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Chair: The Honourable Geoff Regan



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• (1830)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order. Welcome to meeting number 12 of the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations.

Pursuant to the motion adopted on Wednesday, September 23, 2020, the committee is meeting on its study of Canada-China relations.

[Translation]

Today's meeting is in a hybrid format. The meeting is also televised and will be available on the House of Commons website.

[English]

To ensure an orderly meeting I'd like to outline a few rules to follow.

Members and witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of "floor", "English" or "French". Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name, unless you are a witness and you've just been asked a question by one of the members. If you are participating by video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute your mike.

[Translation]

Let me remind you that all comments from members and from witnesses must be addressed through the chair.

Please speak slowly and clearly.

[English]

When you're not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

I would now like to welcome His Excellency Dominic Barton, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Canada to the People's Republic of China. As well, we have Ms. Joya Donnelly, counsellor, political affairs.

We also have Mr. Shawn Steil, executive director, greater China policy and coordination.

Thank you for being here.

Ambassador Barton, please proceed with your opening remarks.

Mr. Dominic Barton (Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Canada to the People's Republic of China, Embassy of Canada to the People's Republic of China): *Bonsoir*, Mr. Chair and honourable members. Thank you for the invitation to appear before you tonight.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to discuss my Tibet trip. I know it's an area of great interest for Canadians and it is at the forefront in our efforts to promote rights and freedoms in China.

I also welcome the invitation from the committee to provide an update on a few developments since my last appearance in February.

As Minister Champagne highlighted during his testimony to the committee last month, we need to be smart and coordinated when it comes to our relationship with China, and we need to work with others. Countries all around the world are evolving their approach to China and all recognize the complexity of the relationship. I think Canadians understand that there are times when we need to challenge China. We need to work with partners to hold them to account. At the same time, there are times when we need to co-operate economically and as we face global issues such as climate change. I'm tremendously proud of the work our embassy staff do every day to navigate this complex relationship.

Our government has clearly laid out my top priority, and that's the safety and security of Canadians, leading with the release of Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor as well as clemency for Robert Schellenberg.

Equally, the promotion and protection of human rights is an integral part of our work. We continue to raise both the arbitrary detention of Canadians and human rights issues with the Chinese government in public, in private and in collaboration with like-minded countries.

Our mission network in China has a host of programs that seek to empower progressive voices and shine a light on existing difficulties. For example, in the last month we've hosted a two-day event on women's empowerment to mark 25 years since the Beijing world conference on women. We've also engaged with children of migrant workers and with family members of human rights defenders.

We are concerned by the decline in civil and political rights in China. We, along with the international community, have raised our deep concerns publicly, and Canada has taken concrete measures following the imposition of the national security legislation in Hong Kong. We remain deeply concerned by the troubling reports of human rights violations in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, and the government has repeatedly raised our concerns, including most recently at the UN, alongside 38 other countries. We remain concerned by the continuous restrictions on the freedoms of Tibetans.

This brings me to the focus of this presentation, which is my visit to Tibet. I visited the Tibet Autonomous Region with nine other diplomats at the invitation of the People's Republic of China. In recent years, as you know, access to Tibet has become increasingly challenging, including for foreign government officials. Despite repeated requests, this was the first time a Canadian diplomat had visited Tibet since 2015. My visit was from October 26 to 30, and we visited the Tibetan capital of Lhasa as well as the Shannan prefecture.

I see the invitation in itself, coming after five years of consistent requests on our part, as positive. We were pleased that the Government of China extended this invitation, but I was also very aware that our visit would be controlled and focused on what they wanted us to see. The decision to participate was not taken lightly, and before doing so, I spoke with representatives of the Tibetan community in Canada, with Canadian academics who specialize in Tibetan studies and with experts around the world who work on human rights issues to seek their views. All agreed that it was important for me to participate given that so few have had access to the Tibet Autonomous Region in recent years.

We should also remember that few Tibetans have had the opportunity to connect with foreigners. I felt that it was important for Tibetans to see that outsiders still show up and care deeply about their situation, and for them to see that Canada cares. For these reasons, and as part of a broader engagement on Tibetan issues, I decided to go.

We had a very packed program over three days. Most activities would fit under the themes of economic development, environmental protection, education, culture and religion. What I saw was not the entire picture on any issue, but I nonetheless want to share with the committee what I was able to observe.

On the economic development front, I visited an industrial park with close to 140 greenhouses growing cash crops. I saw busy stores and markets selling Tibetan goods. I met a Tibetan businesswoman who ran a hotel, with Tibetans in management and at the working level. She told me numerous times that the hotel chain, being Tibetan-owned, needed more foreign tourists to come.

● (1835)

I visited a village where people had been resettled as part of a poverty alleviation program. There, I met a man and his family who were nomads, but he now works in the construction trade. I was able to see the beautiful Tibetan Buddhist shrine he meticulously built on the second floor of his house.

Chinese officials often talk to you in numbers and statistics. They point to government statistics, such as absolute poverty having been completely alleviated in the Tibet Autonomous Region as of 2019, or the fact they have close to 100% broadband access across the region. Our own assessment is that inequality remains a critical issue.

Resettlement and displacement of Tibetans are stark reminders that freedom of choice and the ability to live out one's cultural or other values are equally a measure of well-being or prosperity, as is material wealth.

Our group made other visits to places, including the Lhalu Wetlands, known as the lungs of Lhasa, and saw a conservation area teeming with wildlife. We visited the Lhasa experimental primary school, where I saw mostly Tibetan and some Han students being taught primarily in Mandarin, with some teaching in Tibetan, for example, classes in calligraphy, chess and opera. This school was impressive, but I recognized that most schools in Tibet were probably not of that caliber. It would be important to see schools in the rural areas, where almost 70% of the people live.

I visited the Tibetan Traditional Medical University and the Tibetan Thangka Academy of paintings. We visited cultural and religious sites, including the Potala Palace and Norbulingka. Both were profoundly moving, a reminder of the incredible religious and human accomplishments of the Tibetan people and of the importance of ensuring their rights.

At the Samye Monastery, we saw young monks studying. The visit was led by monks and we were able to speak with them. During my entire visit, top of mind were Canada's concerns about the human rights situation affecting Tibetans, including restrictions on freedom of expression, movement, religion or belief, and the protection of linguistic and cultural rights.

I was able to raise these issues during official meetings and in side conversations with officials in Tibet. I raised specific cases of concern with Chinese authorities while there. I sought out opportunities to speak with local Tibetans. Those whom I met expressed great pride in their culture, and it was evident that the Tibetan language and cultural preservation remain very important to them. In speaking with officials, I advocated for unhindered future access to Tibet for UN agencies, academics, researchers and journalists, as well as return visits by other Canadian representatives.

While my visit to Tibet was short, I hope it opens doors to more contact with Tibetans inside China, and demonstrates that Canada is still very much engaged in the promotion of their rights and freedoms.

Though my appearance today is to be largely about my visit to Tibet, as I understand it, I want to further address the cases of Mr. Kovrig and Mr. Spavor; something which I know is very important to members of this committee and all Canadians. As I said earlier, this is my top priority.

This week, December 10, will mark the second anniversary of their arbitrary arrest and detention. We continue to call on China to immediately release both men. In October, after a hiatus of many months, and much effort by the embassy and the minister, we secured on-site virtual consular access with Mr. Kovrig and Mr. Spavor. I have since met with both of them on two occasions to confirm their health and well-being. The resilience and strength they have shown has been an inspiration to me, as I know it has been to many Canadians.

In closing, this committee plays a vital role to understand the difficult and complex nature of Canada's relationship with China. It also plays a crucial role in the national conversation we are having about Canada's evolving approach to China. The Canadian Parliament, the Canadian government and the Canadian people have a lot at stake in getting this approach right.

With that, I am happy to take your questions.

Merci . Thugs rje che.

• (1840)

The Chair: Thank you, Your Excellency.

The first round of questions will go to Mr. Genuis for six minutes.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): *Tashi delek.*

Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Ambassador.

The majority of my questions in this round will focus on Tibet, but I do want to start with a follow-up from your last appearance. Mr. Barton, the last time you appeared before this committee, you made a controversial statement about Mr. Huseyin Celil's citizenship status.

Could you please confirm today that you do recognize that Mr. Celil is a Canadian citizen, and could you please update this committee on all the efforts you have made with respect to his case?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Yes, I want to reassert that Mr. Huseyin Celil is a Canadian citizen.

After the last testimony, I spoke with his wife just to reinforce to her and the family the importance of his case. Then we raised his case with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to say that we want access to him, that we want to understand how he is doing.

We have subsequently followed up. As I mentioned, the Chinese only recognize his Chinese citizenship, not his Canadian citizenship, and he is Canadian. We said that we need to make sure that his family has access and is able to understand what his well-being is.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you for that response.

Is securing the release of Mr. Celil as important to you as securing the release of the two Michaels?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Yes, it is.

I think we have, as you know, over 120 consular cases where people are in detention. While the public focus is on, obviously, Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, and that's where we spend a lot of time, there is a very large consular team here, where we look after everyone and make sure that we get access and drive it through. There's a lot of effort—

• (1845)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you for that response. I think that you know we're going to continue to follow up on that case.

Reuters reported earlier this year that China "is pushing growing numbers of Tibetan rural laborers off the land and into recently built military-style training centers where they are turned into factory workers, mirroring a program in the western Xinjiang region that rights groups have branded coercive labor."

You've been to Xinjiang before. I wonder if you think similar tactics are being used in Tibet as we know are being used in Xinjiang.

Mr. Dominic Barton: Adrian Zenz wrote a very good report—I believe it was in September—which we read before we went there, saying that roughly 500,000 people have been put into those facilities. We were not able to see that because of where we were in Lhasa and Shannan prefecture, so we were not able to see that.

Clearly, there is an effort going on to take people from the land, if you will, with a view to try to improve the poverty alleviation situation. They're being moved into industrial jobs. We weren't able to get any sense of that or of what that looked like, but we are very much aware of that.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: The Chinese government asserts that all of these relocation operations are voluntary. Human Rights Watch has conducted interviews, finding the opposite, essentially. I would maybe disagree with your characterization of the intentions behind these policies as being based on economic development. I see that as the veneer but not the reality and not the intention.

Are we seeing birth suppression in Tibet similar to what we're seeing in Xinjiang: forced abortion, forced insertion of IUDs and forced sterilization?

Mr. Dominic Barton: We spoke to the people we were able to visit. I mentioned that we saw two families. We broke the group up into two parts. That question was actually asked. Again, we had party officials surrounding us—I'm just telling you what we heard. We asked that question: "Are there any limits on the number of children you can have or your grandchildren can have, and so forth?" They said no.

We have to look at the statistics to see what's actually happening with the birth rate. That's why I think we have to get more access. I think that's the critical factor here.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

Were you ever able to interact with Tibetans without Chinese government monitoring?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Yes, I was—I was actually quite surprised at that—on a number of occasions.

One was early in the morning, mainly because I couldn't sleep, to be honest. I had difficulty adjusting to the altitude. I was up at five in the morning and wandered the streets. There was no one behind me. There weren't a lot of people on the street, but I saw people. During the lunch periods, we were allowed to move around. I tried to go into as many bookstores as I could. I was there basically by myself. I was a bit surprised. I'm sure there were cameras looking at me.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you. I just want to get one more question in before my time is up.

Did you raise or discuss the whereabouts of the Panchen Lama or the Government of China's efforts to control the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Yes, I did raise the question about the Panchen Lama the Dalai Lama had selected. We raised that. We asked, "Where is he? How is he doing? How do we get to see him?" Their response was, "There is one Panchen Lama, and that's not the person. He's fine, and he doesn't want to speak to people." We raised that, and it wasn't just raised by me. It was raised by other members in the group.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: And the reincarnation question?

Mr. Dominic Barton: The reincarnation question, there were assertions by that where the government officials talked about the golden urn process and how that historically has been used—

The Chair: Thank you. I'm sorry I have to interrupt, but Mr. Genuis' time is up.

Now we'll go to Mr. Fragiskatos for six minutes, please.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Ambassador, thank you for being here and for the work that you are doing.

I do want to focus on Tibet here but I would be remiss if on behalf of my constituents, many of whom have contacted me over the past couple of years now about Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor... I know you are limited in what you can say because of the privacy law. Can you comment to this committee and to Canadians about their general health and well-being?

• (1850)

Mr. Dominic Barton: As you said outright, I'm limited by the Privacy Act in what I can discuss in any detail.

What I would say is they are both very healthy physically and mentally. I have to tell you I'm deeply inspired by their resilience and their mindset. It's incredible, given what they're going through. The other thing, and what I just realized too in talking with the families, they're Canadians who have families who are worried about them, who haven't seen them and are worried about their health, their mental health, but they're very strong. It's remarkable.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: They're both extraordinary individuals. Thank you for that, Ambassador.

I want to ask now about Tibet. What would you say to those who are of the view that Canada can only do so much, can exert itself only so much on such issues because it is a middle power and our reach is limited? While well-intentioned, our reach will always be limited. That's the view in foreign policy circles and other circles. What would your response be to that?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Mr. Chair, my response would be that while we're a middle power, we're an important and influential power, I think particularly because of our views on human rights, our multiculturalism, and also I think our own experience. We have not done such a great job ourselves with the indigenous people here. We speak from some experience of maybe how we can do things differently. It's important to have some humility in that, but I think it garners respect that we know what we're talking about.

We're a country that is able to have a very vibrant, important French community that can have votes about whether they want to separate or not. I think we represent a lot of very good things. It's important we're there. Yes, we can't force people to do things, but by asking questions, by showing up, by working with other countries, by continuing to keep this on the table, by working with the Tibetans, what I've learned—because I'm not a Tibetan expert—the community that we have in Canada, which is very vibrant, very thoughtful, there is a lot we can do. I think particularly in these times of change it's important that we do stand up for that and there is a lot we can do.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Ambassador. I'm inclined to very much agree with you, but I want to ask, because you raised some really interesting points, did you put that perspective forward? If so, who did you raise such points with, and how did you do it? By what means did you decide to put that message, whether it was to the Chinese authorities or to others?

Mr. Dominic Barton: There were probably as many Chinese and Tibetan Chinese officials with us on the trip and we had a lot of bus rides. There were a lot of informal conversations about that.

Then when we had the meeting with the deputy party secretary, I raised that issue with the deputy party secretary that we have some experience and we have some views on how we can help. I think it was seen. There's the fact that Canada was asked to come to this. A lot of countries want to do it. I honestly don't know why they asked us. A lot of other countries would like to go. I have to believe there's some sense that we want to try to help play some role. It was informally with the deputy party secretary but there was a lot of that sort of discussion.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Understood, Ambassador. I have one minute left for my last question.

I want to ask you to what extent you have been engaged with ambassadors from other countries, other like-minded liberal democracies on this very question, on the question of Tibet.

• (1855)

Mr. Dominic Barton: Actually we have quite extensively, Mr. Chair. Before the trip, I met with the group that went ahead of time, which included the Swiss and the Norwegian ambassadors, to get a sense of what they were able to look at, what they would do differently and so forth.

I hosted a couple of sessions with ambassadors who weren't able to go, to share what we learned and what they might want to ask for in the trip that hopefully they would get to go on.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

[Translation]

We will now continue with Mr. Bergeron.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Barton, thank you for joining us once again. Thank you for the work you are doing for Canada in the People's Republic of China.

One item in your presentation caught my attention: the visit to the hotel. I was very surprised to learn that there was a hotel, given the restrictions imposed on foreign travellers. I imagine that this hotel is mainly reserved for domestic travellers from the People's Republic of China, namely Han Chinese travelling to Tibet.

[English]

Mr. Dominic Barton: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for that observation.

I was surprised by that, too, and it wasn't choreographed, if you will. I discovered it. She was helping when we were having dinner. It was actually before a performance that we were going to see called *Princess Wencheng*. Yes, I was very surprised by that.

They actually do have a lot of Han Chinese tourists, as you mentioned. Last year, they said there were 40 million Han Chinese tourists.

What I found interesting—and something someone else could do deeper work on—was that there are a lot of Chinese Buddhists. One number I heard—and please check with experts, not what I'm saying, but just a number I heard—was that there could be 300 million.

People are coming, I think, not just for the tourism, if you will, but because these sites are actually quite important to them. They're Han tourists and what she was saying was that it would be great to have more foreign tourists able to come to the session—it was a bit of an oddity to see someone like me or others there—and that more people should visit from Canada. I said, “No kidding. We would like to if we could get access; that would be great. You might want to raise that.”

I don't know if that answers your question.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Yes, very well, thank you very much.

I would like to talk about the linguistic and cultural issue. According to a number of international reports, the Chinese authorities

are making considerable efforts to limit—if not eliminate—aspects of Tibetan culture.

During your visit, did you have the opportunity to speak with Tibetans in Tibetan?

Did the Chinese authorities provide Tibetan interpreters, or were discussions routinely conducted in Mandarin?

[English]

Mr. Dominic Barton: Mr. Chair, the whole area of language was a very important focus on the trip. What we did was ask, but again recognizing when you ask people those sorts of questions with party officials around, you may not get the most accurate response, so what we did was observe. We basically saw that all the signs were bilingual. Posters on the roads and on entrances were in Tibetan and Mandarin.

You make a very important point. Interestingly, all of the tours.... For example, the tour of the Tibetan medicine museum was led by the Tibetan principal, but he did it in Mandarin and then it was translated into English. It was much like when you had the visit in 2018 from the Tibet authority, and they spoke in Mandarin, not Tibetan. I think one of the members made an important intervention in Tibetan. Everything was in Mandarin and then translated, even though they were Tibetans.

At the school, there were classes that were taught in Tibetan. It was more the cultural part of it. We saw lots of Tibetan chess, the calligraphy, and signs in the school that were bilingual. Our sense from the group was that Mandarin was primarily the core measure.

I was able to talk to some of the family members who were there, people who we were able to meet, and they said, “Look, the importance of maintaining our language and culture is critical. We try to do that with the family to make sure we are doing that.”

One of the families we met—I want to be careful, and I won't go into the details, because I don't want to get them in trouble or anything—had actually moved from Canada back to Tibet, because they wanted their son to understand and learn the Tibetan culture. “With all respect to Canada,” she said, “which I love, it's up to me to drive it.” There was a lot of passion, I felt, by the people, but clearly, Mandarin is the core language.

• (1900)

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Chair, my understanding is that two Tibetan regions are not part of the Tibet Autonomous Region.

Are the travel restrictions just as strict for those two Tibetan areas outside the Tibet Autonomous Region?

If not, is there—

The Chair: Mr. Bergeron, your six minutes are up.

[English]

Mr. Ambassador, would you provide a very brief answer, one word, if possible?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Significant population outside, we do have access to those regions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Harris, please go ahead for six minutes.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Ambassador Barton. I was going to give you an opportunity to answer that question in my time, but perhaps we can get back to it after a few questions that I have.

First of all, I want to say that I'm delighted to hear, and I'm sure all Canadians are delighted to hear, that Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig are in good health, and have shown great resilience in their significant ordeal. Thank you for passing that information along to us.

Was there any explanation given by the Chinese government as to why they refused to allow even virtual visits? I had a discussion with the Canadian ambassador back in April and talked about consular visits. Of course, the COVID situation was the explanation. At that time, other countries were being given consular visits through virtual means to their citizens, and Canada was being denied. No real answer was given to me at that time as to why that couldn't be permitted.

Was there ever any reason given to you why the Chinese government would refuse to do that? Did you ask the officials to explain why they would not provide consular access through virtual means prior to when they did?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Mr. Chair, there are a couple of things I'd say about that. One is that we are obviously very frustrated by not being able to get access, even virtually. As far as we know from the science, the virus doesn't go through televisions. How does that work? We pushed them on that.

Second, I just want to clarify one thing. No one was getting access to these national security cases. It wasn't just a Canada thing; everyone was having this problem. That's why we led a joint démarche in May on behalf of other countries, including the United States and Britain, that couldn't get access. This was related to national security cases.

I think our understanding of why it was the case is that the Chinese are completely paranoid about the virus. I was able to see a death penalty case in May. Again, it was not a national security case, so I could see the person virtually. I was actually able to interview the prison warden afterwards, and he asked me for questions. I asked, "What are your KPIs?" He said, "Zero, zero." That's zero cases and zero risk of a case. I asked, "What happens if that doesn't happen?" He said, "I'll be fired."

There was, I think, a craziness in terms of that restriction, but that was what was going on. We tried to demonstrate how in Canada we still allowed people to get access if they had people in detention, but it was very frustrating. I'm glad we eventually got

there, and it's actually opened it up for others on the national security case side to be able to do it.

I hope we'll eventually be able to get to the physical interactions, because again, it's a strange thing. We fly to these places—or drive to them in the case of Beijing—and I know that the Michaels are literally on the other side of the wall. It's like this. It's sort of a TV screen in terms of how that works.

Does that answer...?

• (1905)

Mr. Jack Harris: Yes, it does. Thank you. I think it provides some perspective on it that I didn't have.

Can you speak to us about the follow-up to Mr. Bergeron's question about areas outside of the Tibet Autonomous Region that contain Tibetan people, ethnic Tibetans who see themselves very much as Tibetans? Is any recognition given by the Chinese government, officially or otherwise, as to their status as Tibetans as well?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Mr. Chair, there is a significant population of Tibetans outside the Tibet Autonomous Region. There are nine autonomous prefectures, as they call them, where there are Tibetan people. Those are really in the provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan. These are big provinces. Qinghai and Sichuan are places where there are a lot of Tibetans.

Again, there's a recognition of them, that they have these prefectures. They recognize that there's that group. A lot of people are outside the Tibet Autonomous Region, and we can get access to that. We regularly travel to those regions and will continue to do that.

Mr. Jack Harris: Travel, yes, but my question was whether the Chinese government recognizes them as Tibetans or as part of the Tibetan people.

Mr. Dominic Barton: My understanding is that they do recognize them as Tibetans because they are in these Tibetan autonomous prefectures.

Mr. Jack Harris: Do they regard them as Tibetan prefectures?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Yes.

Mr. Jack Harris: Very good. Thank you.

In August this committee had a visit from Dr. Lobsang Sangay, Sikyong-President, Central Tibetan Administration. He spoke about the efforts of his organization to advance what he called the "middle-way approach", a reconciliation policy with China seeking genuine autonomy for the Tibetan people within the framework of the Chinese constitution, which I believe is the formula.

The Chair: Mr. Harris, I'm sorry, but you're over your time.

Mr. Jack Harris: I will have to pursue that in my next round, sir.

Thank you.

The Chair: I appreciate that. I trust Ambassador Barton will keep that preamble to your question in mind for when you pose the question.

Now we'll go to the second round.

Mr. Williamson, you have five minutes.

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

Thank you, Ambassador, for joining us, again.

Perhaps I could start by getting your thoughts on today's Washington Post story. I'll just read their news blurb so we all get it: Huawei tested face-scanning cameras that could send police a "Uighur alert" to detect a member of the oppressed minority group.

This was in an internal report that vanished after the reporters asked about it.

What do you make of this story?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Mr. Chair, one of the concerns we do have is the cameras that are everywhere to look at people and where they are. By the way, I didn't see any more cameras in Lhasa than I see in Beijing, but they're everywhere. I think that's something that we do want to be concerned about because it's a way of doing surveillance. That's why I said, again, that while no one was following me when I walked around, I didn't think that there weren't people watching me from a camera point of view, and I was sort of being careful about that, so it's a concern.

I'm not familiar with that particular Huawei technology or case on that side.

• (1910)

Mr. John Williamson: It's a police state, so you're going to see as many cameras in Beijing as there are in Lhasa, I would believe.

This is an example of using facial recognition technology to classify human beings based on their ethnicity, something that I think would violate certainly human rights and which has a racist component to it as well.

Is this a company that the Government of Canada should want to associate itself with?

Mr. Dominic Barton: On the point of facial recognition and the ethnic bias or differentiation, I also worry. I fully concur with your concerns.

I think as it relates to Huawei, I don't know enough background in terms of what they've done on that. I'm not involved, in my role here, in anything to do with the Huawei decision, so I'd rather not comment on that.

Mr. John Williamson: The last time you were with us, I believe you said that Canada's 5G network will have to be made...and you said whichever way it goes, there will be consequences.

What do you think some of those consequences are for Canada?

Mr. Dominic Barton: I think the decision that the government is going to make on the Huawei 5G is obviously a very important one. Other countries have been affected by that. I look at least at some of the commentary recently in Sweden. It's obviously played a role in Australia as well, so I think there are consequences to it.

The other part that I would say is that I think a lot of Canadian telco companies have already made decisions in terms of what they're going to do and where it is.

Clearly it's a sensitive area and there will be... I honestly don't know because I think there is...other than that people will be upset, will be mad about it. Again, I think we need to do what we think is right for us and our Canadian interests and then be prepared to deal with the consequences of the decision, whatever way it goes.

Mr. John Williamson: Has Canada's embassy in China prepared for the two scenarios? What steps have you prepared given that a decision should come in the next couple of weeks?

Mr. Dominic Barton: In terms of preparing for different scenarios, we look at a whole range of different things. There is a lot of interaction and feedback from the MFA whenever the government makes a statement on a particular topic, or actually, on what your committee is doing, which I think is important work. It has repercussions. We get feedback on that.

We're preparing as best we can for a range of different outcomes like that. There's not a lot we can actually do except try to explain that we are following a science-based process.

Mr. John Williamson: I have a short amount of time and I have one question on Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor. Could you just tell us what are they like? You've seen them. Are they shells of their former selves? Are they broken men? Will Canadians be shocked when they eventually see them, based on their physical condition or their mental condition?

The Chair: Very briefly, please.

Mr. Dominic Barton: Again, there's the Privacy Act. I'd love to be able to go into more detail but I can't. What I would just say is they are robust. That's what I find inspiring. You would be very impressed by seeing both of them.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Williamson.

We'll now go to Mr. Virani for five minutes.

Mr. Arif Virani (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Ambassador, for joining us.

I represent about 7,000 Tibetan Canadians in my riding of Parkdale—High Park. I'm also the chair of the Parliamentary Friends of Tibet and have a background in human rights law. That's the orientation from which I come to this issue.

I'm glad you acknowledged my Tibetan constituents. The Tibetan Canadian community is vibrant and strong in this country. I know groups like the Canada-Tibet Committee and Sherap Tharchin have been in contact with you. I echo your assessment of the community, because they've taught me a lot about the injustices that they're perceiving on the ground.

I'd also salute you for making the decision to go, notwithstanding the veneer that would have been presented to you and the stage-managed approach with which the Chinese would have approached your visit into the TAR. In my meeting with His Holiness the Dalai Lama in 2018, he told me much the same, that notwithstanding what you may be presented with, it's important that the world see Tibetans in their territory for who they are and that they know the world has not forgotten them. Thank you for participating in that, Ambassador Barton.

That being said, I am suspicious about what you saw. I know you went in with your eyes wide open in terms of what you were seeing.

The first thing I want to ask you about is the linguistic point that's been raised by others, including by Mr. Bergeron. You know that there are provisions on the ground and laws about the education of people. We know there's an ethnic autonomy law in China that says schools and other educational organizations recruiting mostly ethnic minority students should, whenever possible, use textbooks in their own languages and use these languages as the medium of instruction. That's a quote from China's regional ethnic autonomy law.

Tell us a bit more about what you saw at that school in particular. I appreciate calligraphy is one thing, but actually having substantive courses being taught in Tibetan is quite the other. What is the status of linguistic protection from your assessment and your time on the ground?

• (1915)

Mr. Dominic Barton: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for the work he does with the community and everything that's happening on that front.

On the school, it was a large primary school. It was actually grades 1 to 4. We tried to see as many classes as we could beyond the ones that they'd asked us to, if you will. With our group of 10, we were able to do that. It was just an observation but we got the sense that science and math were being done in Mandarin. Now it could be what some people said, that there's a Tibetan stream on that. We didn't see that. We saw the Mandarin stream on that. Then there were the calligraphy and the opera courses, the more artistic elements and they were done in Tibetan. Clearly Tibetan is taught. People have to be able to speak that language in there, but it felt to us that the core one was Mandarin.

Mr. Arif Virani: I was taken by what you mentioned about language instruction. You mentioned a woman who is Canadian taking her family back to immerse them more in Tibetan culture, but I know there are classes in Parkdale where people are being taught languages. I shudder to think whether that would even be possible in places like Lhasa.

You know about the case of Tashi Wangchuk, a very celebrated linguistic activist who was charged and subsequently jailed for daring to promote Tibetan language instruction. Is that the kind of case you were able to raise, specifically people like Tashi Wangchuk and other linguistic activists who have been jailed by the Chinese in the Tibet Autonomous Region?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Right. As I mentioned, the language element was the fundamental area we wanted to look at, and we were concerned and trying to find out more on that. I am very much aware of the Tashi Wangchuk situation, which has been raised by ministers with the Chinese government. I didn't raise his specific case here because he's in Qinghai, so they don't have authority over him. His name was mentioned in it but it was more because of what he stands for on the language side.

The other part I would say is that I tried to spend time in bookstores. I tried to look at what was in there, what they were reading. I found that in the back of the bookstores, there were Tibetan books, children's books. There's that aspect to it. In fact, I asked one of the minders who is Tibetan to tell me what they were, because I can't read Tibetan. I picked up one to buy it and she said, "Don't buy a translation of Aladdin. Buy a real Tibetan book. This is the one you should buy." There are books there, clearly. Do you know what I mean?

Mr. Arif Virani: Ambassador, just in the brief time I have, I would say that we've heard a lot about the two Michaels. Those are important cases, but I think the case of the Panchen Lama, which was one of the first questions put to you, remains very pressing. When he was seized, he was the youngest political prisoner on the planet. Continuing to assert and actually seek access to him is something that I personally would urge you to do on behalf of the Government of Canada going forward.

Thank you for your time, Ambassador Barton.

Mr. Dominic Barton: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Virani. That ends your time.

[*Translation*]

The floor now goes to Mr. Bergeron for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will end up thinking that Mr. Harris and I are kindred spirits today, since our questions are more or less along the same lines. I will try to follow up on his question with what I would like to ask you, Excellency.

Mr. Harris was talking to you about the middle way, the way of compromise, the negotiation that the Central Tibetan Administration is advocating. From what you have been able to see and hear, do you think there is a place for this middle way? From your understanding of what Chinese officials have told you, is there a possibility of negotiation with the Central Tibetan Administration in India?

• (1920)

[English]

Mr. Dominic Barton: Mr. Chair, on the middle way, I think the point I would make is that the government's position is that we recognize that the Tibet Autonomous Region is part of the People's Republic of China, but we support the meaningful dialogue. I think that's a very good thing to do, and I note the motion that you guys passed on that, which I think is very positive. I think we should be pushing for that. I think it's a very good thing to do. Even if the TAR was able to reinforce what is actually in the constitution in China, that would be a good thing.

I think it's important to do it. It felt pretty hard-line from the authorities when they talked about His Holiness and the group. They used pretty aggressive language, but I think we should urge for that dialogue to be able to find common ground.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I sense some hope on your side.

I am inclined to ask you a question about the report tabled by this committee in the House of Commons about the dialogue in which the parties were called to participate. Earlier, you talked about the repercussions of the actions taken. Have you had any reaction from Chinese authorities on the committee's report?

[English]

Mr. Dominic Barton: I think the Chinese watch and hear what you're saying and where it is. That motion, again, I support it. I think that's a very good thing to do. I think they hear it. Whether they do something or not is a different question.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Bergeron.

[English]

Now we have Mr. Harris for two and a half minutes, please.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Chair.

I'll follow a little further on from your response to Mr. Bergeron. You said about the pursuit of this long-standing notion of reconciliation, so-called, reconciliation policy—and there have been fits and starts over the last number of years for various reasons—that Canada should push it.

Is it Canada's policy to do so or to try to find openings for that? Are you doing anything as ambassador to pursue that? Are there openings for you to do that? Are you pursuing that? Is it something that people should know about?

Mr. Dominic Barton: It is something that we raised, the importance of having dialogue. That's the critical part. Again, we weren't pushing the middle way but saying it's important to have dialogue. I think, as you said, there was very good dialogue going on until about 2010. Given the age of His Holiness and where it is, I think there's some urgency to that.

We are not, obviously, in the greatest position to tell China what to do given our bilateral ties, but that said, we should continue to keep and push to try to do it because that's what we believe in.

Again, I don't think we would go on the trip if there wasn't some sense of respect more for what Canada thinks about this and where it is. They obviously recognize that Canada's views on this are important and they know that we're critical on many elements of what's happening. I think we should keep pushing.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you.

I know this is not necessarily on your remit here tonight but we've had a lot of work before our committee over the last number of months on the situation in Hong Kong. How big a feature has Hong Kong played in your relations as ambassador with the Chinese officials during the last number of months?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Thank you for the question on Hong Kong.

It's actually been very much front and centre. You heard from Jeff Nankivell, the consul general who, from the government side, plays the key role in there, but we demarche the government here all the time. It's quite intense.

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

Now we go to Mr. Genuis for five minutes, please.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ambassador, Canada's ambassador to the United Nations, Bob Rae, recently said, "There's no question that there's aspects of what the Chinese are doing that fits into the definition of genocide in the genocide convention."

Do you agree with Mr. Rae's assessment?

• (1925)

Mr. Dominic Barton: Thanks for the question on that.

I fully agree with what Ambassador Rae said in raising the concerns and issues. He also mentioned the need, and the part I would focus on, for us to get independent reports to understand what's happening. We have the reports. They sound very concerning. We need to ensure that we have independent people on the ground who can go wherever they want to find out.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Ambassador, on that part of his comments, I'm not convinced it's realistic that that is going to happen any time soon. He made a statement, though, and I just want to zero in and be clear on your response, because it sounded like you said you agreed, but I'm not entirely clear. He said, "There's no question that there's aspects of what the Chinese are doing that fits into the definition of genocide in the genocide convention." That's a direct quote.

Do you agree with that direct quote?

Mr. Dominic Barton: My view is that I think we need to see the reports. I haven't talked to Ambassador Rae about the particular evidence he has on that side. The key thing is getting the reports. It's worrying enough, all of the satellite imagery and so forth. We know where we need to look, so let's go and get it and look at it. I would be for our getting the information. The reports are very concerning.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Ambassador, obviously everybody is concerned. We have two different ambassadors, our ambassador in Beijing and our ambassador in New York. Mr. Rae is saying there's no question there are aspects that fit into the definition of genocide, and you're saying that investigation is continuing.

I guess I'd like to ask on that basis, is Mr. Rae's statement consistent with the government's policy, or is your statement that we need to do more investigation before we can use that terminology consistent with government policy? Who's reflecting the views of the government?

Mr. Dominic Barton: To focus on your question, I would go to what the government is saying and the minister is saying, which is that he is pushing for a report. He's gone to the human rights commissioner, Michelle Bachelet, saying, "We need to get in there, and you need to go and see what's happening." Bob Rae has been very much involved in the UN vote with 38 other countries to express concern and also to get access. They are focusing on getting immediate unfettered access.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It's the same with Tibet. We'd love to get access, but I think there are realities in terms of what's going to be given.

Ambassador, I would like to follow up on a couple of questions in terms of the follow-up disclosure that you had committed to in February. I don't want to belabour any of these points, but you had said at the time you had expressed an openness to disclosing information about the Chinese state-owned company that you did work for with McKinsey.

Also, in response to a question from my colleague Dan Albas, you had expressed a willingness to provide disclosures in terms of meetings that you had with Huawei officials.

As far as I know, the committee has not received any of those follow-up points of disclosure. Do you want to update us on whether you are prepared to provide that follow-up disclosure either on Chinese state-owned companies that you did work for at McKinsey or on Huawei officials you've met with?

Mr. Dominic Barton: On the disclosure with SOEs, as I mentioned in the last committee hearing, I'm comfortable with that. I think what has to happen is to work through the McKinsey legal counsel to make sure they've worked through it. We connected the committee with that individual and there was a process that was under way. That's where it needs to be done. On my part, I'm comfortable. I think that has to be worked through with McKinsey, and as far as I know that was put forward. I don't know where we are on that, but the committee can follow up with them on it.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It sounds like we may need to follow up with the chair, then, because we're all looking for that information.

Finally, just in the time I have left, Ambassador, a lot of discussion recently has been out there about the guilty plea from Purdue pharmaceuticals, and the role that McKinsey played advising Purdue at the time when you were leading McKinsey. It stands to reason that this controversy could have an impact on your role as ambassador.

I wonder if you have any comments at all on the current controversies around Purdue pharmaceuticals as they relate to McKinsey during the time when you were leading McKinsey.

Mr. Dominic Barton: I would suggest strongly that you look at the statement on the McKinsey website, which is quite detailed and clear about how they feel about what's happened. That's what I would strongly recommend.

• (1930)

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

Now we'll go to Ms. Yip for five minutes, please.

Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Thank you for coming so early in the morning for you.

I'm happy to bring the discussion back to Tibet.

In August, Dr. Lobsang Sangay suggested that the security laws in Tibet not only undermine democratic values and freedom of speech but also contribute to the environmental destruction of the Tibetan plateau and the economic marginalization of the Tibetan people. He further noted that the Chinese government should be held accountable.

What are the principal concerns related to the environmental destruction in Tibet?

Mr. Dominic Barton: As I mentioned, the environmental theme was an important one. What we focused on was this Lhalu wetlands area, which is in Lhasa. Obviously the Tibet Autonomous Region is a huge area.

One area that we would have for concern is mining. There's lithium mining that's been done. We've heard reports of poison in the waters. We didn't get to see any of the mining activity. There are some hydro dams that have been built or are being seen to be built. That also can have an effect on the environment.

I think, as China itself calls it, this is the third pole; the water tower provides the water for 1.4 billion people. Understanding the ecology and the environmental impact on the broader plane would be good. When we asked that question, what the official said was that they have, I think, 34% of the land area now in natural reserve. They have 47 natural reserves that are out there. I think the point is that we didn't get to see them. I think, again, we need to get access and have experts have access to be able to go and look at what's happening. Clearly China's saying it's a priority, but it would be good to be able to see it. Therefore, access, I think, is critical.

Ms. Jean Yip: In your opening statement, you mentioned a decline in civil rights in China. Can you explain this dynamic that we're seeing in China where, with growing prosperity, there is also a decline in civil rights?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Yes, there's no question, again, that material prosperity has grown significantly and continues to grow on pretty well all measures. I think the point I was trying to make is that, on the civil liberties side, it feels very different from the time I was here in the first part of the century, 2003 to 2009, and I think it's even changed over the last five years.

People are more careful what they talk about. It's risky to have a dissenting view. I guess I want to say it's a feeling. It's a hard thing to say X, Y or Z has happened. There are many newspapers, media channels, social media and so forth, but I think people just feel more reluctant to have open conversations about any issues they're concerned about, and in any society there are going to be issues, even if it's performing well from a material point of view.

I don't know if I'm getting at your question, but it feels tighter, more constrained.

Ms. Jean Yip: I'm sure the increase in the number of cameras all around is probably contributing to that feeling.

Also, in that time frame, did you notice more control of the press and less openness?

Mr. Dominic Barton: I think the press has not changed a lot. There are always the headlines talking about what China's doing well. I would say one thing I have noticed is that there's usually a report on the president, which wasn't as much as I saw when I was here before. Every day it says that President Xi has done X, Y or Z, that type of thing. That's one difference.

I think WeChat people want to be careful what they say, because they don't know if they're being monitored. That said, I think it has to be done in very small groups with people you trust. There are people who will talk about it or send articles. You can get VPN access. I can get to Google. It has to change all the time. It's not reliable, but it's not as though people are here in the dark in terms of what's going on in the rest of the world. They can sort of see that, but it is just more constrained.

• (1935)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Yip.

Now we're on to a subsequent round with Mr. Chong for five minutes.

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

Thank you, Ambassador, for appearing in front of our committee.

You were in Lhasa, you mentioned, which is on the Lhasa River, which feeds into the Yarlung Tsangpo River. I assume you know that recently China has proposed a series of megadams on that river, which feeds into India. These dams are significant in their proposition. They would be three times the size of the Three Gorges Dam.

You were just about 50 kilometres north of that river in Lhasa.

The first question I have is, did you ask officials any questions about those proposed megaprojects?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Mr. Chair, we also were aware of the reports of this dam and of its significant impact not just on the environment, but what impact it also may have downstream particularly for India, because I think it's the source of the Brahmaputra River.

We asked the question, and the view was, “We take the environment very carefully. We're very concerned about it, and we have to be concerned about our own water systems in China from this. You

can't differentiate.” That was their response. We didn't get to see... Again, we were too far away to be able to see it, so we asked the question.

The other thing we asked was, “Why do you have so many hydro dams here, when there isn't exactly a big industrial state? Where does the power go? Why are you building these things? Why aren't you using solar or other devices?”

I don't know whether I'm answering your question, but that's the extent of it.

Hon. Michael Chong: Questions were asked, then.

Were questions asked about the recent clashes between Indian and Chinese forces in the Himalayas, which we saw about six months ago, and the rising tension between India and China in that region?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Those questions were asked when we were on the bus. What I heard was that during the previous visit of ambassadors, a military convoy went through. Again, I didn't see it; it was just reported to me. We didn't see that. We had our eyes wide open for it.

The infrastructure in Tibet is pretty phenomenal—the highways, the railroads and so forth. We asked about it. The response was, “We're here to talk about Tibet, not the border dispute.”

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay.

Have you had any discussions with the Indian ambassador to China about these issues, particularly what you saw in Tibet?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Yes, the Indian ambassador is a very good friend here, very knowledgeable, obviously, about the region, but also about China. We not only talked about the conflicts; we actually had a broader group about why this occurred—was it a strategy, or was it just a conflict that blew out, if you will?—to try to get a sense of it, of what the meaning behind it was, because it's such a significant event.

He obviously knows a lot about Tibet and about the Tibetan people from his end. He was one of the people who said, “Please go. I don't think I'll be going very soon.”

Hon. Michael Chong: Has the Indian ambassador raised any concerns with you recently about Canada-India relations in respect of China?

Mr. Dominic Barton: The last time I saw him was two weeks ago, so maybe when I see him again he'll raise some issues, but he has not.

Hon. Michael Chong: Ambassador, I have one last question.

Could you elaborate on the interactions you had with Tibetans away from Chinese officials? You mentioned the bookstore visit. If there were other interactions free of Chinese oversight, please elaborate.

Mr. Dominic Barton: Unfortunately, I don't speak Tibetan. Because I was wearing a Canada Goose jacket and I looked pretty geeky, some people came up to me when I was in the markets and said, “Where are you from? Why are you here?” They had no idea I was an ambassador. They didn't, frankly, care about that; it was, “Why are you here?”

They obviously spoke English, because they felt comfortable enough to come in, but that happened in the marketplaces.

It also happened in the greenhouse. I mentioned visiting these greenhouses. I spoke with some of the workers there about their day: “Tell me about your day, when you wake up. Give me a diary analysis,”—that type of thing.

• (1940)

The Chair: Thank you, Your Excellency.

Perhaps Mr. Virani, who now has five minutes, will ask you to follow up, or not.

Mr. Virani, you have five minutes, please.

Mr. Arif Virani: Here is a sentence for you in Tibetan, Ambassador: *Ngai-ming-la Dominic yin*. That means “My name is Dominic.”

I want to ask you three things somewhat quickly since I only have five minutes.

In keeping with where Mr. Chong left off, you mentioned you were at the Potala Palace and Norbulingka. These are very significant places, the regular palace and the summer palace of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. You also mentioned the Samye Monastery.

Can you tell us about what you observed from the people there in terms of overt devotion in Tibetan Buddhist practices? What was happening on the ground? Were people professing this freedom of religion that is ostensibly in the Chinese constitution or not? What did it seem like to you?

Mr. Dominic Barton: This is, again, just my observation for the honourable member to then interpret because you probably have much deeper experience.

What I saw in the Potala Palace and Norbulingka while we were there was there were pilgrims who were in the facilities. You saw very old people, really old people, and very young children. While we were there, they were touring around.

One of the questions we had been asked by the Tibetan experts in Canada was whether they are able to make donations, or is it coming from the party type of thing. There was money everywhere. People were making donations in all sorts of different places. It looked normal. It was very crowded in some of the areas we walked through. It felt like that was happening.

The second point I would make, especially with that person on the poverty alleviation program, is I want to tell you an impression. We were there doing the interview with him on his main floor. It has pictures of Mao Zedong, red books for all sorts of different awards.

We went up to the second floor, which they really didn't want us to, and that's where we saw this Buddhist shrine. What I would say is on the surface people may say, “Look, I'm following what the government's doing,” but the religious belief and the commitment I felt is deep. It's there.

One of the things I worry about acting up in the way-off future is when the Dalai Lama passes we need to be prepared for the emo-

tion and the commitment to this. I felt like it's there. That's my impression.

Mr. Arif Virani: Let's talk a bit about that. Let's talk about His Holiness and the middle-way approach.

You saw the motion here. You voiced your support for that motion for restarting that dialogue.

How do we get that across the finish line so that it isn't this intimidating idea, but rather it's something where Canada plays a constructive role to advance the middle-way understanding of it and promote that Sino-Tibetan dialogue, which was once occurring, and then just came to a standstill about seven or eight years ago?

I'd like your thoughts on that.

Mr. Dominic Barton: First of all, I think we should keep pushing for dialogue, and looking for this common ground, because a lot of elements in that I think are what's already existing in the Chinese constitution about what is in an autonomous region.

I think there's a lot of fear, obviously, on the Chinese side that there is going to be exposure to all sorts of issues, and they're going to get all sorts of backlash. There's a trust level of how that has to happen.

I would argue that we should make sure that these discussions are done privately and not in the public space. That would be a disaster, and I don't think it would happen, but if it was private, it would work.

I look at what's happening—I have no comment on how it worked or whatever—in the discussions going on between the Vatican and the government, which have gone through various different stages. I guess let's keep trying. Let's show that we're going to tell the truth, and call things out as we see them, but we're trying to get at—

Mr. Arif Virani: I just have a minute left here, Ambassador. I want to get one more question in, which is this point about we're desperately hoping that this isn't your only visit, that there are future visits in this issue of reciprocal access. How do we as parliamentarians facilitate that with you?

I have always been taken by the fact that there are lots of grandiose claims about the development and the progress that has been taking place in the TAR and elsewhere. If that's true, ostensibly the Chinese should have nothing to hide.

How do we get to that stage where future visits occur, including potentially maybe future parliamentary delegations visiting either inside the TAR or those ethnically Tibetan areas among those nine prefectures? Do you have any thoughts on that?

• (1945)

Mr. Dominic Barton: Yes. I think we have to keep pushing for that. I think the ambassador visits are actually one start, the first one, obviously. They were very careful about not publicizing it or instrumentalizing it. They wanted to be careful we weren't doing the same thing so you build trust.

There were a group of journalists who went around the end of October. There are two very good articles to read about their observations, again, limited.

That's a good start. I think what we're encouraging is let's have more ambassadors go. It shouldn't be selective. Let everyone go. Then be more precise. You look for this versus that. Go to the rural areas. Go to rural schools.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Virani.

Mr. Arif Virani: Thank you very much, Ambassador.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Bergeron, you have the floor for two minutes and 30 seconds.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Two minutes and 30 seconds, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Yes. I'm following the order adopted by the committee.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Yes, but we have started a second round.

The Chair: It's the next round. Then I'll start again.

Is that okay?

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Okay.

The Chair: Go ahead, please.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Okay then.

Excellency, I would like to come back to the answer that you were unable to complete about the Chinese authorities' claim to be able to appoint the people to represent various religions.

You mentioned the fact that Beijing actually did want to appoint Catholic priests instead of the Vatican, which led to negotiations between the Vatican and the authorities of the People's Republic of China.

Since there is this precedent where the negotiations seemed to be positive between the Vatican and the authorities of the People's Republic of China, do you see a glimmer of hope in finding a solution for the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama?

[*English*]

Mr. Dominic Barton: Mr. Chair, again, I was using the example to show that there are other dialogues that actually occur. That should be something that could give us some hope that we could have more dialogues in that way. I think it's critical that people are able to do it.

There's something I'm very proud of here, by they way. I think it was Ambassador Mulrone who put it in place. We have a very big Catholic service here in the embassy every Sunday. There's a kind of encouragement of that.

I think the issue is that we need to make sure there are small steps of trust, if you will. That's why I think it needs to be done privately and quietly, but I think we should be pushing for it. As was said before, if it is as good as they say, let more people see it. We're not suggesting that the Tibet Autonomous Region become a separate country. It fits within the system. Let's figure out how we get the dialogue moving. I think small steps can be made to build trust.

Hopefully, as in the case with the Vatican... Again, I'm not familiar with the details of those conversations; all I know is that

they're happening. I hope that leads to something that's constructive for both sides, other things too.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you very much, Mr. Bergeron.

[*English*]

Now it's Mr. Harris for two and a half minutes, please.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Chair.

At the end of this discussion, on behalf of the Tibetan people, I want to encourage this improvement and the attempts to increase that dialogue as much as possible. I know that the Tibetan people are very concerned about that and are looking forward to reconciliation.

I want to touch on one thing while we have you here. I think you're familiar with the trade agreement with China called the TPPA, the trade promotion and protection agreement. We talked in this committee about Chinese influence in Canada in some ways, but also about the involvement in actions in Canada, buying energy, interest in minerals and other activities.

Can you tell us whether or not the TPPA is important to China? Has it ever been raised with you as a concern of theirs that it might not be followed? Is it something that you think they rely on in terms of their relationship with Canada and their interest in developing in Canada?

• (1950)

Mr. Dominic Barton: Mr. Chair, I think the issue about investment in countries is a critical one. The thing that I think they look at in particular is the Investment Canada Act. Again, I don't know if I'm getting at the honourable member's core question, but that's the core element: What is the process by which investments will be screened and allowed? I think there's a concern because of what they're seeing in other parts of the world, from their point of view and where it is. I think that the Investment Canada Act and where it is provides a lot of provision for being able to check on the security side and making sure that we're not putting ourselves in a vulnerable position on that front.

To me, the core of where they're—

Mr. Jack Harris: I appreciate that this would be a concern of yours, but my question more specifically is whether the TPPA has ever been raised by the Chinese officials with you as something that they would insist upon in particular circumstances.

Mr. Dominic Barton: Honourable member, I'm not sure I'm going to be able to answer. I need to follow up with you. Do you mean the CPTPP, the trade agreement?

Mr. Jack Harris: Yes, the trade agreement that has been called very one-sided in China's favour, as you know.

Mr. Dominic Barton: Let me get back to you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ambassador.

Thank you, Mr. Harris.

[Translation]

We continue with Mr. Paul-Hus for five minutes.

Mr. Paul-Hus, you have the floor.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Ambassador, in my first question, I would like to come back to the conditions of detention of the two Michaels.

You contacted them. However, do you have any information on the conditions of detention? I have a report in Mandarin, which I had translated, of course. It provides a lot of details on the conditions of each one. At the time of the report, we knew that Michael Spavor is in Dandong and Michael Kovrig is closer to Beijing. Do you have access to detailed information on their conditions of detention?

[English]

Mr. Dominic Barton: Mr Chair, I couldn't hear anything in the first part, but I think the member asking about the conditions of the two Michaels.

The Chair: Your Excellency, I'll ask.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul-Hus, I have stopped the clock and I'm going to ask you to ask your question again, please.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Okay, Mr. Chair.

I want to know whether you have any details about the detention of the two Michaels. I have a report written in Mandarin that gives a lot of information on the conditions of detention. I am told that Michael Spavor is apparently detained in Dandong, and Michael Kovrig, south of Beijing. I want to know whether you really have a lot of information or very little.

[English]

Mr. Dominic Barton: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Again, I'm somewhat limited by what I can say on the details due to the Privacy Act, but as you saw in that report, Michael Spavor is in Dandong, which is near the North Korean border, and Michael Kovrig is in Beijing, about 15 to 20 kilometres from the embassy.

They're in different detention centres, and they're with different numbers of people. That's all I'm really going to say. I'll just say again that they're both physically well and they're mentally well, which I think is quite inspiring given the conditions they're in.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: That's fine, thank you, Mr. Ambassador.

On November 17, I asked Shawn Steil from Global Affairs Canada a question. I wanted to know whether any protective equipment against COVID-19 had been purchased by Canada in China and whether that equipment had been manufactured in labour camps in Tibet or in Xinjiang.

Can you confirm this or were you consulted? Are you aware of this?

• (1955)

[English]

Mr. Dominic Barton: Mr. Chair, as you know, Canada has purchased a lot of PPE from China. We are obviously very committed to the protection of human rights and not having forced labour in there. We made it very clear in the process of the supplier selection that the integrity of the supply chain—in other words, there cannot be any forced labour in that—is essential to what happens. Other countries are also dealing with this. We've had many conversations with the British, the Italians, the Germans and the French about how we can ensure that this is the case.

I think it's very difficult to say with 100% predictability where everything is, but all of the standards and the processes have been put in place. We've made that absolutely clear to the suppliers. We've been working with the other countries that are in a very similar situation on that because that's the last thing we want, and everyone knows how important that is to us.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Champagne, told our committee on November 23, 2020, that the China of 2020 is not the China of 2015. Yesterday, Canada's former ambassador to China, David Mulrone, stated that Canada lacks leadership on strategic issues with China. Even Mr. Champagne mentioned in his testimony that we need to keep our eyes open. You are our eyes in China.

What do you need to do differently from the former ambassadors who were there in other years? What is very different for you today?

[English]

Mr. Dominic Barton: I think, as the minister said and I tried to say in my part, the relationship with China is evolving. It's become a tougher, more authoritarian place. That means we have to stand up for more issues of human rights and our interests. Those, by the way, include interests on the economic side and what we do. This standing up is critical.

I don't know what it was like before, but what I would say now is that there's a lot of interaction with the MFA. They get mad at us for what we say, and we get mad. There's a lot of interaction going on as we push for things: visits to Tibet, visits to Xinjiang to see what's actually going on out there, to the other regions where there are Tibetans, and to Inner Mongolia to see what's happening with....

We're out there because we have to be. We have to be very proactive in all those dimensions, and there are many issues.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Paul-Hus.

[English]

We will now go to Mr. Oliphant for five minutes.

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ambassador Barton, thank you for being with us tonight, for your work representing Canada and for being our eyes, as Mr. Paul-Hus just said.

I want to follow up on some of Mr. Genuis' earlier questions and put into the record what Ambassador Rae said, with some follow-up, and then give you a chance to comment.

What Mr. Rae said to the CBC was:

There's no question that there's aspects of what the Chinese are doing that fits into the definition of genocide in the genocide convention.... But that then requires you go through a process of gathering information and of making sure that we've got the evidence that would support that kind of an allegation.

Following that, when Minister Champagne was asked about a comment, he said:

We will stand up [and] we will speak up whenever we feel it is appropriate.... We have done that [in] respect to Xinjiang. We have done that with respect to Hong Kong more recently and we will continue to do so.

Under his leadership, Canada was among 39 UN members who jointly criticized China for its treatment of the Uighurs last month. The countries have also demanded China allow independent investigators to visit Xinjiang and see the situation for themselves.

I have a simple question. Is there any light between you, Ambassador Rae and Minister Champagne?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Zero. That's what I thought I was trying to say.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: I just wanted to make sure that it was clear to everyone.

Now that's out of the way. I want to go to Tibet.

You went on a delegation with representatives of nine countries. You've had discussions with other ambassadors and heads of missions since then. You had discussions before then.

What do you think Canada's role is in leading with respect to the issues around Tibet, or what do you think Canada's role is in following other countries? How do we work together? What is the best situation for Canada to work with Tibet?

• (2000)

Mr. Dominic Barton: As I said, Mr. Chair, I think this engagement with Tibet has to be broad and ongoing. This is one vignette, if you will, a three-day trip there.

I think as Canadians, as an embassy, we should continue to reach out, to be there. We're planning our next round of trips to these other regions where there are a lot of Tibetans, and we actually have engagement there. We'll be going back out there in two months. We need to keep doing that.

The other part of what we're doing is we are convening.... I don't want to exaggerate to make us look like we're the.... We are convening other missions here, particularly for the ones who weren't able to go and who want to go, and we're saying, "Look, if you do go, and we think you should, please ask for this and that." We were able to get the agenda changed from the first trip to the second trip. They didn't see a school, for example. We just have to keep working together to push that.

There's a commitment from the group of like-minded countries to do that so that we work together to try to get more access, not only for other countries here but more broadly. That's on the ground. We can do a lot, and we will take leadership, if you will, to try to pull that through.

I think the other area is what your committee recommended in your motion, that we are encouraging of this dialogue. Again, I think there are probably diplomatic ways to try to get that moving, but that's a very important issue. I think it has some urgency to it, as I mentioned before.

Many people ask, "Why are you even saying anything, given that you guys are in the doghouse?" I think that doesn't matter. We will always stand up for what we feel and where we are, no matter what the case is.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: That's exactly what I was going to ask you. Is being in the doghouse limiting us in any way from standing up and speaking out about human rights, civil rights and political rights?

Mr. Dominic Barton: It's not. I can tell you it's not very pleasant. What I have learned in this role is that you play the shock absorber if people get mad. That's okay, though. That's what we do. We cannot be held back on that side. They know we're going to be consistent.

Again, on Xinjiang, on Hong Kong, on Tibet and on global issues, we will have a voice. We're a G7 country. We're an important country that needs to be listened to, no matter what it is, and we'll keep talking.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Thank you, Ambassador.

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

We'll start over here with the six-minute round.

Mr. Genuis, you have six minutes, please.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order before I start my round of questioning. I had received a note from the clerk suggesting that you had agreed to 15 minutes after the ambassador's testimony to consider our motion. I certainly don't want to interrupt the questions for the ambassador, but I do want to get the assurance that we will have that time at the end to move the motion.

The Chair: I don't think I have the authority to do that on behalf of the committee. I'm certainly happy to have the discussion. I'm available for that time. It's up to the committee, obviously, whether it goes on for that length of time.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Colleagues, could I get a quick signal check from everybody else? It's important for us to move this motion. I don't want to disrupt people's final half-hour with the ambassador. It shouldn't take more than 10 minutes. Is there consensus to allow me to do that?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Fragiskatos, on the same point of order.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I will otherwise move the motion now, which I'm entitled to do. I want to work in a collaborative way. I've given notice of this motion and we need to move the motion, but I would rather do it at the end of the ambassador's testimony, if there's agreement to do that.

The Chair: Mr. Fragiskatos, on the same point of order.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I was just looking for clarification and to hear other colleagues' thoughts on that.

The Chair: Thank you. Does anyone else have a comment?

Mr. Harris, please.

Mr. Jack Harris: I would agree as long as it's limited to 10 minutes or so.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Is there anyone else?

Mr. Oliphant.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: I was going to say the same. I was still not clear whether it was 10 minutes before 8:30 or 10 minutes after 8:30. I am prepared to go 10 minutes after 8:30, but at that point, I would ask that the chair ask for unanimous consent to continue. If we have 10 minutes after 8:30, that would be okay.

• (2005)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I'm very happy to proceed in that fashion.

The Chair: All right.

You're on, Mr. Genuis. Your time is 10 minutes, please.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to my colleagues for that.

Just to follow on Mr. Oliphant's comment on the issue of Uighurs, I would observe, at least from my perspective, that the song may be the same but the tone is quite different between our different ambassadors. I do appreciate that Mr. Oliphant has wished to clarify that the government has not yet recognized that the treatment of the Uighurs constitutes a genocide.

Ambassador, do you think there is any reasonable likelihood that China would agree to admit independent investigators to assess the situation?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Mr. Chair, I think we should be pushing for it. I don't know whether they're going to be allowing it.

I understand your concern about this, honourable member, because we want to have a very independent view of it. We should continue, I think, putting the pressure on to get that. These reports have to be very worrying to people. I think we should continue to pile on the pressure to do this.

I think it's going to take others too. The UN has to really push for this again.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: If you look at Tibet and Xinjiang, we haven't had independent observers assessing the situation in 50 years, so yes, let's keep pushing for this. But Professor Irwin Cotler, a former Liberal minister, has testified before another committee that Canada has a responsibility to protect. That responsibility to protect is evoked even when there is credible evidence short of cer-

tainty, but credible evidence, to suggest genocide. We have a responsibility to protect. We can ask for investigators, but our responsibility to protect under the convention is triggered.

Do you believe that Canada has a responsibility to protect in international law vis-à-vis Uighurs?

Mr. Dominic Barton: I think what Canada needs to do is push for access to be able to get the evidence and needs to be asking, "Why are you not allowing us to do this? If you're not concerned about it or you think that these reports are false, let us in, or let the appropriate?"—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Ambassador, I understand, and you have said this. Mine, however, was a specific question. Do you—does the Government of Canada—believe that Canada has a responsibility in international law to protect the Uighurs?

Mr. Dominic Barton: My view is that when there are human rights issues that concern us as, for example, in what's being reported to be happening in Xinjiang with the Uighurs, we need to be pushing as hard as we possibly can to get the investigation and the independent reporting done in order to be able to see what is happening. We need to get—

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Ambassador. I think the question has been asked and responded to, so let's proceed.

Does the Government of Canada support the belt and road initiative?

Mr. Dominic Barton: We don't have a view of supporting or not the belt and road initiative. What we want to make sure is that investments that are being made are following ESG standards when they are made, that there is no pressure put on various countries and so forth. The governance of the way in which this is done is very important.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Is that happening in practice, though? Are we seeing, in your view, examples of this pressure?

Mr. Dominic Barton: It would be good to talk to experts about what those various projects look like in various countries. I don't have that expertise in relation to what has happened in central parts of Asia or in Africa.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It sounds as though what you're saying is that the Government of Canada does not have a position on BRI. It doesn't have a position to support, doesn't have a position to be concerned; it's basically totally agnostic on the matter.

Is that a fair synopsis of what you're stating is the government's position?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Yes. I think it's looking at what is happening on a case-by-case basis. We're not members of the belt and road initiative. We don't have a port being set up that way under those auspices.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Ambassador, we're not members of the BRI, but we are members of the AIIB. Hundreds of millions of Canadian tax dollars have gone into that, and of course, people on maybe the government side of the debate like to suggest that there is some distinction, but the AIIB exists to achieve the same strategic objectives as the BRI. Isn't that correct?

• (2010)

Mr. Dominic Barton: It's not correct; I don't believe that.

I think our position with AIIB is very deliberate. It's a multilateral organization with multilateral governance. We're one of 12 board members in it. I think our involvement in it is quite important, because we can ensure that the right ESG standards...that there is no suasion there. It's a very good governance approach, with others.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Ambassador, I completely disagree with you on that, but I'd like to get one more follow-up question in just briefly, on the issue of Purdue.

You've referred to McKinsey's statement. McKinsey actually issued an apology relating to its role in OxyContin promotion. You had been leading McKinsey at the time. Do you agree with that apology? Do you wish to apologize yourself? What are your reflections and response to that apology?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Mr. Chair, what I would say on that is, the member should read the statement in full. He's reading a very small part of what that statement was about, and I don't think that's a very fair representation.

I would encourage you to speak to the McKinsey leadership in terms of what's happening on that front, to get the full picture, but you're just parsing it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: It was reported—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

Thank you, Your Excellency.

We'll now go to Mr. Fragiskatos for six minutes, please.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I promise to stay on the topic at hand entirely here, unlike some who have decided to waver off in different directions. Let's put it that way. I'll also be giving a few minutes to Mr. Zuberi, who is joining us tonight, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Barton, this question is similar to one that was posed by Mr. Virani earlier, but I want to ask it in a different light.

It's often the case that—and I am not just talking about Canada in specific terms here—liberal democracies will take an interest in a particular issue at a particular moment. It could be the case that the government of the day has an interest in that issue. It could be the case that an ambassador has a particular interest in that issue, and there could be all sorts of other variables that explain why a matter has become a subject of concern for a country.

My question is, how do we maintain an interest in Tibet? What will you do to continue to work on this issue?

I don't want it to be the case that we look 10 years down the road and there is no continued engagement. I wonder what you could say to that. Will you continue to work on this matter?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Mr. Chair, I very much will be continuing to work on it. In fact, I would say that it's due to the work of previous ambassadors and governments that we actually got this visit. Since 2015 we've been asking for it. I've only been here for a year

and a few months, so it's due to the hard work of others and pushing for this before, which we continue. To me, it's passing the baton, if you will.

I happen to be here to be able to do that visit, and we just need to keep pushing that. I think it's actually been very consistent from what I can see. I read all the reports of what has been done on various different TAR trips and in the other provinces where there are Tibetan populations. It's a very consistent, deliberate approach, so I think we have been doing that.

I fully agree with your point. We have to continue to do that irrespective of any changes that are going on. I think it will help with China to know that this is a consistent view. This is not depending on the government of the day or the ambassador who happens to be here; it is core. I definitely feel that.

Again, as I said, I've benefited from work that's been done before. It was those continual pushes to say, "We want to go. We want to be there. We need to see it." We'll continue to broaden and build that.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much.

In your earlier testimony, when I asked you a question about the sorts of issues that you've been putting forward as an ambassador of a middle-power country, I was quite intrigued by the response. You said that there are things to put on the table as an ambassador, learning from the experience of Canada and applying that as part of the way to engage.

Which critical issues do you think Canada can exert itself on in light of our own experience in this country so that we can be most helpful to those in Tibet?

• (2015)

Mr. Dominic Barton: I think there are a lot of areas, and I won't be able to be as comprehensive as I should be.

Some things that stand out, again, are that we are multicultural. If I think again about Quebec and the role and the importance of French, we are truly a bilingual country, and it's important. That is something that people look at and respect, I think, a great deal.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you.

Mr. Dominic Barton: I don't think our treatment of the aboriginal people is something we're proud of at all. It was done very badly, and I think we should have some humility when we talk about it. That's why I'm saying that even with moving people from regions, how much choice did they actually have? What are the schools like?

We come from a place of knowing how that part was not done well. I think we need to have some humility on that side, to say that we do not want to do what happened there. I think there is quite some force to that.

Those are just two of probably many elements.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Ambassador. I really don't want to interrupt; you're on a line of thinking that I find extremely interesting. Mr. Zuberi did ask for some of my time, however, so I'll give the rest of the time to him.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): I want to thank Peter for that.

Ambassador Barton, thank you for being with us and for your very important work around Tibet. Thanks also for continuing to engage with the region. We hope to hear more from you in the future.

I'm going to shift gears for a moment and pick up on what some of my colleagues in this committee have touched upon, which is about the Uighur people.

First, allusion was made to one of our parliamentary subcommittees having come to a determination that there is an unfolding genocide within the Uighur Autonomous Region, Xinjiang. We found, after hearing two full days of expert testimony, that between one million and three million people are being subjected to what China says are re-education camps but what we found are concentration camps.

You said that there's no daylight between you and Bob Rae, which we know. The question is, would you—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Zuberi. I appreciate Mr. Fragiskatos' kindness in giving you some time—not quite enough, perhaps, for the question.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: No worries; that's fine.

The Chair: Thank you for joining us.

I'm sorry about that.

[*Translation*]

We will now continue with Mr. Bergeron for six minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Perhaps I could allow the ambassador to address this question first.

It was my intention to ask His Excellency if he had heard anything about the subcommittee's report recognizing what is happening in Xinjiang as genocide and whether he had also heard about the petition tabled in the House of Commons on October 6, asking the Canadian government to apply the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act, known as the Sergei Magnitsky Law, to the corrupt leaders responsible for the persecutions in China.

[*English*]

Mr. Dominic Barton: On the Xinjiang side, I've looked at the reports you are putting forward. I also said that we're very concerned with the reports that are coming out from Xinjiang, whether on forced labour, detention or concentration-type camps. We're calling consistently on China to allow access to independent people in order to understand what is happening.

That's the message we're pushing and are following, under the guidance of the minister. I think pushing for this through every international organization we can and through doing it ourselves in communication with the Chinese officials is essential. It's about getting access to be able to understand exactly what is happening. That's what we are pushing.

On the Magnitsky proposal, I know there have been some motions in the Senate and broadly in Parliament on it. I would very much concur with what the minister said, that we look at the full

range of policy options. The important thing, however, is that we do things in a coordinated manner, that we coordinate with the like-minded to be able to have the impact we need.

From my own personal point of view, voice is important, and standing up for things is critical, but having influence is another aspect that we have to look at. What are we going to be able to actually change in the behaviours?

I don't know whether I'm getting at your question.

● (2020)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: First, I would like to thank you. Some of my colleagues have thanked you several times for being with us tonight, but there's a 12-hour time difference, so you're with us very early in the morning. We very much appreciate it.

I'd like to ask you a very simple question. As you understand it, does the national security law apply only to the situation in Hong Kong or does it apply throughout the People's Republic of China?

[*English*]

Mr. Dominic Barton: Mr. Chair, on the national security law, obviously the main concern we have is that it is being applied in Hong Kong without any discussion or formal process within Hong Kong, which contravenes the one country, two systems principle in the Sino-British Joint Declaration, which was signed in 1984. It breaks an agreement, and as a country that needs to work in a global rules-based system; it needs to follow the agreements that it has signed.

What's particularly concerning is that article 55, I think it is, allows the security people on the mainland to go into Hong Kong to arrest people or detain people. That's what's particularly concerning. Already on the mainland, in all of the provinces and autonomous regions, there is a national security law. That's not different. I think the concern is that it is being applied to Hong Kong. It's also the way in which it was put in place, which is what we find concerning and what we've registered multiple times.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I appreciate this clarification. I think it is very timely in the context of Hong Kong.

I was asking this question because it can lead to excesses—so to speak—in other parts of China, including Tibet. Could that worry you? We see it, for example, in Xinjiang. We might wonder whether there is differential treatment of religious minorities in China, such as the Uyghurs, Falun Gong and Buddhists, or whether we can expect similar treatment for other religious minorities, such as the Buddhists in Tibet, for example.

[*English*]

Mr. Dominic Barton: Mr. Chair, it's a great question.

I would say that is already happening, I think. That system whereby the security can come into whatever religious group or rights group or whatever...they can do that already in the system, so that's part of how it feels as though China is changing. The ability to do that is already there. What we're concerned about is it shifting to Hong Kong.

The Chair: Thank you, Ambassador.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much, Mr. Bergeron.

[*English*]

Now it's Mr. Harris for six minutes, please.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you, Chair.

If I can return, Mr. Barton, to the question that I raised regarding what I call the trade deal, it's actually the Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement. I perhaps confused you. This is the agreement that was signed with China in 2014, and it's been criticized and analyzed by experts to suggest that it was very one-sided in favour of China. There's plenty of secrecy about how it operates, and also it's something that can't be changed or that you can't get out of for over 30 years.

My question was whether or not you have encountered any discussions with Chinese officials or whether it's been brought to your attention that this is a significant protection for the Chinese state-owned enterprises or others seeking to invest in Canada that prevents Canada from changing the rules and gives opportunity for China to sue the Canadian government for any changes that might affect its profitability or investment. That's the agreement I'm talking about, and my question is whether that has been brought to your attention by Chinese officials in relation to any matter.

● (2025)

Mr. Dominic Barton: Thank you, honourable member, for the clarification.

Those issues have not been brought to my attention by the Chinese. The issues that they have brought to us—and they've brought them to us in Beijing and also in Ottawa—are around what the process is. Shawn Steil might want to comment on that. They feel that the way decisions are made is a bit of a black box. We know that a number of different agencies are involved in that, but what is the process for that? What's the mood in Canada for investment? We've been getting the questions more along those lines rather than on any specific act, if you will. It's the process and the mood for it that they are looking to.

I don't know if I'm getting at your—

Mr. Jack Harris: I hear what you're saying. They obviously would want to understand that, because that's a place at which investments could be prevented and, in particular, takeovers, mergers or amalgamations could be interfered with. Once the investment is there, though, the protection is found in the Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement. My question was whether that's ever been brought to your attention by them as a protection for them, and you've answered no, so I understand that.

Let me raise another question that I think concerns a lot of Canadians. We've seen in the case of Robert Schellenberg the change of his sentence. Coincident with or shortly after the time frame in which Mr. Kovrig and Mr. Spavor were arrested, his sentence was changed from a term of imprisonment to death. Since then, we have also had, of course, Mr. Fan Wei and two Canadians who, in August, were sentenced to death as well.

I know that the death penalty is used in China, perhaps more than in any other country. What efforts are being made by you as ambassador and by Canada to seek to commute the death sentences of all of the Canadians who are sentenced to death in China?

Mr. Dominic Barton: Mr. Chair, we make regular representation to the MFA to seek clemency. We are against the death penalty everywhere in the world. This is focused not just on China; it's for Canadian citizens, and we feel very strongly about it. We regularly mention specifically the names you have mentioned.

I have actually visited Robert Schellenberg on a number of occasions, and I would just say again that what he's going through and how he's handling things is quite remarkable. I can't meet everyone who is in that system, but I've met two on that side. We have regular consular access, and we have had access even...because they weren't national security cases before.

We raise it regularly and strongly. We also talk about this with other missions that are here too, because people are concerned about that. Australia is an example. There are also other countries that are concerned. We raise it regularly and quite forcefully.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you for doing that.

Many people in Canada are also opposed to the death penalty in principle as a moral and human rights issue. Is there anything that Canadians, whether they're members of Parliament or individuals, can do to advance that cause with Chinese officials? I know many, many years ago, AI and other organizations were promoting ending the death penalty. Is that something you would encourage those who feel strongly about it to write to Chinese officials to express their concern, in not only these cases but also others?

● (2030)

Mr. Dominic Barton: It very much is. I think it's very important to be consistent and loud about it, and also to say that this is not targeted at China but is what we believe more broadly, and we engage everywhere with it and that's what we want and what we expect.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Harris.

Mr. Jack Harris: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ambassador. On behalf of all of my colleagues on the committee, I will say that we very much appreciate your getting up very early in the morning in Beijing to join us. We wish you a good morning. Thank you so much.

Now, Mr. Genuis, I believe you have a motion you'd like to move.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to my colleagues and the ambassador as well.

I will read the motion. I think it is fairly self-explanatory in light of the context, so I won't take up the limited time we have for discussion defending it. I think the context and the importance of it are self-evident and that it fits into one of our existing upcoming plans.

The motion is as follows:

That, as part of its study on national security, the Committee examine the national security implications of the National Research Council's COVID-19 vaccine collaboration with CanSino Biologics, and invite the following witnesses to appear during the week of December 14, 2020, provided that all parties agree to extend the ability of committees to meet in a hybrid format:

- a) The Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness;
- b) Representatives from CanSino Biologics;
- c) David Vigneault, Director of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS);
- d) Iain Stewart, President of the National Research Council; and any other witnesses the Committee deems necessary and report its findings to the House.

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

Mr. Harris.

Mr. Jack Harris: I propose an amendment to the motion, Chair, in line three, after the word “appear”, to delete the words “during the week of December 14, 2020”.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Jack Harris: If I may speak to that briefly, I have no objection to the study. We are undertaking a study of national security, and part of our ongoing study should be examining the implications of that collaboration. We're concerned about that.

However, I don't think we ought to violate the break that's coming up. In the non-hybrid world, it's unheard of to have committees meet once the House rises for the winter break. People head home to their constituencies. They do work. They prepare for events with their constituents and for the Christmas season or whatever season they celebrate. I don't think it's that urgent that we do that.

I would suggest that we not do that next week. I have no objections to the motion as such, but there's no urgency for us to deal with that next week.

The Chair: Thank you. Are there any comments or debate on Mr. Harris's proposed amendment?

Mr. Fragiskatos, go ahead on Mr. Harris's motion to amend.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: It's not a comment on Mr. Harris's motion. It is more a question for Mr. Genuis. Can I put it that way?

The Chair: We should deal with Mr. Harris's amendment first. I'm looking for debate on Mr. Harris's amendment, and then we should vote on that, then debate the main motion as amended or not, and then vote on that.

Mr. Genuis, do you have something on this?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, I'm willing to accept the amendment if it is the price of consensus and if it facilitates our adoption of the rest of the motion. I would favour moving forward as quickly as we can on this, but I do understand Mr. Harris's argument. If that will get us to where we need to go, then we're happy to support it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Oliphant.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: For procedure, I think it's fine to work on the amendment first, which I think is a good idea. The amendment is helpful, but I want to say that even if I vote for the amendment, that doesn't mean I would vote for the amended motion, because I

think there would still need to be a substantive discussion about where that discussion should best take place and whether our committee is the best place or NSICOP is the best place—

• (2035)

The Chair: But you're not talking about the motion as amended.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Yes, the problem is, I want to make it clear. The mover of an amendment could be disappointed if we vote for his amendment or her amendment and then we don't vote for the amended motion. I want to say that yes, I think we could support the amendment to move on to the substantive motion. I don't want to get his hopes up that it means we actually like it.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Jack Harris: I left my mike on so I could laugh.

The Chair: We'll vote on the motion to amend.

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: Does anyone wish to speak to the motion as amended?

Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I would ask Mr. Genuis to explain the rationale here, why this committee is the committee to hear this out.

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, it's up to you whether you wish to respond.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: This is the Canada-China committee. It's an issue of Canada-China relations, and it fits squarely within our national security study, which we've already agreed to. I think we're developing expertise on issues of Canada-China relations, especially in our upcoming study as it relates to security. Clearly there are a few committees that I suppose could touch on the subject matter in general terms, but this fits very well with what we're studying.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Bergeron, you have the floor.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Regardless of the substance, Mr. Chair, you will not be surprised to hear me say—and I think Mr. Genuis will not be surprised either, because it has been mentioned several times—that I do not appreciate this way of always presenting us with surprise motions at the last minute, which hold the work of our committee hostage. It happens at this committee. It also happens at the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development. It does not allow us to have any continuity of action. I still hope that, because of this message, Mr. Genuis will stop using this approach of always leaving us with a fait accompli, having to deal with a motion that we did not see coming, that comes out of left field, or in this case, perhaps more out of right field, and that derails the work.

I would suggest to Mr. Genuis that, based on his own argument, we begin our work on security. I am simply suggesting that this point be raised and that we continue our work as planned, that is, once we have completed our study of our interim report on Hong Kong, we begin our study on security, an issue that is not without interest or importance.

I just want to point out to my colleagues that, if we continually submit to the practice of being presented with surprise motions as a fait accompli, there will be no end to it. Let's continue our work, period.

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

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris: Mr. Chair, on a point of order, is that a motion Mr. Bergeron to table the motion?

The Chair: I may have misunderstood.

Madam Clerk, is that a motion to table?

• (2040)

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Marie-France Lafleur): I did not hear any specific motion. Maybe Mr. Bergeron would like to specify.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Bergeron.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: No, I was simply expressing my point of view. If Mr. Genuis wants to withdraw his motion, fine, otherwise I have indicated how I will vote.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*English*]

I have Mr. Fragiskatos and Mr. Oliphant, but try to be brief.

Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I think Mr. Bergeron makes a very good point. I'll leave it there.

The Chair: Mr. Oliphant.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: I think Mr. Bergeron has made a very good point that this should be incorporated into our national security study. It should be looked at in the full range of what we are doing in terms of national security, so I would now move to adjourn debate.

The Chair: Adjourn debate? Okay.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: The clerk can advise on that, but it's a non-debatable motion.

The Chair: Somehow when you said "adjourn", I thought you said "meeting".

Madam Clerk, would you take the vote please?

The Clerk: Absolutely. The vote is on the motion to adjourn the debate.

Mr. John Williamson: I have a point of order.

The Chair: We're now in a vote, John. I'm sorry.

Mr. John Williamson: What does the vote mean?

The Chair: The vote is to adjourn the debate.

Mr. John Williamson: Then do we vote on the motion?

The Chair: No. I think we have to adjourn the meeting. It's effectively the same thing, I guess.

Please carry on.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Jack Harris: Chair?

The Chair: Mr. Harris.

Mr. Jack Harris: I want to ask one question. Could we delay the deadline of Friday for the witnesses for the foreign influence study until next Friday, the 18th?

The Chair: Please raise your hand if you object to that.

Mr. Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong: That's fine.

I just have a quick point before you adjourn.

The Chair: Okay. You're the last to speak, and then I'll adjourn.

Hon. Michael Chong: I know that we've adjourned debate on the motion, but I hope we can invite these witnesses, as suggested by Mr. Genuis, during our national security study when we come back at the end of January or early February.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Hon. Michael Chong: I see a nod from Mr. Oliphant.

The Chair: We'll look forward to more discussion on this.

I wish you all a merry Christmas and a happy Hanukkah. Please be safe. Take care of yourselves.

Mr. John Williamson: Yes, and a happy 2021.

The Chair: Especially that, John. Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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