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• (1405)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.)): Colleagues, welcome to meeting number 25 of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. We are meeting today, pursuant to Standing Order 106(4), at the request of four members of the committee, to discuss the sanctions imposed by the People's Republic of China.

[Translation]

To ensure an orderly meeting, I encourage all participants to mute your microphone when you are not speaking and to address all comments through the chair.

[English]

I will ask members, in order to participate in the debates, to use the raise-hand function in Zoom.

Mr. Clerk, if we can work through you with respect to colleagues present in the room and their desire to intervene in the discussion...

Ms. Sahota, I will turn the floor over to you now to introduce the motion. Please go ahead.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm assuming that I have to officially move this motion.

The Chair: Yes, please go ahead.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: The motion reads:

That the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development strongly condemn the unacceptable sanctions imposed by the People's Republic of China against one of the Committee's Vice-Chairs, the Member of Parliament for Wellington—Halton Hills and the House of Commons Subcommittee on International Human Rights which represent an affront to Canada's democracy and parliamentary system.

The reason the four members filed this motion and wanted to meet in a special meeting today is that, on Saturday, we all found out that China had imposed these sanctions against Mr. Chong and our subcommittee. Obviously, I'm sure most members around this—and all parliamentarians—were very outraged to see that these sanctions were arbitrarily imposed against a Canadian parliamentarian. These sanctions are nothing more than retaliatory measures taken that I feel are unacceptable and unjustified. I'm sure that we'll hear from other members, as well, as to their feelings on it.

We see it as an attack on democracy, on transparency, on freedom of expression, and we think there should be a united and clear

stance taken by parliamentarians and especially by this committee, first and foremost, to condemn this action by China.

As we've heard from our foreign affairs minister and from other parliamentarians, as well, over the last few days, Canada is going to continue to defend our democracy and the partnerships that we have around the world that are working in unison with us to defend democracy and the democratic rights and freedoms—and especially human rights—of people in China and around the world.

That's why I want to move this motion and why I feel that it's timely that we do it today and that we have a vote on this as soon as possible. I think that we need to send that message out. That's all I'll say for now, and I'll hand it over to the next speaker.

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

Mr. Chong, you're next in line.

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

I want to thank Madam Sahota for introducing this motion.

Let me just say that the sanctions put on me and others in the United States, the United Kingdom and Europe have a twofold effect: they prevent us from travelling to China and they prevent Chinese institutions and citizens from doing business with the individuals sanctioned.

I have no business in China, I have no assets in China and I have no plans to travel to China. My wife and I decided some two years ago that we would not be travelling to China for the foreseeable future, ever since they decided to detain Mr. Kovrig and Mr. Spavor on December 10, 2018, and subsequently when Beijing's authorities decided to crack down on Hong Kong with the introduction of a draconian extradition treaty.

In practical terms, these sanctions will have no impact on me, but they are an attempt to silence us.

They're an attempt to stop us from speaking up on the violations of international law—in the form of the 1948 Genocide Convention—that China is perpetrating in its genocide against the Uighur Muslim minority in Xinjiang province. They're an attempt to silence us in speaking up on the violations of an international treaty, the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration, which guarantees Hong Kong's autonomy for 50 years under the one country, two systems doctrine.

I'll finish by saying this. We cannot, as Canadian parliamentarians, allow that to happen. We cannot allow these sanctions to silence us.

What that means for me is that I think we should remain focused not on the sanctions but on why we were sanctioned, which includes the human rights abuses taking place against the Uighurs in Xinjiang. We should be focused on the violations of an international treaty in Hong Kong; the continued persecution of the Tibetan people; the detention of Mr. Kovrig and Mr. Spavor; the fact that Mr. Schellenberg has been arbitrarily put on death row; and, the ongoing two-decade detention of Mr. Hussein Jalil, whose family lives in Burlington, Ontario, and whose children have never known their father.

We need to remain focused on these issues.

I appreciate the fact that Madam Sahota has introduced the motion. I will be supporting it, but I really strongly believe that this committee and the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations should remain focused on those issues and not worry about the sanctions that have been placed on officials here and abroad. Let's remain focused on the issues at hand and continue to speak up publicly on these issues to give voice to the voiceless.

Thank you, Madam Sahota, for introducing the motion.

• (1410)

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

Mr. Harris is next.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Thank you, Chair, for the opportunity to speak on this motion, which I'm certain is going to receive unanimous consent from this committee. At the subcommittee we all stand in solidarity with Michael Chong, who is named in the sanctions, and indeed all parliamentarians in our country who have spoken out on this issue, and there is a unanimous vote of Parliament in respect to the situation in Xinjiang.

I think it's incumbent on us to respond and respond strongly. I think Mr. Chong stated it well when he said we cannot allow these sanctions to silence us, and as was pointed out by Ms. Sahota and Mr. Chong, and by the letter sent to the chair and the motion itself. I think it is clearly an affront to democracy and to the parliamentary system that we are part of. Fortunately for us we are able to speak freely about violations of human rights, whether they be in China or elsewhere in the world, and we will continue to do so.

I believe we should state that in the motion itself. I want to propose an amendment to say that, to add another sentence and to suggest that this motion be reported to the House as well. I would put this forth as a motion. At the end of the sentence that refers to condemning the unacceptable sanctions that represent an affront to Canada's democracy and parliamentary system, I would add this sentence:

“As parliamentarians, we will continue to actively denounce human rights violations and breaches of international law in keeping with our respect for basic human rights, and that this motion be reported to the House.”

I take it that's in order, Mr. Chair. I will let the debate continue.

I think it's a fairly basic addition but it reinforces the statement of Mr. Chong, that we must make it clear that we will not be silenced by this action by the People's Republic of China. They were sanctioned for violations of human rights. They purport to sanction the Canadian parliamentarians for acting on our support for human rights and our belief in the democratic system and our ability to participate fully in that. I think it's fitting that we respond in this way and make it clear that we will not be silenced, that we will continue to do our duty as parliamentarians and exercise our freedom of expression and freedom of voice to stand up against human rights violations wherever we see them.

Thank you, Chair.

• (1415)

The Chair: Mr. Harris, thank you very much.

There's an amendment on the floor. I had Mr. Genuis and Monsieur Bergeron on the original motion. I have Mr. Oliphant's hand up since, I'm assuming, on the amendment.

Mr. Oliphant.

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): I would just very quickly say that I will be supporting that amendment, and I think my colleagues on our side will support it as well.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Is there any other discussion on the amendment?

Mr. Genuis is shaking his head.

Monsieur Bergeron, will you speak on the amendment?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): If Mr. Genuis wants to speak to the amendment, I would be happy to give him the first turn, since his name is before mine.

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

[*English*]

Mr. Genuis, would you want to speak on the amendment?

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): I had a comment on the main motion, not the amendment.

The Chair: We'll keep you in place for the main motion.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much.

Mr. Bergeron, you have the floor to speak to the amendment.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I think it's appropriate for this motion to have an impact beyond our committee alone. I understand that a motion adopted by the committee is very important. But what we're talking about is our ability to do our work unimpeded or without any pressure. If there is one inherent rule of the British parliamentary system, it is the ability of parliamentarians to do their work free from pressure. If we can't accept any pressure from within, we certainly can't accept any pressure from without. In this case, I think it's appropriate to bring the situation to the attention of the House.

Colleagues have heard me say in committee recently that I'm well aware that the opposition has perhaps acquired too much of a reflex of having motions passed in committee and treated as reports to be tabled in the House. In my opinion, the responsibility to legislate doesn't rest solely with government members, but also with opposition members. That's why, on another issue, I proposed an amendment to have that clarification removed.

In this particular case, reporting this motion to the House is all the more important because we're talking about one of the fundamental principles of the British parliamentary system. The matter must be brought before the House, and members must be able to vote on this fundamental issue.

Moreover, the addition of human rights couldn't be more timely, especially since it was our colleagues from the Subcommittee on International Human Rights who initiated all of this by proposing recognition of the genocide of Uyghurs in Xinjiang, for which this committee and Mr. Chong were sanctioned by the People's Republic of China.

Mr. Chair, you will therefore have understand that I fully support the amendment proposed by our colleague Mr. Harris and that I will obviously support the motion proposed by our Liberal colleagues.

• (1420)

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

[*English*]

Is there any debate on the amendment on the floor?

Seeing none, let me seek the committee's unanimous consent to approve the amendment as passed by Mr. Harris so that we don't have to go to a recorded vote.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Amendment agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: We're back to discussion on the main motion as amended.

Go ahead, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I agree with everything that I've heard from all members on all sides thus far at this committee. I think this is an important motion, and I'm happy to support it, but I think we also need to really heed the call from Mr. Chong to focus on the core issue here.

The core issue is that the Government of China has retaliated against specific individuals as a form of recognition of their leadership on the issue of responding to the genocide of Uyghurs and oth-

er Turkic Muslims in China. As the subcommittee heard, this is the largest mass detention of a minority community since the Holocaust, a genocide that involves putting people in concentration camps, that involves forced sterilization, forced abortion, forced insertion of IUDs, systematic sexual violence and organ harvesting. It is that reality that compelled parliamentarians to respond at the time of the initial subcommittee study and statement, and led most members of Parliament to be present and to vote in favour of the resolution put forward by Mr. Chong recognizing that genocide.

That leadership by the subcommittee as well as by Mr. Chong with his motion, recognized in some formal sense by the Communist party, has had ripple effects around the world. We see conversations about these issues happening in other parliaments as well, and those conversations will, hopefully, increase and create greater pressure on those who are perpetrating this genocide to stop the violence now.

There is so much more work needed on the Canadian side in terms of response and leadership, and those issues are, I think, well detailed in the report from the subcommittee that we have passed along and tabled just recently. That report calls for significant strengthening of supply chain measures. It calls for Magnitsky sanctions against those responsible for this genocide. It calls for appropriate immigration measures addressing the significant vulnerability of Uighur refugees in other countries. Of course, it's difficult for those in East Turkestan to get out, but there are refugee communities in other parts of the world that are vulnerable as a result of Chinese government pressure. There are many issues on which we need to see concrete government and policy responses.

To start with, I'd like to see the government recognize this genocide and join with parliamentarians of all parties and join with the direction and leadership that's been proposed by my colleague Mr. Chong.

What these sanctions show us is that the pressure of the leadership by the subcommittee and by Mr. Chong is working, is having an impact [*Technical difficulty—Editor*], not just being sloughed off as not a big deal. Those criticisms are having an impact, and the greater that impact, the more likely we're going to see a change in behaviour.

I want to congratulate Mr. Chong for his leadership on this, as well as the members of the subcommittee, and colleagues around the world who have been involved in these issues that have, in a sense, been recognized as well by the Communist party in the form of these sanctions. This just underlines how we need to continue to be strong voices for the voiceless, because whatever consequences these sanctions may cause for us as parliamentarians, they are absolutely nothing in comparison to the horrific violence being inflicted on people in China, on the Uighur people as well as on others throughout China who speak out and object and who challenge [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] taking place.

We should and we can, I think, draw our strength from those people and commit ourselves to continuing in this critical fight for justice. I encourage the government, on the concrete policy areas of genocide recognition, of strengthening supply chain legislation and on other areas that are so needed, to take leadership as well and to join with parliamentarians in this critical fight.

Thank you.

• (1425)

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, thank you very much.

Mr. Harris, please go ahead.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Chair.

First of all, I just wanted to thank colleagues for their support for the amendment and for the motion of reporting this matter to the House. I thank Mr. Bergeron for his very thoughtful remarks on the importance of the whole House being apprised of this motion and having an opportunity to reflect and comment on it.

Indeed, the subcommittee that was subject to the PRC reaction and sanctions is a subcommittee of this committee, whose report we accepted, endorsed and reported to the House of Commons. I think Mr. Bergeron is absolutely right that the place for this motion to be presented is the full Parliament because the sanctions are an affront to parliamentary democracy. All parliamentarians are therefore affected by that and should be able to see this motion, have it presented to the House and, if at some point someone wishes to raise the debate on it, that can happen. In any event, it will be before the House, which is an appropriate place for it to be.

I want to just thank colleagues for supporting that and thank our colleagues from the Liberal Party for bringing forth this motion to allow this timely debate.

Thank you, Chair.

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. Zuberi, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): I'd like to thank everybody for taking the time today. Thank you to Ms. Saho-

ta for bringing forth the motion, Mr. Harris for bringing forth the amendments and everybody for standing strong and in solidarity with Mr. Chong, the subcommittee and anybody who's been targeted by these sanctions.

As was mentioned by so many, we have to remain focused on the main issue, which is to reduce harm, save lives, and stop rape, torture, forced sterilization, abortion and forced slave labour. That's the main issue. That's why we must stand strongly in solidarity with Mr. Chong and with the subcommittee right now.

So much has been said. I don't like wasting my words. I will share that we do need to continue as a country to raise the alarm. All citizens need to continue to raise the alarm. Everybody has agency. Citizens have agency. Their agency is to share what they know with others around them, be it on social media, within their families or in their workspaces. That's a form of activism and a form of forward movement to help what we are all doing here together right now in this committee.

As parliamentarians, we need to think about the issues around how we can reduce the harm that's happening within Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Thankfully, a number of measures have been introduced. At the beginning of this year, there were measures around imports and exports. That's a good first step. We introduced targeted Magnitsky sanctions, which were appropriate and measured. That's a very positive and necessary step. Our Parliament recognized 266 to zero that a genocide is in fact occurring.

There's still more to do. Let's get this motion passed. Let's stand in solidarity and continue forward.

• (1430)

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

Colleagues, is there any other debate on the main motion as amended?

Seeing none, I think we have a strong consensus. I'm going to seek the committee's unanimous consent to approve the motion as presented and amended.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion as amended agreed to [*See Minutes of Proceedings*])

The Chair: That takes us to the end of our scheduled point of business. Is there any other business relating to the motion under 106(4) that members wish to raise at this point?

Seeing none, colleagues, I thank you very much for this important discussion.

The meeting is adjourned.

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