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Chair

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld

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• (1305)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

We have our witnesses via video conference today. We are in the study regarding the human rights situation of the Uighurs.

Today we have with us Farida Deif, who is the Canadian director of Human Rights Watch Canada; and Adrian Zenz. Welcome to both witnesses.

I will start with Ms. Deif.

Ms. Farida Deif (Canada Director, Human Rights Watch Canada): Madam Chair and honourable members of Parliament, thank you for inviting me to appear before this committee to discuss the current human rights situation of the Uighurs.

Last month, Human Rights Watch released a report entitled “Eradicating Ideological Viruses: China's Campaign of Repression Against Xinjiang's Muslims.” The report presents new evidence of the Chinese government's mass arbitrary detention, torture and mistreatment of Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang and details the increasingly pervasive controls on daily life.

As you know, China's abusive “strike hard” campaign began in Xinjiang in 2014, but the level of repression increased dramatically after Communist party secretary Chen Quanguo relocated from Tibet to assume leadership of Xinjiang in late 2016.

Since then, the authorities have stepped up mass arbitrary detention, including in pretrial detention centres and prisons, both of which are formal facilities, and in political education camps. Credible estimates indicate that one million people are being held in the camps, where Turkic Muslims are being forced to learn Mandarin Chinese and sing praises of the Chinese Communist Party. Those who resist or are deemed to have failed to learn are punished.

The detainees in political education camps are held without any due process rights, neither charged nor put on trial, and they have no access to lawyers or family. They are held for having links with foreign countries or using foreign communication tools such as WhatsApp, or even for peacefully expressing their identity and religion, none of which constitute crimes.

A former detainee described conditions in the political education camps to Human Rights Watch. He said:

I resisted their measures.... They put me in a small solitary confinement cell...in a space of about 2 x 2 metres. I was not given any food or drink, my hands were handcuffed in the back, and I had to stand for 24 hours without sleep.

Outside these detention facilities, the Chinese authorities subject Turkic Muslims to such extreme restrictions on personal life that in many ways their experiences resemble those of the people detained. A combination of administrative measures, checkpoints and passport controls restrict their movements. They are subjected to persistent political indoctrination, including compulsory flag-raising ceremonies, political meetings and Mandarin night schools.

The authorities have also subjected people in Xinjiang to pervasive and constant surveillance. They encourage neighbours to spy on each other. They employ high-tech mass surveillance systems that make use of QR codes, biometrics, artificial intelligence, phone spyware and big data. They have mobilized over a million officials and police officers to monitor people, including through intrusive programs in which monitors are assigned to live in Uighurs' homes.

The “Strike Hard” campaign has also had serious implications abroad. The Xinjiang authorities have made foreign ties a punishable offence. The government has barred Turkic Muslims from contacting people overseas. It has also pressured some ethnic Uighurs and Kazakhs living outside the country to return to China, while requiring others to provide detailed information about their lives abroad.

In recent years, the Chinese government has also stepped up pressure on other governments to forcibly return Uighurs in their countries back to China.

The Chinese government's religious restrictions are so severe that it has effectively outlawed Islam in Xinjiang. It has banned certain facial hair and religious clothing, prohibited children from learning religion, and confiscated prayer mats and the Quran. Officials closely monitor people's religious practices. The Chinese government even detained people for praying five times a day or circulating religious text among family members.

As one ethnic Uighur explained to Human Rights Watch:

What they [the Chinese authorities] want is to force us to assimilate, to identify with the country, such that, in the future, the idea of Uyghur will be in name only, but without its meaning.

An ethnic Uighur woman told us:

We have no rights in Xinjiang.... They scare us so much. Living there changes your way of being. You become afraid of [people in] uniforms, you're afraid of telling the truth, you're afraid of praying, you're afraid of being a Muslim.

The “strike hard” campaign has also divided families. Some members in Xinjiang and others abroad are caught unexpectedly by the tightening of passport controls and border crossings. Children have at times been trapped in one country without their parents. Reports of children of detained Turkic Muslims being placed in orphanages against their families' wishes are particularly alarming. By sending children in Xinjiang to state institutions, the Chinese government is only adding to the trauma of the “strike hard” campaign.

To be clear, the scale and scope of abuses in Xinjiang are unlike anything Human Rights Watch has seen in China in decades. Not just the numbers of people held, but the abuses—the systematic abuses region-wide—are unprecedented. In addition, the impact goes beyond China to Uighurs globally, including Uighur Canadians here at home. It's unlike anything we've seen before.

These rampant abuses violate fundamental rights of freedom of expression, freedom of religion and privacy, and protections from torture and unfair trials. More broadly, the Chinese authorities' controls over day-to-day life in Xinjiang primarily affect ethnic Uighurs, Kazakhs and other minorities, in violation of international law prohibitions against discrimination.

Xinjiang's crisis is symptomatic of the deepening repression across China under President Xi Jinping. China's global power has largely protected it from international scrutiny. A failure of concerned governments to push back against this repression will only embolden Beijing both at home and abroad.

It's clear that China does not see a significant political cost to its widespread human rights violations in Xinjiang. This must change. We therefore ask this committee to urge the Government of Canada to take several concrete actions.

First, the Government of Canada should publicly and privately call on the Chinese government at the highest levels to end the “strike hard” campaign. Canada should impose targeted sanctions through the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act against party secretary Chen Quanguo and other senior officials linked to abuses in the strike hard campaign.

Canada should also impose appropriate export control mechanisms to deny China access to surveillance and other technologies used to violate basic rights in Xinjiang, and Canada should investigate the Chinese government's intimidation of Turkic Muslim diaspora communities across Canada.

Next, we also urge this committee to recommend that the Government of Canada not forcibly return Uighurs, Kazakhs and other Turkic Muslims to China without a full and fair individualized examination of the risk of being persecuted, tortured or ill-treated in

China. This government should also expedite asylum claims of Turkic Muslims at risk of being forcibly returned to China.

To conclude, there is no question that China should be held to account for its mass, systematic violations in Xinjiang. Some governments have begun to speak out against these repressive policies and have taken steps to protect the Uighur diaspora at home and asylum-seekers from further harm. Canada should follow suit. It is clear that stronger, more concerted action is needed from this government to increase the political cost to China of its oppressive campaign against Xinjiang Muslims.

Thank you very much.

● (1310)

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

Now we will go to our second witness, Dr. Adrian Zenz, who is a professor at the European School of Culture and Theology in Korntal, Germany.

Mr. Adrian Zenz (As an Individual): Firstly, I would like to thank the chair and the Subcommittee on International Human Rights for inviting me to testify.

The research performed by others and myself conclusively shows the existence of a large-scale extrajudicial detention network for the purpose of subjecting Xinjiang's Muslim minorities, but also some ethnic Christians, to intensive political re-education and indoctrination procedures.

The evidence I gathered largely comes from the Chinese government itself. A detailed account of my research, including on police recruitments and the installation of surveillance systems, is publicly available.

In August 2018, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination accused China of detaining over one million Muslim minorities in Xinjiang, in extrajudicial re-education camps. China flatly denied the existence of re-education camps, with the representative Hu Lianhe arguing that criminals “involved only in minor offences” are assigned “to vocational education and employment training centres to acquire employment skills and legal knowledge”.

In a recent interview, Xinjiang's governor Shohrat Zakir likewise acknowledged that those “suspected of minor criminal offences” are “provided...with free vocational training through vocational education institutions”. Successful trainees can receive “certificates of completion”.

However, a recent amendment to Xinjiang's de-extremification ordinance specifically refers to vocational skills training centres as re-education institutions: in Chinese, [*Witness speaks Mandarin*], a term that Hu Lianhe and Shohrat Zakir carefully avoid in their statements.

Recently, the Xinjiang government launched a publicity initiative talking about vocational skills training to help rescue ignorant, backward and poor rural minorities. A related TV clip was produced and shown on Chinese television, CCTV. However, these accounts are highly selective. Footage only shows the top of a building, without showing us the surrounding extensive security features. Footage of a classroom, however, shows no less than five security cameras in the back. The statements of several internees come across very stilted, with major discrepancies between their words and their body language, in some ways reminiscent of false confessions. Much of what is said on that TV clip appears to have been memorized beforehand.

From public bid documents, we know that many of these training camps were commissioned with extensive security features. Similar features such as high fences, walls, watchtowers and so on, are visible from satellite footage of the possible location of the facility featured on this TV program. Bid documents also indicate a clear link between vocational skills training of this type...which I would clearly differentiate from proper or genuine, or professional vocational education.

Some of these facilities have been commissioned with hundreds of police and police stations located either nearby or on the facility. Some of these compounds have a re-education facility, using the actual term for political re-education, whose history can be traced to the former, and now abolished, nationwide re-education-through-labour system and these supposed skills-training facilities.

It is disconcerting, especially in the statements of Xinjiang's governor and of the CCTV piece that was produced, the portrayal of the Uighurs' poor farmers, who are supposedly naturally inclined towards extremism just because they are not wage labourers who speak Chinese well or are tightly integrated into mainstream society. This particular perspective is driven by communist materialist ideology that presumes that with improved material conditions, all human beings will naturally tend toward atheism or naturalism. However, since religious belief has been persisting and deepening among many Chinese minorities—even the Han majority, and especially among Muslim minorities in Xinjiang, also in response to what they perceive as ethnocultural discrimination, the authorities have, step by step, increased their securitization drive.

●(1315)

China does face a credible terrorism threat from a fairly small number of Uighur groups who, from what we can tell, have by now been neutralized and disbanded. The present re-education campaign represents a severe and extensive violation of the most basic human rights, which is not only unlikely to achieve the stated aim of deradicalization but is also quite likely to deepen and promote new radicalization among Muslim populations in Xinjiang who previously had no affinity with extremist ideology.

First, I encourage the Government of Canada to publicly name and to condemn Xinjiang's re-education campaign. I encourage the

government to not exclusively rely on quiet or vector diplomacy, which would in my opinion ultimately not make a difference. Second, I would encourage the government to not extradite back to China any Muslim from Xinjiang who is currently in Canada, because of the present human rights concerns.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I am going to suggest, if we have the unanimous consent of the committee, that we limit all the questions to five minutes. That way we'll get through both of the rounds.

Do we agree to that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Madam Chair, I noticed on our schedule that there is some business—

The Chair: It's just five minutes at the end to discuss one witness.

Mr. David Sweet: Okay, good. Thank you.

The Chair: We'll start with Mr. Anderson, for five minutes.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Thank you.

I wish I had more time with you today. This is an important subject.

I just want to raise some concerns we had the other day. Global Affairs was in to speak to us. I don't know whether you heard their testimony. In light of the points you made—that there have been publicly acknowledged surveillance activities and deployment of police, that camps are now being seen as legal entities, and that there has been satellite footage of the camps for a number of months... They were very reluctant to acknowledge that these accounts are accurate, but they were willing to acknowledge that something is going on there. They would not basically accept the overall sense that this is as serious as it is.

I'm wondering whether you have any suggestions for how we might convince the government that this is actually serious enough that they need to take action.

A secondary question is, how bad does a country have to be in violating international norms before governments such as ours should stand up to say, this is going to begin to affect the marketplace for both you and us as well?

That question is for either one of you.

●(1320)

Ms. Farida Deif: In terms of the number and the scale of detentions, there is very credible evidence and information about the mass detentions in these education camps, and it is very difficult for a government to claim that all of the information is fabricated and that there aren't widespread and systematic abuses occurring, both in the detention facilities and among the everyday population in Xinjiang. That is just simply unavoidable.

The question I would have for the government really is, if they are not willing to acknowledge the accuracy of the reports, would they at least call on the Government of China to allow independent investigators to enter Xinjiang and assess and investigate whether those reports are credible or not? Human Rights Watch, for example, has no access to Xinjiang, nor do journalists. Those who have been able to enter are only able to enter in a very monitored fashion, which in many ways actually puts at risk the individuals they are interviewing. If there are issues of accuracy, I would call on this government to request an independent assessment and urge China to agree to one.

Mr. David Anderson: Let me cut you off there; I only have five minutes. and I want to address something that both of you spoke about, which is the scale and scope of this being beyond anything we've seen for decades.

We're familiar with the approach to Tibet, and we've seen some other places around the world where there has been repression, but what's interesting is that we see this spreading across provinces. Now we begin to see it spreading across ethnic and faith groups. I wonder whether you can comment on that. I think the Christians in various communities or provinces are now seeing the application of some of these repressive measures as well.

Can you comment on this? I'll give you the rest of my time to do so, if you both have something to say.

Dr. Zenz, if you want to lead off, we can then come back to Human Rights Watch.

Mr. Adrian Zenz: I think there's great concern that China is creating a real precedent. Of course, we know that all of China has significantly stepped up the persecution of religion, especially in 2018 with the new laws on religion. China is very likely to learn from the methods in Xinjiang how far they can go.

I have argued in my research that this represents an entire level up from the police state that has been created in Tibetan areas, for example, and then in Xinjiang. A re-education drive of this extent has not been seen since the 1950s and 1960s, although back then it was not as systematic, it did not have high tech, and it did not have the same economic resources to power the political indoctrination campaign that we see now.

The Chinese authorities are likely to learn from these methods and then apply them elsewhere. I've argued in an article of mine that we might see different and adaptive forms of indoctrination and re-education camps in other places, or even that these methods may be exported to other authoritarian nations.

Second, and this may relate a bit to what you said before, if what is occurring in Xinjiang today, on this scale, is not challenged in strong ways by the international community in other nations, then my question would be, what would be? How bad would it have to get? The Chinese will, if this is not sufficiently challenged, be emboldened to do anything. That is very much how China has operated in the past, seeing what it can get away with.

We already have seen in the past 10 days a response to the international media coverage and to what international institutions and nations are saying. The Chinese are now coming forward with what you could call a propaganda or marketing campaign in

response. If we had said nothing, even that would not have been necessary. They would have remained at a denial stage.

Now, then, we have moved from a denial stage to acknowledgement and justification. But that is not enough. It has to go one step further.

• (1325)

The Chair: Unfortunately, that is your time, but you can revisit this in a further question if you need to.

We will now move to Ms. Khalid for five minutes.

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for your very compelling testimony today.

I want to continue, Dr. Zenz, from where you left off. What happens when nothing is done? Do you see this moving towards ethnic cleansing, towards genocide? What is the ultimate outcome of this for China?

Mr. Adrian Zenz: The ultimate goal is not to literally destroy, kill or eliminate an ethnic minority. In China, both in past centuries and in the present—the 20th century, the modern Chinese state, nowadays since 1949 the Communist Party—there has been a very consistent self-portrayal of China as a multi-ethnic empire.

The Chinese want to be multi-ethnic, and of course, for the Han Chinese, culture and race are seen as the centre. The minorities complement and create the glory of this empire, so they must exist; however, they have to be in some ways sufficiently assimilated into firstly the Han race and culture.

We're talking, then, about a cultural and a linguistic assimilation—although minority language education does exist—but as in the Hui and Tibetan case, it is not seen as acceptable if the minorities don't speak Chinese well.

The second axis of assimilation is along the lines of socialist or communist ideology, meaning that religion is suspect and inherently problematic. Faith or belief in the party comes first, and that's very much the intention of the re-education campaign, and it's what we hear from witnesses. That must come first. If you have some kind of secondary belief and go to some kind of church that is government-approved, government-controlled—

Ms. Iqra Khalid: I'm sorry, Dr. Zenz, I'm going to cut you off there. I have a few more questions.

We've heard testimony before this committee of organ harvesting occurring within the Uighur community in China. We know that's something that other communities, such as the Falun Gong, have also been speaking out about within theirs.

Let me ask Human Rights Watch, Dr. Deif, whether this is something that you've heard as well.

Ms. Farida Deif: We've certainly heard reports, not through out testimonies in Xinjiang but in other reports, of organ harvesting, but I can't really speak to that issue in more detail, because we haven't done the research on it directly.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: When you're doing the research and are collecting the testimonies and the first-hand evidence, what do you anticipate doing with it, as an organization?

Ms. Farida Deif: It really is to first highlight the abuse and the scale and the severity of the human rights abuses taking place. Its main goal really is to stop the practice, to end the “strike hard” campaign, to convince concerned governments such as the Canadian government to take action.

That goal is expressed through a number of different recommendations that we've made. One is to publicly condemn the abuses that are occurring in Xinjiang and, if there's any concern about the validity of the detention centres, to call for a UN investigative team to investigate the situation.

I think we know quite well, however, that China in many ways is allowed to use its political and economic might to muzzle criticism of its actions around the world. If we are not vocal about the repression that's occurring in China, it will only be replicated in other communities. If the scale and the severity of the abuses taking place in Xinjiang were happening in any other country, we would see investigations occurring, a call for special mechanisms, an increasingly robust response by the international community. Unfortunately China, because it is China and because the abuses are happening there, is really in many ways given a free pass.

• (1330)

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you.

The Chair: We'll go to Ms. Hardcastle for five minutes.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Just to take off from my colleague's questions with regard to the international community's vocal response and active response, Ms. Deif, I think you provided us with a list of recommendations about making public declarations and individual targeted economic sanctions. We've also heard from Mr. Zenz suggestions that the international community be more robust in the way it responds.

What are some of the tools we can use to that end in terms of using exports and our trade relationships? Is there something that you see as key that Canada can be doing right now?

Ms. Farida Deif: I think there's a lot more that Canada can be doing right now. Unfortunately, what we've seen over the past few months is that beyond an expression of concern in Geneva at the United Nations Human Rights Council there has been no public statement denouncing the abuses happening in Xinjiang by this government, and that is incredibly concerning.

In the immediate term, I think it would be very important to use Canada's new targeted sanctions mechanism, the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act, to sanction party leaders and other senior officials who are linked to the “strike hard” campaign. That's something Canada can do immediately through Global Affairs.

Another thing is not forceably returning ethnic Uighurs to China. What we've seen in Germany and Sweden, for example—two allies of Canada—is that they have suspended all returns of Uighur asylum seekers to China, given the scale and severity of the abuses and the risk that they would be disappeared or be detained there. Canada should follow suit. There is no reason that there can't be a moratorium or a freezing of returns of Uighurs to China.

We have a situation in Canada as well in which you have about 2,000 Uighur Canadians who have collected and compiled a list of 300 family members who are currently detained in those camps. They are doing very strong advocacy across Ottawa to ensure that those abuses get to the highest levels of power.

In terms of immigration policy I think there's a lot more we can do. We can expedite asylum claims of Turkic Muslims at risk of being forceably returned. There are several hundred Uighur Muslims still trapped in Turkey. In the same way as for the Chechnyan gay men, we can do what we did for them in the case of these asylum seekers and indicate to the world that Canada takes the protection of Uighurs very seriously and will take action through immigration policy to expedite their claims, to ensure they are not returned to harm.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Mr. Zenz, would you like to expand on on how you think we should be immediately responsive?

Mr. Adrian Zenz: My suggestion is to really come on board with other governments, to try to make joint statements with other governments, because I see that as much more effective than unilateral action. Although Canada by itself taking steps is of course also necessary and helpful, I highly recommend multilateral action, working with other governments.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Do you have any recommendations about how we can establish the credibility of the numbers we're hearing for these detention camps and of what is occurring inside them? We have conflicting information. Is there something that really quickly you can recommend to us?

• (1335)

Ms. Farida Deif: Short of having access to Xinjiang and access to files, it is very difficult to completely confirm the numbers. What we have called on governments to do, including this government, is to work together in a concerted way with other governments that are concerned about the human rights abuses happening in Xinjiang, to call for an independent UN mechanism to be able to enter Xinjiang to investigate the abuses there and determine the scale of the abuses as well. If that's done in a concerted way with many other governments, it might have success.

The Chair: That is our time, so we'll move to Mr. Tabbara for five minutes.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for being here.

My question will be towards the judicial system within China. Could you comment on whether there may be a two-tier system within the judiciary there for Chinese citizens and for Uighurs?

You mentioned, Ms. Deif, that there was no access to a lawyer. Mr. Zenz, you mentioned that officials denied the existence of these camps. If this were taken into trial or into a court, what would be the outcome, if you're not able to get access to a lawyer?

If these institutions are not strong, who's left to defend the Uighurs?

Mr. Adrian Zenz: The so-called re-education, if I may start out, is inherently an extrajudicial procedure. It's an administrative detention determined by public security authorities without the involvement of the courts. There are no court proceedings and also no ways to appeal or to even know what the charge is, and there's no conviction; hence no conviction can be appealed either.

This is the very reason for which the Chinese government itself eventually decided to abolish the nationwide “re-education through labour” system. Local police authorities could easily abuse the system to simply put dissidents or anybody they did not particularly like into a re-education facility.

In Xinjiang we now have rejuvenation of this same system, likely on a larger scale and with greater intensity, and the Uighurs or other Muslims who are interned have no right of appeal. Of course, the issue in Xinjiang is also that even if you were formally censored, even if you were to go through formal proceedings, there is evidence that even so you would have very little recourse to a fair trial. That, however, is a different matter and not the explicit focus of my research.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Ms. Deif, could you comment as well?

Ms. Farida Deif: I think it is inherently a two-tier system at all levels, a very repressive, abusive two-tier system that has instilled an enormous amount of fear among the Uighur community in China and across Xinjiang. I can't really speak to the judicial processes, because again, as my colleague said, these are all extrajudicial mechanisms, around which the Chinese government has tried to create a kind of veneer of legality, but it doesn't really stand up to the facts.

I would say, in terms of that two-tier system, that a few other issues are important to note. Even when we speak about checkpoints and increased surveillance in Xinjiang, there are checkpoints inside the area, in which the Han Chinese will go in one way in a sort of “fast pass area” for Chinese tourists who might be visiting the province, while if you are an ethnic Uighur or other Turkic Muslim you are forced through a different checkpoint area in which there are retinal scans and all kinds of other biometrics employed. At every level, then, it is a two-tiered system.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move on to Mr. Sweet.

Mr. David Sweet: Thank you very much, Chair.

I want to take the opportunity to say to Dr. Zenz that I greatly appreciate his work.

I think you know that we gave the Dalai Lama honorary citizenship here in Canada. I moved that motion in the House of Commons. I notice that you've done quite a bit of work exposing the plight of Tibetans. I greatly appreciate that.

I'd like to pose to you the same question that was answered by Human Rights Watch, which Ms. Khalid asked.

Do you have any evidence, or have there been any reports of the Uighurs being subjected to the same treatment that the Falun Gong have been subjected to, as far as organ harvesting is concerned?

● (1340)

Mr. Adrian Zenz: I have mainly focused on researching official government documents, but also have had statements from informants. I myself have not been able to ascertain evidence on organ harvesting. I have also not particularly attempted to research it. I therefore cannot really comment on that matter.

Mr. David Sweet: Okay. Thank you.

I forget which witness mentioned taking a multilateral approach. Dr. Zenz, I think you did.

I'm wondering about the motivation of the League of Arab States. Have there been any statements from there? Has any one of the member countries or have any of the members taken some leadership on this, particularly because of the Uighurs being a Muslim minority group in China? Have you heard of anything along those lines, so that Canada could work with any of those members?

Mr. Adrian Zenz: Muslim governments have been surprisingly silent on the matter—various sources have speculated as to the reasons, which are probably complex—with the exception of the Malaysian government, which also moved to criticize the belt and road initiative and has been a lot more forthcoming in its perception of China.

The Malaysian government might, then, be an option. Other Muslim governments have been very disappointing in failing to take a public stance on the matter. It might be advisable to point this fact out and not to let it simply pass by, since, as you correctly pointed out, many other nations have large or majority Muslim populations.

Mr. David Sweet: Yes.

Prior to this study, the one that seized us the longest concerned another large Muslim community, the Rohingya, who have been severely persecuted and of course have been driven from their homes as well. Not many nations have come to their defence either.

What about Human Rights Watch? Did you want to respond to the question that I put to Dr. Zenz?

Ms. Farida Deif: I think there are certainly members of the organisation of Islamic states that might be able to partner with Canada and different allies to move on this.

I would also stress that there are a number of rights-respecting governments that are deeply concerned by what's happening in Xinjiang. Canada can partner with them—doing so provides a level of political cover, in a way—either through the United Nations Human Rights Council or at the General Assembly, to push forward resolutions that would denounce what's happening in Xinjiang, denounce the persecution of religious minorities.

Canada has always been a champion on this issue and on human rights in China. Our colleagues in our China team have had very strong relationships with the embassy, the Canadian consulate in Beijing. Generally, from a private diplomacy perspective Canada is quite strong on raising these issues, on connecting with human rights defenders, on raising human rights issues.

As my fellow witness has mentioned, however, this sort of private, backdoor diplomacy has limitations. Really, at this point, given the scale and severity of abuses, there needs to be a concerted public outcry by a number of concerned states, including Canada.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

We now go to Mr. Fragiskatos.

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

My question goes to Professor Zenz. I'm interested in learning as much as I can about what is actually taking place on the ground and about some of the underlying dynamics.

This question is certainly not to excuse what is taking place. I think we're all horrified to hear what has apparently transpired, but I want to know a little bit more about the nature and goal of Uighur activism.

Is it cultural in nature, in terms of securing greater cultural freedoms for the Uighur people? Is it political in nature, so that the goal would be cultural freedom plus political autonomy within a united China? Or is there an underpinning of an independence sentiment that drives it?

What do you have to say to that, sir?

• (1345)

Mr. Adrian Zenz: I'm sorry, your first question was about what goes on inside the re-education camps?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: No. I said I want to know as much as I can, as an observer, about what is taking place on the ground, and then I pivoted to ask about the nature of Uighur political activism. I think you heard that part of the question, did you?

Mr. Adrian Zenz: Yes, I was just wondering if these are two distinct questions.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: No, they're not. The nature of political activism is my question.

Mr. Adrian Zenz: Okay. There have been various degrees and types of discontent among Uighurs on the ground in China over the course of history. There was a particular incident in the 1990s in a particular area of Xinjiang, which was related to access to religious freedom.

After the Cultural Revolution, during which of course religious freedom was greatly suppressed, there became a greater space for this. As part of a clash between what the authorities perceived as an overuse of religious freedom, the Uighurs responded with writing, to an extent. This also has employment ramifications.

Uighur activism has been portrayed as religious terrorism. More recently, this portrayal has an aspect of truth to it, because Uighurs, to an extent, were radicalized and influenced. Some went to Syria, and some swore to take revenge for what has been done to their people.

However, it is highly necessary to see all of this as part of a much bigger picture. There are various types of discontent among normal people on the ground in Xinjiang, and they have responded in very different ways. Some of them, of course, have responded with

violence, not necessarily only religiously motivated, but also politically and economically motivated.

That would be a succinct answer to your question.

Beyond that I would say that it's not been my particular area of expertise to study in detail the nature of Uighur separatism.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Ms. Deif, do you have anything to add to that?

Ms. Farida Deif: Yes, I would just say that over the past five years there have been a number of violent incidents involving Uighur or suspected Uighur perpetrators, but it's really important to note that the "Strike Hard" campaign's broad mandate to punish and control all of the Muslims in Xinjiang can't really be justified in the name of public safety.

The stated goals of the "Strike Hard" campaign are state security, ethnic unity and social stability, but we know very well that these are overly broad terms that the Chinese government often uses to crack down on any political expression.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: What form of opposition, if any at all, is manifesting in Xinjiang? What does it look like? How are those who are opposed to what is taking place carrying out their activities, and how are they organizing themselves, if at all?

Ms. Farida Deif: From our perspective, any opposition to what's happening in Xinjiang is happening outside of China at this moment. Because of the level and severity of surveillance, monitoring, abuses, oppression and mass detention, the Chinese government has closed the door on any possibility of speaking out or publicly organizing in any way inside the country.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Okay. I figured that was the case. I just wanted to know if in fact there was any sign at all, but it's quite understandable why there wouldn't be.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: The last five minutes go to Ms. Hardcastle.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd just like either of you today to maybe help us understand a bit. You spoke earlier about how the international community has to come together, and how we can be effective working together.

I need to know a little more about how we can be working against some of the pressures that we know. China is somehow exerting pressure in other countries that is bringing Uighurs back into China. They had been deported. What exactly are the pressures that are making this population outside of the country even more vulnerable, and what can we be doing?

• (1350)

Ms. Farida Deif: There is quite a bit that Canada can be doing on its own, as well as in concert with other countries. On its own, as you rightly mentioned, there is a lot of pressure to return Uighurs to China, back to Xinjiang and the abusive, oppressive policies there. The Chinese government does not want Uighurs outside of the country speaking out about human rights abuses in Xinjiang. They don't want that activism.

Therefore, one of the things the Canadian government can do quite easily is follow Sweden and Germany's example and suspend the return of Uighurs, at the moment, back to China. We know the level of severity of abuses. The risks are so high that those individuals would disappear or be placed in political education camps, that it really is unconscionable for Canada to return Uighurs at this time, without a very thorough process. That is one thing Canada can do off the bat.

Then, in concert with other countries, there have been a number of proposals for resolutions in various UN mechanisms, to renounce the abuses taking place and to call an investigation with independent investigators. Canada should support those mechanisms.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle: Do we know what some of the measures are? Mr. Zenz, perhaps you have some insight on that. What are some of the measures that China is using to bring Uighurs back into China?

Mr. Adrian Zenz: China is pressuring Uighurs directly, especially when those who are abroad have relatives back home, which makes them more liable to manipulation.

One of the mechanisms China has used is refusing to issue new passports, so when passports expire, it tells these Uighurs to return to China instead of getting a new passport issued in the country of their current residence. These Uighurs then effectively become stateless.

It is highly necessary for countries such as Canada to accept these Uighurs as asylum seekers and grant them asylum, rather than have them return to China. They should be issued foreign passports, which also gives them a stronger foundation. Essentially, any Uighur who is not in China will need to have a foreign passport in order to be better protected. If they do not, they're very vulnerable to various pressures, either by these legal mechanisms or other forms of manipulation.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I want to thank both of our witnesses, Farida Deif and Adrian Zenz, for being here today.

We will now suspend for one minute as we go in camera. I would ask that we clear the room of all but members and their staff, so we can go in camera for a few minutes.

Thank you very much.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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