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Special Committee on Canada-China Relations

Monday, November 16, 2020

• (1850)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number five of the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations. Pursuant to the motion adopted on Wednesday, September 23, 2020, the committee is meeting on a study of Canada-China relations.

[Translation]

Today's meeting is in hybrid format, pursuant to the motion adopted by the House on September 23, 2020. The meeting is also televised and will be available on the House of Commons website.

[English]

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would 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. If you are participating by video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself.

For the benefit of witnesses—the minister would know this—if one of the members is asking you questions, you don't have to wait for me to introduce you or recognize you at that point, but at some point I will cut it off when their time is up.

[Translation]

As a reminder, all interventions by members of the committee and witnesses must be directed through the chair. Please speak slowly and clearly.

[English]

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

I would now like to welcome the Minister for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, the Honourable Marco Mendicino. We also have with us Natasha Kim, associate assistant deputy minister, strategic and program policy; as well as Dr. Nicole Giles, associate assistant deputy minister, operations.

Thank you all for being here. We will now go to the minister for his opening remarks.

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[Translation]

Good evening, everyone.

[English]

It is an honour to be with you all today. Thank you as well, Mr. Chair, for dispensing with the introductions of my two colleagues, Dr. Giles and associate assistant deputy minister Natasha Kim.

Let me begin with the substance of my remarks, and then I'll be happy to take questions from our colleagues on the committee.

Canada remains deeply concerned about the imposition of the new national security law on Hong Kong, including recent developments in the legislative council. This country shares many close ties with Hong Kong, and we continue to stand with the people of Hong Kong.

[Translation]

Canada remains deeply concerned about the imposition of the new National Security Law on Hong Kong, including recent developments in the legislative council. This country shares many close ties with Hong Kong, and we continue to stand with the people there.

[English]

Accordingly, as Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, I continue to work with all of my cabinet colleagues, and indeed all members of the House, especially Minister Champagne, to address the situation and coordinate any responses we may consider.

We have recently announced our new levels plan for the next three years, which will continue to attract the best and the brightest from around the world to help accelerate our economic recovery and drive Canada's prosperity going forward.

Over the course of Canada's history, immigration has helped us not only to grow but also to create jobs. In fact, one in three businesses with employees in Canada is owned by an immigrant.

As we've fought back against this pandemic, Canadians have been grateful for the service and sacrifices made by newcomers, who have played an outsized role in our response. A third of health professionals in key roles, like family doctors and pharmacists, come from abroad.

As we look to recovery and building the workforce that Canada needs for a prosperous future, we will continue to look for highly skilled people from around the world. In this context, I recently announced a number of measures for students and youth from Hong Kong, as well as a number of enhancements to Canada's existing immigration programs, which remain available to those living in Hong Kong and can provide pathways to settling in Canada.

There are three areas that I would like to highlight. First, we will seek to attract recent Hong Kong graduates and workers with the skills that we need to support our economy today and going forward. Second, we will prioritize existing immigration routes for family members, students and workers. Third, we have introduced several targeted measures to enhance the protections that are offered by our asylum system.

In totality, these measures support the objectives of our new levels plan as we seek to attract the world's best and brightest.

[*Translation*]

These measures support the objectives of our new levels plan, as we seek to attract the world's best and brightest.

[*English*]

To attract Hong Kongers from abroad, we are going to fast-track work permits for those with recent graduate experience who wish to come to Canada to work or continue their studies. This will allow recent graduates in Hong Kong to apply for an expedited open work permit valid for up to three years. Eligible applicants must have graduated from a recognized Canadian or overseas post-secondary learning institution in the last five years. If approved, their spouse or partner, as well as their children, will also be eligible to apply for a study or work permit.

Of course, we don't just want them to work or study in Canada temporarily. We also want them to consider staying on, which is why we will create two new permanent resident pathways under this initiative. I will highlight them now.

The first stream is open to Hong Kong residents in Canada who have graduated from a recognized Canadian learning institution in the last three years, having completed at least 50% of their courses in Canada. The second stream will apply to Hong Kong residents who are in Canada and who have graduated with a degree from a Canadian learning institution or a recognized post-secondary learning institution abroad in the last five years, and who have one year of full-time work experience in Canada within the last three years.

Once eligible under the three-year open work permit, Hong Kongers may then qualify under stream one or two or other existing PR programs. These measures represent an exciting opportunity to welcome Hong Kongers who can help to build our country going forward. We plan to welcome the first eligible applicants under this program in early 2021.

• (1855)

[*Translation*]

These measures represent an exciting opportunity to welcome Hong Kongers who can help to build our country going forward.

We plan to welcome the first recent graduates under this program in early 2021.

[*English*]

Foreign nationals, including Hong Kong residents in Canada, continue to have access to our asylum system. All eligible asylum claimants are afforded due process and the opportunity to make their case for needing Canada's protection. In addition, due to changing conditions in Hong Kong that could put some individuals at greater risk, we have implemented an exemption to the 12-month bar on a pre-removal risk assessment, or PRRA, for Hong Kong nationals. Under normal circumstances, individuals who received a negative decision on their refugee claim or on a previous PRRA application would not be eligible to apply for a PRRA for at least 12 months.

Hong Kong residents at risk of persecution who have fled to another country may also be eligible under Canada's existing resettlement programs, including the private sponsorship of refugees program and the government-assisted refugees program.

Canada supports the right to peaceful protest, freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. Taking part in peaceful protests is not considered an offence in Canada. As such, arrests or convictions outside of Canada for taking part in peaceful protests are not grounds for inadmissibility to Canada. No one will be disqualified from making a legitimate asylum claim in Canada by virtue alone of having been charged under the new national security law, and neither will they be hindered in any way from availing themselves under any other immigration route.

As you know, the Prime Minister has committed to a whole-of-government response to China's national security law in Hong Kong. The measures I recently announced complement measures the government previously announced. By introducing new immigration measures that also complement the efforts of our international partners, as well as building on our existing programs and pathways, we are providing options and opportunities for Hong Kong residents that are going to support Canada's economic growth and prosperity.

[*Translation*]

By introducing new immigration measures that also complement those of our international partners, as well as building on our existing programs and pathways, we are providing options and opportunities for Hong Kong residents that support Canada's economic growth.

[*English*]

We will continue to support the many connections and ties between Canada and the people of Hong Kong.

Thank you for asking me to join you today. I will be very happy to take your questions.

[*Translation*]

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

We'll now begin our first round of questions, with Ms. Dancho for six minutes, please.

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for your remarks.

Minister, you've emphasized a number of times that Canada remains gravely concerned about the situation in Hong Kong. What, specifically, are your grave concerns?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Well, the many developments we have seen in Hong Kong, including the passage of the national security law, which we have condemned, as well as the most recent development involving the expulsion of four democratically elected legislators in Hong Kong.... It is against that backdrop that we have taken strong measures, including the suspension of our extradition treaty as well as the announcement last week—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Okay, great. I'll just add to some of your comments there.

As you know, the world has witnessed a live stream video of the brutal response to pro-democracy demonstrations in Hong Kong by the Hong Kong Police Force, which has been accused of widespread human rights abuses by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch since the 2014 umbrella movement. We also know that Chinese Communist troops of the People's Liberation Army are stationed in Hong Kong and are prepared to suppress any dissent.

Are you planning to prohibit any members of the Hong Kong Police Force and the People's Liberation Army from immigrating to Canada under your new immigration announcement perimeters or otherwise?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: As I said, Ms. Dancho, we have taken the step of introducing a policy that is aimed at inviting an opportunity for young Hong Kongers, but we've also aligned two policies to enhance protections in our asylum system. I have made it abundantly—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: For sure, but I'm wondering if you're going to purposely exclude or prohibit the individuals who are responsible for these actions from coming to Canada.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I was just in the process of emphasizing the inadmissibility requirements. I've also made it clear that we have a rigorous process when it comes to screening.

However, no one will be disqualified by virtue of being charged under the national security law alone or for committing any conduct that is not recognized under Canadian criminal law.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I appreciate that, Minister, but I think the recent national media reports regarding Operation Fox Hunt and the

like would possibly disagree with the rigour that is applied to some of the immigrants who are coming to Canada.

We know that because of the Communist Party of China, individuals representing this party in Canada have been engaged in vigorous campaigns of intimidation, threats and coercion against pro-democracy Chinese Canadians, and Chinese and Hong Kong nationals living in Canada.

We know that one of the few ways they can get into the country is through your immigration department. Therefore, have you cancelled, denied or revoked any immigration visas, such as temporary resident visas, permanent resident visas or others, for any individuals known to be unauthorized agents of the Chinese Communist Party engaged in these tactics of intimidation on Canadian soil?

• (1900)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I just want to be clear right off the top, Ms. Dancho. As you well know, any effort to undermine our national security through political interference or through espionage is absolutely unacceptable. We have a robust public safety apparatus that seeks to—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Have you revoked any immigration—

The Chair: Order, Ms. Dancho. The practice generally is that you allow the person answering to have at least as much time as the question.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): On a point of order, Mr. Chair, with respect, that's not our rule and that hasn't been our practice. The member asking the questions has a right to control the time, and it's up to the public to judge whether the minister is answering and whether the time is—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

I'm sure Ms. Dancho will want to ensure that the minister has an opportunity to give his response and not want to interrupt.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Mr. Chair, I assume this point of order isn't taking away from my precious time.

The Chair: No, it's not.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I'm paused at three minutes and 12 seconds, so I assume that's where we can start off again.

On that point of order, to my colleague's point, I believe that was during the Parliament for five months following its being essentially shut down in March. Before that, the time was the questioner's. I just want to confirm that's the case.

The Chair: Please proceed, Ms. Dancho.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Okay, thank you very much.

Minister, just to confirm, you can't say if you've revoked any visas for these intimidation tactics by the Communist Party of China on Canadian soil.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I was in the process of giving you the broader context of what our response is to threats to national security, including through espionage. I want to make it clear that we have a public safety apparatus that actively investigates all of them. We take appropriate actions where necessary, and it would not be appropriate for me to comment on any investigation.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I'll just leave a comment to that. It doesn't seem to be working—any tactics that your department is using—based on the national news we're hearing of what's happening to Chinese Canadians on Canadian soil.

However, moving on, Minister, as you are well aware, there are thousands of pro-democracy activists in Hong Kong who are not residents of Hong Kong. They risk arrest and imprisonment if they try to flee Hong Kong. Your announcement doesn't really do anything for these individuals. What is your plan to support them, and do you have a plan?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Respectfully, I dispute that assertion. Canada has a robust asylum system. We have been recognized by the United Nations for two years in a row for the work we do to uphold human rights.

In addition to that, the policy announcement, Ms. Dancho—as I've now clarified on a couple of occasions—does add additional protections. It doesn't only address foreign nationals from Hong Kong; it addresses other individuals who may be active in this area and ensures that they are not disqualified by alone being charged under the national security law.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: As a specific example, I think we are all familiar with Grandma Wong. Alexandra Wong is a 64-year-old retiree who was arrested and detained for simply waving a British flag at a protest. She was subsequently detained by the Chinese communist government for weeks, and later put under essentially house arrest for a year.

Recently, she was reported as saying that it's too late for an older woman like her to get out of Hong Kong and start a new life elsewhere, for example in Canada. Do you agree with her, Minister, that Canada's doors are closed to a person like her?

In addition to that, I should point out that your announcement on Friday doesn't really do anything to support older pro-democracy activists and those without the financial means to attend post-secondary education. Is that correct?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Again, I dispute that intention, Ms. Dancho. We've created a number of pathways, which we are actively promoting, including the ability to reunite with family members here. With regard to anyone who is engaged in peaceful protests, as I've said, they would not be disqualified from making a legitimate asylum claim.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Respectfully, Minister, the family reunification streams are two to three years backlogged. We'd be looking at a parents and grandparents lottery, for example, that wouldn't open up until next year, and then if they won that lottery and their application was approved, they wouldn't be able to come to Canada for another two years. So again, your announcement doesn't—

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Ms. Dancho—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dancho. That concludes your six minutes.

Thank you, Minister.

We'll go on now to Ms. Yip, for six minutes.

Go ahead, please.

Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): I want to thank you, Minister, for coming to the Canada-China committee. It's good to see you.

I'd like to ask you more about the details surrounding the plan you have put forth to help the people of Hong Kong. You mentioned in your opening remarks that there are specific measures for students and young people looking to resettle in Canada. Can you elaborate for us on exactly why these are for students and young people and not for others who have also supported protests but may not have the work experience or the education?

• (1905)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you very much, Ms. Yip. And it is nice to see you as well.

I would just begin by saying that this is an announcement that builds on our immigration plan, which I tabled a little more than two weeks ago. That immigration plan is very much focused on meeting the needs of our economy, including in some very important sectors like our health care sector, where we have doctors and nurses and pharmacists who have been working around the clock. We believe that through the initiative announced last week, we will be able to tap into the skills, experience and talent that exist in Hong Kong to provide a flexible work permit, and then we hope they will make the transition to a fast-tracked permanent residency through one of the two streams.

I believe this is a real opportunity. We hope there will be young Hong Kongers who will want to come to Canada to contribute. This initiative is also in keeping with the long-standing people-to-people ties between Canada and the people of Hong Kong.

Ms. Jean Yip: Given the recent news about the political interference of foreign actors, are you concerned about the safety of these students coming to Canada?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Well, as I've said, Ms. Yip, we have very rigorous admissibility screening to ensure that the immigration system operates with integrity so that the public has confidence. I would point out that the OECD and other organizations have consistently recognized that Canada has one of the best immigration systems in the world, if not the best, when it comes to integration. As far as international students are concerned, we have a program that is a significant net contributor to our economy, by over \$21 billion a year.

I will say that in recent months, we have seen an increase in the number of applicants from Hong Kong, which is why I think our announcement last week is well timed.

Ms. Jean Yip: I believe that Canada is a popular destination for Hong Kong students.

You've been mandated by the Prime Minister to implement a new stream specifically for human rights advocates, journalists and humanitarian workers at risk, with a target of helping resettle as many as 250 people a year. The majority of people who would become candidates for the new measures just announced would also presumably fall into the category of individuals served by the human rights defenders stream. Can you elaborate for us on how that stream is progressing and explain why the new streams are important?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you very much, Ms. Yip. I'm pleased to report to the members of the committee that the implementation of that stream is on track, and we certainly hope to have it put to ground by 2021. I think the part it is important to underline for you and all of our colleagues is that this is a stream that builds on Canada's record of having a robust asylum system that ensures that people's human rights are upheld, and I look forward to having more to say about that in the very near future.

Ms. Jean Yip: In your opening statement, you also mentioned that nobody will be hindered by their pro-democracy activities. What measures is Canada taking to ensure that these activists do not have visa or asylum applications rejected for some overly broad interpretation of the national security law?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: As I said, we have an asylum system that is revered around the world. That asylum system ensures that people get due process. The claims made by those seeking safe harbour in Canada, who are fleeing persecution, war or conflict, are adjudicated by the Immigration and Refugee Board. That is a tribunal that operates independently from government. It ensures that there are fair hearings and that the claims are adjudicated on their merits.

As well, we have a number of branches that are implicated in the important work of doing all the admissibility screening to really uphold the high degree of integrity and confidence in our immigration and asylum system.

Ms. Jean Yip: The consul general in Hong Kong joined us last month. He talked about the immigration section of their office being one of the largest that we have anywhere in the world. They're currently processing files for our missions for other parts of the world that are unable to do the work because of COVID—for example, countries in Africa and South Asia. He mentioned that they have a lot of capacity on the ground.

If there are only 60 people working in the immigration section processing those files, not just for Hong Kong and Macau, but also those places I mentioned, is there enough capacity at the Hong Kong consulate to handle the increase in applications under the new measures?

• (1910)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: The first thing I want to do is commend the consul general and indeed all staff at our office in Hong Kong.

You are quite right. They have been stepping up and have been performing in an extraordinary period time to ensure that people are able to move across international borders and are able to access their papers. That has been one of the contributing factors in the way in which we have seen safe and orderly immigration continue in Canada.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Ms. Yip.

Ms. Jean Yip: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: I'll now give the floor to Mr. Bergeron for six minutes.

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

Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. Personally, I'm very happy you're here. As you probably know, we began this segment of our study on Hong Kong with a sense of urgency, given the application of the National Security Law in Hong Kong. This law means that democracy advocates in Hong Kong are now at risk and are looking for ways, if necessary, to find refuge somewhere.

The plan you announced fills a gap that had been identified. The British have put in place a number of measures to welcome people from Hong Kong who were present at the time of the handover. This excludes all the young people who were obviously not born at the time of the handover, who cannot take advantage of these mechanisms that have been put in place to find refuge in the United Kingdom.

By the Prime Minister's own admission, the measures aimed at welcoming young and qualified nationals from Hong Kong are not humanitarian measures, since they leave out many young people who are not necessarily qualified or, as our colleague said earlier, perhaps slightly older defenders of democracy.

What do you have in mind for these younger or older people who aren't currently covered by the measures that you've just told us about?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: First of all, I'd like to thank my colleague for his question.

[*English*]

We have introduced a number of pathways that will facilitate family reunification. I was mentioning earlier to Ms. Dancho that there are COVID-era rules that allow for visitors to come and visit immediate and broadened family members in Canada. We also have a number of existing permanent residency pathways through both the parent and grandparent programs, as well as other initiatives that are there to reunite families across a broad range of ages.

But you're quite right. The announcement last week was tailored to young Hong Kongers and recent graduates to meet the needs of our economy today.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Minister, I understand from your answer that there are measures to allow family reunification, but that, strictly speaking, apart from the refugee protection claim process, there are not yet any specific measures for younger people who are not necessarily graduates, who are still studying and who have demonstrated, or older people who have taken part in demonstrations.

In relation to that, you said in your presentation that participation in peaceful demonstrations is not considered an offence in Canada. The problem with the National Security Law is that people who participate in demonstrations are being charged with crimes that exist in Canada, such as sedition.

Would someone who took part in a pro-democracy demonstration and was charged with sedition, a recognized crime in Canada, still be admissible in Canada?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you for asking that very important question.

[*English*]

With regard to screening people for inadmissibility, I'll just underline again that no one will be deemed ineligible just because they have been charged under the national security law passed by China or if they have not committed anything considered a crime under Canadian law.

I would say that any claims that are made by someone seeking asylum in Canada will be adjudicated on their merits by the Immigration and Refugee Board, which, of course, as I mentioned earlier, is an independent tribunal.

• (1915)

[*Translation*]

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

You'll understand that I'm very concerned about the statement that participation in political demonstrations is not considered an offence in Canada.

I'm concerned about the enforcement of certain convictions, for sedition, for instance. I imagine holding a referendum isn't considered an offence in Canada. However, President Puigdemont of Catalonia was refused entry to Canada because he was charged with sedition and convicted by the Spanish government for organizing a referendum. I'm concerned that democracy advocates in Hong Kong, given such a sedition conviction, may also be denied access to Canada.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I understand the distinction, Mr. Bergeron.

[*English*]

I would simply say that we have well-established principles for determining who may and who may not be admissible when seeking asylum, and those principles are there to ensure the integrity of

our asylum system as well as the safety and security of the Canadian people. I think the vast majority of Canadians will understand that as long as you have not committed what is considered a crime under Canadian law, then you will be eligible to make a claim in our asylum system, which will be adjudicated by our independent tribunal.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Do I have a little bit of time left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: It would be an insult to the minister to ask him to answer a question in five seconds, so I'll yield the floor to the next person, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you.

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

[*English*]

Now we have Ms. Kwan for six minutes.

Go ahead, please, Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister.

I'd like to just build on that last question. Hong Kong police have reportedly been instigating violence during the Hong Kong protests, and there are no guarantees of any actual merit to charges laid for rioting, which may be considered a crime in Canada.

Can the minister confirm that the Hong Kong protesters who were arrested or facing charges for rioting or illegal assembly prior to the passage of the national security law will not be deemed inadmissible?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I understand the finer point you're putting on the question, Ms. Kwan, and, again, I appreciate it. I would simply reiterate the principle that no one will be deemed inadmissible simply because they have been charged under the national security law or if they have not committed what would be considered a crime under Canadian law. Those are well-established principles. They have served us well.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I realize that those are the talking points of the minister, but I just want to bring to the minister's attention that according to Hong Kong Watch, around 10,000 Hong Kong protesters had been arrested prior to the passage of the national security law, and approximately 40% of those were students. Right now, as I understand it, about 400 of those have been charged with rioting. I'm very worried about whether or not those individuals would actually qualify and be able to apply for asylum and would not be deemed inadmissible. I ask the minister to consider this and to make the necessary changes to ensure that Hong Kongers actually get the support they need. The answer the minister provided does not provide clarity at all.

The government says that it supports the people of Hong Kong, yet in the minister's announcement last week there were no refugee measures for those who are still in Hong Kong who fear persecution because of their participation in pro-democracy protests and rallies. So why did the minister not provide any refugee measures for these pro-democracy asylum seekers? Is it because of the threats made by the Chinese ambassador?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Ms. Kwan, we make decisions that are in the best interests of Canada, and with respect I would say that the two policies that I announced are there to enhance the protections for those who have simply exercised their rights—including peaceful protesters—which will not be a bar. Those were concerns expressed by the community. Those concerns are reflected in the two policies that were part of our announcement last week.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Well, the measures are very limiting. As the minister knows, groups like Canada-Hong Kong Link, Toronto Association for Democracy in China, and Alliance Canada Hong Kong are pointing out that there are many who are under imminent risk of political persecution but who do not qualify under the new stream. So will the minister initiate a special refugee measure for the people who are currently located in Hong Kong and do not qualify under the new measures?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: As I said, Ms. Kwan, and I think you know, Canada's work on the international stage when it comes to granting asylum is second to none. We have been recognized by the United Nations and others. The immigration plan that I tabled more than two weeks ago ensures that there are additional allocations for refugees—and we will continue to show leadership in this area—in addition to the two policy enhancements that were announced last week.

• (1920)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Surely the minister must recognize that the people in Hong Kong right now can't get to Canada to apply for asylum. That is the problem. So if you do not create a special refugee stream, they cannot access it. I'm going to leave it at that. I know the minister is reciting talking points, but I think he knows what I'm talking about. Again, I urge the minister to consider bringing in special refugee measures for the people who are in Hong Kong right now.

The minister also knows that the family reunification stream applies to spouses, partners and dependent children. Parent and grandparent reunification is subject to the luck of the draw. Will the minister expand the scope of family reunification to include extended family members such as siblings, aunts, uncles and cousins?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Just before I answer that, very quickly, I will say that notwithstanding COVID-era travel restrictions, which are necessary for the security of Canadians, we are still resettling the most urgent cases. My colleague Ms. Kwan knows that.

In addition to that, we have announced 40,000 allocated spots under the parent and grandparent program. That is the most in any two-year period, and we will certainly look forward to the processing of those applications to reunite more families than ever.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Canada used to have an immigration stream that allowed for siblings to sponsor one another to come to Canada.

By the way, that's how my family came from Hong Kong. My aunt sponsored me.

Will the minister consider bringing back a program like that to allow for siblings and other extended family members to sponsor their loved ones to come to Canada?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Let me just pause to say that I'm glad she did sponsor you.

I will say that it has never been easier for families to reunite. We have put an additional emphasis on processing sponsorship applications to demonstrate our commitment to family reunification, and, notwithstanding the challenges of COVID-19, we are making progress. We've added resources. We're leveraging technology. From where we were in March to where we are now, we have made progress.

However, Ms. Kwan, I acknowledge that there is still more work to be done.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I hope the minister will do more than what has been announced, because as everyone has heard, the program that the minister has announced is particularly limiting. Some of the youth, by the way, who are facing potential arrest, have not completed their high school and so they would not qualify. Some of them are not students.

Will the minister consider bringing in additional measures to really support the people of Hong Kong who have been left out by these things?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Ms. Kwan, in addition to our plan, we've announced this initiative that I think is a way in which we can expand opportunities. It speaks to the opportunities that you described.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Ms. Kwan.

Now we'll go to the second round.

I believe it's Ms. Dancho, for five minutes this time.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, you just said something interesting. You said, "it has never been easier for families to reunite." I'm wondering if the protesters outside of your office might disagree with that.

Anyway, Minister, you've also said repeatedly during this committee today, and also previously, that no one will be prohibited from claiming asylum or applying to any other immigration program solely by virtue of having been charged under China's national security law. We know that there are only a few dozen people who have been charged under the national security law, but over 10,000 were arrested and 2,000 charged for protesting, which many believe is politically motivated from the Communist Party of China.

Will those charged under other protest-related charges, excluding the national security law, be permitted to come to Canada, as per your announcement last week?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Again, I think we're going over covered ground, Ms. Dancho.

There are principles that are well in place that ensure no one will be disqualified from making a claim to our asylum system if they have not been charged, as well as a much broader set of conduct where one may be exercising their right to protest but that does not amount to a crime known to Canadian law. With respect to—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: On that exact point, Minister, that's my next question.

Protesters in Hong Kong have been charged, for example, with rioting, unlawful assembly and uttering seditious words. All three of these laws are laws in Canada. As a result, and as per your remarks just now, will these protesters be denied entry into Canada?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Ms. Dancho, all I can do, again, is reiterate what the principle is. It is not for me to adjudicate that admissibility screening. That is a function that is performed, as you would well expect, by our public safety branch, and so—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I understand, but you know the rules. Those are Canadian laws as well. Would they not be permitted? Would they not be allowed in Canada, then, just under what you've just said? You know the rules, so....

• (1925)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Ms. Dancho, I do know the rules, and I have been explaining them on a number of occasions now. They will be applied very rigorously by our public safety branch to protect the safety and security of the Canadian people.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: All right. Well, we'll just go on.

I've heard from many pro-democracy activists here in Canada that a number of activists on the front lines in Hong Kong, following an arrest and participating in protests, often have their travel documents taken from them by the Chinese communist security forces. Grandma Wong is an example of this. There are many others. What is your plan to help those without travel documents, or those who are barred from leaving Hong Kong and China, to get to Canada, to safety?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: First, I would just point out, as you heard me say earlier in answer to Ms. Yip, that our consul general and all of our staff at the office in Hong Kong stand at the ready.

In addition to that, under our modernized system, we have an electronic travel authorization that can be obtained literally in minutes, which is one way in which people will be able to move from Hong Kong back to Canada if they are eligible under one of the existing pathways, or under the initiative that I announced last week.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: All right. Hong Kongers with no family in Canada, though, cannot get to Canada to apply for asylum right now, due to the COVID-19 travel restrictions, obviously. They need documents to travel here, and tourism is of course forbidden, so are you planning to allow NGOs, for example, to provide travel documents to people stuck in Hong Kong, just like you did, for example, for gay Iranians and Chechens in years past?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Well, thank you for highlighting ways in which we have demonstrated leadership on the world stage when it comes to upholding human rights—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Are you going to do that now?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: As I was just about to say, Ms. Dancho, we work very closely with our international partners. It will come as no surprise to you that even the UNHCR and the IOM, which are some of our primary referral agencies, have also experienced disruptions because of COVID. Notwithstanding that, we are resettling the most urgent cases.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: All right.

I just want to go back a bit to the family reunification, particularly grandparents and parents, since you did mention that as an option for Hong Kong residents to bring their parents and grandparents here. I want to summarize for the committee what exactly that means.

They need to wait to apply till sometime late in 2021, when the lottery opens again, since it just closed about a month ago. Then they need to win that lottery. Then they need to submit a complete application and hope that they still have access to their travel documents—which I also just talked about—and then they need to wait two years-plus for the application to be processed. So really, your announcement is saying that we hope they can get here by 2023-24. Is that correct?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: No, it's not correct. In fact, anybody from—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: So you're saying you're going to expedite parents and grandparents specifically for Hong Kong.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: No. I was about to try to answer the first part of your question, Ms. Dancho.

It's not correct. In fact, Hong Kong residents were eligible to apply under the parent and grandparent program.

Quite honestly, Ms. Dancho, the record of this government in reuniting families stands in sharp contrast to the last time the Conservatives were in government.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Sure, sure. Right.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: We've made tremendous progress on backlogs. We will continue to make more going forward.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: That's enough talking points. Thank you.

Chair, is that my time?

The Chair: Yes, your time is up. Thank you very much.

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

Ms. Lenore Zann (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to committee, Minister.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: It's nice to see you.

Ms. Lenore Zann: It's nice to see you as well.

Nova Scotia has a total of 13 universities and post-secondary institutions, two of which are in my riding of Cumberland—Colchester. There are many Chinese students who come to Nova Scotia to study, particularly at Dalhousie's agricultural campus here in Truro, so I'm glad to see measures announced that will provide ways for young students from Hong Kong to have the option of remaining in Canada and, I would say, preferably here in Nova Scotia.

Quite a few international students also make the choice to use the post-graduate study permit as a pathway to permanent residency, and we know that international students are excellent candidates for settlement in Canada because of their education. Can you please elaborate on what specifically is being done for the students of Hong Kong?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you very much, and thank you for being such a tireless advocate for the international student program. It is a great benefit not only to Nova Scotia but right across the country. You've heard me say that it contributes over \$21.6 billion each year.

We were able to recently revive the international student pathway, in partnership with Nova Scotia and all of our provincial and territorial colleagues, in a way that ensures there is safe and orderly immigration, and I know that a number of schools have been approved in Nova Scotia. Hopefully, we will see those students continue to contribute not only to our economy but richly to our communities.

With regard to last week's announcement, as I mentioned, the great advantage of this announcement is that it creates flexibility. It encourages those from Hong Kong who have recently graduated to take advantage of an open three-year work permit. Once here, if they fall under one of the two streams that I explained in my remarks, they are able to apply for a permanent residency and then become more quickly integrated. This is important because of the needs of our economy, whether it's in health or, increasingly, in the tech sector. We believe that we have a real advantage here, and that's what this announcement hopes to make progress on.

• (1930)

Ms. Lenore Zann: I think that's fantastic.

Here, in Truro, Nova Scotia, when I was growing up there were really only three families who were Chinese. Now we have many young women, young girls, including my niece, who are from China, and they grew up together in the system and had each other to fall back on. They have integrated so well and they are very welcome. More Chinese people are welcome here. We love seeing

them. Many of them are working and it's really fantastic. We also celebrate the Chinese new year and have lots of festivities like that, which is good for Nova Scotians who are not used to Chinese customs as well.

Your department did unveil a very ambitious and, I would say, historic levels plan to make room for higher target numbers of newcomers into the country, which we obviously need because we are an aging society. Here in Nova Scotia we are definitely aging and we need immigrants.

In my books, immigration has always been the right choice, and having more people in Canada will strengthen our communities. Can you explain how these measures for residents of Hong Kong actually fit into your levels plan?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: They will contribute to our meeting the bold levels we have set out in the plan. They come at a moment in time when we want to accelerate our economic recovery and create jobs.

I will take this opportunity to emphasize that immigration does create economic growth. It does create more jobs. That's how, we believe, this initiative we have announced will help us meet our important economic needs when it comes to our health care sector. We talk about how our doctors, nurses and support workers are working around the clock. As we confront a second wave, they need a second shift. This is where immigration can really contribute and how we can align the skill sets that exist abroad with those within our borders.

I've also taken the opportunity, in conjunction with our plan, to point out that we have domestic temporary immigration in Canada. I think most Canadians understand that when immigrants are rolling up their sleeves and are helping to contribute to our response to COVID-19, that really does allow us an opportunity to consider accelerating their pathway to becoming Canadians. That will be good for all of us in the long run.

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

Ms. Lenore Zann: I had another one, but no worries; that's fine.

Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: That's four minutes and 55 seconds, so you really don't have time for a question. I'm sorry.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bergeron, you have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Minister, as a former minister myself, I feel a certain empathy for what you are going through with us and some of our colleagues tonight. I always assume that ministers are motivated by the best of intentions to do what is in the best interests of the public.

So thank you for everything you have put in place so far. I understand that there may still be some elements that need to be developed. I know that you will reflect on them in light of the discussions we've had this evening, and eventually announce new measures to Canadians. I hope that we will also be able to make proposals to you for complementary measures that will effectively enable democracy advocates in Hong Kong to find refuge in Canada.

I want to come back to the appearance of the Canadian Consul General in Hong Kong. He told us that we must always plan ahead and make plans for all kinds of events. When we asked him specifically if he had plans in place to eventually receive a large number of refugees, we understood that this was not the case and that he could not presume a government decision.

I'd like to ask you, since you're with us today. As the saying goes, we'll get the answer straight from the horse's mouth.

For your part, have you put something in place to eventually allow the Canadian Consulate General in Hong Kong to plan for the arrival of a large number of refugee protection claims?

• (1935)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Bergeron, I'd first like to thank you for your support as a former minister. I was touched by your comment.

[*English*]

They are performing exceptionally well under very challenging circumstances. As I have also mentioned in the past, the Canadians who are there enjoy a right of return, and we will facilitate that whenever they wish.

Of course, as I have said, we are very grateful to our consul general in Hong Kong for all the work they are doing on the ground there to ensure that we can facilitate the travel of people from Hong Kong to Canada.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We will now go to Ms. Kwan for two minutes and 30 seconds.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

If I could just turn to this issue for a second, the government's website states, "Hong Kong residents at risk of persecution who have fled to another country may also be eligible under Canada's existing resettlement programs, including the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program and the Government-Assisted Refugees Program."

Does that include the Five Eyes countries? Also, since private sponsorships must have a refugee status determination, how would they be eligible under this stream?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Ms. Kwan, thank you for highlighting an alternative route by which one may make a claim.

This work, in particular in this alternative route that you've just identified, is done in conjunction with those countries, as well as with our international partners.

The important point is that, as I have said, notwithstanding the challenges of COVID, we have still been able to resettle the most

urgent cases, and that will occur as well in these alternate routes where necessary.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Sorry, the minister didn't answer my questions.

Would the people of Hong Kong be considered as the most urgent cases?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Every one of those cases will be assessed on its merits, and we have established a precedent whereby we prioritize situations where individuals are at greater risk. As I said, each one will be determined on the unique facts and circumstances of the case.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: How will people be able to get their refugee status determination?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: First, we will work with our international partners, including the UNHCR and IOM, for referrals. Where there are very exigent circumstances, we will prioritize those cases, as we have.

In cases where individuals file claims, they will be adjudicated by the Immigration and Refugee Board—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: So they would need the UNHCR designation. Does that include the Five Eyes countries?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Again, Ms. Kwan, we will work with our international partners, and on occasion we will work with other partners as well.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I wish I could just get a straight-up answer, Minister; it's not a difficult question, really.

I'm going to move on, though.

Of the pathways the minister highlighted, the second pathway is for those who have graduated from post-secondary institutions in Canada, and the first stream is for people who have received a year of authorized work experience in Canada. That means they must be here in Canada already. There are really no programs for students who are abroad in Hong Kong right now.

The Chair: Thank you. I'm afraid that's all the time we have for Ms. Kwan.

Now we're on to Mr. Chong for five minutes.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Thank you, Minister, for appearing.

My first question is, should Canadians living in Hong Kong leave Hong Kong?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Those are decisions that will be taken by Canadians who are there.

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay, so you're not urging them to leave Hong Kong.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I'm saying that those decisions will be taken by Canadians in Hong Kong.

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay. Thank you.

We know, and the government knows, that China is conducting covert and subversive influence operations here in Canada and in other democracies, some of which involve the monitoring and direction of Chinese students on visas.

Minister, you said earlier in your appearance in front of our committee that Canada has a rigorous screening system for approving visas for students studying here in Canada. Several incidents last year in the greater Toronto region belie that assertion, one at the University of Toronto, Scarborough campus, and the other one at McMaster University.

At U of T Scarborough, Chemi Lhamo, a Canadian of Tibetan origin, received death threats from Chinese visa students studying at U of T Scarborough, simply for being elected as U of T Scarborough student president, causing her to worry about her safety and prompting the University of Toronto to take measures to protect her.

Have any of those students had their visas revoked?

• (1940)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Chong, I have said before that any effort to undermine national security, through espionage or other interference, is unacceptable, and we do have a public safety apparatus to address that.

With regard to other conduct that may be against the law, as a former prosecutor I would want—

Hon. Michael Chong: I understand that, but have any of those students had their visas revoked for conveying death threats to a woman at the University of Toronto?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Chong, you've heard me reiterate now on a number of occasions that conduct that amounts to espionage or—

Hon. Michael Chong: I know that. I understand that. If you don't know the answer, that's fine.

The Chair: Order.

Hon. Michael Chong: I just want to know if any of those students have had their visas revoked.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Chong, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on any case.

Hon. Michael Chong: Okay. Thank you.

My second question is this. Last year, at McMaster University, the Chinese Students and Scholars Association had its privileges stripped as an official club because its members disrupted a speech at McMaster by Rukiye Turdush, a Uighur Muslim. They threatened her by reporting her to the Chinese consulate on St. George Street in Toronto.

Have any of the students involved with threatening the safety and life of another woman, at McMaster University, had their visas revoked?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Chong, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on any individual case, but I will reiterate the concerns I mentioned before around interference and espionage and breaking the law here in Canada.

Hon. Michael Chong: All individuals leaving Hong Kong face exit controls, and some of those individuals have been denied exit. For example, some of them have had their passports taken away from them.

Is Canada prepared to issue temporary resident permits or other travel documents to those individuals if necessary?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Well, we take every application on its merits, and we determine whether or not they're admissible or eligible under one of the existing immigration routes, including COVID-era, including the announcement last week.

Hon. Michael Chong: But what if they can't leave Hong Kong to get to Canada to make an asylum claim? Is your department, through the consulate in Hong Kong, prepared to issue temporary travel documents to those individuals?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Chong, as I said earlier, the consul general and the staff there are working in very challenging circumstances, but they will facilitate where they can...where eligible and as long as they meet admissibility requirements.

Hon. Michael Chong: I have another related question.

For those individuals who can't leave Hong Kong because they cannot obtain travel documents, or because of other barriers to their exiting Hong Kong, is your department, through the consulate, prepared to allow those individuals to make their claims from Hong Kong?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: We have an established process, and as I have said, notwithstanding the challenges of COVID, we have still found ways to resettle the most urgent cases. As I've said as well, the consul general, along with their staff, will stand at the ready to provide support where they can.

Hon. Michael Chong: I'll just finish with a comment, Mr. Chair.

The minister fails to acknowledge that his announcement last week and the other pathways available don't capture all the situations that Hong Kongers find themselves in. There isn't a great degree of flexibility for those wishing to leave Hong Kong who find themselves in these unique circumstances as a result of the imposition of this draconian national security law.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chong. That concludes your time.

Now we have Mr. Oliphant for five minutes.

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

I want to thank the minister, as well, for his graciousness.

We know that under the rules of committees, there are two things: the requirement of a witness to answer questions, and, quoting from Mr. Bosc in the manual, it says very clearly that members are also “urged to display the ‘appropriate courtesy and fairness’”, which I think has been missing from time to time in this meeting.

That being said, there was an intimation by one of the members of the committee that people who are accused of or guilty of human rights abuses would be allowed to come into Canada. My understanding, first of all, is that it is not the responsibility of the Minister of Immigration to do security checks. That is the responsibility of the public safety department.

However, is there any credible understanding that you will be allowing people into this country who do not pass security checks?

• (1945)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: No, and thank you for the question, Mr. Oliphant.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: I just wanted to make sure that it was clear on the record that this government has no intention of allowing anybody into the country who has broken a law or is a security risk to Canada. Thank you.

I want to get into the last part of the announcement, which has to do with PRRAs. I will confess that, as a member of Parliament, PRRAs are one of those horrible things to understand that I have to deal with quite regularly.

I want to unpack a little bit what this really means. If someone, somehow, has made a claim for asylum and the IRB makes a decision that denies it, normally we do a risk assessment, as a government. That is done to see whether that person can return home. I understand that now you will be able to have more latitude with respect to PRRAs and that they will be able to reapply to stay in Canada longer while their situation is determined.

Could you explain that a bit to us?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: First, I commend you for doing your homework on what is a very esoteric part of immigration law, Mr. Oliphant.

In short form, the protection that we introduced last week will waive the usual one-year period that a failed asylum claimant from Hong Kong would have to wait until filing an application for a pre-removal risk assessment. In practical terms, what this means is that without having to wait that period, if they are a failed asylum claimant, they may have another chance to stay in Canada as a result of the assessment.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Just to live up to my reputation of not always being nice to my own government, I do want to ask you whether the IRB has or will have sufficient resources to actually undertake the work that could be required if Hong Kong citizens are seeking asylum in Canada. Do you have the resources to actually get the IRB to be able to work? I know they've had to retool for COVID, but, tell us, do you have the money?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Well, certainly we have invested, under our government's border enforcement strategy, significant funds to ensure that the Immigration and Refugee Board can meet the capacity. I will say that I believe we have the capacity to meet the de-

mand, and we would like to ensure that there are more resources going forward, in addition to the plan that I filed.

We also look to continue to show world leadership when it comes to resettling refugees. As I said, Mr. Oliphant, the United Nations has recognized our role in this space for two years now, and I know that it's in large part because of the generosity and the compassion shown by Canadians.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Would you appreciate it if this committee actually recommended that you have the resources to ensure the IRB can meet the possible demands of this difficult situation for Hong Kongers seeking asylum in Canada?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I would certainly not turn down the offer of support. Thank you, Mr. Oliphant.

Mr. Robert Oliphant: Thank you.

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

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

Thank you, Minister, for appearing today. I understand your officials will be staying with us for the remaining hour. It was good of you to be with us this evening.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Genuis, go ahead on a point of order.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I wanted to make sure the minister was aware that the committee had requested him for two hours, and I think this committee has other questions, if the minister is able to stay. In any event, I did want to make sure that he was aware of that request and give him the opportunity to stay longer if he wished to.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am certainly open to returning, if the committee sees fit, at a point in time in the future.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

With that, in the second hour, we'll go on to Ms. Dancho, with questions for the officials for six minutes.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the officials for being here today. I know you're working diligently to improve the situation for those in Hong Kong as we are able to within the limitations of the announcement last week. I have a few broad data-related questions that I'm hoping you can answer.

How many eligible Hong Kong residents do you expect to apply for these new economic streams?

• (1950)

Ms. Natasha Kim (Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic and Program Policy, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you for the question, Mr. Chair. I can start with that one, and my colleague Dr. Giles may wish to add to it.

At the moment, I mean, we can't necessarily predict with any certainty what the volumes will be, just because of the current pandemic situation in particular, and certainly with travel, global travel, the way it is. I think there's some likelihood that people may be assessing options at this point in time and deciding how to make their plans. At the moment, we can't predict with any certainty, but the—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I'm sorry. Pardon me for interrupting. Can I specify? Maybe you'd have a better idea. Do you expect the bulk of them to be from Hong Kong, as in currently in Hong Kong now, or do you anticipate that most of them will be just those who are in Canada already?

Ms. Natasha Kim: Given the way the new measures have been designed, Mr. Chair, there are actually both avenues for those who are already in Canada, and we do have some information there. There are approximately 7,000 who hold valid study or work permits, who possibly would be in Canada, although we don't know if they may have left during the last few months. Then there are also streams where Hong Kongers from abroad would be able to apply for that open work permit and in that way be able to come in.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: You're not quite sure, though, how many. There are 7,000 currently in Canada who may be eligible, but you're not sure how many from Hong Kong would be coming. Your department wasn't able to do any modelling to ensure we can take that capacity in, so you don't really know how many would be coming from Hong Kong.

Ms. Natasha Kim: Estimates at this stage would be largely speculation, I would say, just because of the variables at play. One of those variables, as mentioned, is the pandemic situation. The other would be the domestic conditions in Hong Kong.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: How many individuals would you estimate to be excluded from applying to your new economic immigration program because they do not meet the standard restrictions under education, age, financial requirements, etc., which are, again, pretty standard and would be applied to these even in the special stream? Do you know how many would be excluded?

Ms. Natasha Kim: Actually, these would be quite facilitative measures, as the minister outlined, targeted to complement what we already have in terms of many immigration options to come to Canada on both a temporary and a permanent basis. All these would be targeted to recent graduates from Hong Kong. Certainly, they would complement our existing immigration pathway.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Okay.

Do you know how many of the 10,000 invitations to apply to the 2020 parents and grandparents lottery program went to sponsors seeking to bring their Hong Kong-based parents to Canada?

Ms. Natasha Kim: For that question, I may turn to my colleague, Dr. Giles. Because that program was just launched—the notices of interest to apply were received—we may not have those figures at this stage. It may be too recent.

Dr. Nicole Giles (Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just to clarify, we are in the process of validating which of those applications are complete, so we do not yet have any specifics on the application packages themselves.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Can you tell us how many got through the lottery, though?

Dr. Nicole Giles: Not at this point. We're still in the process of doing that work.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Is the department able to commit to tabling that to the committee when it has those numbers? How many were approved under this year's parents and grandparents lottery, and how many were from Hong Kong? Can you commit to tabling that to the committee?

Dr. Nicole Giles: Mr. Chair, if you agree, the department can certainly bring that back if that is of interest to the committee.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Great. Thank you.

Just a little more general.... I believe the immigration website currently says that the spousal sponsorship program is 12 months. Again, this plays into how long it's going to take to get Hong Kong folks to Canada. All the experts we've talked to, particularly immigration lawyers and the like, and the people who have experience, who are in the midst, in the grip of spousal sponsorship, say that 12 months is not accurate.

Do you have a more accurate number for how long the spousal sponsorship wait is?

Dr. Nicole Giles: Mr. Chair, we recognize that family reunification very much remains a priority for us. We have introduced a pilot to digitize spousal applications, which will facilitate the review of these applications and allow our officers, both in Canada and abroad, to process remotely. We've also increased the number of decision-makers on spousal applications by 66% to increase the application assessments more quickly and to reduce the wait times.

We are aiming to process approximately 6,000 spousal applications each month from October to December 2020. Combined with processing to date, this rate will lead to about 49,000 decisions by the end of the year.

• (1955)

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I want to go over something that I spoke about with the minister. Just to summarize, this is the parents and grandparents lottery. There is a lot of interest in this. That's why I keep asking.

This is the process that we understand: They didn't make it into the lottery this fall, and—I'll go quickly, Mr. Chair—they have to apply for the lottery in 2021, win the lottery, submit a complete application, hope they still have the travel documents, wait two years or longer for the application process, and then hope to get to Canada in 2023 or 2024. Is that accurate?

The Chair: I'm sorry; there isn't time for—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Can she just answer briefly?

The Chair: If she can answer yes or no—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I'd love that.

The Chair: I know you would, but I don't want to put her in that position.

Can we have a very brief answer?

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you.

Dr. Nicole Giles: *Grosso modo*, it does seem like the process, correct.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you for being very brief. It's much appreciated.

[*Translation*]

I'll now give the floor to Mr. Dubourg.

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to welcome Ms. Kim and Dr. Giles, who are both associate assistant deputy ministers.

Thank you for being here. This is a very important topic.

The minister's announcement last week contained a certain openness to the idea of streamlining the process. He spoke about the process for graduates, workers, families and refugee protection claimants.

At one point in his speech he said that, under normal circumstances, individuals who received a negative decision on their refugee claim or on a previous PRRA application would not be eligible to apply for a PRRA for at least 12 months.

Why did he need to clarify that?

Ms. Natasha Kim: Thank you for your question. I'll answer it in English.

[*English*]

In terms of the measure—the PRRA bar exemption, as we call it—in the normal course if someone's claim has failed, so they have been found by the IRB or by the Federal Court to be ineligible for asylum, there will be a 12-month period during which they cannot apply for what's called a pre-removal risk assessment.

Given that that country's conditions have changed, the minister announced that there is an exemption to that usual 12-month bar so that those from Hong Kong will now be able to apply for that pre-removal risk assessment. That means, as the minister stated, that practically speaking they cannot be removed. They will have a chance to actually apply for that risk assessment so that before any removal happens, the risks against them can be assessed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Thank you.

I know that Canada's immigration system is very robust and that all checks are done. There's also an element of empathy within that system. As you know, in the case of Zimbabwe and Haiti, for example, the government had put in place measures to support these individuals to facilitate their applications. I also see that in the case of Hong Kong, the minister decided that there would be no fee for applications. In other words, individuals won't have to pay to become Canadian residents.

I'd like to know to what extent you've reviewed these programs to provide assistance to the people of Hong Kong to come and contribute to our economy. I remind you that we have welcomed many Syrians. Today, these people own businesses and drive the economy. This is an invaluable contribution.

Have you tried everything to support Hong Kongers?

• (2000)

[*English*]

Ms. Natasha Kim: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That is a good point. In terms of the measures that were announced by the minister last week, there were a range of measures aimed at not only showing solidarity with Hong Kongers but also highlighting, as the minister did, the economic objectives of our levels plan.

When we look at the measures that were implemented, the waiver of fees for those Hong Kongers who are in Canada and who wish to extend their stay is one that can facilitate their stay here in Canada. The PRRA bar exemption that we just spoke about is another one. The new pathways the minister highlighted—both the open work permit, which is a temporary pathway, and the new permanent residence streams for young Hong Kong graduates—would complement the ones we already have for those who are abroad.

Definitely there are a suite of things being proposed to facilitate things for Hong Kongers, both in Canada and abroad.

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg: Yes, thank you.

[Translation]

I know it's not necessarily an immigration issue, but in all circumstances, it's a security issue. I talked about the robustness of the program. My understanding is that medical examinations and security background checks continue to be part of this. Otherwise, have these measures been relaxed in order to support persecuted people to Hong Kong?

[English]

Ms. Natasha Kim: As the minister stated, we do have an existing framework in place when it comes to both security and admissibility. That won't be changing. As that framework sets out, there are rules around that.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kim.

[Translation]

Thank you very much, Mr. Dubourg.

Mr. Bergeron, you have six minutes.

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

Thank you, Ms. Kim and Dr. Giles, for staying with us at this late hour. We really appreciate it.

As I mentioned to the minister during our last exchange, obviously there are still elements that need to be developed, and I'm convinced that you're working on it. You'll probably get recommendations that you can work on later. However, one element has been raised by my colleagues and myself so far.

While there is great willingness to welcome human rights advocates, journalists and humanitarian workers who would be concerned for their own safety in light of the application of the National Security Law, at this time, there is nothing in place in the department to deal with an extraordinary and unexpected influx of refugee protection claims from Hong Kong. I asked the minister this question just a few moments ago, because the Consul General in Hong Kong was asked this question.

Is work currently being done in government offices to respond to what may become a greater demand from refugee claimants who are not necessarily Canadians, but who actually wish to seek refuge in Canada?

[English]

Ms. Natasha Kim: Thank you for the question.

I'll start by saying that, again, there are many pathways when it comes to Canada's immigration system. For the protection pathways that are available, as highlighted, there are the resettlement pathways. Based on our legal framework, which models the UN convention on refugees, if someone has no other durable solution and has fled their home country, they would be eligible for resettlement, either by referral by the UNHCR or by private sponsors who have agreed to sponsor them. That is Canada's general framework when it comes to the resettlement of refugees.

For the in-Canada asylum process, someone who's in Canada can apply for asylum. Those protections exist here, and that process is there by the IRB, the Immigration and Refugee Board.

In addition to that, the other economic streams, as well as family reunification streams and the new measures that were announced last week, would be there to provide pathways for those who are in Hong Kong to come to Canada as well.

• (2005)

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: All right. However, as I mentioned earlier, by the very admission of the Prime Minister, this measure announced last week does not constitute a humanitarian measure per se. It's more of an economic measure, if I can put it that way.

I was discussing it with the minister; spurred on by a sense of urgency, we decided to undertake this particular study on Hong Kong. I'm concerned that the existing mechanisms are not able to respond to the full range of the claims or situations that may arise in the context of the application of the National Security Law.

With the Consul General, we discussed the situation of a person seeking refuge in Canada who suddenly shows up at the Consulate General. How will they be received? Under the current legislation, will they be granted refugee protection?

Will that person be offered refugee protection or simply refused, risking arrest by the authorities of Hong Kong or the People's Republic of China?

[English]

Ms. Natasha Kim: Mr. Chair, within the existing international framework, when someone is in-country, in general they become the responsibility of their home country. A suite of efforts, both by the international community as well as other states, can be engaged in terms of diplomatic efforts to impact that situation.

From an immigration standpoint, we do not accept asylum claims in missions abroad from those who are still in-country, but our resettlement pathways exist. We work closely with our international partners, such as the UNHCR, to facilitate that.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: The reason we have asked the minister to appear today, and you, in turn, is precisely because we feel we need to go beyond the existing parameters. The Prime Minister recognized this himself. We need to go beyond the existing mechanisms, as they would probably not be able to meet the extraordinary needs that may arise in Hong Kong under the application of the National Security Law.

As parliamentarians, our concern—and I hope you've understood this by now—is to see whether, beyond existing mechanisms, work is being done in government offices to be able to respond to increased demand that does not fit with existing mechanisms.

[English]

Ms. Natasha Kim: In terms of the last comment, certainly there are these measures that are being taken, including the new pathways that were announced, that can have both humanitarian and economic benefits at the same time.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Bergeron.

[English]

Ms. Kwan, you have six minutes, please.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the officials.

My first question is really to try to get some basic information. I wonder if the officials can provide the following information to the committee.

How many Hong Kongers have been granted refugee status in Canada to date since 2019, and how many are in process? What is the average processing time? For those awaiting processing, are they granted an open work permit? What is the wait time for them to get an open work permit? Are there additional resources provided to facilitate expeditious processing of these applications, and if yes, how much?

Dr. Nicole Giles: Thank you very much for the question. I'll try to capture most of those.

In terms of the number of refugee claims that were made in 2019 to 2020, the number is zero. In terms of asylum claims for 2020, we had approximately 30 claims in the system until September 30. While people are waiting for their claims to be processed, they are able to work in Canada, and they also receive other supports.

I'm sorry. Can you please repeat the other questions?

● (2010)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I wonder if I can get the answers to these questions tabled with the committee, so I can get on with other questions, if that's okay. All those other questions will be on the Hansard record.

I'm going to move on to the next questions, if I can.

The government says it will support the 300,000 Canadians who are in Hong Kong right now. There appear to be conflicting reports as to whether or not Canadians abroad have been able to seek consular support. Can the officials advise if the Canadian government has made any effort to check in on Canadians, particularly those who might be active in the pro-democracy movement, to see if they are safe?

Dr. Nicole Giles: Global Affairs Canada is Canada's lead on providing protection to Canadian citizens and permanent residents abroad, but of course, we work very closely with them to provide support services. The consul general in Hong Kong remains ready, and has been providing ongoing passport and citizenship services to our clients. There has been no break in that service being provided, even during the global pandemic.

Until September 30, our IRCC offices in Hong Kong have issued nearly 5,000 passports to Canadian citizens this year. We have also supplied our office in Hong Kong with a large number of emergency travel documents, and mitigation plans are in place to ensure that passport and citizenship services continue to be provided. I understand there's been a significant amount of outreach done to Canadians in Hong Kong to ensure they have the travel documents they require.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Sorry, my question was whether or not the Canadian government has proactively reached out to Canadians who are abroad to see if they are safe—not the other way around, for them to reach out to Canadian officials for consular support. Have we proactively reached out to anyone in Hong Kong?

Dr. Nicole Giles: Throughout the last year, Canada's mission has completed a robust outreach campaign, encouraging Canadian citizens studying, working and living in Hong Kong to ensure they have the correct and valid travel documents. Yes, there's been quite significant outreach to Canadians.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: So, we've reached out to them to see if they have the appropriate travel documents.

Dr. Nicole Giles: That's correct.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Okay. Thank you.

Have we reached out to them to see whether or not they have any safety concerns?

Dr. Nicole Giles: Global Affairs Canada has a lead on providing the protection. I'm not sure about the content of non-immigration-related issues.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I wonder if the officials can try to find that answer from their colleagues in Global Affairs.

The student program is limited to students who have graduated from a post-secondary institution in Canada in the last five years. What happens if you're only in year one of a four-year program? Will they be able to apply after they complete their post-secondary education, and is there a time limit for the program?

Ms. Natasha Kim: Final details on the pathways that have been announced will be available soon. The intent would be that these pathways would be available for a number of years, and there would be a window through which those who are eligible could apply. Those final details will be released when they are available.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: So we won't know until 2021.

Ms. Natasha Kim: The permanent resident pathways are expected in 2021. We're aiming to have the open work permit temporary pathway in place by the end of the year.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I see.

The government website states this:

Hong Kong residents at risk of persecution who have fled to another country may also be eligible under Canada's existing resettlement programs, including the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program and the Government-Assisted Refugees Program.

I asked the minister this question. Does that include the Five Eyes countries?

Ms. Natasha Kim: As the minister stated, each case would be assessed on its merits, and we would follow the legal framework that's in place for Canada, which is based on the international definition, which is grounded in there not being another durable solution available.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: So that means it does not include the Five Eyes countries.

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

We'll go on now to the second round. We have Mr. Williamson for five minutes.

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

I'd like to return to some of my colleague Mr. Chong's questions to the minister, which involved revoking student visas of individuals from abroad who harass, intimidate or threaten others in this country. The minister was not prepared to discuss specific cases, for privacy reasons, but could you talk about the process? How does your department track that? How is it recorded? What is the process by which someone who is here as a visitor could be expelled for actions that Canada deems to be unacceptable?

• (2015)

Ms. Natasha Kim: I can start, Mr. Chair. My colleague, Dr. Giles, may wish to expand on this.

In terms of the general framework, as the minister stated, these would definitely be matters that are handled on a case-by-case basis, and there would certainly be due process involved throughout that process to ensure that we have the right evidence.

I'll hand it over to my colleague for expansion.

Dr. Nicole Giles: If indeed there is conviction for criminality, at that point there is an assessment done in terms of whether the visas should be revoked. There is also the due process, as my colleague indicated, prior to removal taking place, ensuring as well that if an individual is removed from the country they won't come into harm's way once they are returned to their home country.

Mr. John Williamson: That's interesting. So there has to be a conviction. It's a very high threshold. Is that correct? The department doesn't do its own investigation to determine that individuals were behaving in a threatening or intimidating or perhaps violent fashion. A police conviction is required.

Ms. Natasha Kim: In general, conviction would be clear evidence of inadmissibility that would apply in a case like this. Perhaps I'll clarify as well that IRCC does not have investigative powers.

Mr. John Williamson: Okay. So there is no reporting mechanism within the department. It would become a police matter, and then it would be picked up.

I'm trying to understand the process that an individual could go through. Perhaps I'll bring it down to a micro level. If there is a Hong Kong citizen in Canada today at school, and this person is threatened or harassed by others, what would the process be? Could this person approach your department, or is it a police matter?

Ms. Natasha Kim: Mr. Chair, perhaps we can return to the committee with some clearer details on this. I can speak in general terms.

Any criminal issue would be a matter for the police of local jurisdiction. In terms of the admissibility and the validity of that student permit, there would be both terms and conditions attached to that permit. That would fall under IRCC's mandate. In addition, there would be admissibility concerns that we could also look at.

Mr. John Williamson: If you could provide the committee with some more background, I'd appreciate it. The minister certainly left the impression that he was not able to talk about the procedures because of privacy issues. Now I'm left with the belief that perhaps the department is just not in the business of examining behaviour that we wouldn't expect or we wouldn't want visitors to this country to engage in with regard to threatening or intimidating others who are here for studies or for any other reasons.

I think I'll leave it at that, Mr. Chair. I'm out of time. I know you like to keep a firm watch on that. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you for your assistance in that, Mr. Williamson.

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

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair, and thank you, witnesses.

I'm very interested in the extent to which multilateral approaches can be of assistance here in terms of Canada's approach to China generally but also specifically the matter and challenge of Hong Kong. My question is with respect to the recent policy announcement that's been made and explained here tonight. To what extent did the government consult with and reach out to like-minded allies, whether at the United Nations, our Five Eyes partners, or both? Can you speak about that international coordination, if there was any, and what it looked like?

● (2020)

Ms. Natasha Kim: In terms of Canada's co-operation with other Five Eyes countries in particular, there is regular and in-depth consultation with them on a range of immigration matters. In terms of our Five Eyes partners, we have a group called the Migration Five. We regularly discuss different immigration matters of interest.

In terms of these particular measures, certainly we were aware of what other partners were doing in this space. Canada announced its measures in a fashion that was complementary to what was being done.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: But specifically on this particular matter, to what extent did discussions take place? I think it's important to push on this, simply because we've heard witness after witness emphasize the importance of multilateral engagements between countries on the matter. When the idea of doing something...in terms of what we've ultimately seen materialize with respect to asylum issues and the like, were we engaged with Britain? Were we engaged with like-minded allies like New Zealand, Australia and so on? Can you shed any light on that?

Ms. Natasha Kim: Yes. As mentioned, we regularly engage with all of those Five Eyes partners: Australia, New Zealand, the U.S., as well as the U.K. As you know, the U.K. and Australia had announced measures in the space of migration. Certainly we were following that closely. In developing these measures, we were then mindful of what existed in those other countries.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Looking at it from a domestic perspective, in terms of the overall policy construction of what materialized, how did the policy come together? Obviously, there's COVID-19 on the one hand. We're experiencing COVID-19. It makes things challenging in any policy-making environment. Can you speak at all to how these different policy decisions were arrived at—for example, consultation, engagement with experts, or anything along those lines? How did it all come together?

Ms. Natasha Kim: As noted, certainly we had conversations with allies and like-minded allies in terms of what was developing in their initiatives. We looked at other contexts around the world. Obviously, there were some consultations with stakeholders on the ground as well, and looking at what measure could be put in place to complement what already exists in Canada's immigration system—

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Sorry, I don't mean to interrupt, but when you say "on the ground", Ms. Kim, are you speaking domestically, as in here in Canada?

Ms. Natasha Kim: Yes, as well as abroad.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Okay.

Ms. Natasha Kim: Certainly, these measures were intended to complement what we already have. As noted, we have a broad suite, an array of pathways available. These ones were very much targeted to be facilitated for the best and the brightest population and to complement our levels plan as well.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much.

I have a final question, Mr. Chair.

In recent days, The Globe and Mail has published a few articles that have taken some by surprise and are of great concern. I'm speaking specifically about CSIS's recent statement making clear that Chinese state officials have been engaged covertly in a campaign of intimidation against either real or perceived Chinese dissidents here in Canada. Certainly, I would expect that would include Hong Kongers as well.

To what extent is IRCC involved in vetting individuals who could be engaged in this activity?

Well, let me rephrase that—

The Chair: Be very brief, please. You have only a few seconds left.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: What is the vetting process like?

The Chair: Give a very brief answer, please.

● (2025)

Dr. Nicole Giles: The security vetting process for admissibility is done by our public safety partners in consultation with us.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

[Translation]

Mr. Bergeron, you have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Chair, I must say that I'm sometimes a little perplexed by agreed-upon answers that are provided to us by public servants and that anger parliamentarians. When I ask if we're looking at anything other than the existing mechanisms, I'm told that the existing mechanisms are in place and that they should be able to do the job.

According to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada's Departmental Plan 2020-21, in 2020—that's this year—a new refugee stream will be launched to provide refuge for human rights advocates, journalists and humanitarian workers at risk of persecution. This comes from your department.

When I asked the question earlier, I chose my words well. I've repeated word for word what your department said. Can you tell us very clearly what you are working on to go beyond existing mechanisms to provide safe haven for human rights advocates, journalists and humanitarian workers at risk of persecution?

[English]

Ms. Natasha Kim: To clarify—and my apologies if answers are sometimes puzzling—first I would say that we do have our existing resettlement programs, which really focus on the most vulnerable and those who are facing persecution. That can include persecution based on political opinion. If there is a referral on that basis, which could include a human rights defender, we can accept those claims already. I would note that we don't currently track those in a systematic way.

With regard to the minister's mandate commitment around creating a new stream for human rights defenders, as he noted, we are hoping that this can be announced soon. Implementation is under way, and the design is as well. This would be a way to advance that specific commitment for this population.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Do I have a bit of time left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have 15 seconds.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I won't insult our witnesses by asking them to respond in five seconds.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bergeron.

[English]

Ms. Kwan, you have two and a half minutes, please.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Am I up, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Yes, please, for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

For individuals who have fled to another jurisdiction, can they go to the Canadian embassy to seek refugee support? For example, if they fled to Japan or Taiwan—since the Five Eyes countries...they would not be eligible—would they be able to go to the Canadian embassy for help? How would they be able to submit their applications?

Dr. Nicole Giles: Canadian embassies and consulates are not able to accept refugee claims. If refugees have fled their home jurisdictions and do not have a durable solution in another country, they can be referred to us by the UN for resettlement under our government-assisted refugees program. They can also receive private sponsorship to come to Canada through the private refugees sponsorship stream.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Well, even with the private sponsorship stream, they will still need refugee determination from UNHCR, so they have to contact the UNHCR first.

Dr. Nicole Giles: There are other mechanisms for referral, as well as those primarily through the UNHCR.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: What are the other mechanisms?

Dr. Nicole Giles: There are some specific cases where we can work with other agencies to identify that they are indeed refugees who require urgent protection.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I wonder if I could have the officials table that detailed information to the committee so that we actually can have access to that information, please.

I'm going to move on to the next question.

The only change that has been announced for the refugee asylum seekers is that the one-year wait period would be waived for Hong Kongers whose asylum claim was denied by the IRB between November 13, 2019 and November 12, 2020.

Why would the deadline be November 12, 2020? Let's say, for example, that someone was denied today. They would not be eligible for the one-year waiver of the asylum claim. Why is that?

● (2030)

Ms. Natasha Kim: The PRRA bar exemption, as we call it, is reflective of changed circumstances in the country of alleged persecution. It's really backward-looking to waive that 12-month period that someone would have to wait. If we're looking at November 12, 2020 and onward, then that would already take into account the changed circumstances in the country in terms of the IRB decision.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you, Ms. Kwan.

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

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm going to be splitting my time with MP Chong.

I wanted to follow up on what a couple of my other colleagues asked. They mentioned that there was no reporting mechanism if the immigrants are in Canada and do happen to engage in these intimidation tactics. Another one of our colleagues got to the next question that I was going to ask and didn't quite get an answer, so I just want to reiterate it.

What is the mechanism to screen out these folks from getting those immigration visas to come to Canada? I just wanted to give you an opportunity to answer that more fulsomely.

Dr. Nicole Giles: Thank you very much for the questions.

First, in terms of the screening before arriving in Canada, there is quite a robust security screening procedure in place that is conducted by our public safety partners, and that includes, as you would imagine, ensuring that...and looking for evidence of criminality and of human rights abuses in other countries that these individuals might have committed.

If there are crimes that people are committing while they are visitors in Canada—whether they're temporary residents or otherwise—there is a reporting mechanism whereby if people are found to have evidence of criminality, at that point there is a loop back to IRCC and to the immigration services, and then there are certain procedures that are followed at that point.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: That's quite a high threshold if they are here. I'm just wondering, given that we know this intimidation is widespread in Canada, can we, from your perspective and your expertise, do anything to tighten the ability to prohibit these folks from getting into Canada? Folks are slipping through the cracks, clearly, is what I'm saying. Is there anything further that can be done?

We're almost out of time.

Dr. Nicole Giles: When the admissibility screening is done, decisions are made based on evidence of past behaviour. Predicting future behaviour is obviously a little more difficult.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you very much.

Thank you to the officials.

Over to MP Chong.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Ms. Dancho. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, I have a comment that I don't expect any response to.

Based on the testimony we've heard today, the announcement last week by Minister Mendicino doesn't seem commensurate to the deteriorating situation in Hong Kong, nor does it seem commensurate to the response of our allies. For example, the United Kingdom provided a pathway for residency and citizenship for anyone in Hong Kong holding a British national overseas passport. The U.K. Home Office estimates that there are 2.9 million people, almost half of Hong Kong's population, who would be eligible for this pathway to residency and citizenship. I want to put that on the record as a commentary on last week's announcement.

I'd like to move on to the issue of granting visas by the IRCC. We all know that China is conducting covert and subversive operations in Canada. According to *The Globe and Mail*, agents from China's security services have travelled to Canada on tourist visas to engage in activities that are a threat to Canada's national security.

In addition, last March, the Government of Canada's National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians said that China is “target[ing] ethnocultural communities, seek[ing] to corrupt the political process, manipul[at]ing the media” here in this country, and that it “poses a significant [threat] to the rights and freedoms of Canadians”. It also said that the Canadian National Security and Intelligence Committee, including the IRCC, is insufficiently coordinated in its response to the threats.

My question is simple. Has the IRCC made any changes since last March in how it is coordinating with other entities in Canada's national security and intelligence community?

• (2035)

Dr. Nicole Giles: Thank you very much for the question.

As you might imagine, we are continually looking for opportunities to strengthen our coordination with our partners across government, including our partners in the security and intelligence community. We are also always looking for ways to strengthen admissibility and security screening, and program integrity screening is ongoing.

It's certainly not something that's static. It's something that's dynamic and something that we're always seeking to improve across all of our lines of business.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Chong and Ms. Dancho.

Now we'll go to Ms. Yip for the last set of questions, for five minutes.

Ms. Jean Yip: With respect to the capacity, we've already heard about whether Canada is able to withstand the 300,000 Canadians moving back.

Does IRCC have the technological resources to keep up with the increased applications and the general support needed?

Ms. Natasha Kim: I can start, Mr. Chair, and then my colleague may wish to add.

In terms of capacity—and I believe the consul general confirmed this when he appeared—we currently have the capacity for the demand we are seeing with the existing travel restrictions. Canadian citizens and permanent residents, of course, have a right of entry. There would be a flow there that would be enabled in the current context.

I'll see if my colleague wishes—

Ms. Jean Yip: My question has more to do with the technological resources. Do you have the technology to process...and quickly?

Ms. Natasha Kim: In terms of the processing of applications, I'll turn it over to my colleague with regard to some of the innovations in that regard.

Dr. Nicole Giles: We have been putting in place a number of innovations in order to increase our ability to process applications. Most of our permanent resident applications are paper-based, which, as you can imagine, poses certain limitations in terms of how quickly processing can take place.

One of the public policies put in place as a response to COVID is that temporary resident applications, including for student permits, for example, are now being submitted online—with exceptions, of course, for those who have disabilities or who might not be able to do online applications. That is certainly speeding up our ability to process these temporary resident visas and permits.

Ms. Jean Yip: Are there any programs that will be provided in the near future to help modernize this paper-processing aspect? It seems kind of antiquated, especially since we're very much supposed to be using technology for quicker processing.

Dr. Nicole Giles: This is something that is a very significant focus and priority for IRCC—undergoing a digital transformation of our systems. It is something that is capturing a lot of our attention and our energy right now as we're certainly looking for ways to speed up our digital transformation.

Ms. Jean Yip: What measures is the IRCC taking to ensure that the information systems it uses to process the immigration applications aren't vulnerable to compromise, including insider threats and cyber security in general? Is it robust?

Dr. Nicole Giles: A number of systems are put in place in multiple layers to ensure that the Privacy Act is respected, as well as to ensure that we're able to protect against both insider and outsider threats to the system. There is close co-operation that happens with partners across government on this.

This is not my area of expertise, however, so I would defer to my colleague who is in charge of digital transformation.

Ms. Jean Yip: What are some of the resettlement pathways that Canada works on with other countries? I believe, Ms. Kim, you mentioned that in answering another question. Could you provide some specific examples?

• (2040)

Ms. Natasha Kim: Primarily, there is the government-assisted refugees resettlement stream. For that stream, we work with the

UNHCR, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, to receive referrals. That stream really does focus on the most vulnerable and those at risk. As part of it, those who arrive as permanent residents receive one year of income support to enhance their integration while they adapt to a new life in Canada.

Another stream would be our privately sponsored refugees stream. That's where private sponsors here in Canada can sponsor refugees. They arrive with the support of those private sponsors in Canada to help their integration pathway but also to provide income support.

I see the chair is saying that we're out of time.

The Chair: Thank you very much for recognizing the time signal.

Thank you, Ms. Yip.

I want to thank Ms. Kim and Dr. Giles. I also want to remind you that there were a number of questions or items that members asked for. If you could provide those answers at your earliest convenience, it would be most appreciated.

With that, we thank you for your virtual appearance before the committee today. It is much appreciated.

[*Translation*]

This ends our meeting. Be well. See you tomorrow.

The meeting is adjourned.

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