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—
Chair

The Honourable Jason Kenney

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•(1110)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC)): Good morning, colleagues.

We have a quorum. I call to order this meeting of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

[Translation]

I would like to welcome our witness, Mr. Lu Decheng. Mr. Decheng arrived in Canada last year as a refugee. He is really very courageous. I hope he will tell us his personal story.

[English]

We anticipate that Mr. Decheng will be the last witness in our ongoing study on the Canada-China bilateral human rights dialogue.

Mr. Decheng is accompanied by an interpreter. Mr. Decheng will present his testimony, I believe, in Mandarin, and it will be translated into English.

[Translation]

But you are bilingual; so you can answer the questions in French as well, can you not?

[English]

You are bilingual, are you not? I'm speaking of the interpreter.

Mr. Zhao Donghai (Interpreter, As an Individual): Only in English.

The Chair: That's fine; I understand.

Pardon me. I asked whether you are bilingual. My question should have been whether you speak French. In Ottawa, people can speak six languages, but they're still not bilingual if they don't speak French or English.

Mr. Decheng, welcome to the committee. Thank you for coming. We look forward to your presentation.

Mr. Zhao Donghai: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

First of all, I'd like to thank Parliament and the Subcommittee on International Human Rights for the opportunity to make suggestions on Canada-China bilateral human rights dialogues.

My name is Lu Decheng and I currently live in Calgary. During the democracy movement in 1989 at Tiananmen Square in Beijing,

China, Yu Zijian, Yu Dongyue, and I threw eggs filled with oil paint onto the portrait of Mao Zedong that hangs over Tiananmen Square. I was sentenced to 16 years in prison for this action, Yu Dongyue for 20 years, and Yu Zhijian for life. I was released after spending nine years in prison and fled to Thailand later.

The Canadian government rescued me to Canada last year. Once again, I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the Canadian government for the rescue and for its increased concern about China's human rights.

Yu Dongyue has become deranged as a result of the tortures in prison since 1992, but he was not released for medical treatment. He was finally released in February 2006 and he had been in prison for almost 17 years. One of the conditions for his release was that his family would not charge the prison that had maltreated him. The family also had to admit that Yu Dongyue had no health problems.

These are the pictures taken after he was released.

Based on my personal experience and understanding of China's human rights situation, I think the way Canada-China bilateral human rights dialogues have been conducted over the past 10 years needs to be further improved.

•(1115)

In recent years, the Chinese government has intensified its control and persecution in the areas of democracy, human rights, media, speech, and religion. Meanwhile, it has deprived the general public of their basic rights on the large scale to speak up on the unbalanced economic development and strengthening of government dictatorship.

The deranged Yu Dongyue was finally released last year; however, how many of those people who were sent to prison as criminal offenders during the June 4 massacre are still imprisoned? There is no way to know the specific number, because of the so-called national secret, but we believe the number is not small.

What's worse is that cases of injustice are happening in China every day. I have collected the names of the people who were sent to prison, named as criminal offenders, on June 4, 1989.

A few years ago I worked in a clothing factory in Wenzhou City in China's Zhejiang province, and I investigated the living conditions of workers there. The workers had to work over 12 hours a day, and the daily wage was merely 15 yuan—which is Chinese currency. Every evening after work, the workers were locked inside the shabby dormitories, separated by wood boards on top of the workshops, which were full of inflammable materials. A fierce wolf-dog, which only recognized the owner and security guards, watched the building entrance. Even so, many workers still wanted to stay because they could at least be paid, although meagrely.

•(1120)

I have a study provided by an organization of labour correspondents. This study is about the living conditions of Chinese workers. I can give an example here. This is a shoe factory in China's Dongguan county in Guangdong province, neighbouring Hong Kong. Workers at this factory really have to work from 7:30 in the morning to 11:30 in the evening, and only two hours of this period is considered overtime; the other part is normal time.

I was deeply touched by the following incidents. Before the winter of 2006, the City of Calgary ordered that a vacant shopping mall at Centre Street and 16th Avenue not be demolished until the coming spring or summer to allow the homeless people staying inside to spend the winter safely. At the same time in China, Xue Xianggu, a senior in Yangzhou City of China's Jiangsu province, was crushed to death in his own residence because of its forced demolition, led by the authorities. There were some reports about this incident. I have some samples here, which you could also find.

Today, such sad incidents are taking place in mainland China frequently and in large numbers.

As freedom, democracy, and human rights are increasingly becoming the universal values of human beings, Canada, with its rich resources and being one of the largest territories in the world, is fully obliged and capable of playing an important role. Therefore, I would suggest the following:

First, change the way Canada-China bilateral human rights dialogues have been conducted over the past 10 years; these have been nominal, closed, and purely intergovernmental. NGOs and activists dedicated to improving bilateral human rights situations should be allowed to participate in the dialogues, which should be open to the public.

•(1125)

Second, on a case-by-case basis and with persistent determination, urge the parties to gradually improve bilateral human rights situations.

Third, on a regular basis, organize China human rights investigation groups to visit China and examine the improvement of these human rights situations.

Last, establish a widespread and cooperative mechanism with human rights groups of all circles to form a social network focusing on human rights.

A dictatorial, tyrannical, and powerful China is a disaster for the world. A democratic China that respects human rights and the rule of law is not only fortunate for the Chinese people but also guarantees

the peaceful development of the world. It is encouraging to see that the current Government of Canada has increased its concern on China's human rights and is exploring more effective ways to promote China's progress in human rights.

I sincerely wish that this momentum will continue.

Thank you.

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

[*Translation*]

We will start the round of questioning with Ms. St-Hilaire, so that Mr. Silva has an opportunity to familiarize himself with Mr. Decheng's testimony.

So I will now give the floor to Ms. St-Hilaire.

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I think it is enriching for committee members to hear your testimony this morning. I would like to welcome you to our meeting today.

I believe I heard something incorrectly. You suggested four ways of enhancing our dialogue with China. I would like you to repeat that, because I missed a few of your points. That is my first question.

My second question is somewhat broader. You are first and foremost Chinese, unless I am mistaken. In your opinion, what could be done to get the Chinese authorities to move, and to respect human rights? You mentioned some ways of renewing the dialogue, of enhancing our bilateral dialogue with China. What would cause the Chinese authorities to move? The dialogue has been in place for some time, with its flaws and weaknesses. Do you think there is some way we can get the Chinese authorities to move?

Once again, I thank you for being here.

•(1130)

[*English*]

Mr. Zhao Donghai: The suggestions I made just now indirectly answer your question. I now would like to repeat those suggestions.

The four suggestions are as follows. First, change the way Canada-China bilateral human rights dialogues have been conducted over the past ten years, which have been nominal, closed, and purely intergovernmental. NGOs and activists dedicated to improving bilateral human right situations should be allowed to participate in the dialogues, which should be open to the public.

Second, on a case-by-case basis and with persistent determination, urge the parties to gradually improve bilateral human rights situations.

Third, on a regular basis, organize China human rights investigation groups to visit China and examine the improvement of its human rights situation.

Last, establish a widespread and cooperative mechanism with human rights groups of all circles, all walks of life, to form a social network focusing on human rights.

I do have other suggestions if time permits. I can submit them in written form later. We can discuss those in detail.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire: I do think it would be interesting to hear your other suggestions. You talk about changing the dialogue to opening it up to everyone, and I think that this is what the committee and the NGOs would like to do. However, we hear, on the other hand, that even if the dialogue were opened, nothing would change, because the individuals currently involved in the dialogue are government officials, not the senior authorities.

If the dialogue were to be opened up and made more public, would the message get through to the highest authorities? Would that really help change the way China deals with the issue of human rights?

• (1135)

[*English*]

Mr. Zhao Donghai: Given the limited time we have today and considering that there are questions from other friends here, may I suggest that we use another opportunity to discuss the other proposals that I have?

The Chair: That's actually fine, because we've run out of time on that round.

We'll go to Mr. Silva, if he's ready.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank also the witness for being here. I just had an opportunity to look at your record of commitment to human rights, and it's very impressive. Certainly we're very honoured and congratulate you for the courageous acts you've done over many years to promote human rights in China.

I want to ask you a question in relation to what is happening on the ground. I think that would be very important for us when we talk about whether we need to have a broader dialogue, not just with the Chinese government but also with the Chinese people and the non-governmental organizations that exist on the ground.

Can you give us an assessment? Are these organizations growing? Are you aware that they're growing in China? What types of pressures are they facing on a daily basis, and are they able to help us with this dialogue with China or are they very much constrained by the government to participate in an open manner?

Mr. Zhao Donghai: Thank you for that very interesting question.

As far as I know, there are over 200 democratic organizations outside of China, and they are helping to push the human rights improvement inside the country. I think western countries need to understand China more, or more deeply, because we need help and support from friends here and from other countries to promote China's human rights improvement.

For example, a dissident reporter from Hong Kong, whose name is Ching Cheong, was sentenced by the government to five years in prison due to pressure from other countries, from western countries, whereas another person, whose name is Lu Jianhua, was sentenced to 20 years, but was sentenced quietly, so nobody knew that. There was no pressure, and the sentence was much longer.

• (1140)

Mr. Mario Silva: Mr. Chair, do I have any more time?

The Chair: We'll come to you in another round. Is that all right?

Mr. Goldring.

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you very much for appearing here today.

Earlier you mentioned the labour conditions in China and the fact that they're working from 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 p.m., which would indicate a 16-hour day and 96-hour week. In most organized societies, there's some semblance of labour laws and labour restrictions. Even Haiti has a restriction of eight hours a day.

Does the government have any restrictions on or regulations about the number of normalized working hours per day, particularly considering that we're dealing internationally with a very large level of manufacturing and competitiveness?

There was also the feeling that when we first put in the 48-hour, six-day week in North America and Europe, the efficiency curve was probably one of the bigger reasons for having restricted working hours for labourers. It's plainly more efficient to have workers who aren't worn out from working all day.

Could you comment on the labour or the laws? Is this something concerning which Canada might have some suggestions, if we're competing in this worldwide economy, so there should be some compliance or adherence?

• (1145)

Mr. Zhao Donghai: In 1998, China joined the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and also the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

In China there are lots of laws and regulations. For example, at the very beginning of the constitution, it says that this law is for the people of China. In chapter 1, it also says that every citizen in the country has freedom of speech, publication, conventions, societies, and demonstrations—all these freedoms—but they're not implemented.

Mr. Peter Goldring: Recognizing that, and it being understood that most organized societies have rules and laws, whether they follow them or not is quite another thing. What is your suggestion? Is this something that can be made known more?

The information we read about China and its economic powerhouse and booming economy is relative to \$120 per month for a manufacturing worker.... That's one of the reasons for its competitiveness. But there is very little talk about this 96 hours a week thing. Maybe it's in China's constitution, but are there international trade organizations, or something that Canada could do?

We want to export the maple leaf, or our flag, but should we not also be cognizant of extreme labour violations? Quite frankly, it is against all decency in human rights, but if you want to look at it materialistically, it is also against all forms of normal competition. So is there something we can do from an international trade perspective to amplify this and at least point it out so it's not overlooked?

•(1150)

Mr. Zhao Donghai: I totally agree with your comments.

Mr. Peter Goldring: But do you have any real suggestions on how we might orchestrate this? What type of venue, platform, or level should our enunciating of this come from?

Mr. Zhao Donghai: I made a suggestion that we should organize some study groups to visit China so you can see with your own eyes the situation in the factories. Based on that, we could make some decisions or resolutions.

The Chair: As a point of information, in order to avoid perception problems, a number of western companies that contract with Chinese factories hire consultants to inspect the factories to ensure they're observing minimally acceptable labour practices. But often there are fake front rooms in the factories, and as soon as the consultants show up to see what's going on, hundreds of people run out the back door. This is not an easy job.

Mr. Goldring, I think one thing we can all do in Canada is look at the labels to see where the clothes we're buying are made, and make a moral judgment ourselves as to whether we want to contribute to this kind of exploitation.

Mr. Marston.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank our guest for coming today.

In 1996 I led the largest civil demonstration in the history of this country, and during that we had 105,000 people, which was a significant number, on the streets of Hamilton. During that time, often we talked and thought about what happened in Tiananmen Square, and about the difference in how we could protest here, the penalties and the costs. I have to say I have a great respect for the people who lived through that time. I want you to know that others were thinking of you.

Today you talked so eloquently about the needs of others in China, and other people could have come here and talked about their personal pasts and their personal trials. I respect you greatly for doing it in the manner you have done today.

•(1155)

Mr. Zhao Donghai:

You mentioned 1996. That was a demonstration against...?

Mr. Wayne Marston: It was against the Conservative provincial government of Mike Harris.

A friend of mine, who is in Hong Kong but who goes into China underground and instructs labour unions in that country that are trying to form, has told me that she believes some things have been changing, improving, and that there is an optimism there that, because the leadership is aging, within a reasonable period of time we'll see some natural changes happening.

She said to me that the iron rice bowl is now gone, and as a result, the people in the urban areas are doing much better than the people in the rural areas. Do you see that as possibly fostering some kind of significant protest in that country?

Mr. Zhao Donghai: I believe it's a fixed impression that people get that China's human rights situation is improving. If you checked some free media, media outside China, you would see that China's human rights situation is not improving, but in fact is going backward.

For example, Internet restrictions in China are still going on. Free association and organized activities are not allowed, even though they are not intended to go through the government but are just some people who want to get together to do something.

If you are interested, I have a long list of those organizations that have been crushed by the government.

Mr. Wayne Marston: One of the things I was pleased to see is that you were talking about NGOs and other countries coming together, like-minded countries. I had suggested to this committee that we include labour in that group and that the dialogue actually report back to this committee. Earlier in remarks I heard what I thought was a comment that the dialogue taking place was too much hidden from the public and putting it on the map by having it at a public committee might be very helpful in changing the situation.

Mr. Zhao Donghai: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Marston.

Mr. Cotler, would you like to ask any questions?

•(1200)

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Maybe just one.

I do want to thank you for coming here and sharing your experience and your testimony with us.

I'm not sure the question I'm going to ask is one that the witness will be able to answer, but it has to do with the putting in place for some three years now of a Canada-China legal aid and community services project. I gather there are now model legal aid centres set up in four provinces in China. I'm wondering if the witness has any information—and I don't expect experience—about how these legal aid centres are working in helping to assist people to access justice?

Mr. Zhao Donghai: I'm sorry that I don't know any specifics in this regard, but I do know that China has received much assistance or aid in the areas of legal aid or cultural economics from western governments, including Canada.

I will do my best to answer any questions you may have.

The Chair: Mr. Khan.

Mr. Wajid Khan (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): I want to share my time with my colleague.

Thank you very much for being here, sir.

I have been to China, to seven cities and different provinces. China is growing, but it's also disheartening to know that we have human rights abuses.

My question, sir, is this. Outside the United Nations and outside other organizations, is there somebody like you—you're here before this committee—communicating with the countries that China deals with in trade or other things, whatever relations they have with countries such as Pakistan, India, and other parts of the world? Unfortunately, certain other countries they have relations with don't have stellar human rights records anyhow, but is there any other way you see that some influence can be brought upon China to act on the issue that we talked about?

Mr. Zhao Donghai: I believe there is influence when China deals with other countries. What I do think is that we need to change our mindset. China, meaning the Chinese government, thinks or considers everything in this regard of freedom or human rights. They use them as a way to just maintain their governance or their power.

For example, in the late seventies, when Deng Xiaoping started economic reforms and opening China to the outside world, people thought China was becoming more open and more civilized, but it was really a way for him to maintain his power or dictatorship. It was nothing different from what Mao did before.

• (1205)

The Chair: Just briefly.

Mr. Peter Goldring: Just to return to the law, you said Canada is involved in providing aid to assist in the law, yet the law seems to be the thing that is not adhered to. The question it really comes down to is how you can encourage the adherence to law in another country.

I've seen that China has ratified several United Nations conventions. Would this not be a role, or does the United Nations play a role in that now, giving a kind of rights barometer, labour barometer, or legal barometer for various countries and institutions? Would that be a role the United Nations could play a part in, to give an annual assessment of various countries and how they're adhering to the conventions to which they're signatories? Would they have a role? Do they do it now?

Mr. Zhao Donghai: This is a more complicated question, because China is a member of the UN Security Council and it has its veto power. For example, in the case of Taiwan's secession, if Taiwan wants membership in the United Nations, or if Japan wants to be a Security Council member at the United Nations, China can veto it. But I know the UN can do something.

Mr. Peter Goldring: If it's a complication with the United Nations, is there some—

The Chair: I'm sorry, you're over your time in this round.

Madame St-Hilaire.

[Translation]

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire: I do not want to put you in an embarrassing position. Perhaps you simply cannot answer the question.

Should Canada go so far as to boycott products that violate trade rules, but particularly those in violation of human rights considerations?

• (1210)

[English]

Mr. Zhao Donghai: I want to express my own opinion here. It seems like a simple question, but it's very complex.

There should be a trade-off between responsibilities and economic benefits in this situation. It could hurt Canada's economic interests to boycott all imports from China, or to boycott the import of certain products from China. It would be ideal if we could be importing products from China while human rights situations were being improved in China.

The Chair: Thank you.

If I may, Mr. Decheng, I have a couple of quick questions as well.

The time you spent in prison in China, was it in a *Laogai* camp?

Mr. Zhao Donghai: There are different names in China. There are prisons, and *Laogai* are camps.

The Chair: Forced labour camps.

Mr. Zhao Donghai: Or labour education camps. Although they have many names, in essence they do the same thing; they treat prisoners badly and deprive them of their basic rights. But I was staying in a prison.

The Chair: Were you ever the victim of corporal punishment? Were you ever tortured or physically assaulted?

Mr. Zhao Donghai (Interpretation): I can give you an example. I spent nine years in prison. The drinking water there was not filtered, and I developed kidney stones because of it. Later on, in the hospital, the doctor was shocked to see stones so hard. They were not easy to remove.

• (1215)

The Chair: But your friend and colleague Yu Dongyue was left prison-deranged. Why do you think that was?

Mr. Zhao Donghai: The case of Yu Dongyue is just one of many of those kinds of cases.

In 1991 Yu Dongyue was tortured, mentally and physically, by the wardens in the prison, and that caused his mental breakdown. Only after 14 years in prison was he released due to pressure from the outside world.

The Chair: To the best of your knowledge, were some of the young people who protested with you at Tiananmen Square killed?

Mr. Zhao Donghai: Yes. One person who stayed in prison with me was executed. Just before his execution, that morning, we went to the washroom and we were both handcuffed, and we used our hands to button each other's pants.

I feel very sorry to think about this. His name was Luo Hongjun.

The Chair: And he was one person, at least, who you know was executed?

Mr. Zhao Donghai: That's true.

• (1220)

The Chair: To the best of your knowledge, has the Chinese government ever acknowledged or recognized the deaths of students, the killing of students that occurred following Tiananmen Square?

Mr. Zhao Donghai: You hear different versions from the government on the victims in that movement. From the very beginning, Yu Anmu, who was a government official, denied there were any deaths in the event, and then later on we heard that a few were killed, and then after that, a few dozen.

So there were different versions, because there were pressures from the outside world about this. But I believe that these numbers are far from being true, and that nobody knows the truth.

The Chair: I have one last question.

You talked about pressure from the outside world being effective in some cases, including your own. I have a two-part question. The first part is, do you think that if the Chinese people had a choice, they would choose to be governed by the Communist Party?

My second question is, do you think those who support democratic reform in China are encouraged and motivated by foreign governments like Canada, who express concern about the human rights situation in China? Do you think it's helpful to the forces for reform when countries like Canada publicly express concern about the human rights situation?

Mr. Zhao Donghai: In answer to your first question, the Chinese people are actually forced to accept the leadership of the Chinese Community Party. They really have no choice.

Secondly, after 1989, after June 4, it was Japan that first gave up its sanctions to China. In other words, if there were no compromises from any countries, would China's human rights situation be better today?

The Chair: Okay.

Well, thank you again very much, Mr. Decheng. Thank you to the interpreter.

We'll adjourn this portion of the meeting. The committee will move in camera, so I would invite those who are not members of the committee, or their staff, to please leave the room.

Thank you very much.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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