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Chair: Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury

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

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• (1535)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.)): Welcome to meeting number 45 of the House of Commons Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Today we resume our study of the detention of Jimmy Lai in Hong Kong, after which we will continue our examination of the draft report concerning inclusive international education for people with disabilities.

To ensure the meeting will go smoothly, I would like to outline a few rules to follow for witnesses and members.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference via Zoom, click on the microphone icon to activate your microphone. When you are not speaking, your microphone should be on mute.

Regarding interpretation, those on Zoom have the choice at the bottom of the screen of the floor, English or French. Those in the room can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

I wish to inform the subcommittee that, in accordance with our routine motion concerning connection tests, all witnesses have completed the required connection tests in advance of the meeting.

I would now like to welcome the witnesses joining us today. From the Committee for Freedom in Hong Kong Foundation, we have former ambassador James B. Cunningham, board chair. From Canada-Hong Kong Link, we welcome, by video conference, Mr. Fernando Cheung, representative and former member of the Hong Kong Legislative Council. From Hong Kong Watch, we welcome, by video conference, Mr. Benedict Rogers, managing director and co-founder. Finally, from Journalists for Human Rights, we welcome, by video conference, Mr. Zein Almoghaby, director of International Programs.

Thank you for joining us today. You'll each have a maximum of five minutes for your remarks, after which we'll move on to questions from subcommittee members. I'll let you know when you have one minute left.

Mr. Cunningham, we'll start with you.

[English]

Welcome to our committee.

[Translation]

The floor is yours for five minutes.

• (1540)

Mr. James Cunningham (Board Chair, The Committee for Freedom in Hong Kong Foundation): Thank you very much.

[English]

Mr. Chair, thank you for the invitation to meet with the subcommittee today.

This committee has heard much already about Jimmy Lai and repression in today's Hong Kong. It is an undeniable fact, no matter how hard the Chinese Communist Party and its instruments in Hong Kong pretend otherwise, that the freedoms and rights promised under the Sino-British agreement have been gutted.

Today I would like to discuss why the people, Parliament and Government of Canada, or of any country which values freedom, democracy and justice, should care about Jimmy, Hong Kong's political prisoners and Hong Kong itself.

When I arrived as U.S. Consul General in 2005, Hong Kong was the most free part of China and prided itself on being Asia's world city. People like me hoped that Hong Kong could, over time, provide an example to China of what a free—or at least more free—Chinese society and economy could become. I also met Jimmy then, and we and our families became, and remain, personal friends.

Today Hong Kong has become the place where one can witness the clash between Xi Jinping's vision of an advancing authoritarian world order and the vision set out in the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, a vision embraced by Canada and aspired to by most people the world over. Xi has long been clear about his ambitions, though we have not paid attention until recently. The lure of the Chinese economy, and what turned out to be false hope about the nature of China's role in the international community, blurred the reality of Xi's drive to overcome the liberal values on which so much depends.

To see Xi's vision for the future in real time, look no further than Hong Kong. The freedoms and way of life promised by China for at least 50 years after the handover no longer exist, except to the extent that the authorities say they do—at their discretion. Rule of law, once a core value, has become rule by law at the disposal of the authorities. Hong Kong once embodied liberties not available to mainland Chinese. Jimmy and the more than 1,700 political prisoners languishing in Hong Kong jails for peaceful political activity, which was previously protected in Hong Kong, give evidence that those liberties are no longer available as a matter of right to the people of Hong Kong as well.

What becomes of Jimmy and the freedom in Hong Kong matters, because the erosion of freedom and fundamental Liberal values there raises the risk for all of us over time. If people of goodwill stand aside and fail to resist that erosion, our vision of values becomes weaker. Jimmy chose his path when he did not need to. He had options. He chose to stand against the authoritarians in Beijing, against repression, and for the principles and values of a free and democratic world, and to stand for the promise of Hong Kong and its people.

I recall the words of the German Lutheran minister who famously regretted his failure to speak out when the Nazis came for the socialists, and then the trade unionists and then the Jews: He lamented, "Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me." I have long remembered those words. Jimmy Lai is standing his ground for all of us. We owe it to our people and our children to speak for him and the people of Hong Kong.

The Canadian government should press for the release of Jimmy and all political prisoners. The Canadian government should sanction chief executive John Lee and other senior officials—an action currently under consideration before the U.S. Congress. Parliament should demand the removal of all non-permanent foreign judges from the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal, including former Canadian Chief Justice McLachlin. Their continuing presence confers an air of respectability when rule of law as protection of freedom has collapsed. The government should also close the Hong Kong economic and trade office in Toronto, which now operates not on behalf of an autonomous Hong Kong but on behalf of the Chinese Communist Party, with all that entails. Finally, I urge you not to forget Jimmy Lai in Hong Kong.

Mr. Chair, thank you and the members of the subcommittee for your time and attention.

• (1545)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cunningham.

Mr. Cheung, the floor is yours for five minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Fernando Cheung (Representative and Former Member of the Hong Kong Legislative Council, Canada-Hong Kong Link): Thank you.

Good afternoon, esteemed members of the international human rights subcommittee. I'm Fernando Cheung, a former legislative councillor in Hong Kong. Today I stand before you representing

Canada-Hong Kong Link, a Canadian registered organization established in 1997 with the aim of promoting democracy, freedoms and the rule of law in Hong Kong post handover to China, along with safeguarding national interest, security and democracy in Canada.

To many Hong Kong Canadians, Jimmy Lai is more than just a media tycoon. He is a valiant defender of freedoms in Hong Kong. The first time I met Mr. Lai was in 2014 during the umbrella movement, in a tent in an occupied area close to the Hong Kong government headquarters.

Jimmy Lai's journey of persistent struggle under Communist rule reflects the political changes that Hong Kong has gone through. An international and free society before its handover to Communist China, Hong Kong has gone through a "one country, two systems" transition period on its journey to become a police state, a vast prison without walls, under the Hong Kong national security law.

In a time of grave challenges under the Hong Kong national security law, Lai chose his principles over money or even personal freedom. As the publisher and owner of Apple Daily and Next media group, he's willing to sacrifice his own freedom by staying behind to defend the freedoms of this city that he profoundly cherishes.

Jimmy Lai's trial is the most high-profile prosecution in the Hong Kong government's crackdown on independent media. Without independent media or sources of information, it is extremely difficult for Canadian businesses or civil society organizations alike to accurately assess the risks and opportunities there.

The fact that Lai faces the prospect of life imprisonment on the trumped-up charge of colluding with foreign powers is just one of many red flags warning Canadian businesses that Hong Kong no longer has the rule of law and is not a safe place to operate. Such severe penalties for vaguely defined offences under the national security law have created "white terror" in Hong Kong, where an estimated 500,000 Canadians live. But the Chinese government has stated that this draconian law applies everywhere on the planet, creating a chilling effect that threatens freedom of expression even in Canada, particularly for those Canadians who have family and other connections in Hong Kong or mainland China.

Jimmy Lai is fighting on the front lines of a global struggle against forces of oppression that threaten freedom everywhere. We strongly urge our government to take a number of actions.

Closely monitor the trials of Jimmy Lai and the 47 accused because of their involvement in the Hong Kong primary election and demand the immediate release of all political prisoners under prosecution of the national security law.

Use our Magnitsky law to call to account the human rights violators who aim to put Jimmy Lai behind bars for life. As we have done with Russian human rights violators, we should freeze the assets owned by these officials under sanction as well as their immediate family members in Canada.

Closely monitor the implementation of Basic Law article 23 legislation and assess its impacts on civil liberties and freedoms in Hong Kong, especially on Canadians living there and the Canadian businesses operating in Hong Kong.

To protect diaspora communities from foreign interference, the Canadian government needs to pass the foreign influence transparency registry in Parliament without further delay, before the next election is called. The passage of this registry should not be bundled with the final report of the public inquiry.

The Canadian consulate general in China and Hong Kong should start registering all Canadian residents and citizens in Hong Kong and mainland China. Canada needs to establish an exit plan to prepare for the worst scenario in case of China's attack on Taiwan, which would lead to immediate and rapid deterioration of the situation in Hong Kong and the mainland.

Together, let us stand in solidarity with Jimmy Lai and all those fighting for freedom and justice in Hong Kong and beyond.

Thank you.

• (1550)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cheung.

Mr. Rogers, the floor is yours for five minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Benedict Rogers (Chief Executive and Co-Founder, Hong Kong Watch): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is an honour to testify today. In doing so, I wish to endorse all of the recommendations of the previous two witnesses and of those who appeared last week, especially the call to sanction those responsible for human rights violations in Hong Kong.

I have the privilege of being able to call Jimmy Lai a friend. I have been named several times by the prosecution in his trial as a “collaborator” simply for having met and communicated with Mr. Lai on many occasions.

The absurdity of the charges against Mr. Lai is illustrated by the evidence cited by the prosecution in recent weeks, which includes, for example, a WhatsApp message that Mr. Lai sent to me in 2019, asking me to request the last governor of Hong Kong and a patron of Hong Kong Watch, Lord Patten, to provide a comment to a journalist from Apple Daily, the pro-democracy newspaper that Mr. Lai founded and owned; and also a WhatsApp message he reportedly sent to one of his staff after meeting me for the first time in 2017, encouraging that employee to follow up with me. These perfectly normal actions by a newspaper publisher are now being presented in court as evidence of alleged crimes.

As the head of Mr. Lai's international legal team, Caoilfhionn Gallagher KC, whom you heard last week, puts it, Mr. Lai, a 76-

year-old entrepreneur and British citizen, is charged under the national security law for conspiracy to collude with foreign forces, but in reality, what that means is conspiracy to commit journalism, conspiracy to talk about politics with politicians, and conspiracy to discuss human rights issues with human rights organizations. His trial is emblematic of the Chinese Communist Party's all-out assault on Hong Kong's basic freedoms.

For the final year of its existence, I had the honour of contributing a weekly column to the English-language online version of Apple Daily. I have unreserved admiration for its spirit and the courage of its staff. Its forced closure, the arrest of several of its editors, and the trial of Mr. Lai himself are a complete affront to press freedom. Indeed, media freedom in Hong Kong today lies in tatters, as a 2022 report by Hong Kong Watch titled “In the Firing Line” details.

Mr. Lai is a devout Catholic, and while his imprisonment and prosecution are not directly due to his religious beliefs, indirectly they represent the erosion of freedom of religion in Hong Kong because his pro-democracy campaign was inspired and informed by his faith. Hong Kong Watch recently published the first-ever report on this topic, titled “Sell Out My Soul”, which we launched in the Parliament of Canada last November.

Mr. Chair, the evidence presented by the witnesses for the prosecution against Mr. Lai is unsound. The UN special rapporteur on torture has expressed serious concerns that Andy Li, due to testify in the trial soon, was tortured during his detention on the mainland and will be providing inadmissible evidence in the trial. This raises concerns about the risks of torture and mistreatment, as well as the rule of law, in Hong Kong.

Other witnesses in the trial are likely to have appeared under duress. It is important to note that Hong Kong, unlike mainland China, has signed, ratified and incorporated into the Basic Law the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, so mistreatment of prisoners is a direct violation of Hong Kong's international obligations.

Canada should note the call by five UN special rapporteurs for Mr. Lai's release on the eve of the recent universal periodic review of China at the United Nations, as well as the recommendations by 18 member states on human rights in Hong Kong during the UPR, and the specific call by the United Kingdom for Mr. Lai's release.

I welcome Canada's recommendations at the UPR to “[e]nsure Hong Kong upholds its responsibilities under the ICCPR” and to “[r]epeal the...National Security Law”. Canada also highlighted transnational repression. I urge Canada to repeat that call at every opportunity.

I echo the call by my colleague Katherine Leung last week for the use of sanctions, and I urge Canada to use every opportunity unilaterally, bilaterally and multilaterally to call for Mr. Lai's immediate and unconditional release.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1555)

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Thank you.

Mr. Almoghraby, the floor is yours for five minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Zein Almoghraby (Director of International Programs, Journalists for Human Rights): Thank you.

Honourable members of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights and colleagues, good afternoon.

I am here presenting this testimony on behalf of my organization, Journalists for Human Rights, based on our 20-year global record of defending human rights in the most difficult and challenging environments, working with courageous journalists and civic actors to stand against oppression, marginalization and instability and, most importantly, to hold governments to account.

At JHR, we have been dealing with various oppressive power structures and the mechanisms that enable their tactics to silence the pro-human rights and democratic voices. In the context of today's testimony, we have monitored the actions of the Government of China in mainland China, in the special administrative regions—SARs—and in neighbouring countries across the Indo-Pacific: actions within a holistic strategy to silence opposing voices, crush democratic spaces and manipulate facts and truths.

If the collapse of the Soviet Union has provided authoritarian regimes in the late eighties and early nineties with lessons on what not to do, the Government of China has provided authoritarian regimes with a blueprint, a road map, of what to do to hold on to power regardless of any democratic considerations.

The ruling Chinese Communist Party has maintained a constant effort to balance regime stability against reform priorities. This includes the complete control of media and communication channels within both the mainland and the SARs and, in particular, Hong Kong, which should possess a higher degree of autonomy from China's central government.

Since 1997, Hong Kong has experienced a gradual downfall of freedoms, which were once protected under the “one country, two systems” principle that guaranteed a higher degree of autonomy, including freedom of speech and freedom of the press, guarantees that were not respected with the introduction of the national security law in 2020. Since the law came into force, hundreds of protesters, activists and former opposition lawmakers have been arrested, many news outlets have been shut down and pro-democracy leading figures continue to be prosecuted.

Jimmy Lai's conviction is another milestone towards fully silencing Hong Kong. “Not guilty” was his answer to his prosecutors.

No one is guilty for being a journalist. Centralized dictatorships directly harm journalists with impunity through reputational, physical and monetary damage. They eliminate democratic spaces through controlling communication channels and monopolizing information.

We must draw attention to the fact that a defining characteristic of such regimes is to spill over their national borders into neighbouring countries and beyond. They are threatened by human rights and democracy. They implement their harmful ways against freedom of speech abroad, as they do at home.

China aims to heavily influence the international information environment. This includes propaganda, disinformation, misinformation and censorship, with a massive annual budget. In the Indo-Pacific region, China's information manipulation always aims to increase positive perceptions of the Communist Party while shaping narratives and influencing political outcomes. This strategy raises concerns about democratic integrity, societal stability and the potential for increased conflict and violence.

Additionally, the legitimacy of the coming 2024 and 2025 elections in the Indo-Pacific is at risk. Coordinated misinformation campaigns by players such as the Government of China undermine confidence in these democratic processes.

Honourable members and human rights advocates, it is critical for the Government of Canada to stand for human rights and democracy in the whole region of the Indo-Pacific, as it should elsewhere. It is crucial to support pro-human rights non-state actors—in particular, courageous journalists and media professionals such as Jimmy Lai—to promote and protect necessary freedoms, not only because it is the right thing to do, but also to ensure stability in a region of the world that is important to our country and defend principles that Canada stands for.

Thank you.

• (1600)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Almoghraby.

I'd like to thank the witnesses once again for their presence and their comments.

We'll move on to the first round of questions from subcommittee members.

Mr. Majumbar, the floor is yours for seven minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Shuvaloy Majumdar (Calgary Heritage, CPC): Thank you very much.

To all the presenters, we really appreciate the harrowing and insightful perspectives you have provided, both for Jimmy Lai, for Hong Kong, for the wider Indo-Pacific region and for our shared values of human rights.

Let me begin my directing my first question to Ben at Hong Kong Watch, with compliments to your colleague, Katherine Leung, who had mentioned to this committee specific people who could be sanctioned in Canada not only for their ties to the CCP and Beijing, but also for their family assets here.

Ben, let me ask you this. There have been incrementalist approaches to authoritarian encroachments on everything from Afghanistan to Ukraine to Hong Kong. I am grateful for the recommendations you and your team have made over the many years as we've watched this authoritarian march across the world. May I ask you this: if you were to be even bolder for the democratic world to rally around Jimmy Lai and the restoration of the Basic Law for Hong Kongers, including over 300,000 to 400,000 Canadian Hong Kongers today, what would be the next step after what's being proposed today?

Mr. Benedict Rogers: First of all, let me say that I think sanctions are absolutely essential. It's a case that we're making to Canada. We're also trying to make it to the United Kingdom. I think that if many democracies in the free world act together to impose sanctions, that would really, potentially, have a strong effect. I think it's essential. If the perpetrators of the tearing up of the Sino-British Joint Declaration and the dismantling of Hong Kong's freedoms feel they are allowed to get away with what they've done with impunity, then they're just going to be emboldened to continue and to increase their aggression.

Beyond sanctions, I think western democracies—not just western democracies, democracies in general, the free world—really need to unite and act together. Moreover, of course, although this is outside the scope of your hearing today, Taiwan is increasingly in Beijing's sights. Unless we speak up for Jimmy Lai, we're not going to be in a position to stand effectively with Taiwan.

So we need to speaking up for Jimmy Lai, we need to speaking up for Hong Kong, and we also need to be prepared to stand up to Beijing over Taiwan.

Mr. Shuvaloy Majumdar: Thank you very much for that. That was very comprehensive. I think you're setting the story of Jimmy Lai at the core of why his case is so critical to the era of competition.

First of all, Your Excellency, Ambassador, thank you for your tenure and service to the American people in some of the more interesting places around the world. Congratulations for wonderful run. It's great to see your being so active here on this file for your friend, our friend, Jimmy Lai.

Let me ask you something, sir. You mentioned that the Hong Kong economic and trade office that we have in Toronto could be something the Government of Canada could act to close. Toronto is also the core of international mining finance. A lot of the world's financial flows for critical minerals and more traditional resources are managed out of the Toronto Stock Exchange. Canada has a lit-

eracy when it comes to resources that few other countries can parallel.

In the name of Jimmy Lai and the promise of Hong Kong and capitalism that was supposed to be at the core of the Sino-U.K. declaration for Hong Kong, what could you recommend Canada do to curb Beijing's state-owned enterprise approaches on critical minerals that dominate developing nations across the Indo-Pacific and Africa and beyond?

Mr. James Cunningham: Thank you for your comments.

First, on the specific issue of the Hong Kong economic and trade office in Toronto, the reason we have spoken about its operations is that, at least, in the United States—and I assume here in Canada, and wherever else it's located throughout the world—it was established in recognition of Hong Kong's autonomy, a special status that no longer exists, which is why we and many others are recommending that its special privileges be revoked.

On the issue of critical minerals, this is something that is of concern to every country around the world. As in many other instances, we have collectively fallen into a situation where my country, and Canada and many other countries around the world, rely upon resources that are basically lodged in China one way or another, whether these are manufactured, mine-owned by contractor, or whatever.

One of the key things that has come to view in our own internal discussion in the United States about the future of our relationship with China—and it's something that I discussed with people in London and Berlin, when I was there earlier this year—is the need to diversify our resources and our supply chains across the board.

It's not just critical minerals. There are many other aspects of this problem. It's not to say that we need to break off or disrupt those exchanges of commercial interest, but we need to diversify them. Critical minerals, I'm glad to say, is something that is turning up as other countries start looking for them in their own territory. We have some great possibilities in the United States. I understand that you do here in Canada as well. There are other places in Europe and Scandinavia that can be exploited.

It's more expensive perhaps to do it in other countries, but it's also very necessary that we do that, both as a matter of industrial policy and also as a matter of government policy, because it is really a security issue over time to which we need to pay attention.

• (1605)

Mr. Shuvaloy Majumdar: Thank you.

As a message to the CCP, looking at that resource stream could be very important, especially if it's anchored around Jimmy Lai.

Do I have a few seconds left to ask a quick question?

The Chair: You have 18 seconds.

Mr. Shivaloy Majumdar: Maybe I'll reserve it for Fernando, for round two, but I might be asking you a question about how we can best assist the 300,000 to 400,000 Canadians in Hong Kong.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Majumdar.

I would like to invite Madam Damoff to take the floor, for seven minutes please.

[Translation]

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

Thank you to all of our witnesses for being here today.

I want to focus first on media freedom. We know that freedom of the press is a pillar of a healthy democracy. With the witnesses we had at our last meeting, we talked about the press, Apple Daily, in particular, being shut down, resulting in that that particular viewpoint now gone in Hong Kong.

I'm wondering if other media outlets, like The New York Times, have moved some of their staff to Seoul. Other media outlets have either closed or moved on. I wonder if you could talk about the impact on media freedom in Hong Kong from the closure of Apple Daily News, and also more broadly on what's happening right now in the country.

Ambassador, if you want to start, that would be great.

Mr. James Cunningham: Sure. I'll try to be briefer this time given the time limits.

It's actually a crucial element of what's happening. The way this works is that the government makes an example of one person, or one entity, and then that creates a chilling effect on everybody else. It then gradually moves forward.

The government closed Apple Daily. It blocked foreign journalists from coming back in. It has questioned journalists about what they're reporting, and when they're reporting it. It has just announced that those people who seek visas to go to Hong Kong will now be questioned on national security grounds to see if it's safe for them to come.

That's clearly a situation that's dangerous and inimical to free journalism and free media. The government has conditioned course instruction in Hong Kong universities. The list goes on and on. Where you end up with this is, and this is the genius, if you will, of authoritarianism, people self-limit what they will say or do, because they are afraid of getting in trouble.

• (1610)

Ms. Pam Damoff: With Apple Daily closing, are there any media outlets that are reporting criticisms of the Chinese government or criticisms of the crackdown that's happening in Hong Kong?

Mr. James Cunningham: I don't read Chinese, but I suspect not.

There is an entity called the Hong Kong Free Press that is still doing a pretty decent job. It's illustrative to watch the South China Morning Post, which used to provide pretty free commentary on Hong Kong society and politics. It's a good example of what I was

just describing. It's still trying to report news, but it's clearly within certain boundaries.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Do any of the online witnesses want to comment on either of those before I move on?

Mr. Benedict Rogers: If I may add to that, Mr. Chair, I think Ambassador Cunningham has answered very comprehensively. There are just two other factors I would add.

One is the closure of most, if not all, of the other independent Chinese-language media, and particularly Stand News, which was the other major publication to be forced to close down. Many of its staff were arrested.

The other challenge for journalists, particularly foreign journalists, is the understandable unwillingness of people in Hong Kong to talk to journalists now. Even if journalists have the freedom to research and write stories, they struggle to find people to interview because of the national security law. That will become even more challenging when the new domestic security law, article 23, is imposed.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Are you seeing the media reflecting more state views now than they were? Are they parroting what the Chinese government wants them to say?

Mr. Benedict Rogers: There are many courageous reporters who are still trying to report news stories as best they can. However, certainly in terms of opinion pieces and commentary, my understanding from what I can see, both in the South China Morning Post and from what I learn of the Chinese-language media, is yes, they are parroting Beijing's line. This is particularly so for the pro-Beijing newspapers, which have long been doing that, but even the previously more moderate newspapers are finding it hard to be critical.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you.

Did you want to add anything, Ambassador?

Go ahead.

Mr. Fernando Cheung: If I may add to that, I continue to read some Chinese media in Hong Kong and I've certainly noticed that they have really exercised very heavy restraint on reporting anything that is negative about the Hong Kong government or the central Chinese Communist regime.

Journalists are walking on thin ice. They are heroes. It is extremely dangerous for them to report anything that would reflect negatively, even on things that are not political in nature. Some examples are things related to environmental protection and livelihood issues, such as lack of housing, or when they report situations of poverty and poor housing situations.

I understand that certain individual groups are not journalists yet, but advocate groups have been named by the authorities and the Hong Kong government as playing an opponent role. That warning comes as a political warning to these groups.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I have only 30 seconds left, Chair, so I'll give the time back to you. Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Damoff.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you now have the floor for seven minutes.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I can also use Ms. Damoff's remaining 30 seconds.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here for this important study.

I also want to thank all my colleagues serving on the subcommittee for agreeing to shake up their agenda by supporting my proposal to study Jimmy Lai's case. I hadn't thanked them yet.

Mr. Cunningham, you spoke in your opening remarks about measures being considered by the U.S. Congress. Can you tell the subcommittee if you are aware of any other free and democratic countries that are considering measures regarding Jimmy Lai's case? If so, can you say how significant these are internationally and how Canada should follow their lead?

• (1615)

[English]

Mr. James Cunningham: The short answer is that we're working in a number of venues to encourage parliaments and governments to take action. It has not been as widespread as we would hope yet, but it is becoming an increasingly important conversation in various congresses and parliaments in Europe, as well as in the United States and Canada.

To go back to a discussion that we had a couple of minutes ago, in order to affect what's going on in Hong Kong, in China, on human rights and the kinds of issues that we're concerned about in raising them today, it is really important that the countries that share the values that are under attack in Hong Kong, in China, come together with a common view of how to deal with them and respond to them. This goes to everything from the economic issues we were discussing earlier, the trade issues, the commercial contacts which are under attack in Hong Kong as well, to the human rights in media and other issues.

The more that all of our countries can move towards a common understanding, not just of what is happening in Hong Kong, which is a major point of what we're trying to do, but also how to respond to it, the stronger the sense will be of not just support for Hong Kong but the message that will be sent to what is really, the core of all this, which is the Communist leadership in Beijing. They need to understand that what they are trying to do in rewriting the story of Hong Kong is not something that is going to just be accepted by those of us who care about the values that they are trying to discard there.

[Translation]

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

I want to follow up on some of my colleagues' questions about journalists and democracy advocates, but I'd like to hear from Mr. Almoghraby, who represents Journalists for Human Rights.

Mr. Almoghraby, to what extent has Mr. Lai's arrest influenced the willingness of journalists and democracy advocates to express their opinions?

[English]

Mr. Zein Almoghraby: Thank you for the question.

The main approach that has been implemented right now is what we refer to as "lawfare", meaning that the Chinese government is restricted but with limitations when it comes to Hong Kong, when it comes to oppressing journalists and civic actors, generally speaking.

We have to remember here that China is ranked 179 out of 180 on the press freedom index. The only country that competes with China is North Korea. They have no problem with arresting people directly and implementing the most horrible approaches, but now they are restricted in the case of Hong Kong, so they are implementing lawfare and they are implementing the misinformation campaigns. It's going to go in two directions: the continuous implementation or the utilization, taking advantage of the available laws and regulations that they can manipulate on one hand, and on the other hand, discrediting journalists and civic actors by using whatever available tools they have with social media, and then later on, spreading that misinformation and controlling the public sphere in all of Hong Kong. It's going to be gradual, unfortunately. It's rapidly increasing, so if it doesn't stop, Hong Kong is just going to become another part of China, and it's going to be competing with North Korea when it comes to oppression.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: To what extent have these same human rights journalists come under scrutiny since Mr. Lai's arrest? It's not just Hong Kong laws; some paranoia may also be experienced, since they might feel more closely monitored.

[English]

Mr. Zein Almoghraby: Sorry, is the question for me?

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Yes.

[English]

Mr. Zein Almoghraby: The chilling effect is impacting everyone. Also, the tricky part about it is the fact that there are—I don't want to say rumours, but people do exaggerate what the Chinese government possesses. They do possess a lot of technologies, a lot of capabilities. Then we add more to it, and people start recirculating these misconceptions about what they're capable of doing, including the fact there is now the thinking that wherever you are, with anything that has electricity in it, there's a possibility for the government to listen to you.

The fear now is spreading. We are being sent back to the 1980s and to the 1970s before that, and whether it's in China or the eastern socialist bloc in Europe, we're going back decades in time where people think that walls have ears.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Rogers, you touched on the issue of trial credibility. Last week, the legal team surrounding the Lai family told us that they don't believe Mr. Lai is getting a fair trial. We know that Mr. Lai has been denied access to a lawyer, but there is also the choice of judges. At what point does the current trial lack credibility under the rule of law?

[*English*]

Mr. Benedict Rogers: Thank you for the question.

I think there is a total lack of credibility in the trial. As you have—

The Chair: Is it possible, please, sir, to have a quick answer? We have 24 seconds.

Mr. Benedict Rogers: Of course.

I think the trial is completely lacking in credibility.

I'll leave it at that.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

I now yield the floor to Mr. Gord Johns for seven minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Thank you.

Thank you, all, for the important work you're doing to advance human rights and freedoms, and for your advocacy for the release of Jimmy Lai. I can't say enough about how much we appreciate your work.

Mr. Rogers, could you just elaborate a bit more? You talked about the UPR and the UN Human Rights Council, and certainly there is a peer review mechanism there through the special procedures that allows Canada to be a bit more of a stronger advocate. Can you speak about what Canada can do through that review process and how we can help support human rights by making sure that there is a proper human rights review of China there at the UPR?

Mr. Benedict Rogers: Thank you.

Yes, I think that what Canada, together with like-minded countries—the 18 member states that made specific recommendations on Hong Kong—can do is to take part in the follow-up process. The UPR has now concluded in terms of recommendations, but certainly they can follow up with the People's Republic of China, with the Hong Kong government, to look at how they're responding to those recommendations.

As well, I think that Canada can join with the U.K. in specifically calling for the release of Jimmy Lai.

Mr. Gord Johns: I appreciate that.

Ambassador Cunningham, you talked as well about the importance of Canada coming out as strongly as the U.K. did.

Can you share with us how important it is that Canada take a much stronger and bolder position, and not just make a declaration in the House of Commons? What is the importance of the Canadian government demanding the release of Jimmy Lai?

Mr. James Cunningham: Let me say that it's been very encouraging to me, having been involved in this effort now for a little more than two years, to see the interest you have shown in Hong Kong and Jimmy Lai, and the growing sense that this is becoming an important issue, not just because you have so many Canadians living in Hong Kong and so many Hong Kong residents in Canada, but also because of the importance that Canada attaches in its foreign relations to addressing human rights issues.

Canada can join in what we hope will be a chorus of countries in supporting Hong Kong and take an important leading role if it's interested and willing in doing so, and I hope it will be.

There is a lot of room to join this effort and we hope that this hearing and other work you are all doing will help contribute to that.

Mr. Gord Johns: We know there are 250,000 people of Hong Kong origin living in Canada, and they're clearly dealing with the stresses, the mental health impacts, the threats and fears that their families are facing due to Chinese police station surveillance and whatnot.

Mr. Cunningham, can you also speak about the Hong Kong diaspora media that are here in Canada? What can Canada do to help support those reporters who are working in Canada and ensuring that they're able to do the work they need to do?

• (1625)

Mr. James Cunningham: I'm not the person best suited to address what's going on in Canada itself, but I am certain that their freedom to operate in Canada is not an issue.

What is an issue is how the information and the work they're doing gets relayed back in Hong Kong and Asia. To the extent that you can use your outlets and your resources to amplify their voices and to see that what they are writing about and are concerned about is heard and reflected, I think it will help build the international focus on what's going on in Hong Kong that all of us should want to see. It is the light that keeps shining on Hong Kong that will eventually, I hope, help us solve the issue of the political prisoners, and that's what our focus is on.

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you.

Mr. Cheung, you put out some really key points. I really appreciate you being so clear on what you believe needs to happen.

Can you speak a bit more in depth in terms of what more Canada needs to do in terms of monitoring the trial? You talked about the importance of calling for the release and the Magnitsky law and the monitoring at the UN.

You cited one piece that I think was something that we haven't talked about enough, and that's the foreign influence transparency registry. Can you speak a bit more in depth about that? We have the ongoing inquiry right now, but can you speak about the importance of that piece and maybe elaborate a bit more in depth?

Mr. Fernando Cheung: Well, I think it is well known by now that CSIS has produced reports that the Chinese Communist regime has inserted their interference on local elections—or even national elections—in Canada.

That is not new to many Hong Kong Canadians or Chinese Canadians here, but in order to stop these types of foreign interference, the first step is to create transparency. This foreign influence transparency registry would require these foreign agents to report on any formal connections or any transactions they provide to Canadian public officials. In that way, at least that would give the public an understanding of what is going on. That is really one of the first steps that the Canadian government should take to at least create some barriers to these types of interference—those boundaries.

The other thing is that we should certainly monitor the progress, the evolving, of the cases of Jimmy Lai and 47 people, as well as article 23, which is a national security law that would be produced by Hong Kong itself and is in addition to the national security law that was imposed by the Beijing government in 2020.

This article 23 would redefine state secrecy and also redefine foreign connections. In so doing, the law would prohibit a lot of exchanges or make certain connections or interactions off limit, especially for journalists and for civil society, academics and other organizations alike. In assessing and analyzing—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cheung. You got almost one minute extra.

Mr. Fernando Cheung: I'm sorry.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

We will now move to the second round.

Ms. Vandenbeld, the floor is yours for five minutes.

• (1630)

[*English*]

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Chair, I believe I still have a minute left.

The Chair: I'm sorry. No. You had an extra minute.

Madam Vandenbeld, the floor is yours for five minutes, please.

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

I want to thank all of the witnesses for what is really vital testimony that they're giving here today.

I would like to direct my first question to Mr. Almoghraby, particularly because we heard in our last meeting that authoritarian states are working together. They're learning from one another. The tactics they're using, particularly tactics against journalists, are seen across different countries and different journalists. One thing you said made me question this, because you have said that it's not only the tactics of suppression of free speech in journalism that are being shared. You mentioned something that sounded like China is looking to control information, but not just within China, and that this is something that goes beyond those borders.

Of course, we know about disinformation and those sorts of things, but is this something that you're seeing more broadly? Is this something that you're seeing across the board in terms of information control no longer being geographically specific in the authoritarian countries where these sorts of things are happening?

Mr. Zein Almoghraby: To answer the first point about authoritarian regimes likening each other and collaborating, they collaborate directly and indirectly. Unfortunately, there's a form of collaboration whereby they literally send experts from China to other countries to teach them how to manage things, how to run things.

They do that with media and journalism in the Middle East, for example. They do that also in east Africa, where they will take people from the government or from the media to China to train them and prepare them. They don't hide it. They call it something like “telling the stories of China”, which means I'm going to teach you and train you how to do reporting the Chinese way to tell our stories.

They directly collaborate with these entities, and there is the indirect collaboration to the effect, “I'm sending you the blueprint. This works; this doesn't work”. That was implemented in two different places, in Vietnam, for example, in the early 1990s, where they paused laws. They wanted to go to more press freedom, but they made a law that you cannot publish anything without sending it first to a committee of the Communist Party in Vietnam. They meet every Tuesday, and they have to approve it; otherwise, you're committing a crime.

They did the same thing in Syria. They provided them with an approach where they could go into a more free market, but also saying to them that you don't have to have else free. You can keep all the political power and the media under your control, and you can benefit the people around the regime and the party officials, the high-ranking members.

When it comes to the geographic scope of it, I have a long list of documented actions by China. In my case, I focus more on the Indo-Pacific region, which is a massive region and has huge interests for both Canada and the global economy, etc.

The most terrifying things—I don't know what to call them—is that there are different approaches. In the private sector in Indonesia, for example, there is TV network. They buy time from them and they broadcast shows they produce. It's without any questioning, and it doesn't go through any editorial lines. There's no code of ethics for journalism. It's published or broadcasted exactly as if it were propaganda. The same applies to another radio network.

If we go to a different, more sophisticated approach, we can look at Pakistan. There is something called the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Media Forum, under which they're including how to fight misinformation that's deemed by the two governments to be propaganda and inappropriate.

It's cross-country collaboration that is being done to go after press freedom everywhere that is in their interest.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Thank you very much. I think there's quite a bit there to delve into.

I wonder if any of the other witnesses want to answer that before I move on to my second question.

The Chair: You have 25 only seconds.

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: I was going to ask about the change you've seen over time, but I guess I'll ask very quickly: Do you think that it is getting significantly worse as time goes on?

• (1635)

Mr. Zein Almoghraby: When it comes to the collaboration, etc., there will be, in the coming years, about 15, 16 or 17 elections that are very critical in the Indo-Pacific and they are making more investments with a massive budget.

The estimations are that it's increasing by the billions on an annual basis, so the impact is increasing, the effort is increasing and, most importantly and sadly, it's getting more sophisticated. It's more sophisticated than in other countries to the north when it comes to campaigns of misinformation.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Almoghraby.

Thank you, Madam Vandenbeld.

[*Translation*]

I now invite Mr. Majumdar to take the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Shuvaloy Majumdar: Thank you.

[*English*]

I'll delve right into this with Mr. Cheung, if that's okay with you, sir.

We have seen organizations inside Hong Kong working to undermine the efforts of the communists in Beijing to impose on them, and we've seen surveillance cameras being installed across Hong Kong, and news of that emerging just in the last week as further subversion by the national security law.

Let me ask you, Mr. Cheung, what is the scale of resistance that the people of Hong Kong are going to bring to the communists of Beijing, and do you fear or do you see an inflection point from when peaceful protest becomes something more robust?

Mr. Fernando Cheung: It is dangerous to talk about resistance in Hong Kong now, publicly or even in private. As you mentioned, there are multiple layers and various tools being utilized in the surveillance. There are laws and regulations that encourage reporting of any suspicious speeches or acts. There's a culture of reporting each other for things that are not politically correct, and the authorities are encouraging that as well. It is getting so difficult that I don't see how the resistance can become organized.

There are certainly a lot of contentions and a lot of anger among people who have gone through the 2019-20 anti-extradition movement that turned into a democracy movement, but people cannot communicate openly about their feelings. I can't really see a turning point until people understand it is safe again for them to talk about it or express their political opinions openly. With the current repressive regime and more draconian laws coming, I really don't see that being on the horizon.

Mr. Shuvaloy Majumdar: That's a very disturbing observation, Mr. Cheung, and I'm grateful for your candour on that, but let me delve a little deeper.

With the strength of the repression that Beijing is imposing on Hong Kongers, creating a culture where people are trafficking in conspiracy, we know that unless Hong Kongers, including Canadians in Hong Kong, find ways to be more resistant, it creates pressures and difficulties for partnerships to succeed with those people. Do you have tools, suggestions or thoughts as to where Canada could look for how we can help Hong Kongers protect what freedoms they have as they scale their protest to the challenges that Jimmy Lai is encountering today?

Mr. Fernando Cheung: It is important for the Canadian government to speak up—to speak up for Jimmy Lai, to have a strong stance and speak up on anything that the Hong Kong government is deemed to be violating in international covenants, such as IC-CPR—so that the Hong Kong government and Canadians living in Hong Kong understand Canada's official position.

Continuing to provide risk assessment information to Canadians living in Hong Kong is very important. We certainly understand that it is getting more and more difficult to protect Canadian citizens living in Hong Kong any further—take a look at the cases of the two Michaels—and Hong Kong has become much like the rest of China. The current national security regime, the laws that govern these areas, are pretty much in line with the mainland, so it is becoming so difficult that I don't see, other than providing more information to them, that anything else can be done. In addition, of course, there should be an exit plan, as I mentioned in my recommendations.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, the floor is yours for five minutes.

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

Mr. Rogers, we haven't had much time to expand on the reason for the lawsuit and demonstrate that it's not credible. In Mr. Lai's case, it's important for the subcommittee to understand why this trial is not credible. I'd like to hear your thoughts on this.

[English]

Mr. Benedict Rogers: Thank you. I think there are four main reasons why the trial is not credible. The first is that Mr. Lai was, as you mentioned, denied his original choice of legal counsel.

Secondly, the judges, as in all national security trials, are hand-picked by the government and are known to be judges who will take a pro-government line.

Thirdly, as I mentioned, much of the witness testimony is questionable. There is one particular witness, due to appear soon, whom the United Nations has said has been tortured.

Fourthly, if you look at the evidence that the prosecution is putting forth, you will see that they're citing what, in Canada, in the United Kingdom and in any free society, would be perfectly normal day-to-day activities. The idea that a WhatsApp message from Jimmy Lai to me, asking me to ask Chris Patten to make a comment to a journalist—that idea—is admissible evidence of a crime is absurd.

The prosecution is presenting a case that is just not credible.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you.

Mr. Rogers, I would really like to focus on Mr. Lai's case. How important is it, not only for Mr. Lai, but also for his legal team and his family—his son Sebastien comes to mind—who continue to fight for him, that Canada take a clear stance on this case?

[English]

Mr. Benedict Rogers: I think it's incredibly important. I welcome the fact that you had Sebastian Lai here last week. I also welcome the fact that Sebastian has, in previous months, met with government officials in Canada. He also met the British foreign secretary, David Cameron, just before Christmas.

I think it's very important that as Sebastian so courageously campaigns for his father, our countries and others support him, and through supporting him, we support his father as much as we can.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you.

Mr. Cunningham, I'd like to ask you the same question, but a little differently, since you've held a fairly senior diplomatic position. How is it perceived by the diplomatic community of free and independent states when a country like Canada takes a clear position on a case like Mr. Lai's?

[English]

Mr. James Cunningham: The whole trial itself is based upon a fallacious premise that, through both diplomatic and media means, we need to keep rebutting. There is no crime here, and yet Jimmy has already been pronounced guilty by the Chinese political authorities. If you go back and look at the media, you see that they have already termed him the most dangerous criminal in Hong Kong.

They predetermined what the attitude is. There's no question of innocence or guilt; it's just a question of their mounting a show to demonstrate that he's guilty of something. He's guilty of being political. He's guilty of reporting. He's guilty of supporting democracy. He's guilty of standing at a vigil. Those are the things that he's guilty of.

The diplomatic and media worlds need to keep pointing out this truth. The whole premise of what the Hong Kong government and the Chinese authorities are trying to do is to pretend that everything's fine—this is just one episode of one criminal. It's not just one, by the way, as we've noted. There are more than 1,700 political prisoners in jails. One of the more pernicious things that the authorities are doing is the so-called “Hong Kong 47”. The other witnesses, who are testifying against Jimmy, are being held without bail until the conclusion of the trial, to exert pressure on them and to make sure that they say the right thing when they come before a court.

This whole thing is a farce, and the only way to rebut it is to use the diplomatic means and the media means that all of us have at our disposal—political means—to constantly make the case that what's happening here is completely unjust. Jimmy is a symbol of these many other people whose rights are being trampled now.

• (1645)

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Johns, the floor is yours for five minutes.

[English]

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Cunningham, you talked about Canadian businesses doing business in Hong Kong and the importance of them being aware. Do you think Canada and Canadian business organizations are doing enough to educate Canadian businesses about the risks and threats of doing business in Hong Kong right now?

Mr. James Cunningham: Absolutely not. It's not a Canadian issue or problem. It's a problem in the United States. It's a problem in Europe. It's a problem in Asia. It's a problem for everybody who is participating in the fallacy that things are still the same in Hong Kong as they were five years ago. That's just not the case.

We all—we in the advocacy community and also in Parliament and governments—first need to join in clarifying the perils that now exist for doing business in Hong Kong and what the potential costs might be. The risk factors are now much greater than they were a couple of years ago. Governments aren't doing a good job of this. I think it came up here last week that one of our congressmen, Congressman Gallagher, has talked about businesses wearing a “golden blindfold” doing business in Hong Kong and China.

As I said in my statement, our vision of what is happening there has been blurred by both economic means or goals and our own political hopes over the years. There is literally no protection now, or any more protection now, that exists in Hong Kong than exists in mainland China for people who are doing business. One of our means of bringing pressure to bear is to highlight that fact and to get people to realize it.

Mr. Gord Johns: Can you speak about how irresponsible it is for businesses sending their employees over, given the risks they're putting those employees under?

Mr. James Cunningham: The first thing they need to do is accept that those risks exist and then draw the consequences. It's not politically or economically realistic to think that all these business connections are just going to go away. That's not going to happen. But it should be more apparent to business leaders and chambers of commerce, who have been very bad about this, to make it clear that what's happening in Hong Kong now is a real signal of problems ahead if it doesn't change.

I'm not saying this should necessarily be done in public, but this is what every senior official of a government or a corporation or an investment firm or a bank should be telling people in China: If you keep doing what you're doing, this will increase the risk for us. It will make it more and more difficult for us to have the kind of economic relationships that we've had in the past.

That is, I think, the reality. It's the thing that people don't want to talk about but need to talk about.

• (1650)

Mr. Gord Johns: One thing that Sébastien Lai, Jimmy Lai's son, told this committee last meeting really stuck with me. He told us that his father would often say that fear was the cheapest weapon. I think we can see that in the press landscape in Hong Kong lately. Some organizations have gotten shut down. Others have chosen to shutter because they saw that happening. Some journalists have been refused visas and denied entry. Others have moved their work overseas, because they saw the persecution and prosecution of peers like Jimmy Lai.

We've heard that the national security law could theoretically apply to actions or publications made anywhere in the world, not just in Hong Kong. We've seen dual citizens like Jimmy Lai denied their consular rights, because their dual citizenship isn't recognized. It makes me worry about the security and mental health of Canadians with heritage, family or other ties in Hong Kong.

Mr. Almoghraby, can you speak about the impact of the law on them and also the risks to international journalists who travel to Hong Kong? We know that some Hong Kong-based journalists have moved abroad, but I'm wondering if this is still affecting what

they feel they can say and how that impacts the volume, the tone or the content of international coverage from them.

The Chair: You have 15 seconds, please.

Mr. Zein Almoghraby: Very quickly, there is severe damage that happens to the diaspora, to the community and also people who have escaped Hong Kong, if they're going to stay away from being networked and being able to do what they're supposed to do just because economically, at the beginning, it seems not profitable. In Canada are they going to report on Hong Kong? That would be a severe problem and a huge mistake that we are going to commit. We have to take that into consideration and keep it in mind.

The changes for other people are spreading all over. It's just a matter of time when we're going to find fewer and fewer people going in without their even being denied. It's going to be the “I don't have to do it; you will do it by yourself.” That's the kind of situation. This is why we need to give some attention also to the people who are in Canada or elsewhere and cannot return to Hong Kong.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Almoghraby.

We have approximately six minutes. Would you like to have one minute and a half each, or would you like to give the witnesses who want to a chance to explain further?

What would you prefer, please?

Okay. I invite Madam Damoff for one minute and a half, please.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Now I know how the Bloc feels when they have a short time.

Mr. Cheung, my question is for you.

Just before you were put in jail, you did a broadcast with an organization to talk about how the national security law had changed things in Hong Kong overnight. I'm just wondering if that organization is still in existence.

Mr. Fernando Cheung: I'm sorry. Which organization are you talking about? Could you name the organization?

Ms. Pam Damoff: I don't know the name of it. You had apparently done an interview with them just prior to your arrest in 2020.

Mr. Fernando Cheung: There are many journalistic organizations that have gone defunct since I spoke with them and the enactment of the national security law. I suspect the one that I spoke to is already diminished.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Okay. Thank you.

Can you describe the sentiment in Hong Kong towards the national security law? Has it shifted since it was adopted, or are people just afraid to speak out so you don't know?

Mr. Fernando Cheung: At the beginning, nobody really knew what was happening. The law was imposed by Beijing without any consultation or even transparency. The law became law, and we knew nothing about it until that moment. Then in the following couple of months, people began to understand the severity of it.

Of course, by now that is a big stick above everybody's head. There are hundreds of people being prosecuted. People are afraid. Like my previous colleagues mentioned about Jimmy Lai's comments, fear is among everyone in Hong Kong. People—

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cheung. We have to give others a chance.

I invite Mr. Majumdar for one minute and a half, please.

Mr. Shuvaloy Majumdar: In Canada, we are encountering intimidation, interference, coercion, elite capture and corruption. Nowhere across the Government of Canada is there a single place that assesses the threat from Beijing for all aspects of the government.

Could our witnesses provide a sense as to what may be some of the best practices they've seen in the democratic world that shape an understanding of the Communist threat?

That's for whomever wants it.

The Chair: Go ahead, Your Excellency.

Mr. James Cunningham: First, let me say that's a persistent problem. The dimension of the confrontation is very broad and multi-faceted.

One of the things that our Congress tried to do to deal with that was to establish a select committee in the Congress, in the House of Representatives, headed by Chairman Gallagher. It was a bipartisan committee with a Democrat co-chair. Their mandate was to look at these kinds of issues on where the problems and threats were and what might be done about them from a holistic perspective.

I personally think it's been quite effective. Not only are they very much interested in what's going on in Hong Kong, but they have had a real impact on focusing on issue after issue after issue and drawing out some of the reality of the complexity of the issues that we need to deal with when it comes to China.

The Chair: Thank you, Your Excellency.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, the floor is yours for a minute and a half.

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

Mr. Rogers, how accessible is the Hong Kong diaspora media to the population living on Hong Kong soil, and to what extent is the Hong Kong population aware of the facts regarding Jimmy Lai?

[*English*]

Mr. Benedict Rogers: Very briefly, they are still largely aware.

There are individual websites, including Hong Kong Watch's own website, that have been blocked, but the great firewall of China has not been imposed on Hong Kong yet. Twitter, Facebook and other websites are accessible.

I think people in Hong Kong are still very aware at the moment.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you.

Mr. Cheung, representing Canada-Hong Kong Link, I have a little time left to address you: if a person living in Hong Kong provides or demonstrates support for Jimmy Lai, what might happen to them?

[*English*]

Mr. Fernando Cheung: They could be arrested. They could be prosecuted for sedition or they could be treated as a conspirator.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you so much to all the witnesses.

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

I now invite Mr. Gord Johns to take the floor for a minute and a half.

[*English*]

Mr. Gord Johns: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to give my time back to Mr. Almoghraby. He was cut off because I ran out of time on that long question I asked him.

I'll cede my time to you, Mr. Almoghraby.

Mr. Zein Almoghraby: Thank you.

The point was about providing support for people who left already or are about to leave, because more people who are human rights activists and journalists, etc., are going to leave in larger numbers. They are going to be in Canada or neighbouring countries, so we have to provide them with whatever support is available. We also need to support the ones who are going to stay there, even if it's not possible to be that effective. Providing support goes a long way, wherever the human rights defenders and the journalists are.

A very important part is that in the very worst case scenario—when Hong Kong becomes part of China on all levels; it's going to be competing with North Korea for the last place on the world press freedom index—we are going to need, as international media, citizens, people everywhere, and Canadians in particular, to read the news and reports about Hong Kong. It will be very critical to have networks, journalists and civic actors from there who are networked, capable and able to do their work, so we will be able to separate what is true from false because they would know best what the Communist Party of China is capable of spreading. They would know what it is used to spreading and what would most likely be the truth.

There is a great value to do so in an event where the worst case scenario happens.

In the meantime, things are only getting worse, but we will have to keep on fighting and pushing against these kinds of measures imposed by the government of China.

• (1700)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Almoghraby and Mr. Johns.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for their testimony and for participating in our study on the detention of Jimmy Lai in Hong Kong. We are grateful to you for having taken the time to meet with us and for sharing your expertise on this important subject. If you have any further information to submit to the subcommittee, please contact the clerk.

We will now briefly suspend, then continue in camera in a few minutes.

The meeting is suspended.

[*Proceedings continue in camera.*]

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