if we just radically, overnight, say we're shutting things down. As a country we have had our own abuses, yes, but it would be bizarre to say that Canada isn't one of the leaders in mixing, in a positive way, a whole range of rights for our citizens. We have, I believe, an obligation to the citizens of other countries in the world to use whatever little pressure we have in certainly controlling our own aid assistance, to help put pressure on those governments to respect the religious and fundamental rights of their own citizens.

There's a degree of pragmatism built into this motion. Picking up on Mr. Day's point, it looks at requesting that our government find ways to protect and promote, and it seems to me that one of these ways would be the flexible but determined application of our own aid policy to be used, not to be indifferent to human and religious rights, but to help foster human rights and religious freedoms in those countries.

• (1035)

The Chair: I'm sure you'll recall that yesterday we passed a unanimous motion basically imposing an embargo on Burma, or Myanmar, for their outrageous human rights abuses too.

Could we ask the researcher to read Mr. Day's motion and Mr. Bains' addition, and then perhaps Mr. Broadbent's further addition, if you can keep them all separate.

Mr. Marcus Pistor (Committee Researcher): I think that's possible.

The motion would read:

That the ongoing international policy review examine ways in which the Government of Canada can make the protection and promotion of the right to freedom of religion and belief a central element of its efforts to defend human rights internationally;

The addition proposed by Mr. Bains was:

including in its international development assistance policy and programs;

The alternative proposed by Mr. Broadbent would be:

and, in particular, look at ways of making the receipt of Canadian aid conditional upon the absence of systematic abuse of religious and other fundamental human rights.

The Chair: It's not going to be perfect as we do it on the fly, but is that more or less acceptable to everybody?

Mr. Day.

Mr. Stockwell Day: To our first two presenters, what you're seeing here is the constant, frustrating, but very necessary process of democracy. It's called writing a speech by committee, and it's very dangerous work.

But the other thing that's happening here is that usually in a committee meeting like this, we don't do our motions here. We go back, somebody proposes something, and we give 24-hour notice; the process becomes very elongated. It just shows you the commitment of all parties that we're saying, if we can deal with this at this level here today and avoid a whole lot of bureaucratic problems, then we'd like to.

Now, having said that, I want to ask a question of both Mr. Broadbent and anyone who would like to make a quick intervention. The only concern I have with the addition, Mr. Broadbent, is that we've already identified that we want to make this a central area of our policy. Navdeep has proposed even taking it a step further in saying we're also going to look at the area of relief. But if we come out so strongly that we may not even help suffering people in a certain country because of persecution, I'd want to hear from those of you who know people who are suffering from persecution because of regimes that don't allow this right. Are you comfortable with the fact that we may cut aid off to those people who are suffering—

A voice: Before their government changes—

Mr. Stockwell Day: Yes.

• (1040)

Mr. Navdeep Bains: Very quickly, I know you've asked that, but my only concern and the reason I asked for the amendment was that I don't want us to reward any corrupt regime. That's the only concern I have, and the panel can speak to that.

Mr. Stockwell Day: I understand that, and that's why I think Navdeep's addition covers it, Ed. We now have to move this to the next committee and then it has to go to Parliament, and I don't want somebody being able to stop this by hiding behind the idea that they think it's going too far.

Do you know what I'm saying, Ed?

Hon. Ed Broadbent: I do, and I very much appreciate the reasoning behind my Conservative colleague's expression of concern.

I'm not going to repeat what I just said a minute ago about why I would like us to try this. I believe in principle. As someone who's worked with many people in developing countries, by and large I can say that in my experience with organizations dealing in international human rights, whether they've been in Pakistan, whether they've been groups outside of Tibet, or whether they've been in a variety of other countries, those people were happy with this kind of linkage. It's not a threat to act unilaterally overnight; it's phased in, it's our aid going.

In concluding, I come right back to one of the great examples of modern times, which of course is South Africa. There you had the

big application of sanctions. It was the representatives of the black majority of South Africa themselves who supported sanctions against the regime. They were going to be the people who ultimately, in the short run, suffered most, but they said this was the kind of pressure that should be made.

Well, this doesn't go as far as that. It does say a thought-out policy and, I repeat, a flexible, phased-in policy so these governments would know it's coming and would take some steps to cut out the persecution of groups they're persecuting.

I would say to my friend from the Conservative Party that I will be happier with attaching my amendment and leaving it as it is if we agree on it and it goes to the larger committee. If then they want to cut it out, let them cut it out, but as a member of a human rights subcommittee, I would be happier if we could get it through here in the way I propose and for the reasons I propose.

The Chair: Mr. Day.

Mr. Stockwell Day: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Even while Mr. Broadbent was speaking, I was anticipating, well, we can duke it out at the next level. I would take these as friendly amendments; I have no problem with that.

The Chair: We do have a problem, though, that there is a sort of option route. We can take the "including in its international development assistance policy and programs", or we can take Mr. Broadbent's "and, in particular, look at ways of making the receipt of Canadian aid conditional upon the absence of systematic abuse of religious and other fundamental human rights".

Mr. Navdeep Bains: I suggest we take an either/or approach. We present it to the committee and if they think the language is too strong or if there are any issues, then we can choose the broader perspective.

The Chair: So you suggest we use both.

Mr. Navdeep Bains: I suggest we use both.

The Chair: Is that agreeable?

Mr. Stockwell Day: I see them both as friendly amendments. As long as our Bloc colleague is comfortable with the translation, then that's fine.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Stockwell Day: It's unanimous. Great.

The Chair: Grace wanted to say something, and we'll go down the line.

Grace, please.

Ms. Grace Wollensak: I just want to provide a piece of information that'll be helpful to you. Actually, in one of the reports I submitted to the clerk...in a bigger book there's a report about the financial resources used in persecuting Falun Gong. It said there were billions poured into the labour camps and the brainwashing centres and used on Internet surveillance. Basically, its conclusion was that a number like one-quarter of the national finances was used in persecuting this group. Imagine, they mobilized a whole nation, all levels of government, and all corners of society—the workplace, the legal system, education—to persecute 100 million people and their families. To be able to do that, they need a huge amount of money. I'm pretty sure lots of the money comes from foreign countries, but I don't have a figure as to which country and how.

I'm just providing this information to you.

•(1045)

The Chair: Thank you very much for that.

Yes, Dr. Sahota.

Mr. Ajit Singh Sahota: I don't think this linking of trade and human rights is going to help us much, because those countries that are violating these rights know how to circumvent that and how to dupe people. They will establish a human rights commission to investigate, and it will investigate for twenty or thirty years. You know Mr. Kalra's case. Since 1996 nothing has been done. The Canadian government cannot get even a single...what happened to that person who was saying 25,000 have been cremated as unidentified bodies, and he disappeared.

All these human rights organizations, Amnesty International and others, when they were asking that the police, whatever is in their possession... When they arrest somebody, they are supposed to account for that. Now they make people disappear. They don't arrest people; they just kill them, and that's it. They circumvent all that.

It's the same when these governments have these commissions and things. There have been seven commissions so far, but nothing has been done for the last 20 years. They know how to circumvent these things by duping other governments, saying they are doing something but doing nothing.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Dr. Janet Epp Buckingham.

Dr. Janet Epp Buckingham: Dr. Buckingham is great. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I was just going to mention that as I understand it, the way CIDA is approaching these issues is to use more the carrot approach, saying they will give a preference to countries that meet certain standards, such as accountability and transparency. I'm not sure if human rights is one of the things on the list; it certainly should be if it isn't.

One approach might be to use the carrot language rather than the stick to talk about preference for countries so you don't end up cutting out governments that might have desperate people in their country. It's just a thought.

The Chair: Vietnam came up, and somebody told me that allegedly CIDA is actually funding the creation of what are the equivalent of residential schools for minority religions in the

highlands. I probably shouldn't have raised that, but I'd like to look into it. If it's happening, it certainly shouldn't be happening.

We're running out of time. Would anybody like to have the last word, perhaps one of the members of the committee?

Mr. Broadbent.

Hon. Ed Broadbent: These presentations have been superb for us.

I just want to raise a bit of a concern. There is no representative of the Jewish community here at a time when there's rising anti-Semitism, not only in Canada but around the world. Also, I don't know what happened, but the imam from the Ottawa area was scheduled to be down. So two very large communities with religious concerns and freedom concerns have not been before the committee. I don't know how we can address this point, but maybe we should take this into consideration.

The Chair: Excellent point, Mr. Broadbent.

The imam did not come. He has had health problems—I work with him quite frequently—and I presume he just wasn't able to be here this morning, but perhaps we could find out why he wasn't here.

With respect to the Jewish faith, there is now an all-party interfaith committee of the Parliament of Canada, and Rabbi Reuven Bulka and I co-chair that. I hope that committee's going to become more active too.

But you're absolutely right that there should have been someone from another faith that's under severe persecution, harassment, and so on, too.

Yes, Mr. Bhatti.

Mr. Peter Bhatti: I have one more recommendation regarding Pakistan. If an international commission goes there, they never meet with the minorities. I will request that when they go for an investigation, if they can, they call the minority leaders there and investigate the current situation of the minorities that are there. It might also help the committee know how to deal with the Government of Pakistan.

The Chair: Thank you.

Yes, Ms. Tamas.

Ms. Suzanne Tamas: Could I just say this is my first time having the privilege of addressing a committee. I want to thank all of you very much and my fellow presenters very much. I have learned a great deal, I've been deeply moved by what I've heard, and I so appreciate the move to action you've taken because it really speaks loudly. It feels very hopeful.

I think that what we've done is open up a dialogue that needs to intensify. I hope this is going to up the pace but isn't the last opportunity we'll have to explore how we can make a difference.

•(1050)

The Chair: Thank you.

That was an excellent note to end on. I'm sure we all agree with you completely. These have been very useful and moving presentations we've had today, and I hope we won't disappoint you in terms of carrying forward what you've all said so eloquently.

Merci dix mille fois.

We are adjourned.

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

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

**Also available on the Parliamentary Internet Parlementaire at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le réseau électronique « Parliamentary Internet Parlementaire » à l'adresse suivante :
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.