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Chair: Mr. Peter Fonseca

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• (1830)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.)): Welcome, colleagues, to meeting 18 of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights.

Today we meet to hear from witnesses for briefings on the situation in both Hong Kong and the Philippines.

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would encourage all participants to mute their microphones when they are not speaking and to address all comments through the chair.

When you have 30 seconds left in your questioning time, I will signal with this paper.

Interpretation for our witnesses is available. You will see a globe icon at the bottom of your screen, and it's available in French and English. If you don't speak one of the languages, please set up your interpretation there.

Also, just for everybody to remember, there are no screen captures or photos permitted.

I would like to welcome our witnesses for this first panel, which is on Hong Kong.

We have with us, Ms. Ai-Men Lau, adviser with Alliance Canada Hong Kong. Mr. Albert Chan, former Hong Kong legislative councillor, is appearing as an individual. From Hong Kong Watch, we have Mr. Sam Goodman, senior policy adviser; and Ms. Joey Siu, associate.

Ms. Lau, I will now invite you to make your opening statement for up to five minutes.

Ms. Ai-Men Lau (Advisor, Alliance Canada Hong Kong): Good evening. My name is Ai-Men Lau.

[Translation]

Thank you for inviting me to speak today.

[English]

I'd also like to thank the administrative, technical and translation team for all their hard work.

From the 2019 peaceful protest movement until today, Hong Kong's autonomy has been decimated by the Chinese Communist Party and the Hong Kong government. This has continued with impunity and the inaction has only emboldened the Chinese regime.

The Hong Kong government uses the national security law to stamp out street protests, silence dissenting voices, gut the city's legislature, decimate political opposition and weaponize COVID-19 health measures to restrict movement, mobility and gatherings, effectively bringing the entire movement to its knees.

Without an opposition, Beijing has implemented sweeping institutional changes to ensure complete control over the city's governance, including stripping Hong Kong of its electoral autonomy, requiring pledges of allegiance in public sectors, firing teachers for their political views and delegitimizing university student unions. It is also targeting trade unions and religious groups, raiding and targeting pro-democratic yellow businesses, requiring professional bodies like the Hong Kong Bar Association to adhere to its patriotic statutory duties and requiring Internet service providers to ban specific websites under the national security law.

Beijing's political imperative has now seeped into society and private life.

Living in fear and uncertainty, pro-democracy Hong Kongers are struggling to see a brighter future. Two years ago, Hong Kongers were able to march the streets in protest to voice their concerns. Today, they can be arrested for simply holding up blank pieces of paper in protest.

We have witnessed countless coordinated attacks by police officers and triads on regular civilians and arbitrary arrests of medics and reporters. Protestors were raped, beaten, tortured and denied due process. Co-organizers have gone missing for months on end and many more have fled to Taiwan via boat.

As of February 28 of this year, there were 10,242 arrests and 2,506 prosecutions related to the protests, yet after two years of perpetrating violent state and police suppression, few, if any, police officers, triad members or government officials have been held accountable.

Over 60% of youth in Hong Kong are hoping to leave the city. In a city-wide survey conducted by the Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute, one in five Hong Kongers is seeking to flee the city and 65% are not confident about Hong Kong's political future.

Even before the passage of the national security law, many Hong Kongers who hold foreign passports or have the financial resources have fled the city in fear of retaliation for their involvement in the protest movement. Now even that may be at risk. The Hong Kong government has passed a law that can bar people from leaving or entering, transforming Hong Kong into an open-air prison. This law will come into effect August 1, meaning we have a limited window of time to act.

We have three recommendations for the committee to consider.

First, we have previously submitted recommendations to CIMM, which we will also be submitting to this committee. Canada should create a dedicated asylum pathway for those fleeing prosecution or persecution, along with other immigration policy changes, such as modifying private sponsorship and family reunification that enables extended family members to resettle here. Canada should also plan to support the 300,000 Canadians and their families who need to renew permanent residence status or make applications. We urge you to consider the travel visa restrictions that have barred many from entering Canada, either seeking asylum or for resettling permanently.

Second, even though Hong Kongers are hoping to leave the city, we know that many more cannot leave. This is why we need to hold Hong Kong and Chinese officials accountable. Canada should invoke the Justice to Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act, and place targeted sanctions against the Hong Kong government, the Hong Kong Police Force and PRC officials who are complicit in perpetrating human rights violations.

We must also ensure that these sanctions are enforceable by the Government of Canada.

Finally, we also urge Canada to address foreign state harassment operations, as dissidents' families are also targeted by authorities in Hong Kong and China.

• (1835)

Thank you, again, for inviting me. I am happy to take your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lau.

Now we'll hear from Mr. Albert Chan.

Mr. Albert Wai Yip Chan (Former Hong Kong Legislative Councillor, As an Individual): Mr. Chair, thanks for the invitation.

I am Albert Chan. I'm a Canadian resident living in Vancouver now. Before I returned to Canada in 2017, I was an elected politician in Hong Kong for 31 years.

I was the founding member of many political parties and was seen as one of the most radical politicians in Hong Kong. I have been arrested, indicted and convicted of political charges, and experienced first-hand police brutality.

My last indictment was in 2014 for burning the Chinese government's white paper on Hong Kong. I was charged together with Joshua Wong, Nathan Law and Raphael Wong, all three of whom you will recognize as distinguished and able young leaders in Hong Kong. Joshua is now in prison. Nathan is in exile and Raphael is pending trial on bail.

My last arrest was in 2016, together with Martin Lee and Jimmy Lai, for taking part in the Occupy Central protests.

In my years of political involvement, I have seen the deterioration of the rule of law, human rights and civic liberty in Hong Kong. With Xi Jinping's "thought" incorporated into the Chinese Constitution in 2018, the situation in Hong Kong has become worse and worse. Hong Kong is now, effectively, ruled under state terrorism, and many political activists have been arrested and charged arbitrarily. With the promulgation of the Hong Kong national security law, the government has, effectively, legitimized tyranny against all citizens of conscience. The situation in Hong Kong seems to repeat what happened in Shanghai in 1951 or in Nazi Germany in the mid-1930s.

There are three main areas of action that we can and should take.

First, the Canadian government should invoke the Magnitsky act to sanction all those people who have committed crimes against humanity. Many Chinese and Hong Kong officials have close connections to Canada. Economic sanction against these individuals can be effective and meaningful.

Second, there are 300,000 Canadians living in Hong Kong, and their rights, welfare and lives are now in jeopardy. The Canadian government should formulate a coherent plan to protect their rights and interests, and to rescue them when the situation arises.

Third, many Hong Kong people are fleeing, and Canada is their preferred destination. Unfortunately, the pandemic restricts their entry, and the Chinese government's control and intervention further prevent many from coming here. I call upon the Canadian government to expedite policies and procedures to facilitate those who want to come.

I'm sorry to point out that the Canadian government has done little in the past few years to address the problems in Hong Kong and to repel Communist China's influence. I am afraid that China has installed a very successful united front to infiltrate Canadian society and governments.

Clive Hamilton has conducted a comprehensive study of China's United Front work in Australia. *Silent Invasion* is deeply entrenched in all social, economic and political fabrics of that country, and effectively sways government decisions. I believe the situation in Canada is no better, if not worse. The silent hand may have reached deeply into our daily lives.

Canada is well known for its stand on humanitarianism. During the Second World War almost 2,000 Canadian soldiers sailed to Hong Kong to help with her defence, and more than 550 would never return. Hong Kong is again now facing the most serious humanitarian crisis in history. The Canadian government has no excuse to not take immediate action and change its past misdirected path. We do not want our Prime Minister to become yet another modern-day Neville Chamberlain.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

• (1840)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chan.

Mr. Albert Wai Yip Chan: I have more written submissions for the committee.

Thank you.

The Chair: That would be great. Thank you very much.

Now we're going to hear from Mr. Goodman and Ms. Siu.

Mr. Sam Goodman (Senior Policy Advisor, Hong Kong Watch): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Since the national security law has come into force in Hong Kong in July 2020, over 100 pro-democracy activists have been arrested and are awaiting trial. Under the draconian law, they face 10 years to life in prison, with high-profile activists like Joshua Wong and Jimmy Lai now facing a carousel of court appearances and jail sentences that look set to continue into the immediate future. The Chinese Communist Party has moved swiftly to use this law and new culture of fear to silence dissent, firing pro-democracy academics and civil servants who refuse to swear allegiance to Beijing, rewriting Hong Kong's electoral system, introducing national security education to brainwash children as young as six, and steadily censoring the Internet and broadcast.

Journalists and judges for the moment are the two holdouts against Beijing's total control of the city. Both are finding themselves increasingly under assault. For the foreign press, this has come in the form of visa denials and, in the BBC's case, an outright ban. Local journalists fare far worse, risking fines or imprisonment for reporting. This was the case for the investigative reporter, Bao Choy, who was recently fined for exposing police corruption. Hong Kong authorities have also called for the closing of Apple Daily and directed the public broadcaster to purge investigative documentaries from its online archives. The Hong Kong police commissioner has warned that the national security law could be used in the future to target the spreading of so-called fake news.

The city has a long history of an independent judiciary, and the rule of law is the cornerstone of its success as a global financial centre, yet pro-Beijing outlets continue to call for judicial reform on an almost daily basis. Carrie Lam last week warned of government intervention against the Hong Kong Bar Association.

In the courtroom, things do not fare much better. Judges are hand-picked by Beijing. Juries are denied, and bail hearings now go on so long that there are reports of defendants collapsing and needing medical treatment. In the recent bail hearings of 47 pro-democracy activists, the judges considered only two narrow facts: the

public profile of the accused and their record of opposition to government policy.

In a recent report published by Hong Kong Watch on "red capital", we found that the speed at which Beijing has dismantled Hong Kong's autonomy has been made possible by economic coercion and the steady takeover of the city's economy through the influx of capital from the mainland.

Hong Kong is the canary in the coal mine. It provides a stark lesson on the cost of economic dependency on Beijing and the CCP's ability to co-opt business and utilize economic leverage to great effect. We recently saw this play out in Europe, where Hungary blocked the introduction of a package of EU measures out of fear of losing Chinese investment.

Beijing would have you believe that this disagreement is cultural, that potential conflict is ideological and that the solution lies in private dialogue. I would urge the members of this committee to avoid falling into this trap. For thousands of years prior to the formalization of international human rights conventions, Chinese philosophers promoted the idea of human dignity and respect for human life. So, the next time you hear that the treatment of Uighurs, Tibetans and Hong Kongers at the hands of the CCP is just a result of cultural differences, don't let that fool you.

Those brave protestors on the street in Hong Kong in 2019 and citizens in Taiwan today demonstrate that people of Chinese ethnicity value not only human rights but freedom, democracy and the rule of law as well. That is why, in the final analysis, democracies like Canada must do all they can to support them. This should include introducing Magnitsky sanctions against Hong Kong officials, making it easier for Hong Kongers to claim asylum in Canada through an upgraded lifeboat scheme, working toward the creation of a UN special rapporteur for Hong Kong, and urgently reviewing Canada's economic dependency on China.

Thank you very much.

• (1845)

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, witnesses, for your opening statements.

We are going to proceed to questions from members.

We're going to begin with MP Khalid for seven minutes.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for their time and their very compelling testimony today.

I'll start with something that all of the witnesses have touched on today, which is response from the international community. Over the past number of months and this year, the response from western countries, including Canada, to the imposition of the NSL and the ongoing repression of pro-democracy legislators and activists has been swift and condemnatory. Imposing sanctions, changing immigration policies to favour Hong Kongers and restricting exports of certain goods to Hong Kong have been a few of the steps that have been taken by the western countries.

I'll start by asking this: What has been the impact of these measures on the ground in Hong Kong specifically, and how has the government really responded on the ground?

Perhaps we'll start with Mr. Chan.

The Chair: Mr. Chan, you're muted.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Maybe while we wait, we'll go to Ms. Lau and then we'll come back.

Ms. Ai-Men Lau: Thank you for that question.

To be frank, and I hope the committee can appreciate my candour, I don't think much of what we've done has deterred Beijing. You have to understand that they have been emboldened by, frankly, what they see as inaction. Soft power engagement is not working with China.

We have asked repeatedly for sanctions. Alliance Canada Hong Kong did a community consultation of a survey across Canada and got 13,000 responses from Hong Kongers and Canadians. The top demand was sanctions in the face of the tightening grip of Beijing.

To be frank, this has been a long, ongoing struggle. I think we have ignored the plight of Hong Kongers for a very long time. I commend the government for acting as swiftly as it did to suspend the extradition treaty with Hong Kong when the NSL came into place, to suspend certain sensitive military exports and to introduce some of the immigration measures. However, we're not doing enough.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you.

Ms. Siu, do you want to add to that?

Ms. Joey Siu (Associate, Hong Kong Watch): Chair and members of the committee, I think you have skipped my opening statement. Do you mind if I go on right now?

• (1850)

The Chair: My sincere apologies. I thought Mr. Goodman was making the statement for the two of you.

Yes, let's provide time for Ms. Siu to make a statement.

Go ahead.

Ms. Joey Siu: Thank you.

Good evening, everyone. Thank you for inviting me. My name is Joey Siu, a Hong Kong activist now based in Washington, D.C., with Hong Kong Watch.

Over the past few months, Hong Kong's situation continued to worsen rapidly. The national security legislation passed in July 2020 has become the most actively used tactic to silence voices of opposition in Hong Kong. In February, 47 pro-democracy activists were arrested on suspicion of subversion of state under the sweeping legislation, simply for their participation in the democratic primaries.

Among the 47 who were arrested, 36 were denied bail and have been in custody for more than two months now. Another nine prominent leaders, including Martin Lee, Margaret Ng and Albert Ho, were also sentenced for participating in an absolutely peaceful assembly back in 2019, while more protestors in Hong Kong are being charged with protest-related offences under the heavily criticized public order ordinance.

Aside from the continuous political persecutions, the Chinese Communist Party's rubber stamp parliament also passed a resolution a few weeks ago to overhaul Hong Kong's electoral system, with a unanimous vote. More than 380 district councillors of Hong Kong are now expecting to face potential disqualifications in the upcoming months. It is now almost impossible for pro-democracy candidates in Hong Kong to run for local elections, not to mention the promised universal suffrage for Hong Kongers.

While national security related cases are handled by judges hand-picked by Beijing, other judges who rightfully dismiss the most ridiculous charges against protestors are also being placed under heavy pressure and criticisms from Beijing officials and also pro-CCP groups.

Following the conviction of investigative journalists for documenting the history, more were being stripped of their contracts or forced to resign under pressure. Documentaries and news programs of Hong Kong were also being deleted.

Cancellation of truth and values happens not only in newsrooms but also in classrooms. Books were being pulled from library shelves and school curriculums were shaped to include the brain-washing national security education elements. More teachers were disqualified over complaints of providing one-sided and biased materials related to values of freedom and democracy.

University student unions of Hong Kong have been a cradle of social movements in the past. During my time in Hong Kong as a student union member, I was still able to organize different campaigns, yet it recently became impossible as well. Slamming the student groups for “becoming increasingly politicized” and “repeatedly making inflammatory and potentially unlawful public statements,” more universities in Hong Kong decided to cut ties with their students, ceasing financial assistance and taking back all possible resources.

Censorship fears have also shadowed the cultural industry in Hong Kong. Tiananmen massacre-themed artwork by the famous dissident and artist Ai Weiwei was taken down. Screening of a documentary about the siege of the Polytechnic University was cancelled. Nomination of the protest-related documentary *Do Not Split* also seemed to become the reason behind broadcasters' decision of not airing the Oscars ceremony for the first time in over 50 years.

Under the haze of Beijing's escalating crackdowns of Hong Kong, many were left with no choice but to leave the city. However, as the new immigration bill amendment passes in Hong Kong, relocation might soon no longer be an option as well. The amendment passed on April 28 gives immigration officials of Hong Kong almost unlimited power to stop any individual from leaving or entering Hong Kong. Given the CCP's similar tactics used against Uighurs, there is concern that the law will be weaponized as a tool to restrict freedom of movement and prevent Hong Kongers from seeking asylum or applying for lifeboat policies elsewhere.

Current lifeboat policies should be improved to allow applications in a third country, and requirements should also be loosened to expand the coverage. As Canada welcomes more Hong Kongers, resources should also be allocated to assist new arrivals' integration and help preserve the culture of Hong Kongers. Internationally, we should also continue to work closely with allies with shared values to impose coordinated sanctions and to construct more comprehensive China policies.

I became a student activist right before our movement broke out two years ago, and within two years' time, almost all my friends are now either facing charges or going through trials, in exile or imprisoned.

The continuous violations of the Sino-British Joint Declaration are a clear reflection of the Chinese Communist Party's trustworthiness. Turning a blind eye to Beijing's ongoing human rights violations and disregard of international rules-based order is no different from encouraging their escalating repressions at home and aggressions abroad.

Thank you. I look forward to answering your questions.

• (1855)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Siu, and my apologies again.

Ms. Khalid, we were at three minutes and 12 seconds into your question time, so you have about another three minutes and 45 seconds.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Ms. Siu.

Given that I have such little time left, perhaps I'll turn to Mr. Chan.

Specifically, Mr. Chan, Ms. Lau mentioned in one of her three recommendations that Canada take action on foreign state harassment operations within Canada.

With you being a resident of Canada, may I perhaps ask, have you experienced such harassment here in Canada? What has been your experience with this?

Mr. Albert Wai Yip Chan: I haven't experienced harassment myself recently, mainly because I haven't been that active. I do understand that some people have.

I think the most effective thing the Canadian government can do right now is to assist those who want to come to Canada. Second, as I said earlier, the Canadian government should invoke the Magnitsky act to sanction those individuals who have relations with Canada, mainly because there are so many people in Hong Kong who are helping, assisting or enabling the Chinese Communist Party to deprive people's basic rights. They are actually violating the international covenants on human rights and other rights as well.

If the Canadian government can target those individuals.... I believe there will be hundreds or even thousands of them who are living in Hong Kong now, but have close relationships with Canada. If the government can identify those individuals and sanction them economically and financially, I believe this will be the best and most effective means for the Canadian government.

This is something other governments cannot do.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you, Mr. Chan.

My sincerest apologies. I'm very cognizant of time and I do have one more question for Mr. Goodman, if that's okay—through you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Goodman, you spoke about perhaps calling for a UN special rapporteur to be created. What do you think would be some of the challenges that such a rapporteur would face once they are on the ground to do their work—if they are able to get to the ground?

Mr. Sam Goodman: Thank you for the question.

I think that, obviously, the first challenge would be access on the ground. I imagine the Hong Kong government officials and Chinese officials would be quite obstructive to a UN special rapporteur operating in Hong Kong.

Given the number of pro-democracy parties and pro-democracy-leaning civil society organizations that dissolved in the last eight months, I think it would be quite hard to engage on a community level. I imagine they also would probably be denied access to a number of the pro-democracy activists who are now behind bars.

Nonetheless, I think it is tantamount.... It is really quite important that there be a special rapporteur for this reason, so we can get credible information about the human rights abuses that are taking place in Hong Kong and get up-to-date reports.

For organizations like ourselves at Hong Kong Watch, increasingly, the contacts we have on the ground are running out as many of them are ending up in jail.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much, Mr. Goodman.

Witnesses, thank you once again for your very compelling testimony.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will move to MP Chiu for seven minutes.

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

My first question is for Ms. Lau.

Many here in Canada would hold the belief that Canada shouldn't be admitting lawless rioters into Canada. What's your view?

Ms. Ai-Men Lau: First and foremost, the protest movement was a peaceful protest movement. It was one that was also arguing for the universal suffrage that was enshrined in the Sino-British Joint Declaration.

We need to dispel this idea that this was a lawless riot. It was not. That is something which I believe is a common narrative pushed by the CCP. More so, it is fairly misunderstood among the Canadian society.

We need to understand, as I mentioned in a previous answer, that this has been a long, ongoing fight. This is not new. Because of the 2019...it was a breaking point. It was a boiling point.

I think we need to dispel this myth. I think we need to push back hard.

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Thank you. I appreciate that.

My second question is for Mr. Chan.

Mr. Chan, a lot of people here in Canada believe that the Hong Kong matter is a Chinese sovereignty matter. It's a sovereign territory of China; therefore, it's none of western countries'—like Canada—business.

What's your view on that?

• (1900)

Mr. Albert Wai Yip Chan: It is not a cultural or regional difference. The crimes committed by the Hong Kong and Chinese governments are crimes against humanity. The international court of human rights can take those cases. You know, these two sovereign-

ties are members of those covenants. Unfortunately, both China and Hong Kong are not members.

If you look at the so-called crimes committed by those activists—and I said earlier that I had been indicted and convicted on numerous occasions in Hong Kong in the past few years—the activities that I have done are similar to those I did before the transfer of sovereignty, so I didn't do anything particularly wrong or different in terms of political activity. However, in the past few years, they became crimes in Hong Kong.

For those crimes that I committed before I left, as compared to those being sentenced now, it's outrageous. I was being penalized \$4,000 for those crimes, whereas some of these people have been sentenced to three years in jail for similar activities. The whole political and legal system has totally changed.

Now Hong Kong is similar to Nazi Germany in the 1930s. That is why I think the Canadian people and the Canadian government should treat this differently.

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

I want to turn the angle a little bit. You mentioned the United Front in western countries like Canada. Canada perhaps is no better, if not worse, being influenced by the United Front Work, but then later on in your answer to one of the committee members you were saying that you did not experience personally any interference or any threats.

How could you make such a statement that Canada is being influenced, perhaps even worse, while you didn't experience that personally? How did you experience this interference or the influence that you were labelling?

Mr. Albert Wai Yip Chan: I haven't been active at all in the past four years since I returned to Canada. I live a retired life.

I should point out that back in the 1980s when I was in Canada, I was in the first group of people who entertained the first ambassador from China to Canada. We had a welcome party for them. I have seen that some of the people involved at that time have changed their stance and have also become more friendly to the Chinese government. In my 30 years in politics in Hong Kong, I have seen individuals, groups and society change from the work of the United Front on them.

When you see how people perform, how people react, you can see quite clearly that their actions and activities are related to the influence of the Chinese government. I didn't have direct contact with many groups and people here, but if you look at the Chinese media in Canada, I do believe that 90% of that is manipulated or controlled by the Chinese government, directly or indirectly. It's quite clear, without any doubt in my mind.

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Thank you. I appreciate that.

My fourth question is for Mr. Goodman.

Mr. Goodman, some people in Canada might think that Canada has done enough. We have suspended the extradition treaty. We have stopped selling military equipment. We have opened up lifeboats for Hong Kongers. In fact, this very subcommittee has been sanctioned by the People's Republic of China's foreign ministry. So, haven't we done enough?

Mr. Sam Goodman: I think Canada has done a lot, and I think we appreciate that the Canadian government has acted. It has introduced the lifeboat scheme that targets young Hong Kongers.

Really, I suppose what we're talking about is whether Canada is willing to act in unison with like-minded partners, including the U.K., including the U.S.A., including our partners in Europe and perhaps Australia as well. By no means do we think that Canada should be leading the charge on Magnitsky sanctions alone. In fact, really, I think the country that should be leading on that is the U.K., given that the U.K. is the signatory to the Sino-British Joint Declaration.

The message that should be coming from the Canadian government to the U.K. government is that if they do go ahead with the Magnitsky sanctions, Canada will be there with them. I think we saw that with the recent sanctions against Chinese officials regarding persecution of the Uighurs. That's really what I think we're talking about here: Is Canada doing stuff with its allies?

• (1905)

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

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move now to MP Brunelle-Duceppe for seven minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My heartfelt thanks to the witnesses for being here. I think it is very brave of them to speak out against tyranny. I know they have done so before in other forums. One of the priorities of this committee is the safety of those who agree to testify.

I have a hypothetical question for Ms. Siu. Ms. Lau may also answer it afterwards.

Are you afraid of reprisals from the Chinese Communist Party simply because you are appearing before the committee this evening?

[English]

Ms. Ai-Men Lau: I'll let Ms. Siu go first.

Ms. Joey Siu: Thank you, Ms. Lau.

Yes, I mean, basically everything we say here before the [Technical difficulty—Editor] simply by participating in protests and rallies elsewhere in the free world countries. Different Hong Kongers or different people who have been participating in similar kinds of defence face the risk of being charged under the national security legislation if they're ever to step inside Hong Kong or other parts of China. Definitely, this is one of the very large concerns. This is also a concern and risk faced by the Canadian Hong Kongers in Hong Kong or those Canadian Hong Kongers who are willing to go back

to Hong Kong but because of their participation in or support for Hong Kong's free democracy structure, they can no longer do that.

Ms. Ai-Men Lau: I'll say, first and foremost, that, yes, I am terrified. I do have family and loved ones back home in Hong Kong. When I first started getting involved in my activism for Hong Kong, I was a little bullheaded and a little arrogant. I didn't exactly know what I'd gotten myself into. Now a year later, I'm kind of not sure where I stand. I've imposed a self-exile on myself. I will no longer return to Hong Kong, and this is something that I know many of my other friends have done as well.

I would recommend to this committee that if you want to hear more from Hong Kongers in Canada.... The fear is real. I'd recommend being able to have people testify anonymously or have a representative testify on behalf of them in these meetings, because the community is terrified. We self-censor for sure. It has caused a lot of emotional turmoil and conflicts in my own life.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you so much, Ms. Lau and Ms. Siu. It's hard to hear those words. We are trying to understand, but we are not in your shoes.

You represent organizations that defend the rights of those who live in Hong Kong, and I think you have contacts there. Do you have any contact with the activists who were arrested in January under the national security law?

This question is for all the witnesses. Perhaps someone can tell us whether they had any contact with those who were arrested in January.

[English]

Ms. Joey Siu: Yes, I personally know many of the 47 who were prosecuted under the national security legislation on suspicion of suppression of state simply because of their participation in the democratic primaries in Hong Kong. I even campaigned for one of the candidates. Obviously, because they're behind bars right now and also because of the risk posed by the national security legislation in Hong Kong, I can no longer keep in touch with them, because that would further lead them to being charged with, potentially, colluding with foreign forces or other serious criminal offences under the national security law.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: How many, approximately?

Do you know how many people were arrested in January and are still behind bars?

[English]

Ms. Joey Siu: There were 47 arrested under the national security legislation in February 2021 for participating in the democratic primaries, and 36 of them are still behind bars right now.

• (1910)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you.

I would like to ask Mr. Chan a question about his personal experience.

What do you think is the ultimate objective of the government of the People's Republic of China regarding Hong Kong?

[*English*]

Mr. Albert Wai Yip Chan: When Xi Jinping's thoughts were incorporated into the Chinese constitution, he wanted to change Hong Kong completely. He wanted to change Hong Kong to Shanghai as in 1951. He eradicated all the opposition and wanted to erase all western influence. Everything will be under one party rule, period, with no opposition, no dissension and no western or outside influence. This is Xi Jinping's way of thinking in controlling Hong Kong.

The Canadian government has to be conscious of the 300,000 Canadians in Hong Kong. Sooner or later, those people have to be rescued one way or the other. Their property, their life and their interests have to be looked into as well. It is a crisis and we have to take action early.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: My time is almost up. I wish this study would last longer.

What is the current state of the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong?

This question is for all the witnesses.

Mr. Goodman, we haven't heard from you yet. Do you have any comments?

[*English*]

Mr. Sam Goodman: As Ms. Siu has said, nearly all the leading pro-democracy activists are either in jail awaiting trial or in exile abroad. The pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong, it's fair to say, is on its last legs.

My understanding of it is that one of the few pro-democracy activists who isn't in jail will be in jail by this time in August. Fundamentally, the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong will have to transition from a local movement to a broader, international movement, which we are starting to see.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I have no time left, but I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your testimony. It is very important. It will be part of our report.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, MP Brunelle-Duceppe.

We're now moving to MP McPherson for seven minutes.

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

I echo my colleague Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe when he thanked all of you for being here and for showing the bravery to share your stories with us.

Hearing the testimony that the community is self-silencing because of the fears they feel and knowing the risk that you take for being here, it means an awful lot to us. We will take your testimony very seriously because we recognize both the seriousness of the situation and the risk that you take in sharing it with us.

Thank you very much.

Please know that we recognize the impact that this has on all of you. We are very grateful that you're willing to share with us today.

I want to start with some questions for Ms. Lau.

We've seen a change in the direction of focus with the international response to what's happening in Hong Kong. There is a shift towards, as you mentioned, the institutional overhaul of the electoral system, education system, immigration bans and whatnot, but the human rights violations that have happened during the protest movement are continuing to happen. We've heard time and time again during the testimony this evening that we're now overlooking that protest movement, yet those human rights abuses are still happening.

Can you talk about what you would like Canadians to know about what is happening in Hong Kong with regard to human rights abuses?

Ms. Ai-Men Lau: I would also encourage this committee to read our written submission. We have anonymous testimony from Hong Kongers in appendix C that can also help illustrate what is going on, on the ground.

One thing that everyone should know is that it has transformed from anger to despair, to now fear. No one knows how the national security law and the immigration ban is going to be implemented in Hong Kong, and that has created a climate of fear. With what people have seen as inaction on the ground, it also seems to have created a climate of impunity where the Chinese regime should just take over because no one is doing anything.

They are struggling with everything that we have also struggled with globally, an economic downturn and the pandemic as well. For the protest movement, I would say it has gone underground but the resistance still remains. Because of their love for the city, people are still resisting what is happening. I will echo Mr. Goodman's comments that it has gone global and we're starting to see that shift.

In terms of the human rights violations, I will highlight that it has been two years. People are asking and have been yelling for help for two years now. We need to act.

• (1915)

Ms. Heather McPherson: It's well beyond time, absolutely.

One of the things when we're looking at human rights abuses... Having that freedom of press is so vital, is so important.

Mr. Goodman, you mentioned in your opening statement that journalists, both local and international, are being silenced. Of course, that is a very dangerous thing to see happen.

Can you talk about how the Canadian government can support local and international journalists at this time to ensure that those stories are continuing to be told?

Mr. Sam Goodman: I think, first and foremost, we're seeing it, as I mentioned, in two different spheres. We're seeing, really, an attack on foreign journalists via the weaponization of visas and the banning of certain foreign news agencies, like the BBC. You saw the New York Times announce that it's relocating its offices to Seoul. I think that we're going to see a lot more of that in the years to come. Local journalists are really taking the brunt of the assault on the freedom of press.

Canada really can step in more, I think, and do more for local journalists. It was good to see a statement from the Foreign Correspondents' Club last week about the fining of Bao Choy, but I do think that the Canadian government should be putting out firmer statements and really calling on China to respect freedom of press in Hong Kong, along with like-minded partners.

However, that doesn't go nearly far enough. I think, fundamentally, the assault on the press goes hand in hand with the assault on the pro-democracy movement. Fundamentally, there's really only one way to answer that. I guess eventually it circles back to this argument about targeted sanctions against the perpetrators of these abuses, the Hong Kong officials.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Absolutely.

I'm going to ask some more questions about those sanctions, perhaps in my next round, but I'd also like to get more information about the incoming August 1 immigration law that we know can bar people, including Canadians, from leaving Hong Kong. I have so many concerns about that, so many worries.

Perhaps I could ask the Alliance Canada Hong Kong representatives, Hong Kong Watch or even Mr. Chan this: What does the role of Canada look like? What has it been so far? What do we need to see? What are those things that Canada needs to do going forward?

I'm happy to start with you, Mr. Goodman, because you're on my screen.

Mr. Sam Goodman: I think, first and foremost, Canada needs to look at expanding its lifeboat scheme for Hong Kongers, particularly for young Hong Kongers who are not graduates and who need a lifeline out of the city and do not qualify for the U.K.'s BNO visa scheme. That should be first and foremost.

Second of all, the Canadian government needs to closely monitor what's happening with the immigration bill and make sure that if there is a restriction of freedom of movement out of the city, it's ready to go beyond sanctions, working with the U.S., U.K. and European partners.

The U.S. restricted trade to the Soviet Union because it restricted freedom of movement in the cold war. It's something similar to consider if China decided to restrict freedom of movement out of the city of Hong Kong.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Very quickly, Ms. Lau, do you have anything you'd like to add to that?

Ms. Ai-Men Lau: I'd be happy to connect after the testimony as well, but I would add travel documents for those known activists who are facing exit bans at the moment.

The Chair: Great. Thank you.

We are moving into our second round. In looking at the time, I see that we're going to have about two and a half minutes for each of the members to ask questions.

We'll begin with MP Sidhu.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Brampton East, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here and sharing their insights. It's very important.

Mr. Chan, you were cut off a couple of times due to a lack of time. I'd like to hear more from you and your thoughts. You said you came to Canada, I think, in 2017. You said that you were quite engaged in Hong Kong as a legislative councillor and have been involved for over 20 years, as you mentioned in your opening remarks.

I'd like to hear more from you about your lived experience being a legislative councillor. Please enlighten us.

• (1920)

Mr. Albert Wai Yip Chan: Hong Kong has been changing drastically in the past few years. When I left Hong Kong in 2017, I didn't expect that the situation would deteriorate so fast. Since 2019, the whole situation has changed. The Chinese paramilitary is actually present and took action in Hong Kong. Also, the overall administration changed.

Hong Kong is actually living in a state of state terrorism right now. The government can do virtually anything to violate human rights and to deprive people's basic rights. Three hundred thousand Canadians are actually living in quite difficult circumstances. All the... Basically, freedom of press is gone. Hong Kong is becoming a typical Chinese city.

When you look at Hong Kong right now, it's going to become just a Chinese city. You have to get the government's approval to report. You have to get the government's special approval to travel. If you look at Hong Kong from this angle, you will probably have a better understanding of the dire situation that Hong Kong people are facing right now.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Thank you for that.

Ms. Lau, you briefly touched on immigration pathways that should be created by the Government of Canada. You just had a sentence there. Do you want to add more to that?

Ms. Ai-Men Lau: Yes. I think I would add some of the recommendations that we have submitted as ACHK.

We want to also expand private sponsorship and family reunification measures. With regard to the private sponsorship as well, we have a really strong Hong Kong diaspora community and organizations that are informally already supporting asylum seekers here, so for the government to help collaborate and help legitimize some of those supports would be great.

Also, we should modernize and expedite the Canadian immigration and asylum system to address the backlog of new and pending claims. I think—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lau. I'm sorry I had to cut you off.

Ms. Ai-Men Lau: No, that's okay.

The Chair: We're moving to MP Williamson.

Welcome to our subcommittee. You have about two and a half minutes.

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Thank you.

I have two and a half minutes. I'm going to turn right away, then, to Mr. Chan.

Could you talk about the character of Hong Kongers? This could be a dark moment for some time. Do you expect that Hong Kongers will be resilient like the Poles were under the Soviets or like the Hungarians? How do you think Hong Kongers are going to respond to this threat from Communist China?

Mr. Albert Wai Yip Chan: I feel that Hong Kong people will fight to the end. I know so many of them. Many of them have been arrested, and some of them are in jail. They will defy the Communist rule to the very end. This is why I believe that international support, especially support from Canada, is extremely important.

Mr. John Williamson: Thank you.

I'll turn now to Mr. Goodman.

Mr. Goodman, you touched on some ideas that I'm beginning to think we need to contemplate in terms of Beijing's unwillingness to respect rights and values we hold dear.

First of all, I think you've let Canada off a little easy, because while there are more British overseas nationals, Canada has more full-fledged passport holders in Hong Kong than any other country. We have a claim on the ground there with 300,000 Canadian citizens, full stop, whose rights cannot be upended because Beijing happens to say so or the Hong Kong government, for that matter.

In terms of our economic relationship with mainland China, what are your views on expelling China from the WTO? It doesn't live up to its pacts right now, its agreements, and on top of that, we are seeing these ongoing violations in other areas.

You have 30 seconds.

● (1925)

Mr. Sam Goodman: I think that, practically, it would be very hard to expel China from the WTO, but I agree with you. Looking back, I think it was a substantial mistake to allow China to join the WTO when we did. Economically, geopolitically and on a human rights basis, we're all paying for it. However, I do think there are

serious questions to be asked now about Hong Kong's WTO membership as well. Beijing shouldn't just get the economic benefits of one country, two systems, while stripping away the political benefits and the freedoms that the people of Hong Kong have had under that model of governance.

Mr. John Williamson: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. That was right on 30 seconds.

We're moving now to MP Brunelle-Duceppe for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I do not have much time, but I would like to reiterate all the admiration I have for the witnesses, whom I thank for joining us this evening.

Distinguished witnesses, you might be quoted in the committee's report. So I think it is important to hear who you think the perpetrators of the human rights abuses in Hong Kong are right now.

I know that Xi Jinping will be one of the people named, but would you like to name others?

[*English*]

Ms. Ai-Men Lau: Hong Kong chief executive Carrie Lam.

Mr. Albert Wai Yip Chan: And I think the Chinese members of the political bureau. They are all responsible and, I think, the ones who formulated the policy.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Mr. Goodman and Ms. Siu, do you want to add any other names?

[*English*]

Ms. Joey Siu: I think that we would also definitely recommend members of the National People's Congress, as they have voted to pass the national security legislation in Hong Kong and also a resolution to overhaul Hong Kong's electoral system.

Ms. Ai-Men Lau: If I may add, Alliance Canada Hong Kong has created a sanctions list. We are happy to send it over if you'd like.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: We would be very grateful. On behalf of the committee, thank you.

Canada and other western countries have taken actions in response to what has happened in Hong Kong.

What do you think has been the effect of these actions on the Chinese Communist Party? Have they had the desired effect?

[English]

Mr. Sam Goodman: I mean, I don't think they've had much effect, to be honest. I think, sadly, the Chinese Communist Party doesn't really care what much of the world thinks of their actions in Hong Kong, and they've set themselves on a path now to dismantle Hong Kong regardless of what actions we take. That being said, there has to be a price paid for what they're doing in Hong Kong, and it's up to like-minded democracies to make sure that there is a price.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Do you think that a boycott of the 2022 Beijing Olympics would have a greater impact on China?

[English]

Ms. Ai-Men Lau: Yes.

Mr. Sam Goodman: Yes, definitely. That's not a bad idea.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll move now to our last questioner in this panel.

To conclude, MP McPherson, you have two and a half minutes.

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

Again, I'll thank the witnesses for being here. I'm sure that I speak on behalf of all of us when I say that we really wish we had you for about seven more meetings because there are an awful lot of questions that we want to ask you. I want to thank you for giving your time to us. Many of you I've met with before, so I've been able to get other additional information from you. However, I would encourage you to submit whatever you can to the clerk so that it can be included in our report.

I have the privilege of always going last in these committee meetings. You are the specialists here. I am hoping that I can pass this to you to get your final thoughts on what you'd like to see Canada do. Please keep the comments very short, as we don't have very much time.

Ms. Lau, I'll start with you.

Ms. Ai-Men Lau: I'll keep it brief and short.

Hong Kong is a litmus test for Canada as to whether we are upholding our Canadian values of democracy, civil liberties and human rights. I urge this committee to not let us fail this litmus test.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you, Ms. Lau.

Mr. Chan.

Mr. Albert Wai Yip Chan: I think that Canada should compare Hong Kong now to Shanghai in 1951. If you can understand what Mao Zedong did to Shanghai in 1951, then you will know what Xi Jinping is going to do in Hong Kong right now. The Canadian government has to find ways and means to prevent the atrocity that is going to be created in Hong Kong. It has to find ways and means to stop Communist China from destroying Hong Kong and killing Hong Kong people.

● (1930)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Chan.

Madam Siu.

Ms. Joey Siu: I will keep it very brief and short.

As Hong Kong's situation continues to worsen, it is really important for the Canadian government to take actions to expand the lifeboat policies and, really, to impose sanctions against Hong Kong and also Chinese officials who have been committing human rights violations.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

Mr. Goodman, you get the last word this afternoon.

Mr. Sam Goodman: I think there's a small window to act in the next six to 12 months. I think that Canada should work with like-minded partners to introduce Magnitsky sanctions, upgrade its lifeboat scheme to help young people get out of the city so that they don't spend 10 years of their lives in jail, and work towards a UN special rapporteur on Hong Kong.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you so much.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, I'll pass it back to you.

The Chair: Thank you, MP McPherson.

Thank you to the witnesses. Thank you for your testimony. Thank you for your answers to the many questions and for your courage. Thank you for the time that you've spent with us today. We really appreciate it.

Members, we're now going to suspend for about five minutes to get our next panel ready.

Thank you very much, everyone.

● (1930)

(Pause)

● (1935)

The Chair: Welcome, everyone.

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would encourage all participants to mute their microphones when they are not speaking and address all comments through the chair.

When you have 30 seconds left in your questioning time, I will signal with this paper. Interpretation is available through the globe icon on the bottom of your screen. It's in English and French. Please note that screen captures or photos are not permitted.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses for the briefing on the situation in the Philippines.

With us tonight, representing the International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines Canada, we have Guy-Lin Beaudoin, and Cristina Palabay, secretary general of Karapatan.

We have Maria Ressa. She is the CEO and executive editor at Rappler Inc., and is appearing as an individual.

We have Catherine Coumans, research coordinator and Asia-Pacific program coordinator at MiningWatch Canada.

We also have Emily Dwyer, coordinator at the Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability.

Mr. Beaudoin and Ms. Palabay, please start us off with your opening remarks for up to five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy-Lin Beudoin (Lawyer, International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines - Canada): Mr. Chair, we have split our time. Ms. Palabay will speak first for three minutes, and then I will speak for two minutes. I'm counting on you to let me know when my time starts.

[*English*]

Ms. Cristina Palabay (Secretary General, Karapatan, International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines - Canada): Thank you for having me today, as it becomes even more dangerous every day for human rights defenders, with an epidemic of rights violations in the Philippines.

Our colleague, Zara Alvarez, is among the 15 human rights workers of Karapatan who were killed in the last five years, out of the 394 civilians killed in the course of the Duterte government's counter-insurgency campaign. The majority of those killed are land rights, indigenous and environmental defenders. These figures add to the thousands killed in the government's drug war, which is creating a climate of fear and impunity in the country.

Many more defenders, including myself, face judicial harassment for trumped-up charges based on perjured testimonies, planted evidence or fabricated grounds. The independence of courts is questioned for complicity in issuances of questionable search and arrest warrants against defenders that result in their arbitrary arrests, detention, or worse—their killings. Because of these cases, there are currently 703 political prisoners in the country; 68% of them have been arrested under this administration.

Women human rights defenders are among those killed, arrested and detained. We eat death, rape and threats of sexual violence for breakfast every day, online and offline. Community pantries, relief and fact-finding missions, universities, journalists, doctors, lawyers, church people, members of the opposition, the Commission on Human Rights and many more receive what UN Special Rapporteur Mary Lawlor called context-specific death threats in the form of red-tagging.

I emphasize that these occur in the context of the government's counter-insurgency campaign, with its whole-of-nation approach to stemming the armed rebellion in the country. In our view, this is a murderous campaign in violation of the principle of distinction between civilians and combatants under international humanitarian law. It is a militarist or strongman approach, which trumps civilian authority and interests.

From this policy stems measures that restrict democratic and civic spaces, such as the recent counterterror legislation. A national task force to end local communist armed conflict is conducting and wielding the baton for these wholesale attacks on civilians, particularly human rights defenders, in the crackdown on dissent.

In the midst of this, there is inadequacy or lack of domestic mechanisms that encourage victims for the rendering of justice and accountability. Courts deny legal protection for defenders, resulting in more harmful impacts on our lives, security and liberty. We are among those who sought legal protection and our colleagues were killed. We continue to be threatened and harassed and a reprisal suit is brought before us.

No perpetrator has been prosecuted nor convicted in all the cases I mentioned. We implore the Canadian government to take action on these concerns with urgency, as our country further descends into an authoritarian state.

Thank you.

● (1940)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy-Lin Beudoin: Given the abundant and damning testimonies and findings in the Investigate PH report, our coalition takes the liberty of making the following recommendations.

First, we recommend that Canada end its policy of quiet diplomacy on the human rights situation in the Philippines.

Second, we recommend that the Department of Foreign Affairs issue a public statement expressing Canada's concern about the serious deterioration of human rights and the restriction of civic space in the Philippines.

Third, we recommend that the Minister of Foreign Affairs direct the Canadian Ambassador to the Philippines to take immediate and concrete steps to implement Canada's guidelines for supporting human rights defenders, namely to meet with human rights defenders, to visit communities and organizations that are facing harassment, and to expedite the visa process for temporary settlement in Canada.

Fourth, we recommend that the Government of Canada suspend its support for policies and programs related to anti-terrorism and counter-insurgency programs, including military funding, training, co-operation and military sales in the Philippines.

Fifth, we recommend that the government investigate or request international agencies to investigate, and prosecute, senior officers who order, commit, or have assisted in extrajudicial killings and other human rights violations in the Philippines.

Finally, we recommend that the Government of Canada pressure the Duterte regime to resume peace talks between the New People's Army and the Government of the Philippines.

Thank you for your attention.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. You're right on time.

Maria Ressa, you're up for five minutes.

Ms. Maria Ressa (Chief Executive Officer and Executive Editor, Rappler Inc., As an Individual): Thank you.

Good morning. I'll cover these in the next few minutes: the weaponization of the law and how it works hand in hand with on-line state-sponsored attacks; enabling this environment where abuses of power and human rights violations are normalized, an example of which is something we call red-tagging or calling someone a terrorist; increased violence and impunity; and the killing of human rights workers and activists, the jailing of journalists and the killing of lawyers.

Let me start with the abuses I know first-hand. In less than two years, the Philippine government has filed 10 arrest warrants against me. I've had to post bail 10 times in order to be free and to do my work. I was arrested twice in a little more than a month. One arrest was timed to the closing of courts, with a warrant or information that left out the amount I needed to pay for bail, so the arresting agents brought me to the National Bureau of Investigation where they had dinner and delayed until night court closed, detained me overnight and took away my freedom unjustly. These seem small in the big picture, especially after what you just heard, but it's a reminder of the state's power that was meant to harass and intimidate me to prevent me and my company, Rappler, from doing our job of speaking truth to power. I like to say that they miscalculated.

The ludicrous charges against me fall into three broad buckets: cyber libel, tax evasion and securities fraud. In order to file five criminal charges of tax evasion against me and Rappler, the government had to reclassify our company as—and this is a direct quote—“a dealer in securities”. We're not a stock brokerage house. We don't trade and deal in securities. Securities fraud includes what I call the mother case: trumped up charges of foreign ownership.

Now I'll go on to cyber libel. On June 15 last year, I sat in this decrepit, windowless courtroom and listened to Judge Rainelda Estacio-Montesa deliver her verdict on a case that in the past would never have even made it to court. This decision will impact all Filipinos. The statute of limitations for libel was changed from one year to 12 years. I was convicted for a crime that didn't exist when we published a story nine years ago, for a story I didn't write, edit or supervise. Oh, and while my former colleague and I were found guilty, Rappler was innocent. Don't remind them of that. It's just Kafkaesque.

Of course, I'm challenging this verdict because I've done nothing wrong. I'm a journalist, not a criminal, yet I'm now fighting for the basic right to travel, and these ongoing cases can send me to jail for the rest of my life.

However, I'm lucky compared to others, like 35-year-old Ritchie Nepomuceno, who accused the police of torture, extortion and rape. She was one of at least three Filipino women who filed charges against 11 policemen she named who, these women said, held them inside a secret room at a police station. Less than two weeks ago,

on April 19, Ritchie was walking down the street when she was shot and killed.

You heard from Cristina about human rights activist Zara Alvarez and another colleague. They were set to testify against the government and the military. She went as far as asking for court protection, which was, at first, denied and is still on appeal. Last August, she was just walking home after she bought her dinner when she was shot and killed. So was her colleague. No one is left to testify.

Now, let's go to the journalists. Frenchie Mae Cumpio celebrated her 22nd birthday in prison, arrested and jailed more than a year ago. This is a familiar tactic. The police get an arrest warrant. They do a raid, and then they charge the target with possession of illegal firearms and explosives. That's non-bailable.

It's not a coincidence that a lot of the victims are women. This February, I'll just remind you, Senator Leila de Lima, whom Amnesty International calls a prisoner of conscience, began her fifth year in prison. She calls it “lawfare” when law is used as a weapon to silence anyone questioning power.

Exactly a year ago, Filipino lawmakers, nudged by President Duterte, just shut down ABS-CBN, once our largest broadcasting network, our largest news group, taking away credible information sources. In the provinces, thousands lost their jobs. Around the same time that Hong Kong passed its draconian security law, the Philippines passed an anti-terror law that sparked 37 petitions at the Supreme Court to declare it unconstitutional. Under that law, anyone some cabinet secretaries dub a terrorist could be arrested without a warrant and jailed for up to 24 days. This makes red-tagging, or when a government calls a journalist a human rights activist or an opposition politician a terrorist, even more dangerous.

I, along with other journalists, have been red-tagged.

● (1945)

Here is a fact about the lawyers who defend us in court. More lawyers have died under the Duterte administration than in the 44 years before he took office.

There is a lot more—

The Chair: Thank you. You'll have an opportunity during questions.

Ms. Coumans, you have five minutes.

Ms. Catherine Coumans (Research Coordinator and Asia-Pacific Program Coordinator, MiningWatch Canada): I have lived and worked with environmental and human rights defenders affected by Canadian mining companies in the Philippines since 1988 and in the last 22 years with MiningWatch Canada as Asia-Pacific program coordinator.

I first testified before this committee in 2005, together with two indigenous Subanon leaders from Mindanao in the Philippines. Timuay Anoy and Onsino Mato flew to Canada at the invitation of this committee to testify with urgency about human and indigenous rights abuses faced by their people and threats to their lives as a result of Canadian mining company TVI Pacific's determination to mine a sacred mountain on their ancestral land.

Due to this committee's concern about actions taken by TVI Pacific, even as the Subanon were on their way to Canada, they were invited to testify in camera for their safety.

The abuses suffered by the Subanon of Canatuan are well documented. I witnessed some abuses myself on visiting their place, including forest relocations and TVI Pacific's use of paramilitary forces to set up roadblocks to control access to community members and food to the village. They included the marginalization of traditional leaders such as Timuay Anoy, bringing in fake leaders to secure free, prior and informed consent as required by Philippine law, and using funds provided by the Canadian embassy to reward villagers who agreed to cease their opposition to the mine.

I have taken us back to this earlier testimony because, in the context of severe deterioration of human rights in the Philippines and lack of access to remedy, the abuses suffered by Timuay Anoy and Onsino Mato are prevalent at Canadian mine sites throughout the Philippines today.

You heard testimony earlier from Mr. Clemente Bautista about threats to local indigenous Ifugao opponents of OceanaGold's mine in Nueva Vizcaya and about the history of well-documented human rights and environmental abuses at that site.

In 2018, I accompanied indigenous rights defenders from that community, who had been red-tagged and were threatened by extrajudicial killing, on a fruitless visit to the Canadian embassy to seek protection for them. These indigenous community members remain threatened today.

Additionally, Barrick Gold has been embroiled in legal action since 2006 as a result of 30 years of irresponsible mining by a Canadian mining company bought out by Barrick that had left widespread environmental devastation on the small Island of Marinduque.

Another Canadian company, B2Gold, operating on the island of Masbate, is also embroiled in disputes with local farmers and fishers because of the loss of land and livelihood to the mine, environmental impacts to water and fishing, militarization and the criminalization of dissent.

I am also taking us back to 2005 because in that year, this committee prepared a very strong report that remains highly relevant to the issues discussed here today. This report was unanimously en-

dorsed by both the subcommittee and the standing committee. It asked for an investigation to be made "of any impact of TVI Pacific's Canatuan mining project in Mindanao on the indigenous rights and the human rights of people in the area and on the environment".

The Canadian government of the day declined to carry out this investigation.

The report also asked the government to:

Establish clear legal norms in Canada to ensure that Canadian companies and residents are held accountable when there is evidence of environmental and/or human rights violations associated with the activities of Canadian mining companies;

We are still waiting for these laws to be established.

To conclude, Canada must fulfill its obligations to protect human rights in the context of the deteriorating human rights situation in the Philippines. In particular, it must protect those who are criminalized and whose lives are threatened for speaking out in defence of human rights and the environment.

Canada should not be selling military equipment and providing defence, support and co-operation to the Philippines. Canada needs to mandate its consular staff to protect human rights. Canada needs to fast-track the means by which rights defenders whose lives are threatened can receive visas for temporary relocation to Canada or other safe countries.

Next, Canada needs to live up to its commitment to grant the Canadian ombudsperson for responsible enterprise the powers to compel testimony and documents from Canadian corporations in the course of her investigations.

In addition, Canada needs to follow the lead of European jurisdictions and implement mandatory human rights due diligence legislation that would require companies to prevent human rights abuses throughout their global operations and supply chains and to report on their human rights and environmental due diligence procedures. Companies could be sued in Canadian courts if they caused harm or failed to do due diligence.

Thank you.

● (1950)

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we'll move to Ms. Dwyer.

Ms. Emily Dwyer (Coordinator, Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability): Mr. Chair, I don't have any opening remarks. I am just here for the question and answer. Catherine took our five minutes.

Thank you.

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

Thank you, witnesses.

We're going to be moving to questions from members.

Our first questioner will be MP Vandenberg for seven minutes.

• (1955)

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Witnesses, I want to thank all of you for your incredible courage and for the work you're doing for human rights in the Philippines.

My first question is for Maria Ressa.

It is very good to see you again before this committee.

You have fought very hard—Rappler and you, yourself. You're renowned around the world for the work on press freedom, journalistic freedom and integrity. Yesterday, for World Press Freedom Day, there was a global action by Reporters Without Borders called #HoldTheLine. It was in support of you and the attacks on you that were a direct result of your work in making sure there is media freedom and that the abuses are actually being reported openly. World leaders from around the world spoke out for you.

Global action like that, this committee, and I know you spoke before the ethics grand committee previously.... When the world gives platforms and voice and speaks out, what impact does that have? How important is that?

Ms. Maria Ressa: It's incredibly important. I think part of the reason we've survived this long is precisely because there is global action, so thank you so much for helping us shine the light.

I think what the government would have wanted would be for us to shut up and to follow. In fact, that's what they told one of my reporters when they came to arrest me. She was livestreaming and he just came and tried to grab the phone and told her she's next.

Thank you. I think the initiative that you took, along with the U.K., in June 2019 to defend media freedom is incredible. You held the line while the United States got its act together. Please continue moving forward.

I will also temper what I have to say because under this anti-terror law, any Filipino can be charged with terrorism by me just telling you that you should do this. I won't tell you that because that can be used against me.

It's a very strange time. This is my 35th year as a journalist. I've never lived under anything like this and I've covered war zones.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Thank you.

I would like Ms. Palabay to weigh in—I see that she's nodding—on both the importance of press freedom and the global action around that.

Ms. Cristina Palabay: I think Canada was among those that supported a resolution on the Philippines to look into its human rights record. It's currently monitoring ways on how it is complying with its commitments.

Maria is correct. I think that's the reason why we are still alive, so to speak. We are lucky. There are more in remote places who do not have this platform and thus we are speaking for them and with them. Your voice certainly is very important.

Also, putting across the message that Canadian dollars and Canadian taxes shouldn't be used to kill us or to silence us is one of the most important things that the Canadian government can do.

[Translation]

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Mr. Beaudoin, do you want to add a comment?

Mr. Guy-Lin Beaudoin: It is very difficult to speak after Ms. Ressa or Ms. Palabay. They are both true heroines, in my view.

Ms. Palabay raised a very important issue about Canadian financial assistance. We have made an access to information request to Global Affairs Canada about the traceability of money sent to the Philippines, including any use to fund anti-terrorism measures. From 2018 to 2019, just under \$40 million in total was sent in aid, and \$2.4 million was still earmarked for anti-terrorism in the bilateral aid.

When we go on human rights missions to the Philippines and see heroines like Ms. Palabay and Ms. Ressa, we see that the money is often used against them. We want to make sure that the money can really be traced so that it is invested exactly as it is stated on page 11 of the guidelines, which is to support the people who are defending human rights and who are the first to be vilified, murdered, raped or illegally arrested. That's where we should be putting our money, not in military aid or in training the police and the military. These are the people we need to help. It is very important.

There is a beautiful expression in English: walk the walk, talk the talk. It is time for the guidelines to be turned into concrete procedures, processes, and programs, as they are in some countries, including Holland. Taxpayers' money must be used to promote sustainable peace in the Philippines. This is very important. After all, the Philippines has been going through an armed revolt for 53 years, and millions of dollars invested in all the anti-terrorism and counter-insurgency measures have been useless.

• (2000)

[English]

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Thank you. *Merci*.

I would like to go back to you, Madam Ressa, because I know you're in the Philippines right now. What is the current situation? How dangerous is it for human rights and democracy defenders at the moment?

Ms. Maria Ressa: I think it is extremely dangerous. The violence has escalated.

I'll just go back to March 7, on what we call "Bloody Sunday" when 24 arrest warrants, I believe, were issued and then nine activists were killed in their homes. There was a knock on the door at 5:30 in the morning and people were ushered out and nine people were killed.

It's death by a thousand cuts. I mentioned lawyers who were defending us in court. They were afraid. Violence and fear are part of the environment we live in, and we continue to fight.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: I just want to say, and I think I'm speaking for all committee members here, thank you for the work you're doing. It is very, very important work. If we can give any legitimacy and validity to the work you're doing by having you here, then we're very happy to do so. We know that you are not guilty and you are definitely fighting for human rights.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we'll move to MP Chiu for seven minutes.

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Thank you.

My first question is directed to Ms. Ressa.

In the current situation we are facing, to a large extent, a significant portion of the human rights abuses have been connected to President Duterte's 2016 efforts to eradicate the effects of drugs, perhaps modelling after Singapore, Saudi Arabia and some other Middle Eastern countries.

My first question for you is, what was the extent of drug use in the Philippines before and what has it been since, and what is the size of the associated industry?

Ms. Maria Ressa: What is under-reported is that in the days before Duterte, drug use had been curtailed, but during the campaign of then mayor Duterte, drugs went from being the number eight concern to the number one. I often equate this with social media, because social media was very effectively used by then mayor Duterte and was actually weaponized after he became president.

Where are we today? Look, all of the specific numbers President Duterte has said have been inflated in terms of the number of people using drugs. The government then downscales numbers. I would say the key part that is difficult is to look at exactly how many people have been killed in this brutal drug war. In January 2017 the number the police gave was, I think, 7,200, and in plain view that was rolled back to 2,000. If you ask the Commission on Human Rights, they'll say that it's 28,000 or 27,000 as of December

2018, but you can see that last year alone the police rolled the number back to 5,000.

I would say we are caught in a battle for truth. It is a battle for facts that is global because of American social media companies, these platforms that prioritize the spread of lies over facts. Facts are really boring, and that notion has enabled this environment. The number of people killed: Who knows? That's the first casualty in our battle for facts.

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Thank you, Ms. Ressa.

I have a follow-up question on that. What is the support level of the Filipino population on this war on drugs campaign, the Duterte style of war on drugs that may not even exist, may not be a problem anymore, until he stirred that up?

• (2005)

Ms. Maria Ressa: Absolutely today, the problem is coronavirus, and the Philippines, like Brazil, chose retired military generals to head our pandemic response. It's part of the reason that we are right back in lockdown. We have curfews until 10:00 p.m. today. At the worst, most extreme lockdown, we needed to get quarantine passes to be able to leave home. It was a largely security-driven response that has largely failed.

How do we deal with the drug war? I think in the hierarchy of needs of Filipinos, the first one is health. The pandemic takes front and centre stage. Help hasn't really gone to the people in terms of—we call it *ayuda*—monetary help. There's been some help for large companies, but not for the tens of millions who have lost their jobs.

Then, it's some basic things, like contact tracing. None of these things.... I would say that coronavirus by pandemic response is a human right.

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Thank you.

My next question is for Ms. Palabay.

What is the state of human rights for political dissenters in the Philippines? Do you have fair and free democratic election campaigns? We talked about the general population and what they think about the war on drugs, but are there fair and transparent elections?

Ms. Cristina Palabay: MP Chiu, I think that the war on drugs and the war on so-called counterterrorism and the war on human rights defenders are all wars on political dissent.

It has created a climate of fear, a climate of impunity. It affects how people would participate in the electoral process. This was very apparent in the 2019 mid-term elections. Even politicians are on so-called drug watch lists, and many have been killed. There is no due process at all.

At the same time, this is what is also happening with political activists, journalists. You would not believe this. Even organizers of community pantries, which are mutual aid initiatives, are being red-tagged and harassed.

The problem is really this level: Anybody who voices their opinions, whether directly against the government or even proposing measures for the government to do something under this pandemic, is being—

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Thank you.

In the last minute that I have, can I get your opinion on how the LGBTQ2+ minority groups are being impacted? Are they the ones who are voicing their opinions, or is it that they don't even need to do that and they're just being oppressed?

Ms. Cristina Palabay: I myself am a member of the LGBTQ community. I was not able to join that rally last year, but there was this pride march, and most of those who joined were arrested for expressing their opposition, on account that there are many LGBTQ leaders of movements here who are being silenced. Of course, they themselves are activists, but also at the same time, there are gendered attacks against them, threats of sexual violence. These are all widespread.

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now move to MP Brunelle-Duceppe for seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to all the witnesses for joining us this evening.

I want to point out that Mr. Beaudoin described Ms. Palabay and Ms. Ressa as heroines. I agree with him. They are on the front lines and, frankly, they have our utmost admiration, once again.

My questions will be directed to Mr. Beaudoin, but I invite Ms. Palabay and Ms. Ressa to speak if they wish. That's absolutely fine.

Mr. Beaudoin, the International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines recommends that specific sanctions be applied against individuals who order, assist or perpetrate extrajudicial killings or other human rights violations.

Are you thinking of any specific individuals from the government, military or police?

• (2010)

Mr. Guy-Lin Beaudoin: Certainly, unlike a country subject to the rule of law, the police and the military do not help to impart justice.

Ms. Palabay and Ms. Ressa would be best able and most reliable to answer your question, because they have intimate knowledge of the matter on the ground.

If I may, I will give them the floor.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I would be pleased to listen to them.

[*English*]

Ms. Cristina Palabay: I think the range of sanctions can be varied, but at the same time, of course, we have a list of names. We have a long list—it's getting longer by the day—of people who are violating, persons in authority—to be frank with you, starting with

our president who has committed, incited and ordered this violence. It's very basic out there in the open. You can even google the links to these public statements.

At the same time, we think it's high time for Canada to review its support for the police and the military, for the drug war and for the counterterrorism efforts, and at the same time look into how it is implementing its guidelines for the protection of human rights defenders.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you very much.

My question is for the three witnesses.

You have just referred to President Duterte. The coalition recommends that the Canadian government support the peace talks by calling on President Duterte to remove the obstacles to resuming them.

Can you tell us what the obstacles are to resuming the peace talks and why it is important that they continue?

Mr. Guy-Lin Beaudoin: Before I turn the floor over to the two heroines, for whom I have great respect, we must recognize that there has been an armed conflict for over 53 years.

It is important to remove the obstacles, because money from Canada to fight terrorism or counter-insurgency will not help us build lasting and sustainable peace. We can achieve this only by truly getting to the root of the problems. This is not done by having more weapons, guns, or tools, which in any case, only hinder the work of those who must lead the peace process and who are vilified.

Instead of listing the many obstacles, I will turn it over to Ms. Palabay and Ms. Ressa, who work in the trenches.

[*English*]

Ms. Cristina Palabay: I would just add that we are looking at the role of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict, the chair of which is President Duterte. The vice-chairperson and national security advisers fight cases against us. General Antonio Parlade and Undersecretary Lorraine Badoy are spokespersons of this task force, spokespersons who are inciting violence against our persons and against our organization.

Those are a few of the names. Of course, there are many more down the line.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Would you like to comment, Ms. Ressa?

[*English*]

Ms. Maria Ressa: Why are these names critical? It's because they use social media. That's one of the biggest reasons it is so effective, because it's almost as though they unleash a virus of lies. These lies are targeted, and the disinformation networks are gendered, so on the LGBTQ question the marginalized are even further marginalized.

What we're seeing in other countries around the world is this equally dangerous, insidious virus of lies that's in our information ecosystem. That is seeded by power wanting to stay in power. That's part of what Cristina mentioned.

Those messages are amplified. They are spread by algorithms that are motivated by profit. That's a business model that Shoshana Zuboff calls surveillance capitalism. I testified with her in front of one of the committees here in 2019.

The last part is that all of this is connected to geopolitical power play. Last week the EU slammed Russia and China for their intensified vaccine disinformation campaigns. Last September Facebook took down information operations from China that were campaigning for the daughter of Duterte for president in our presidential elections next year. They were creating fake accounts for U.S. elections, and they were attacking me. I'm just one journalist, but I'm the target of information operations that are geopolitical in nature.

• (2015)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: You are concerned that Canada is continuing to provide support, co-operation and funding to the Philippine government despite the rapid increase in extrajudicial killings and other human rights violations perpetrated by state forces.

Can you elaborate on the nature of the support, co-operation and funding, and why it should be discontinued or reviewed?

Mr. Guy-Lin Beaudoin: This is our fourth recommendation. I'm really glad you asked that question, because it's a very important issue.

I would like to come back to the traceability of money. It is not clear what Canada's money is being used for. Is it for counter-insurgency or anti-terrorism? It's a little opaque. We don't know whether the money is being used to buy weapons, build prisons or hire more officers.

When the Philippine military and police are trained in Canada, what does the training entail? It is certainly not about the peace process. First and foremost, what is important to us is to see more transparency and traceability of funds. When \$40 million is provided each year, it would be nice to know where that money is going.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaudoin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We're now moving to our final MP to ask questions for seven minutes. That is MP McPherson.

We will have just a few minutes left at the end of that, so we won't have enough time to go to another round. I'm going to ask witnesses to gather their thoughts. We'll give you an opportunity for 30 seconds to a minute in which each of you can express your final thoughts, comments or anything you want to leave us with.

I will now move to Ms. McPherson for seven minutes.

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

Thank you to all of the witnesses for sharing their stories.

I find these stories harrowing. Your sharing this testimony with us is so important. We will do our job, hear your testimony and take those recommendations to the House of Commons and to all parliamentarians.

I'm going to ask a series of questions just to ensure that we do get on the record all of the things that we need to hear from you in your testimony.

I'd like to start with you, Ms. Palabay.

You mentioned that you and other women human rights defenders are among those being arrested, raped, getting death threats or killed. Thirteen human rights workers from your organization have been assassinated. Can you speak briefly about your experience?

Ms. Cristina Palabay: My experience is one that I would not wish to happen to anyone, not to any human rights defender. It's about receiving threats day in and day out. It is about how we have sleepless nights and days knowing about the killings, arrests and raids against the good people who we work with or worrying that the next time it might be me, my family or my colleagues in the office. It is about processing that vicarious trauma that one can acquire when you're exposed to reports every day. It is a very harrowing experience.

The lamentable and frustrating part of this is that when you pore into engaging government institutions, they do not address these concerns, and they get back at you with further threats. After the martial law period of President Marcos, this is the most dangerous time, the most dangerous time for activists, journalists, lawyers and members of the political opposition in the Philippines.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

You talked a bit about engaging with governments. Has the Canadian embassy reached out to your organization and taken any steps at all to protect and support human rights workers who are in peril?

Ms. Cristina Palabay: Well, to be frank with you, there has been no substantial engagement among civil society of the Canadian government here in Manila. I'm sure they have engaged with other actors as well, but as for civil society and those who are at risk, I believe that they can do more, especially in providing sanctuary and support for defenders in providing other venues.

One example of ours is what the Swedish and German ambassadors did. They went to the communities of drug war victims. The German ambassador went to the community pantries that were being red-tagged. That form of solidarity and support is very important. It lends legitimacy and, at the same time, it says that the world is watching and that you cannot just do anything you want against these people. I believe that more proactive action by Canadian voices in accordance with walking the talk with the guidelines on human rights defenders in this program is very important for the Canadian embassy here to undertake.

• (2020)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Ms. Ressa, is there anything you'd like to add to that?

Ms. Maria Ressa: I think the key part of what we're seeing today is that I've never seen power and money being so up front, as well as the quid pro quo, the building of a kakistocracy, and the values. I'll echo what everyone has said with regard to accountability and values.

In 2016 my outlet got in trouble because we demanded an end to impunity. The world doesn't work that way anymore. UNESCO just published "The Chilling", which shows you how women are targeted far more than men are. Our data in the Philippines shows that women are targeted online at least 10 times more than men are, but the data there also shows you how it is about tearing down the facts, because if you don't have the facts, you have nothing.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Absolutely.

I will go back to Ms. Palabay.

The head of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism says that global co-operation on counterterrorism must remain a priority. Can you explain why Canada should not continue to support, fund or co-operate with the Philippine government on anti-terrorism efforts?

Ms. Cristina Palabay: The Philippines' framework and approach to counterterrorism, in our view, is not to counter terror. I think it is driving and enhancing state terror, and it is framed in a way that quells political dissent or any of its perceived enemies. At this point, where even universities, journalists and community pantries are being red-tagged or terror-tagged, it is apparent that funding, supporting or co-operating with the Philippine government within this kind of framework is signing off not only on the constriction of democratic and civic space in the country but also on the rise of authoritarianism.

It is really important that Canada review and look very hard at its continuing support for this kind of framework, the kind that promotes a military solution rather than a more sustainable approach to achieving just and lasting peace.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you. That's very, very interesting. It's important for us to have that information. I think that's key, so thank you for sharing that with us.

I have one final question for you, which I hope I can sneak in.

Ms. Palabay, you speak about the inadequacy or the lack of domestic mechanisms that can truly render justice and accountability for the people of the Philippines. Can you explain how the laws and

the lawfare are being used to stifle political dissent and constrict democratic spaces? Elaborate on the specific issues related to the failure of domestic mechanisms for justice, for accountability, for all of those pieces.

Ms. Cristina Palabay: Our case is emblematic of this frustration, or should I say deliberate impunity that we face. After six of our colleagues were killed, we received so much vilification online from the government. We filed for legal protection, the petition for the Writ of Amparo and Habeas Data at the supreme court. This is a remedy that came from the Latin American institutions. The appellate court denied our petition, and then nine more of our colleagues were killed. Then malicious charges were filed by one of those whom we held to court, the national security adviser.

A commission on human rights faced enormous obstacles in conducting investigations on the killings. It was not given access to important documents. You have a task force led by the justice department and courts with zero conviction rates on the killings of activists. You have both houses of congress dominated by allies of the president, who do not engage civil society in their investigations and opinions.

The Chair: Thank you.

We are going to conclude, but we are going to give all of our witnesses an opportunity to give one final comment, just some parting words.

We'll start with Monsieur Beaudoin.

If you could do that for us, that would be great.

• (2025)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy-Lin Beaudoin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Human rights defenders are asking you today to ensure that Canada applies the great principles of the rule of law. We have to tell you that our appearance before you is giving hope to the relatives of the victims, the witnesses and the victims who have survived the abuses of the Philippine regime, hope that assistance and, most importantly, justice can come from our international community being mobilized.

Please include in your report the importance of human rights defenders. They are often the first to denounce abuses, but also the first to be killed in action and be vilified. They are too easily targeted. It is important to provide money and support for them and to integrate the set of guidelines into a real Canadian support program. The guidelines are good and important, but they are not enough. We need to take the steps that will get us there.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

We'll move to Ms. Coumans.

Ms. Catherine Coumans: Yes, I want to briefly say that when we think about the situation that has just been described to us, we see that Canada intersects in this reality in the Philippines in at least two ways: through our embassy, which is not doing enough to protect people, even people who come to the embassy to seek help, and through our corporations. In particular, our mining companies are making use of the militarization of the Philippines, the red-tagging, the impunity and the criminalization of dissent. When people oppose a mine because it's impacting their lives and livelihoods, they are being red-tagged, and their lives are threatened by extrajudicial killing.

We have to look again at how to hold our corporations to account for the activities that they are involved in overseas, particularly in places like the Philippines with the human rights situation as it is there now. We have to hold them to account in Canada, and our embassy has to be more active in protecting the human rights of people who come to seek support and help.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Ressa.

Ms. Maria Ressa: Thank you so much for asking me to speak to you today.

I go back to just painting a picture of an environment of violence, fear and insidious manipulation—when you have 100% of Filipinos on the Internet on Facebook, the insidious manipulation that is used by state-sponsored actors to manipulate us.

With regard to that question, in that environment, do we truly have free will? Do we have independence? I postulate to you that we may not, that we don't, that this is the time for those who do have power and money to step up and bring up the values that are important for a democracy because at this point if you don't, silence is complicity.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Dwyer.

Ms. Emily Dwyer: Thank you very much. Good evening, everyone.

I would just say very quickly it's quite clear, hearing this context, that what's needed when we're looking at the operation of Canadian companies is for Canada not to simply have an expectation of behaviour, not to simply have access to voluntary dispute mechanisms. There need to be real mechanisms in place to ensure that corporations are required to prevent human rights abuse, undertake due diligence and face real consequences in Canada, including the ability to be sued in court and have there be real, independent investigations.

I think it's quite clear that, in this context, we need to question whether there's a way to ensure that Canadian companies are not fuelling, supporting and directly or indirectly fostering this violence. I think the situation right now is that is not the case and there is certainly complicity.

Thank you very much, everyone.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Palabay, you have the final word.

Ms. Cristina Palabay: I think that whether there's a public health emergency or not, there should be no lockdown on human rights, and we should normalize putting rights at the front and centre of governance and of our society. At the same time, we enjoin the Canadian government to speak out with us and to work with us in achieving justice and accountability in the country.

Thank you for having us today.

● (2030)

The Chair: Thank you.

On behalf of the committee, we thank you, all, for your testimony, for the many questions that you answered, for your courage and for being with us today. Thank you very much.

That will conclude this panel.

An hon. member: Thank you, everyone.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: My thanks to all the witnesses.

[*English*]

The Chair: I do need the members just for two minutes, and then we'll be done.

We need to dispose of two very quick items, committee business first. Do I see agreement for the proposed study budget for a study on human trafficking and modern slavery? Is everybody okay? Give a thumbs-up. Great. Thanks a lot.

Second, can we set a deadline for the submission of witness lists for the study on human trafficking and modern slavery? The clerk has suggested next Wednesday, May 12, at 5 p.m. for prioritized lists. Does that work for everybody? Again, give a thumbs-up. Okay, that's 5 p.m. on May 12.

Thank you, colleagues. The next time we meet will be for briefings on Turkey and northern Syria and Colombia.

I see a hand up.

Monsieur Brunelle-Duceppe, yes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I love you dearly and I know it's difficult for you to do your job, given the problems with interpretation and many other things. However, I calculated the time and I noticed that, during my two rounds last week, I lost a minute and a half of speaking time in total because of the delays related to interpretation and points of order. I wanted to let you know. But this evening, I did not lose any minutes from my time. It went well.

I just wanted to let you know that you have to be careful with silences. It's not your fault. I understand it's difficult, and there's work to be done, but we have done the math and I could send you the excerpts with no problem, if you ask me to. I don't think we should lose any of our time because of the delays in interpretation. That's all I have to say.

I wish you all a good evening.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Have a good evening, everybody.

The meeting is adjourned.

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