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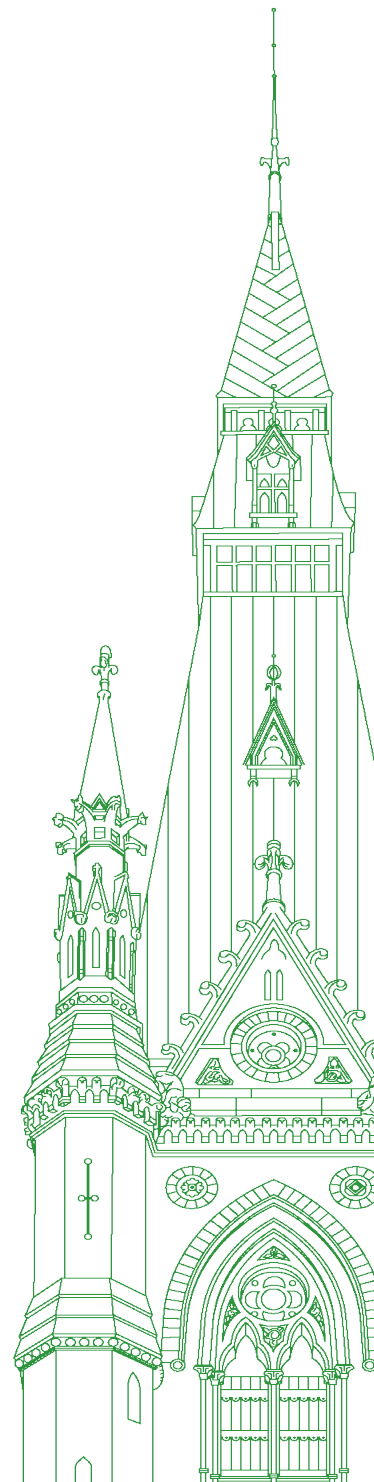
Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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Chair: Mr. Sameer Zuberi

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• (1305)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC)): Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the 28th meeting of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights.

Today, this meeting is taking place in a hybrid format.

I want to welcome Arif Virani, MP, to our committee. The regular members are all here, but I believe you're subbing in, so welcome.

I wanted to make a few comments about how the meeting is run. I'll recognize you by name and then you will have the floor. I wanted to note that there is simultaneous translation. You can access that by using the little globe at the bottom of your screen where it says interpretation, and by clicking on the language of your choice. Remember to speak clearly and slowly so that translation can indeed happen.

This is just a reminder, as well, to address your comments to the chair. We have already gone through our sound checks for this meeting.

This study is taking place pursuant to Standing Order 108(2). We will resume our study on the Chinese government's residential boarding schools and preschools in the Tibet Autonomous Region and all Tibetan autonomous prefectures and counties.

It's our pleasure to welcome you all to our committee hearing today.

With us today, we have Canada Tibet Committee, Tibet Action Institute, Tibet Watch and the Tashi Lhunpo Monastery.

We're going to hear from each of these organizations and groups today. There will be five minutes given to each group for opening statements.

Interestingly, today, we have a witness from an organization who will be speaking to us in a language that is not English or French. Therefore, we will be giving five minutes to the monastery witness to speak in Tibetan, and then there will be five minutes for that to be translated into English by an interpreter who is sitting in the room with us. It will be a little different from normal, perhaps, but I'm sure we will be able to manage that.

Without further ado, I'd like to turn it over to the Tashi Lhunpo Monastery and their representatives for five minutes. Then we'll have five minutes for translation of their statement, and we'll go to the next witnesses for five minutes each after that.

To the witness with the monastery, the floor is yours.

Mr. Tenzin Rabgyal (Abbot, Tashi Lhunpo Monastery): [*Witness spoke in Tibetan, interpreted as follows:*]

Tashi delek, everyone.

As the abbot of Tashi Lhunpo Monastery, I would like to take this opportunity today to make some fervent appeals to the Canadian government on behalf of the followers of Tibetan Buddhism around the world, human rights, religious freedom and child rights advocates, as well as the millions of disciples of His Holiness the Panchen Rinpoche—more well known as the Panchen Lama—across Tibet and the Himalayan region.

Currently, we see the Chinese government undertaking ruthless and restrictive policies in Tibet. The situation is worsening day by day. We see human rights being trampled, religious freedom and the rights of the child being denied. Those Tibetans who disagree with the Chinese government are being arbitrarily detained, with many being disappeared. Today I'd like to explain the situation in Tibet and the context of the disappearance of an eminent spiritual leader, namely His Holiness the 11th Panchen Lama.

In 1989, the 10th Panchen Lama died suddenly and mysteriously while in the town of Shigatse in Tibet. Subsequently, as per Tibetan Buddhist convention, His Holiness the Dalai Lama announced on May 14, 1995, his recognition of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima from Nagchu in Tibet as the unmistakable reincarnation. Sadly, three days after the announcement, on May 17, 1995, the Chinese authorities detained the less than six years old Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, his parents and entourage. They have not been seen since then, and 28 years have passed. To make matters worse, later in 1995, the Chinese government interfered in our religious process and forcefully appointed a child by the name of Gyaltzen Norbu as a fake 11th Panchen Lama. Since then, he has been used as a political tool by the Chinese government.

His Holiness the 10th Panchen Lama worked tirelessly his entire life and even sacrificed his precious life to preserve Tibetan language, religion and culture across Tibet—including the 70,000 character report. His Holiness the 11th Panchen Lama is very crucial to continue the legacy of the 10th Panchen Lama and further realize his great works and visions. All efforts made regarding His Holiness the Panchen Lama for the past 28 years have resulted in no significant proof of his whereabouts; hence, we urge the Canadian government to take more concrete actions.

• (1310)

Therefore, with great concern, we would like to make the following five appeals to the Canadian Parliament and administration.

One, I urge the Canadian Parliament to pass a motion urging the Canadian government to instruct the ambassador in China to meet with the 11th Panchen Lama and ascertain his whereabouts and well-being.

Two, I urge the Canadian government to honour the 11th Panchen Lama with an award recognizing him as a victim of enforced disappearance for 28 years and as someone who has been denied his human rights, religious freedom, the rights of a child and other fundamental rights of movement, residency and action.

Three, in order to enable his early release and as a way to draw attention to his situation, I urge the Canadian Parliament to observe both the birthday and the day of the disappearance of the 11th Panchen Lama on April 25 and May 17 respectively.

Four, I urge the Canadian government to intervene in the forced colonial boarding schools for Tibetan children so that we can ensure the continuity of Tibetan culture.

Five, the aspirations of —

• (1315)

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): I'm sorry to interrupt. I'm very sorry, but the translation has switched, and I'm getting French on the English channel. I would love to hear what that fifth point was, please.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Arnold Viersen): I would attempt to speak in French, although I'm unable to.

[Translation]

My name is Arnold Viersen.

[English]

There we go. We're good.

You may continue with your presentation on the fifth point, please.

Mr. Tenzin Rabgyal: [Witness spoke in Tibetan, interpreted as follows:]

Five, the aspirations of the Tibetans in Tibet is for His Holiness the Dalai Lama to be able to return at the earliest. Therefore, I urge the Canadian government to consider taking concrete initiatives to support His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Central Tibetan Administration to enable the resolution of the Tibetan issue with the Chinese government through a mutually beneficial middle way approach.

The Canadian people and government have been consistently supporting the Tibetan people, so I take this opportunity to express my gratitude. This five-point appeal I have made today is in one way also connected to the mental well-being of the several million believers and connected to the democratic rights of individuals.

I have firm hope that the Canadian government will consider the reality of the Tibetan situation, particularly on the issue of His Holiness the Panchen Lama, and consider my appeals positively.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Arnold Viersen): Thank you.

We'll now turn the floor over to the Canada Tibet Committee and the executive director from there.

You'll have five minutes. I'll attempt to give you a signal at the one-minute mark.

The floor is yours.

Mr. Sherap Therchin (Executive Director, Canada Tibet Committee): Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members. I deeply appreciate this opportunity to speak with you on this important matter of Tibetan language and education.

The Canada Tibet Committee is an independent, non-partisan association of Tibetans and non-Tibetans from across Canada. Founded in 1987, its mandate is to promote the human rights of Tibetans living under Chinese rule.

As committee members will know, the right to education is protected in both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Both of these treaties explicitly guarantee that minority groups must not be denied the use of their own language, either in the community or otherwise. Further, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights states that individuals “have the right of self-determination”, including “social and cultural development”.

Here in Canada, the federal government supports efforts by indigenous peoples to reclaim and revitalize their linguistic heritage, in part by adopting the Indigenous Languages Act in 2019. In the province of Quebec, it has been more than 40 years that all children in the province have to be educated in the French language until the end of their secondary studies.

It is also interesting to note that the Government of China has adopted its regional national autonomy law, which clearly states in article 37 that “The organs of self-government of national autonomous areas shall independently develop education for the nationalities” and “shall, whenever possible, use textbooks in their own languages and use their languages as the media of instruction.”

Despite such guarantees, however, a suite of policies imposed across the whole of China by the central government under the pretext of poverty alleviation or ecological protection have reinforced the ongoing assault on the Tibetan language and cultural traditions. Such policies include various nomad relocation schemes, the school consolidation policy and the bilingual education policy. These policies have, in effect, reduced the ability of Tibetan children to access schooling in their own language, as witnesses explained in detail before this committee in the previous meeting.

A few years ago, Global Affairs Canada funded a project to support efforts by the Tibetan exile community in India and Nepal to deliver quality education in the Tibetan language. Notwithstanding the many differences in the broader context, the project provided valuable lessons about challenges faced when promoting Tibetan language in the face of a different dominant language. For this reason, Canada is well placed to take the lead on this issue.

Therefore, in conclusion, we wish to make the following recommendations for the committee's consideration.

Number one, open the dialogue with the appropriate counterparts from the National People's Congress on the matter of minority languages and education in Tibet.

Number two, invite visiting parliamentarians from China to indigenous communities and to Quebec in order to share Canadian experiences regarding the protection and promotion of minority languages.

Number three, support academic research aimed at identifying the impacts that resettlement and education policies in Tibet have had or might have on the vibrancy of Tibetan language and culture.

Number four, encourage the Canadian embassy in Beijing to develop Canada fund projects related to Tibetan language education, including support for Tibetan-language lending libraries or the training of Tibetan-language teachers.

Finally, number five, advocate on behalf of Tibetan human rights defenders who uphold linguistic rights.

Thank you.

• (1320)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Arnold Viersen): Thank you, Mr. Therchin. That's right on the time there, for sure.

I will now move on to the senior researcher with the Tibet Action Institute.

The floor is yours for five minutes.

Mr. Tenzin Dorjee (Senior Researcher and Strategist, Tibet Action Institute): Thank you. I'd like to thank the distinguished members of the committee for this opportunity.

Among all of the tools of colonial dispossession wielded by European settlers against indigenous populations in North America, residential schools stand out for the scope, scale and persistence of their impact. Under the guise of providing education, these boarding establishments removed indigenous children from their homes, erased their cultures and languages and left a lasting legacy of multi-generational trauma that haunts indigenous communities to this day.

This 19th-century colonial practice is being quietly resurrected on the Tibetan plateau by the Chinese government.

Two years ago, after hearing about children being forced into state-run boarding schools in parts of eastern Tibet, my colleagues at Tibet Action Institute began investigating the matter. After months of research, they arrived at the disturbing conclusion that approximately 800,000 children, which is 78% of all Tibetan stu-

dents aged six to 18, are living in residential boarding schools. That's 800,000 children. This staggering statistic does not include the more than 100,000 Tibetan children aged four to six who are believed to be in boarding preschools.

In these boarding institutions, children are put through a highly politicized curriculum designed to sever their ties to their religion and culture, strip them of their mother tongue and methodically replace their Tibetan identity with a Chinese one. The residential school system sits at the centre of China's new solution to the Tibetan problem.

Whereas previous administrations under Hu Jintao, Jiang Zemin and Deng Xiaoping balanced political repression with a degree of ethnic accommodation towards Tibetans, Xi Jinping's China has opted for an all-out eliminationist approach. This new approach is grounded in the ultra-nationalist notion that the only route to political stability is cultural uniformity and ethnic homogeneity.

In the past, Beijing believed that the best way to solve the nationalities problem was to afford non-Han minorities a range of special protections and cultural accommodations. However, following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Chinese public intellectuals like Ma Rong and Hu Angang argued that special treatment for minority communities somehow undermined Chinese nation building. They called for a highly interventionist form of party-directed cultural nationalism. What Beijing now seeks to eliminate is not just separatist ideology but the separate identity of Tibetans. Dissent never went unpunished under Beijing, but now even difference is criminalized.

Among all the features of Tibetan identity, language is what most effectively unites Tibetans across the plateau. The Tibetan language forms the bedrock of one of the great civilizations of Asia, with a written history dating back over a millennium and an oral literature that goes back even further. It is also home to the largest body of canonical Buddhist literature in the world. Of all the markers of a distinct identity, language is the central pride of the Tibetan people.

For Xi Jinping's China, this is precisely why the Tibetan language must be eradicated. What better tool for that task than the residential school system? In all schools across the plateau, Tibetan has been replaced by Mandarin Chinese as the medium of instruction. Beijing has deceptively labelled this new policy "bilingual education", but there is nothing bilingual about the system. Tibetan has been demoted to second-language or third-language status in its own native homeland. This is literally a highway to mother-tongue erosion. To make it worse, China has shuttered scores of local and private schools, pre-emptively destroying all village-level alternatives to the consolidated boarding schools.

Ironically, two months ago, when UN experts in Geneva grilled the Chinese delegation, Chinese officials defended the mandatory boarding policy by claiming that there were no schooling alternatives in rural Tibet. Guess what. They themselves had destroyed all the local alternatives that existed. At the same event, when asked about the use of Mandarin as the medium of instruction in Tibet, Chinese officials said that the Tibetan language doesn't have the right words for teaching math and science. This is a blatantly racist and fictitious argument.

• (1325)

All languages, when they meet new subjects for the first time, face challenges that can be overcome. The Chinese language itself faced the same problems in the recent past, and it managed pretty well, borrowing thousands of terminologies from Japanese and Russian. Tibetan has by and large also solved some of these problems.

Meanwhile, the boarding system is causing a major upheaval in the social, psychological, cultural and linguistic structures of Tibetan life. We are already seeing the early results of this colonial policy. Tibetan children below a certain age are fast becoming native Mandarin speakers, which means they can no longer converse meaningfully with their parents and cannot even communicate with their grandparents. In Tibet, as in many traditional societies, grandparents play a seminal role in shaping children's overall psychological development and orienting their cultural world view. If children inherit genes from their parents, it can be said they inherit culture from their grandparents.

This colonial system is clearly designed to stem the transmission of culture from one generation to the next. Thankfully, the world is beginning to take action and take note. Two months ago, the UN sent a strong communication to Beijing on the issue. Yesterday, the German government officially called for an end to this system.

My recommendation to the Canadian government is to publicly condemn this consolidated boarding institution and to call on the Chinese government to halt this system and allow the reopening of village-level local and private schools. Finally, I request that the Canadian government sanction Chinese leaders and officials responsible for this heinous policy, including the intellectual architects responsible for developing and implementing this system.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Arnold Viersen): Thank you.

We will now be hearing from the senior researcher from Tibet Watch.

The floor is yours for five minutes.

Ms. Tenzin Choekyi (Senior Researcher, Tibet Watch): Thank you for having me.

On behalf of Tibet Watch, I would like to thank all of the members of the committee for their attention on this urgent matter, and the interpreter for making this communication possible.

First, I must make note of the atmosphere of fear and surveillance under which Tibetans inside Tibet live every single day. Ever since the spate of 2008 freedom protests and the self-immolations

from 2009, Tibet was effectively turned into a police state. Rural villages, cities, crossroads, community halls, monasteries, border crossing areas, chat groups and social media are all monitored by police.

The Chinese Communist Party says it is for social stability. Meetings are convened to announce unilateral decisions. Tibetans inside are warned to cut off their ties with friends and family living in exile and diasporas. Old-aged people with knowledge of family history are interviewed to extract information about Tibetans living outside. Huge cash awards are promised for reports on communication between those inside and outside. Police visit homes and warn aging parents to tell the children in exile to stop going to protests calling for freedom in Tibet.

What is oppressed at home is repressed abroad. What, then, is the purpose of school in an occupied country? A young refugee girl, aged 15, who recently escaped to India from eastern Tibet, told us about her time at her minority boarding secondary school. She says this: "We wake up early around 4 to 5 in the morning and start morning exercises like running in the playground, all under the close watch of surveillance cameras.

"The medium of instruction is mainly Chinese. Except for the Tibetan language class, the rest of the subjects...are taught in Chinese language. Tibetan language class is optional and marks in the Tibetan exam are not even counted in the final exam score."

She belongs to the top class of students who scored the highest, but they don't get the chance to visit home on weekends like others. The best teachers give them classes, but only 10 out of 50 teachers at the school are of Tibetan origin, teaching Tibetan language.

A couple of other newly arrived refugees from eastern Tibet also echoed the same observation, adding that naming a school "Tibetan" is just for the namesake. There is no career and scope for jobs in a market-driven society where Chinese-language proficiency is the main requirement.

In between this structural injustice, Tibetans have carefully and consistently carved out spaces for a Tibetan education with private school, online language chat groups and home tuition. However, these spaces are also rapidly shrinking.

For example, in July 2021, Sengdruk Taktse, a school founded with government permission, was forcibly shut down without any official clarification. Its students were then enrolled into local state-run schools, whilst orphans without fixed domiciliation faced many difficulties. A Tibetan teacher at the school was deeply disturbed by the closure and unable to eat. She was detained. The same year, Gyalten Getsa, another renowned Tibetan school, was ordered to change the curriculum and medium of instruction to Chinese and take all exams in Chinese, or face a shutdown.

Then came the replacement of Tibetan textbooks with that of Chinese. Parents in Darlag township in Golog were told that from September 2021 onwards, all of their children must go to school with only the newly introduced textbooks in Chinese. Two youngsters expressed concerns about the future impact of this decision in an online chat group, and they were both detained.

Another teenager in Ngaba county was also taken into custody after he submitted a petition against the Chinese medium of instruction and refused to join a propaganda meeting about praising the CCP. Shortly after the schools opened in September 2021, in Markham county three children aged 11, 15 and 16, who expressed unhappiness about the lack of Tibetan classes, were arrested from their boarding school and taken to a so-called “reform through education centre”, under the pretext of needing psychological counselling.

The Chinese government also issued two other notices in 2021—promoting Mandarin Chinese as the national common language in preschool kindergartens, and reducing the burden of homework and off-campus tuition. This double reduction, so to speak, means that off-campus tuition in the Tibetan language, or any other subjects by Tibetans, faces scrutiny and closure.

The boarding school is also deeply intertwined with state policies that displace nomads from their ancestral lands. Known in Tibet Autonomous Region as the extremely high-altitude ecological resettlement program, by 2025 entire villages in their hundreds are going to be moved hundreds of kilometres away. The consequences are that parents lose their traditional and sustainable livelihoods. Even if their children and their boarding school have also been moved to the same new area, parents no longer have their homeland to live in and pass on their ancestral knowledge of the land.

• (1330)

This is how the Chinese Communist Party, to use their jargon, give “full play” to the children of Tibet. Their mother tongue is systematically devalued to nothing more than a language subject.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Arnold Viersen): Thank you very much.

We'll now turn to our questioning. This is a seven-minute round, so each member will have seven minutes to ask questions.

I will turn the floor over to Ziad Aboultaif.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Thanks for appearing today before the committee.

It's very obvious that the Chinese regime and government is trying to use schooling to be able to impact changes on the culture of

the Tibet region and Tibetans in general. Since 2008, these forced boarding schools have been running, and they may have been running before that.

I would like to start with Mr. Therchin.

In your own assessment, how much of an impact have these boarding schools had on the culture, the language and the community in general?

• (1335)

Mr. Sherap Therchin: Thank you for the question.

The impact of forcibly putting Tibetan children into residential boarding schools has created an environment where Tibetan children are no longer able to communicate with their grandparents, because grandparents speak Tibetan and children are not able to speak Tibetan. It has cut off the link of sharing not just the language but also the history that grandparents would usually share with their grandchildren.

That is just one example, but I would defer to our colleague at the Tibet Action Institute, who has done research and spent a lot of time on this particular issue.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you.

Mr. Tenzin Dorjee: If I may add very quickly to what my colleague Sherap just said, in terms of doing extensive research on the ground on exactly the scope and scale of the impact, it's very difficult to do because the Chinese government does not allow any foreign researcher, scholar, independent investigator or journalist to go into Tibet. They don't allow any information from Tibet to escape out of Tibet.

In Tibet, one reason there is an information black hole is that the messengers get punished sometimes even worse than the protesters. At the same time, here are a couple of examples that I have observed in my own experience: The age of the child seems to be very important in terms of how deep the level of impact is, let's say, if we just look at the individual impact on one family. My colleague, Dr. Gyal Lo, who is here with us, observed that among children who are between the ages of three and six, three to six months is long enough for a child to switch completely from Tibetan to Mandarin. It literally takes less than six months for the language erosion to happen at a very fundamental place.

I also met a young Tibetan student around the age of 11 or 12. This was somebody who attended one of those boarding institutions recently. Her story was a little bit different because she grew up in a family that was fiercely proud of their Tibetan heritage. She grew up speaking only Tibetan in her home and that was the language of the home, but when she was enrolled into a boarding institution at age 10, within one year, Mandarin displaced Tibetan as her first language. When I met her, she was no longer comfortable speaking in Tibetan. She was speaking to me in halting Tibetan, and her first language was very clearly Mandarin.

I asked her, “What about the other students in your school? In class, of course, you speak Mandarin, but outside of class, what language do you use with each other, with your peers?” She said, “Mandarin, Chinese.”

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: On this note, how long will it take, with continued residential schools, to wipe out completely the Tibetan culture and language?

Mr. Tenzin Dorjee: That's the implication that many of us really deeply worry about, because it is one of those impacts that are difficult to observe and difficult to notice. Let's imagine. In her case, students who are 11 to 12 years old right now have already switched to Mandarin as their first language. We cannot say what's happening to people who are 16, 17 or 18 years old. It's easy for people to think that the Tibetan language is still doing okay, because people are still speaking Tibetan, but if we play this experiment forward, when her generation gets to 40 years old or 50 years old, we will have a world where in Tibet the majority of the Tibetan population will be speaking in Chinese—not Tibetan—to each other. There is nothing wrong with being bilingual, but there is something disturbing when Tibetans talk to each other in Chinese as their main language.

This is the real scenario that we are looking at because it is a cohort effect and it happens. Right now it's hard to notice, but when the world starts to notice, it might be too late. That's why right now is the time for action.

• (1340)

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Between the action of doing something with a very stubborn regime out there, which is basically on a power trip, versus the other countering action to be able to preserve and to minimize the impact of the actions happening as a result of residential schools, what do you think is the best action to be taken to minimize the effect of what's going on?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Arnold Viersen): Unfortunately, that puts us out of time.

We will turn it over to Mr. Virani for seven minutes.

Mr. Arif Virani (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you for the welcome to the committee.

Thugs rje che—that's thank you in Tibetan—to all the witnesses, virtual and in person, who have come to share such important information. It's not lost on me as a Muslim Canadian that today is Eid al-Fitr, and Muslim Canadians are free to celebrate with their families, as I have been doing with my family today, while religious worship and religious freedom in other parts of the world, including in Tibet, are extremely restricted. I think it underscores the need for us all to be vigilant. Let me start by saying that.

I want to put out a request to the first three witnesses. I was jotting things down as quickly as possible, but I think between Thupten Rabgyal-la and Sherap Therchin and Tenzin Dorjee, you have provided about 12 different recommendations. Could you please just make sure that all of those recommendations are provided in writing to the clerk and the analysts? That would be very beneficial for us, because we do want to scrutinize those very closely.

My first question in these seven minutes is for the Tibet Action Institute and Tenzin Dorjee-la.

It seems to me that Tibet, given what we've heard, is at an inflection point where Canada was in maybe the 1870s or 1880s, just when we were designing the residential school system for indige-

nous kids in this country. The overt policy of the Government of Canada at the time was to take the Indian out of the child.

You've said quite candidly, Tenzin-la, that the PRC under Xi Jinping is deliberately attempting to assimilate Tibetans quite directly by converting to a complete usage of Mandarin. What analogies do you see between what happened in this country, and unfortunately continues to this day in Canada—with the Indian residential school system, where we took kids away from their indigenous homes and put them in faraway places, forcing them to learn English as a foreign language—and what is happening right now in Tibet? What lessons can we apply from our own experience to help the Tibetan cause?

Could you start with that, please, Mr. Dorjee?

Mr. Tenzin Dorjee: I think the two cases are very similar when it comes to the intent of the government. The main goal of the government and many of the strategies that the government is using are also very similar. Some of the tactics might be a little bit different, but most of the strategies are the same. The goal is exactly the same.

The only major difference I see is that, in the case of what China is doing to Tibet right now, it is not too late—yet. There is time to stop it from happening. If the phrase “never again” has any meaning, we have a chance to stop this genocide.

Mr. Arif Virani: Thank you, Dorjee-la.

I will turn to Sherap Therchin from the CTC.

Obviously there's a moral flaw to what the PRC is doing. There's a violation of international human rights, and you outlined some of the covenants. It also seems that you're making the case that the Chinese government, even pursuant to their own domestic legislation, are violating their own domestic laws, their own national laws, of the PRC in terms of what they're doing to the Tibetan people.

Can you just refresh us about the legislation that you feel is being violated domestically in terms of the PRC violating their own laws?

Mr. Sherap Therchin: When it comes to the practices of any policies in Tibet by the Chinese government, this critical question remains: Are they transparent? What about the actual implementation of the policies that exist only in theory? This is where the idea of fact-finding, independent of them, unrestricted by them, is very important to Tibet and other autonomous parts of China.

In this regard, I would suggest the idea of reciprocity, which is that, in 2018, we had the Chinese government-appointed officials visiting and testifying before the foreign affairs committee and sharing their thoughts, but we do not have the same opportunity for Canadian government officials and Canadian parliamentarians within Tibet to see the actual situation. To answer this question, I would suggest that reciprocal access to Tibet is very important.

• (1345)

Mr. Arif Virani: Thank you, Sherap.

I will turn to Abbot Tenzin Thupten Rabgyal for this last question.

I think it's fairly familiar to me—I'm the chair of the Parliamentary Friends of Tibet—in terms of understanding the role of the Panchen Lama, but I'm not sure if it's crystal clear to everyone on this committee and people watching at home, the importance of the Panchen Lama vis-à-vis the succession of the Dalai Lama.

My understanding is that each recognizes the other's reincarnation and that the end strategic goal of the Chinese government is that, by controlling who the Panchen Lama is and effectively trying to replace the current Panchen Lama, they control who would succeed the 14th Dalai Lama, because the Panchen Lama identifies and recognizes who would be the 15th Dalai Lama.

Can you just explain to viewers the strategic purpose that China is trying to achieve by abducting Gendun Choeki Nyima and also by trying to put someone as a replacement in his place?

Thank you so much for being here, Rabgyal-la.

Mr. Tenzin Rabgyal: *[Witness spoke in Tibetan, interpreted as follows:]*

His Holiness the 10th Panchen Rinpoche is very important to many millions of Buddhist followers across Tibet and the Himalayan region. He serves as the root guru of many Tibetans.

In regard to the importance of His Holiness the Panchen Rinpoche in relation to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, there's an analogy in our community of the sun and the moon, the sun being His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the moon being His Holiness the Panchen Lama. This is in accordance with the historical traditions of both the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama and the relationship between them as a father and a son or as a teacher and a student, and also, very importantly, their being involved in recognizing each other's reincarnations.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Arnold Viersen): Thank you. That's all the time we have.

I'm now going to turn the floor over to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair. You are doing a fine job.

First, thank you to all witnesses for being with us today. Please forgive me if I mispronounce your names. I will try my best not to butcher them too badly.

All witnesses spoke at length about language. It is the foundation of Tibetan culture, alongside Buddhism, of course. As a Quebecker, I can certainly relate.

A sad precedent has already been set in Canada. We need only think of certain provinces that banned French-language education, like Manitoba and Ontario. We saw what happened as a result. When Manitoba joined the Canadian Confederation in 1870, it had as many francophones as anglophones. When French-language education was banned, it led to the outcome we know today. Unfortunately, you might take this as an indication of what ensues when education is imposed in another language, causing the assimilation of future generations.

I would like to hear what Mr. Dorjee has to say about that. We must look to the past to see what the future holds. Can Canada's past serve as an example of what could occur in Tibet?

Were my comments understood, Mr. Chair?

• (1350)

[English]

Mr. Tenzin Dorjee: I understood the gist of it. I missed a bit of the translation for the last part of the question, I think.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Arnold Viersen): All right, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe. I'll give you another minute to repeat your question.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Okay, I will begin again.

There have been cases in some Canadian provinces of francophones being assimilated after a ban on French-language education. Manitoba is one example.

Could what happened in Canada be used to illustrate what is likely to happen in Tibet with the current residential boarding schools?

[English]

Mr. Tenzin Dorjee: Thank you so much.

There are no words to stress the importance of language to an individual, to a society, to a people and to a family. Sometimes I think we make a mistake when we think of language as a tool for communication between two people or between two societies. Language is much more than a tool. It's the foundation for being a human being. In some ways, it is what distinguishes us from all the others as humans. Language is basically a way of thinking. It's a way of being in the world.

I was speaking just this morning with Dr. Gyal Lo about its importance, about what it means to lose a language. When somebody loses their language, it's not the same as losing many other things that are important to a person. The person who loses their mother tongue does not always gain another language at the same level. Usually, they gain half a language. Usually, they gain an incomplete language.

There are people who argue—there is literature that says so—that language basically determines thought. It determines our characteristics, our personalities. It influences who we are even at that level. When we talk about losing a language, it is not only a traumatic loss for an individual. It's not only a traumatic loss for a nation. It's not only a loss for society or for the relationships people have. We lose so much more that cannot be expressed enough through words. I think that is the future we are looking at if we fail, if the world fails to notice the alarming situation right now, if we fail to respond to this alarm that is the situation right now.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you so much. I also believe language is the basis for forming thought. People with different mother tongues think differently, that much is clear. Many sociologists could attest to that.

I now have a question for Mr. Therchin, from the Canada-Tibet Committee.

Are you running a risk when you advocate for the Tibetan people while in another country, such as Canada? Bearing in mind everything we hear about Chinese interference, it is difficult for you to defend the interests of the Tibetan people? Do you feel safe in Canada when you stand up for Tibetans who are still in Tibet?

• (1355)

[English]

Mr. Sherap Therchin: Thank you for the question.

I think the threat is mainly applicable to Tibetans who still have families in Tibet, which is what the Chinese government often uses to coerce and self-censor Tibetans living in exile.

I didn't really have much fear when I joined Tibet advocacy and when I started speaking out in Canada for human rights in Tibet, but in recent times, after hearing more stories about Chinese influence and interference in Canada, and especially after hearing the stories of the existence of Chinese police stations in Canada, it really gave me a sense of fear about whether I am safe or not. This is something that I had never felt until two years ago.

Thank you.

[Translation]

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

Your Holiness Abbot Rinpoché, if Canada and the parliamentarians of the House of Commons support your five recommendations, do you believe it will set an example for the rest of the world and that other democratic countries might follow suit and support the five recommendations?

[English]

Mr. Tenzin Rabgyal: [Witness spoke in Tibetan, interpreted as follows:]

Yes. Canada would be a leader should Parliament support the five appeals. We have big hopes for Canada leading that conversation for the millions of followers of His Holiness the Panchen Rinpoche, who is, namely, the second-highest Buddhist leader. This action by the Canadian government will support raising awareness about His Holiness the Panchen Rinpoche and help extremely. Not only will it help, but we have high hopes that Canada will take the lead on this.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Arnold Viersen): Thank you.

We will now go to MP McPherson.

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

Thank you to all of the witnesses for coming and sharing this very difficult testimony.

Similar to my colleague from the Liberal Party—and I should say *Eid Mubarak*—I also see the commonalities with the residential system that we've seen in Canada. It seems like the same tools have been used to destroy the Tibetan people. Obviously, that is extremely upsetting.

His Holiness just spoke a bit about wanting Canada to take a leadership role in this. I would like to ask all three witnesses if they could comment on what other countries have said and what other countries have been doing with regard to support. I would just like to get a sense of where that situation is.

I know that when dealing with the PRC it's always best if we can work with our allies and if we can work with other like-minded countries as a bloc. It is an easier and more effective way of us doing that work. I'm just wondering where other countries are at and if there are any that have been leading on this and any that have been doing really good work that we can look to.

Perhaps I'll start with His Holiness and then maybe the other two witnesses would like to jump in.

Mr. Tenzin Rabgyal: [Witness spoke in Tibetan, interpreted as follows:]

In short, wherever I have been able to visit, whether it is in the United States, here in Canada, across Europe, in India or in London, where where I'm about to go, we've seen immense support in regard to His Holiness the Panchen Rinpoche's case.

• (1400)

Mr. Sherap Therchin: I would say there are certainly many other countries that have taken a strong position on the issue of not only the human rights but also the political issue of Tibet. I would cite the example of the bills that were passed in the U.S. in recent years. The Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act was passed in the U.S., and the Tibetan Policy and Support Act was passed in the U.S.

Currently, there's a bill on resolving the Sino-Tibetan conflict that is also under consideration for passing in the U.S. Congress.

More at the multilateral platform, I wanted to give an example that was probably from, I think, a little more than a year ago. Canada's UN ambassador, Bob Rae, mentioned, in response to a question asked by a Chinese representative there, that Canada actually recognizes the acknowledgement and the reconciliation of its history with indigenous peoples. This happens whenever there's any international attempt to point out China's treatment of its national people, whether it's Tibetans, Uyghurs or Mongolians. China often uses this as a counterattack to point out to western governments and to remind them of their own histories. This is where Bob Rae's answer, I thought, was a really good answer.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Mr. Dorjee, is there anything from you?

Mr. Tenzin Dorjee: I will just quickly add also that, two months ago, the United Nations released a very strong statement on this subject demanding that the Chinese government abolish the entire colonial system of boarding schools in Tibet. Just yesterday actually, the German government, from the foreign office, took a stand and made a very strong call to the Chinese government directly that it should close down the colonial boarding school system as well.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

Mr. Therchin, how would you evaluate Canada's response to date? How do you feel that Canada is doing?

I know that you brought forward many recommendations that we can review, but how do you feel, to date, that Canada has done?

Mr. Sherap Therchin: I think the fact that we're having this meeting is a recognition of Canada's active interest on this issue. The fact that we recently had, on December 14, a unanimously passed motion supporting the resumption of Sino-Tibetan dialogue is a sign that Canada shows an increasing interest in resolving the human rights issues and in resolving the Sino-Tibetan conflict. I hope there will be more interest. I hope this is just a start.

Mr. Tenzin Dorjee: I also feel that the response from the Canadian Parliament, so far, has been very encouraging to us. The fact is that we are holding this hearing and that the Tibetan people are following this event. We can assure you that people inside Tibet, who really have no voice because they are being crushed by the Chinese government, are following what the Canadian government, the Parliament, and other governments around the world are taking action on.

I believe that the Canadian government could go much further than it is currently. In fact, it could take a much stronger stand, from the government side, to release a statement from the highest levels of government and to make strong calls to the Chinese government on closing down this institution, especially because of our own history here in North America. I think the colonial history of what happened in Canada places the Canadian government in, ironically, paradoxically, a very powerful position for taking action on this issue.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much.

I believe I'm almost out of time.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Arnold Viersen): I was going to go around the room to canvass the members. Do you want to do another round?

I know we have an hour of committee business coming up after this. I would look for a motion perhaps to do one more round. Would that be the will of the committee?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: We'll do one more round of five minutes.

• (1405)

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Chair, on an administrative point, could Mr. Dorjee provide the committee the two statements he mentioned to Ms. McPherson? He mentioned a German government position and a UN report. I think that might be helpful for our analysis.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Arnold Viersen): For sure.

We'll go to our second round. These will be five-minute rounds of questioning.

First on the list, I have MP Anita Vandenbeld.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Chair, does this mean we will not have a second question for our side? If that's the case, I'll probably split my time with Ali.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Arnold Viersen): Yes, my understanding is that we would just do one more round.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: In that case, I'll split my time with Ali. I'll try to be very quick.

Some of the things you've testified today included the spectre that we will have a generation that will lose its language and culture if we don't take action now. For every one of us here, the idea that children can't speak to their own grandparents is absolutely heartbreaking, but it also inspires anger and action, so thank you very much for testifying.

I have a quick question for Mr. Therchin. You mentioned a couple of things, first of all, you mentioned human rights defenders and the need for Canada to do more to help the human rights defenders who need to come here. We first proposed through this committee, and now the government has created, 250 spots for human rights defenders to be able to come to Canada annually.

Do you think this is something we should expand and increase and allow globally, and also for Tibetans, more human rights defenders as a unique stream of immigration—not as refugees or as immigrants but specifically, so they can come? Then if they need to return or stay here, it would be flexible.

Mr. Sherap Therchin: Certainly, if there is a scope for expansion of the committee, invitations should be sent to Tibetan human rights defenders from inside Tibet. Many committee members would know the story of Tibetan language advocate Tashi Wangchuk, who was sentenced to five years in prison just for advocating and speaking about the preservation and promotion of the Tibetan language to a New York Times reporter.

The Canadian government has issued statements for the immediate and unconditional release of Tashi Wangchuk in the past. We have communicated with Canadian officials at the embassy in Beijing, and we're thankful that the embassy sent its official to try to get inside the court, when his sentencing hearing was about to happen.

Unfortunately, and not surprisingly, Canadian officials, as well as officials from other countries, were not allowed to get inside the court to hear about the details. This is usually quite common to many Tibetans, which is something I have spoken about in my previous testimony at the foreign affairs committee. Many Tibetans who are political prisoners or prisoners of conscience do not have the right to access lawyers and do not have the right to access their families when they are detained.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you. Those are very important recommendations.

The flip side of the human rights defenders who are still in Tibet is those who are here today. Mr. Therchin, you said something about how there's been a change in the last couple of years.

Would you think there would be a need for the federal government, maybe within the RCMP, to create some kind of a protective service, maybe a public persons protective service, for people who are targeted, specifically because of their activism?

Is that something you would...? I'll ask for a very quick answer, so I have some time left for Mr. Ehsassi.

Mr. Sherap Therchin: Thank you for this very important question.

The best person to really answer this question would be my colleague who is actually sitting here today, because Chemi Lhamo has been a victim.

Chemi.

Ms. Chemi Lhamo (Community Organizer, Human Rights Activist, As an Individual): Yes, I'll keep it short. There's also a report by Amnesty International that has been presented multiple times. I've personally testified here more than twice with the recommendations. The first recommendation, which is the low-hanging fruit, is a point person to be able to direct resources or connect us to individuals who could support us, because we've always gone round and round, and never really had the support. My case was presented in 2019.

• (1410)

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: We'll remember that for our recommendations.

Mr. Ehsassi, I don't know if there's time left, but go ahead, please.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): I think I have 30 seconds. Thank you, Ms. Vandenberg.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll jump right in, and I will preface it by saying, as Canadians, we obviously understand the significance of language and identity.

I wanted to ask Mr. Therchin about the GAC funding that was made available. You touched on it. Can you tell us about the significance of that, and whether there is more funding required going forward, for preserving the Tibetan language?

Mr. Sherap Therchin: As I mentioned in my opening remarks, GAC has funded this. As far as my knowledge is concerned, this is the second project that has been funded in the last six years, and the project is still going on. The project deals with helping Tibetan schools in India and Nepal—covering over 76 Tibetan schools—by offering them the opportunity to learn in their own Tibetan language. We're talking about Tibetans in exile.

As I mentioned in my opening, this presence and opportunity shows the Chinese government that Tibetans, if given an opportunity, could succeed. The Tibetan language, as my colleague from the Tibet Action Institute mentioned, has all of the qualities to succeed as a language in whatever aspirations one has.

The Central Tibetan Administration has requested that the Canadian government continue this funding. I would appeal to this committee for the continuation of funding to Tibetan schools in India and Nepal.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Arnold Viersen): Thank you.

We'll now move to MP Aboultaif for five minutes.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you.

The Chinese government has signed on to the United Nation's declaration, article 26, on education and the parents' "right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children." What is going on here? The Chinese government now is doing the opposite.

I would like to know from you whether there is pressure from the United Nations on the Chinese government to fulfill this signatory commitment.

Following that, I would like you, if you don't mind, to touch on the role of the religious institutions in fulfilling the agenda of the Chinese government regarding Tibet. Thank you.

Mr. Tenzin Dorjee: Thank you very much.

The Chinese government has been responding to the world starting to criticize the institution of colonial boarding schools. We have noticed that, after the United Nations sent a communication to Beijing, after seeing news of hearings being held in the U.S. Congress, and now in the Canadian Parliament, the Chinese government is really taking this issue seriously.

Contrary to the wrong conventional wisdom that the Chinese government doesn't care about what the world thinks—nothing will move Beijing, they're too powerful, they won't budge—contrary to all of that, Beijing actually cares a lot. They have been responding from the highest levels, writing in their own media channels about this issue and trying to fight us back.

That's why they're trying to come up with all of these fictitious arguments about why Tibetans should be in boarding schools, and why the Tibetan language is not adequate for learning math and science. If there is continued building of more pressure from the world, from governments, from various organizations, I think it is possible for the Chinese government to budge and to change its behaviour and to change its policy.

We've been hearing whispers that in some small places, in some counties in Tibet, there seem to be new changes on the ground. There is some reversal of policies that are not written, that are not completely official yet, but there is some adaptation and change happening on the ground. We see these as signs that, if the world takes action, we can actually change China's behaviour.

• (1415)

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Terrific.

My second question is for Mr. Rabgyal.

Can you advise us on what I think is a very important question? What is the role of the religious institutions in fulfilling the agenda of the Chinese government?

Mr. Tenzin Rabgyal: [*Witness spoke in Tibetan, interpreted as follows:*]

In relation to His Holiness the Panchen Rinpoche post-1959, His Holiness the 10th Panchen Rinpoche had worked tirelessly for the continuation of various religious institutions, but also had worked tirelessly for the spread of education and the preservation of our Tibetan culture and the education system. His contributions are insurmountable. Since his passing, the impact on the Tibetan community and Tibetans has been terrible. That is the impact of His Holiness Panchen Rinpoche, the 10th reincarnation.

If I may just add, in the statement earlier, it was mentioned that His Holiness the 10th Panchen Rinpoche had passed away suddenly and mysteriously. Right after that, there was the 11th Panchen Lama, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, who was six years old when he was kidnapped and abducted. That clearly shows how far the Chinese government can go when there are religious institutions that pose a threat to them.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has also publicly expressed his deep sadness for the passing of the 10th Panchen Rinpoche because should the 10th Panchen Rinpoche still be alive or the 11th Panchen Rinpoche still be here and known to the world, the impact on the Tibetan community would have been insurmountable. Hence, His Holiness the Dalai Lama has also publicly spoken about how impactful His Holiness the 10th Panchen Rinpoche was and how important it is for us to find the 11th one.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Arnold Viersen): Thank you.

We'll now hear from MP Brunelle-Duceppe for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Dorjee, much has been said about the residential boarding schools where education in Tibetan and religious practices are forbidden. Some people also describe a kind of forced political indoctrination of the children at these schools by Beijing.

What do you think of that?

• (1420)

[*English*]

Mr. Tenzin Dorjee: That's a really important question.

In the place of religious and cultural education, not only are Tibetan children not getting the kind of education that is relevant to their own culture, their own history and their own world view. Tibetan children are actually being given a very politicized, extremely strong propagandistic version of the Chinese Communist Party's world view.

The shocking thing is that it starts very early. They don't even wait until children are 10 or 15 years old. Kids who are four, five or six years old are already being bombarded with this type of propagandistic, politicized indoctrination. Basically, they're removing what makes a child Tibetan, which is their families' cultural, local, scientific, natural and ecological way of being in the world. It's not only the language, but the psychological orientation to this world. While taking out all of those things, they are filling that empty vessel with political indoctrination about how great the Chinese Communist Party is and how terrible the Japanese occupiers and the Japanese soldiers are.

That's just one example. I've seen some of these textbooks with images that are extremely violent, extremely disturbing, extremely bloody and extremely gory. Those are the kinds of books that are used to teach very young children, starting from five or six years old. That is the reality of the type of indoctrination and political education they are getting.

[*Translation*]

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

Ms. Choekyi, I would like to ask you a simple question.

You probably know that some of my colleagues and I have been banned from entering Chinese territory. This is obviously political.

When one fights against the Chinese communist regime, as we have done to advocate for the Uyghurs, for example, and for Tibetans and so forth, a certain rhetoric against us appears, saying that our remarks are racist toward China. When this happens, I believe it could be a case of Beijing propaganda, which then echoes in the public sphere.

How important is this propaganda in the public sphere? In your view, how can one avoid falling into this trap?

Ms. Tenzin Choekyi: Thank you, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, for the question, which relates to Tibetans and to everyone else who has been supporting Tibet for years.

I think that first of all, it is important to trust that we are fighting for the Tibetan cause, because it is a cause in the service of truth, and there is no freedom in an occupied country. The country has been under Chinese occupation for over 70 years.

Therefore, we are defending values that are very precious to us in a democratic country. Even if these arguments may nevertheless seem very dangerous, in our hearts and in their essence, it is because we are fighting for our values, which are just as precious to us as they are to other people.

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

Mr. Dorjee, in October 2020, you published an article in *Foreign Policy* magazine in which you mentioned tools for promoting democracy that were moderately successful in smaller regimes, but that failed against Beijing. That was partly owing to the surveillance state put in place by the Chinese government against its people.

How does China use surveillance data to suppress its people, particularly the Tibetan minority?

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Arnold Viersen): Answer very quickly.

Mr. Tenzin Dorjee: Thank you.

The Chinese government has been very effective and rather successful at mobilizing big data totalitarianism and various transnational tools of tyranny to silence Tibetans abroad in the world and also to repress Tibetans inside Tibet. One key tool they use to achieve this is by linking Tibetans living in the diaspora to their family members in Tibet. By using that linkage and that relationship, they use families who are in Tibet as hostages. They are quite blatant about it.

I know a lot of Tibetans—Tibetan Americans or Tibetan Canadians—who have travelled to Tibet. They get told by these United Front minders explicitly and directly, “You guys live out there in freedom, in the free world, but if you say anything critical of the Chinese government, just remember that your family is right here under our thumb.” That's the specific kind of threat China is using as a strategy to silence the world.

Within Tibet, there have been cases where DNA collection without consent has taken place in schools and in various communities. There are still a lot of questions about exactly what the Chinese government is trying to do with this, but it is nothing benign. Nothing good is ever going to come out of this.

We do live in a very scary time, when the world could go to a very different place. China is at the cutting edge, is leading and is at the frontier of how technologies are being mobilized to increase tyranny. The dream we had 20 years ago was that the Internet would liberate humanity and bring democracy and that the technologies of liberation would help us. Instead, the Chinese government is playing a huge role in inverting this whole logic.

Right now, that is another reason why we have to be really careful and hold accountable the corporations, especially multinational corporations that are out here in the west, that are benefiting from our democracy and freedom but at the same time giving their software and aiding the Chinese government to impose its tyranny not only in China but also abroad. We have to hold these corporations accountable as well.

• (1425)

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Arnold Viersen): We'll now have five minutes for MP McPherson.

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

Thank you again to the witnesses.

I'm very interested in the last question. I think the chair asked for a bit of a brief answer, but I'd like to explore this a bit further.

I just returned from Taiwan. I saw there what the Taiwanese are having to deal with in regard to misinformation and disinformation campaigns and the cyber-attacks they are receiving, with up to one million per day happening. We also know that there is the suppression of human rights with regard to the Uyghurs and Hong Kong. All of those things are part of this bigger picture of how we are seeing the PRC become increasingly belligerent.

I am one of the members who, like Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, has been banned from visiting China. I'd like to hear from all of the witnesses more information about how the PRC is hiding the human rights abuses that it is perpetrating, how it is silencing Tibetans and how it is using online tools to suppress information.

I'd like to start with our guest from Tibet Watch. We haven't had the opportunity to hear from her quite as much.

Ms. Choekyi, could I start with you?

Ms. Tenzin Choekyi: Thank you for this very important question. It's all by design how they hide, deliberately and intentionally, by all means, using technology and having people monitor online chat groups.

We have received reports of Tibetans who opposed Lhakar—happy White Wednesday—which is a decentralized movement of

celebrating Tibetan identity on the soul day of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. We have people getting arrested for simple messages like that online.

There are people monitoring online communication. We have huge cash rewards for people who report to the police knowledge about Tibetans who have contact with Tibetans living outside, and cash rewards for monitoring people crossing the border areas. As a result of this, after 2008, there is just a trickle of Tibetan refugees being able to escape to Nepal.

There are also CCP members in the monasteries. Monasteries are learning centres where the whole pursuit of education is liberation from suffering, not just for one's self but for the benefit of all sentient beings. However, since 2012, there have been monastic management committees in monasteries where Chinese Communist Party members, who are atheist, are there permanently to monitor, oversee and supervise all of the activities of the monks. We have case studies of how there are police stations constructed right next to a monastery in Shuanghu county, for example.

Chat groups are monitored. Online communication is monitored. Online posts on individual social accounts are monitored, and livestreaming is monitored. We have information on Tibetan musicians stopping themselves from speaking in Tibetan, because their livestream will be shut down.

I also have evidence of a Tibetan mother and child talking to each other on a livestream. This little boy, who was just scribbling figures repetitively, like any child would, innocently asked his mom, "Mom, if I speak in Tibetan on Douyin," which is a video-sharing platform, "they say they will shut down our account, so I don't know whether I should speak in Tibetan or Chinese." The mom has no answer. The mom only says, "I know. I will ask, okay?" The kid replies, "Okay, Mom." This is an online video-sharing platform. The mother has no answer. She has 26,000 followers, but that's how it is.

Tibetans are not able to escape. Tibetans have an endless list of thoughts in their minds, and this list is always getting longer and longer. It's about what to say, what to think, what not to say, what not to think and to always love the CCP. In 2021, when the CCP celebrated its 100th founding anniversary, children in the Tibet Autonomous Region, as they call it, were made to perform this song called "I love CCP". All of these children are dressed in Tibetan attire, but they were singing "I love CCP".

There is the closure of chat groups and the monitoring of whatever space there is online, as well as informers on street corners, in monasteries and in rural villages. Order is everywhere. It is a police state.

• (1430)

Ms. Heather McPherson: I would like to ask the other witnesses questions, but I think I'm out of time.

Is that correct, Mr. Viersen?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Arnold Viersen): Yes, we are at the end of the time here.

I want to thank the witnesses for appearing today and sharing their testimony. We will be putting all of this in a report. The information you've given us is very valuable. We look forward to our report that will be coming forward, hopefully fairly soon.

You could also submit any information that you've mentioned here today or that you think we need to know. You can submit it to the clerk. Please do that rather quickly, as we're hoping to get that report out as soon as possible.

With that, we will be suspending this meeting.

Members of Parliament, please resume on the in camera link that you have been sent. I'll suspend the meeting, and I'll see you back in the in camera portion after a half-hour.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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