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Chair: Mrs. Salma Zahid



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• (1605)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.)): I call to order meeting number 14 of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, on February 1.

Before we get into it, I would like to talk about the public health safety guidelines.

Given the ongoing pandemic situation and in light of the recommendations from the health authorities as well as the directive of the Board of Internal Economy on January 28, 2021, to remain healthy and safe I ask all those attending the meeting in person to please maintain a physical distance of at least two metres from others. Wear a non-medical mask when moving in the meeting room, and preferably wear a mask at all times, including when you are seated. Please maintain proper hand hygiene by using the provided hand sanitizer at the room entrance and regularly wash your hands well with soap. As the chair, I will be enforcing these measures for the duration of the meeting. I thank members in advance for your co-operation.

The first item on the agenda is considering the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure's report number two.

The committee is considering the motion by Mr. Dhaliwal to adopt the second report of the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure, and the amendment by Ms. Dancho. The text of Ms. Dancho's amendment is published in the minutes of meeting number 13, which happened on January 27, 2021. On January 28, the clerk distributed a message on my behalf to clarify the matter of the last meeting's adjourned debate. I instructed the clerk to plan for a resumed debate as the first item of business at today's meeting. I've also asked the clerk to reschedule one of today's panels due to the voting in the chamber and to allow the committee to dispose of committee business.

The second report of the subcommittee was distributed to the committee on the House of Commons website.

Just so you are aware, the webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entirety of the committee.

The first item on the agenda is the consideration of report number two of the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure, and the amendment that was proposed by Ms. Dancho on Wednesday of last week.

Ms. Dancho.

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

I did notice that the “raise hand” function isn't available. I don't know if anyone else has this problem, but I was going to raise my hand with the little function. I'm not sure if everyone's affected, but I know some Conservatives don't have it either.

• (1610)

The Chair: Yes, I don't see—

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.): Madam Chair, it wasn't working this morning either when I was on another committee.

The Chair: I will ask the clerk to look into it.

You can raise hands, and the clerk and I will try to keep a list. I'm sorry for the inconvenience.

Ms. Dancho, the floor is yours.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Following several very productive conversations with members from all parties on the committee, I think we'll have agreement for the following.

I would ask the committee for unanimous consent to withdraw my original amendment. Should we receive that unanimous consent, I have a new motion to put forward that I hope will be amenable to the committee. It was amenable to the members we spoke with over the last couple of days.

The Chair: Do I have unanimous consent to withdraw the amendment proposed by Ms. Dancho?

(Amendment withdrawn)

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to put forward the following amendment. It is that the report of the subcommittee be amended in paragraph 1 by replacing the words “and invite witnesses to appear for three hours” with the following words:

invite witnesses to appear for five hours, and invite the minister to appear for 1 hour and apply this testimony to the studies of Special Immigration Measures for the People of Hong Kong, and of Labour Market Impact Assessments, and that relevant witness testimony from the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations in the 43rd Parliament be used as evidence for the Special Immigration Measures for the people of Hong Kong study draft report;

I hope that makes sense.

The Chair: Ms. Dancho has proposed an amendment to report number two of the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure. Is there any debate?

We have Ms. Martinez Ferrada and then Ms. Kwan.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Hochelaga, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank my colleague Ms. Dancho and the opposition members for the fruitful discussions we've had.

We are pleased to support my colleague's motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thanks very much, Madam Chair.

I will also be supporting the motion with the amendment.

I also want to note for clarity for our committee that it is the intention of the committee that, whenever we have committee business, it does not take away from those hours of the witnesses' presentations. In the case of today, for example, our committee meeting is going to be reduced by one hour. The second panel will not be appearing before us. That does not eliminate that panel of speakers and that one hour of committee business. It will be made up in a future meeting. I just want to make sure that is understood, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kwan.

Yes, I will clarify that. Because of the vote, we started the meeting late today, and because there are more meetings happening after our meeting, which ends at 5:30, and we don't have the services available on Mondays, especially after 5:30, it's a hard stop at 5:30. That's why I asked Mr. Clerk to.... Because we had this committee business and only one panel was possible, that second panel, which is not happening today, which was scheduled to happen earlier from 3:30 to 4:30, will be scheduled for the next meeting. The panel is not cancelled. It will be rescheduled for the next meeting.

I hope that clarifies, Ms. Kwan, your question.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you. It doesn't reduce the number of overall witness panels for this study.

The Chair: No. It will not reduce that. We will have those panels. With the amendment that has been proposed by Ms. Dancho to have five hours of witnesses, we will have that.

Madam Normandin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to add my voice in support of my colleague Ms. Dancho's amendment.

By the way, I'd like to mention that it seems to work well when women collaborate and talk to each other. This may be an incentive for even more women in Parliament in future parliaments.

• (1615)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Normandin. That's exactly right.

There seems to be consensus on the amendment that has been proposed by Ms. Dancho.

(Amendment agreed to)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I just wonder, in light of the fact that we will have additional meetings for the Hong Kong study, whether or not there would be some casual agreement from committee members to provide more room for opposition witnesses in the additional meetings. I'm wondering whether the committee members would be amenable to that.

The Chair: We will be getting to that, but first we have to adopt report number two of the subcommittee on agenda and procedure. Once we do that, we will go into those further details.

Madam Martinez Ferrada, you wanted to say something.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: I'd simply like to make a comment about my colleague's proposal.

To avoid taking time away from our witnesses today, I'd like to suggest that we discuss it at the subcommittee for future meetings. I'd like it if we could move quickly to our witnesses, who are already here and are waiting for us.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Martinez Ferrada, but first of all, we have to adopt the second report of the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure.

We have a motion, as proposed by Mr. Dhaliwal, to adopt that report.

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: I just want to let everyone know that the "raise hand" feature is now available, if you want to use that feature.

The report is adopted, and based on that, five hours of witnesses will be scheduled for the study on Hong Kong. Today we will have one panel, scheduled to happen from 4:30 to 5:30. Based on the amendment passed today, I will work with the clerk on the calendar, which will be circulated to all members.

In regard to the witness list, I will ask Mr. Clerk to please let everyone know how many additional witnesses can be submitted and what the breakdown is of those witnesses. Earlier we were scheduled to have three hours of witnesses. We have now added two more hours for witnesses, which means six new witnesses will be added to the list.

Mr. Clerk, I will pass the floor to you. Please inform the members when you would like to have the list of witnesses and what the breakdown of that would be.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Leif-Erik Aune): Thank you, Madam Chair.

With six additional witnesses, the breakdown is a little difficult because of the small number. Ordinarily the Liberal Party gets 50% of the witnesses, the Bloc and the NDP each get 10%, and the Conservative Party gets 30%. With six witnesses, the committee has a couple options. If three go to the Liberal Party, then one each would go to the Conservatives, the NDP and the Bloc. The committee can agree to whichever allocation of witnesses it wishes.

At this time, the existing witness list has enough extra witnesses to fill one panel, so I would go back to you, the members, and ask that you please submit between two and four additional names, just in case some witnesses are unavailable to appear when they're invited. The committee can set its own deadline to supply that information to me, but as soon as I receive the names I will begin sending invitations that same day.

I hope that answers your question.

• (1620)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Clerk, for clarifying that.

I see some raised hands.

We will start with Ms. Dancho.

[Translation]

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I'll speak after Ms. Normandin, who raised her hand first.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Madam Normandin.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

I just want to specify something.

When we prepared the first list of witnesses, I had submitted only one. However, unless I'm mistaken, I was entitled to 1.4 witnesses. Adding 0.6, I would give me a total of two witnesses. I could then submit a new witness who would automatically be on the list.

Am I mistaken?

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Normandin.

I would suggest that if everyone can submit their list, I will work with the clerk, based on the breakdown, the representation of parties we have, to make sure that everyone gets their fair share of witnesses. I will work on that with Mr. Clerk and let you know. I would not like to waste the time allocated for the witnesses today.

Ms. Dancho.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I just want to suggest to my opposition colleagues that I'm happy to work on a joint witness list with Bloc and NDP members if they so wish. I'm happy to connect about that if they'd like.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Serré.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I just have a suggestion about the distribution of the six new witnesses that the clerk mentioned. The Liberals and Conservatives have almost the same number of seats. So I propose two witnesses for the Liberals, two for the Conservatives, one for the Bloc Québécois and one for the NDP.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Serré.

What I would propose after listening to everyone is that, at least based on what the clerk said, send in the names and then we can work together to make sure that everyone has representation, which is based on the number of seats we have. We will work on that. In the earlier list there was also a lot of overlap. Once the list is submitted, we can go through that.

Before we start today's meeting I would just like to update everyone in regard to the meeting that will be happening on Wednesday. All of you must have seen that there are three or maybe—I was getting the news from the clerk today—four votes on Wednesday. What I would propose is that, for the second panel that we cancelled today, we do it on Wednesday, because if we have four votes I don't think we can start before five o'clock. The voting will be through Zoom and not the app. I would propose that the panel we have cancelled today we hold on Wednesday, and after that we will schedule two hours of panels for the next CIMM committee.

Mr. Serré.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I hear that we may have five votes on Wednesday. If that's the case, I don't think we'll be able to have the committee meeting that day because of the current format.

I wanted to bring it to the attention of the committee members.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Serré, for updating me that there are five votes. It can take us up to five hours of voting after three o'clock, so that might be too late. I will work with the clerk to determine once we have the confirmation of the number of the votes. Accordingly I will work with the clerk and inform everyone in time on what the plan will be for Wednesday's meeting.

I would like to welcome our witnesses, but before I go into that I just want to let everyone know I would like to take this opportunity to remind all participants in this meeting that screenshots or taking photos of your screen is not permitted.

For those participating virtually, 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. With the latest Zoom version, you may now speak in the language of your choice without the need to select the corresponding language channel.

You will also notice that the platform's "raise hand" feature is now in a more easily accessible location on the main toolbar should you wish to speak or alert the chair. For members participating in person, proceed as you usually would when the whole committee is meeting in person or in a committee room. Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are on the video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself. For those of you in the room, your microphone will be controlled as normal by the proceedings and verification officer.

I will remind you that all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair. When you are not speaking your microphone should be on mute. With regard to the speaking list, the committee clerk and I will do the best we can to maintain a consolidated order of speaking for all members whether they are participating virtually or in person.

With that I would like to welcome our witnesses for today's meeting. We have three witnesses. We have Cherie Wong, executive director of Alliance Canada Hong Kong. The second witness is Brian Wong, reverend, from Mustard Seeds Hong Kong Concern Group, and as an individual, we have Dominic Tse, pastor.

Welcome, everyone. Thanks a lot for appearing before the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration today. I would welcome all of the witnesses and request that Ms. Cherie Wong please start.

Ms. Wong, you have five minutes for your opening remarks.

• (1625)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Cherie Wong (Executive Director, Alliance Canada Hong Kong): Good afternoon.

[*English*]

My name is Cherie Wong. I extend my thanks for the opportunity to appear before the committee today. I follow this committee's work closely.

Witnesses before me have spoken about the immigration measures that only appeal to a small group of post-secondary graduates from Hong Kong or international students in Canada. I share similar concerns over the narrow reach of the new policies.

Canada's approach to Hong Kong's ongoing crisis fails to consider the realities of everyday people of Hong Kong.

The national security bureau has been carrying out systematic surveillance and clandestine operations, including plainclothes officers at airports, loitering inside international terminals and boarding areas. We have friends whose travel documents are confiscated, teammates who are monitored and scared for their lives, and fellow activists who are arrested before they can leave. The Hong Kong

government is even looking at legislation to impose exit bans and further suppress freedom of movement.

This is not a conventional humanitarian crisis, so conventional solutions are not effective for those who need our help.

Last week, IRCC suggested that Hong Kongers can apply through existing programs such as family reunification, express entry and UNHCR. These programs might appeal to middle upper-class migrants, but are not accessible for most Hong Kongers. Most Hong Kongers do not qualify for travel exemptions under the current border restrictions, and many activists cannot leave, as their travel documents are confiscated and exit visas denied.

For immigration programs that rely on points systems, our team assessed various profiles of well-known activists, and none would have high enough scores to be successful under recent draws based on their socio-economic status, age or professional history. Most programs request a police check and biometric data, but the Hong Kong Police Force has carried out arbitrary mass arrests and many have a criminal record. A police check can also be used to inform the authorities of the activist's intention to leave the city. Even if Hong Kongers qualify, they do not have the capacity, resources or luxury to be stuck in bureaucratic processes in these pathways.

I cannot stress this enough: Canada's conventional immigration and asylum pathways are failing Hong Kongers. We need a cohesive resettlement strategy that puts Hong Kong's deteriorating situation into consideration.

Hong Kong's political opposition has been decimated. The network of activists has been severely compromised. Persecution under the NSL has manifested indirectly through regulations at various social, political, legal and judicial sectors: loyalty oaths at the civil service and district councils; banning of TV shows, textbooks and websites; firing of teachers and union activists; and even biometric data for professional registration.

We expect the Chinese and Hong Kong governments to shift attention to every citizen who has participated in protests, voted in the democratic primaries or even posted on social media. Time is running out.

We have submitted a written brief to the committee, outlining our recommendations.

First, create a dedicated pathway for those fleeing persecution, allowing Hong Kongers to apply for travel documents directly from overseas, with the ability to waive border restrictions.

Second, modify existing private sponsorship or family reunification measures to enable extended family members and activists to resettle in Canada.

Third, modernize and expedite the Canadian immigration and asylum system to address the backlog of new and pending claims.

Fourth, create a clear, strategic communications plan to combat misinformation and promote various existing pathways for Hong Kongers.

Fifth, release a plan to support Canadians and their families in Hong Kong. Restore citizenship and permanent residence status, and expedite PR pathways for extended family members.

These are not stand-alone recommendations but are meant to work together to create a comprehensive strategy that addresses the diverse needs and maximizes accessibility for Hong Kongers to settle in Canada. All of these recommendations should be inclusive of individuals from Hong Kong who might not hold a BNO or HK-SAR passport.

Thank you, all.

● (1630)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Wong.

We will now move on to Mr. Wong.

Mr. Wong, you have the floor. You will have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Mr. Brian Wong (Reverend, Mustard Seeds Hong Kong Concern Group): Thank you for the opportunity to share our presentation on behalf of the Mustard Seeds Hong Kong Concern Group. I am Reverend Brian Wong. Our group is concerned with Hong Kong and has multi-denominational Christian members.

I would like to comment on the Canadian government's new immigration measures in response to the deterioration of human rights in Hong Kong under the national security law. This is a very encouraging start, showing Canada's commitment to protect the safety of the Hong Kong people, who share the same core values as we do, as well as the 300,000 Canadians residing in Hong Kong.

Given the unprecedented mass arrests of pro-democracy activists on all fronts since the imposition of the national security law and the diversity of Hong Kong participants in the pro-democracy movement in terms of age groups and professional and educational backgrounds, Canada needs to come up with a more inclusive policy to accommodate the needs of a broad spectrum of Hong Kong people under risk of political persecution. Our core objective is to save the lives of Hong Kong people based on the level of their risk of political persecution, not just the age, educational or professional background, or the socio-economic status of the applicants. Immigration measures should apply to prioritized categories in accordance with the level of political persecution.

First, prioritized categories should include high-risk activists whose passports have been confiscated and Canadian residents or

citizens who were forced to surrender their Canadian status when they ran for office in the Legislative Council or the District Court council. Apart from the pro-democracy activists, it looks like certain sectors have been the targets of crackdowns by the Hong Kong SAR government. These include social workers, journalists, teachers, medical workers and pastors.

For these categories of people under high risk of political persecution, we urge the government to offer them special travel documents to allow them to depart from Hong Kong at the earliest possible time before they are arrested, convicted and imprisoned. We should also consider offering them the "essential traveller" status under coronavirus pandemic guidelines to allow them to cross the Canadian border under the above special circumstances.

With the restrictive implementation of the nationality law in Hong Kong, BNO passport and Canadian passport holders have been denied the right to exit from Hong Kong unless they officially surrender their Chinese nationality. We urge the government to follow up on the impact of the nationality law on the status of the 300,000 Canadians in Hong Kong, as well as the 200,000-plus Canadians who have been residing in Hong Kong without claiming non-resident status. We wonder how the Canadian government could provide consular protection to them in case of need.

Second, the applications of Hong Kongers who are currently in Canada seeking political asylum should be processed in an expedited manner, with a pathway to permanent resident status.

Third, Hong Kongers studying or working in Canada who will be subject to political persecution when they return to Hong Kong because of their involvement in the Hong Kong pro-democracy movement in Canada should be offered a five-year visa with an expedited pathway to permanent resident status.

● (1635)

For Hong Kongers—

The Chair: Reverend Wong, I'm sorry for interrupting, but your time is up. You will get the opportunity to talk further once we go into the round of questioning.

With that, I now request that Pastor Tse, our third witness, please begin. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Rev. Dominic Tse (Pastor, As an Individual): Thank you.

Honourable members of the committee, my name is Dominic Tse. I came to Canada as a teenager. I was 17 at the time. I have been here over 40 years. I love Canada and I think like a Canadian in most cases, but I also love Hong Kong.

I think the members of this committee all agree that the Hong Kong situation is a crisis, and it is a crisis that calls for bold and swift actions. Our conventional tools are not very effective right now.

We have the asylum systems, but the people being persecuted cannot leave Hong Kong because their passports have been confiscated. I know young people who are in the court system, and it's being dragged out for months and years, basically forcing them to confess and plead guilty and go to prison, with hefty sentences. This is the game that the Hong Kong government, under Beijing's rule, is playing, so our conventional asylum system is not working.

Also, there are people who have participated in demonstrations who cannot leave. They want to leave. Right now, of course, with the pandemic and other things, we have tools, but many people cannot leave. Mind you, it's not only young people who are demonstrating. We have middle-aged people, 40 or 50 years of age, who go into the streets. The two million people comprise not just young people but a lot of people. Many people in Hong Kong want to leave.

Britain has now swung open the doors and two million or three million BNO holders can go there, providing lifeboats and a safe destination. I think Hong Kong requires more lifeboats and more safe destinations, and I believe Canada is a good destination. In fact, many Hong Kong people have relatives, friends or classmates in Canada. If they have a choice, they would actually rather go to Canada than the U.K. I love the U.K., but I have a lot of friends who simply like Canada's weather better than the U.K.'s because we have more variety and so on.

Canada must act quickly and boldly to offer more lifeboats and a choice for these lifeboats to go to. Canada's system has been doing some things, such as allowing students to stay, but I think we should do some catch-up. It's not just a humanitarian crisis. It's also a challenge for Canada to attract all those good, hard-working people: smart, educated, professional people who want to leave Hong Kong and want to come to Canada. They might not have \$100 million or something, but they will be major citizens who can build this country better. I think Canada can do something quickly.

I am proposing in my brief that we do a three-plus-two system, giving a lot of people work permits so that they can come here to a safe Canada and apply for whatever they want to do. It's the same concept as the BNO system. We don't have a BNO, but we can have them come in, using a work permit for three years, and then they can apply. The advantage of it is that it provides security in a shorter time so that people can come and then start applying to the process. With this thinking, we don't need to change the immigration policy or system.

I have talked to an immigration lawyer who is a friend of mine, who is an expert in the field, and she says we should not create a special immigration policy just for Hong Kong. The thinking is that we don't change the door—the door is the same—we just create

more lineups, different pathways to come in. People go through the same door, but we allow them to come quickly, once the pandemic is over, when restrictions are probably lifted and people can come on a work permit and then can proceed to apply to different programs.

That would include a lot of people. People who have been in demonstrations who have not been arrested yet but are fearful, they can come. People who might not qualify under the normal circumstances can come with a work permit, and once they gather the work experience, they might be able to apply. They can come to school, and so on.

Canada, in facing this humanitarian crisis and a competition crisis, must act quickly and boldly.

Thank you.

• (1640)

The Chair: Thank you, Pastor Tse, for your opening remarks.

Now we will move on to our first round of questioning. We will start with Ms. Dancho.

Ms. Dancho, you will have six minutes for your round of questioning. Please begin.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

I will go to Cherie Wong.

Cherie, you and I have met before. I want to ask about your perspective on the recent developments. We've learned that the Hong Kong government is looking to enforce its decades-old law that denies dual citizenship. We learned in *The Globe and Mail* on Saturday from Steve Chase that Ottawa has learned that a Hong Kong resident who had a Canadian passport was imprisoned and was asked to choose whether he was a Chinese or a Canadian citizen. That of course has impacts upon his consular access and things such as that.

I'm wondering what you've heard on the ground. Are people concerned about this? What kinds of impacts do you think it will have, should the Hong Kong authorities begin enforcing their old law?

Ms. Cherie Wong: This tactic has been used by the Chinese government in China to deny consular access to activists or sensitive prisoners. It is thus no surprise for Hong Kong to see this type of threat.

From what I know, the process to officially renounce one's citizenship is quite complex and requires an individual to personally visit the consulate to hand in a form. Formally we don't really have to worry, because if an individual is going into a Canadian consulate, there is a certain level of free will there. However, the Canadian government needs to take action to advocate for dual citizens and also maybe consider putting out public announcements about how an individual must go about renouncing their citizenship, if there is any information relating to individuals who are under duress requesting to renounce their citizenship.

In general, I think this is a rising concern and that Canada needs to keep a close eye on the issue.

• (1645)

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I appreciate that.

Last week at the committee we had the chance to question immigration officials. As you know, the minister announced the original Hong Kong policy support from Canada on November 12. Then on November 16, we were able to question officials at the Canada-China committee, and it was there that we confirmed with immigration officials that the open work permit would be launched by the end of 2020.

Last week the officials admitted to us that this in fact did not happen. Is this being communicated to folks in Hong Kong? Are they anticipating that these things are being launched when they're not? What has been their reaction so far?

Ms. Cherie Wong: We have been getting many questions from Hong Kongers asking about the program and when it will be launched. I personally am not sure of the timeline, but I think there's a huge issue with understaffing at the IRCC.

I would like to see the Canadian government put in a few more staff members, whether for delivering the new measure for Hong Kongers or for the asylum or immigration passports.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: It seems to be an ongoing problem with all immigration streams. It was disappointing to hear, given that they announced a very limited scope for the policies for Hong Kong and then failed to launch this one in particular, for the open work permit, when they promised to do so.

Another question I had was regarding the second of your five proposals, regarding family reunification of extended family members. The minister and immigration officials in the fall indicated that the grandparents and parents lottery—of course, for Hong Kong parents of those residing in Canada—could apply. When we asked how many Hong Kong grandparents and parents had been successful applicants, they didn't have an answer just yet.

I'm wondering whether you felt that the grandparents and parents lottery was sufficient for family reunification for those with parents and grandparents residing in Hong Kong.

Ms. Cherie Wong: It is a necessary measure, but it's insufficient. It only lets some into Canada for 90 days, which is really not that much.

I think we also need to look beyond the western definition of family members. For Hong Kongers, our cousins and uncles are just as close, and we need to extend that family reunification to ex-

tended family members who may not be considered traditional family, as well as remove the lottery system for Hong Kong families, because there is definitely a growing danger of being in Hong Kong.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I appreciate that.

I was intrigued by your fifth one. You mentioned this a little in your remarks throughout, about better communication from the Canadian government. Where should they be communicating this message, so that Hong Kong Canadians both at home and in Hong Kong are receiving proper updates from the Government of Canada? Where should they be looking for it?

Ms. Cherie Wong: I know many currently rely on the IRCC website, which is only available in English and French. For Hong Kongers, while many of us learned English growing up, it's definitely not our first language. I think many Hong Kongers would appreciate it if we could have Cantonese-focused communication on the website as well. I know that the consulate does a lot of the promotional work, so if there is different language access, that would be a huge help.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: That's a great idea, given the audience that those pathways and announcements are supposed to address. I hope that's something that ends up in the report and that the minister hears. I think it would be a fairly easy change to make, given that we have many excellent officials in the immigration department. I think that would make sense, given the audience, so I appreciate that.

I believe that's all my time, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Wong, for your comments.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Dancho.

We will now move on to Madam Martinez Ferrada.

Madam Martinez Ferrada, you have six minutes for your round of questioning.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Wong, Mr. Wong and Mr. Tse, thank you for being with us.

My question is for all three of you. Could you help us to understand the situation in Hong Kong before the government measures were announced?

You also talked a bit about current programs and how they could be expanded or simplified. I'd like to hear more about that.

What specific measures do you think should be taken to simplify and expand the process so that it is easier for Hong Kongers to come to Canada?

• (1650)

[*English*]

Ms. Cherie Wong: Again, I'll jump in, if you don't mind.

One of the proposals I have made is a private sponsor program. I know that it currently exists for asylum seekers to be sponsored by community groups or by a group of individuals to resettle here in Canada. There is a strong diaspora community here that has been doing a lot of the asylum support work and supporting refugees, whether financially or in daily life in Canada. If we could make amendments to that program, we could expand this collaboration for diaspora communities to support more asylum seekers to come to Canada. As I have proposed, if there is Cantonese-language access for the programs that are specifically targeted to Hong Kong, that would be an amazing addition.

I would also recommend considering putting Hong Kong and claimants from China into the less complex claim stream, which would expedite the asylum application process for Hong Kongers and other community groups being suppressed by China.

Rev. Dominic Tse: I would like to say a few words regarding the context of the situation.

I think that the watershed time was last July, when the national security law, this is draconian law... For me, having Hong Kong citizenship, by appearing today, if I go back to Hong Kong, I will be arrested for consorting with foreign forces. By appearing before you guys today, I have basically decided that I am not going back to Hong Kong, and I tell my children, do not go back to Hong Kong because your dad appeared at this public event and that was consorting with foreign forces.

This draconian law is used as the almighty power to arrest and to muzzle people, and that has been happening for the past months. Pastors, doctors and nurses were forced to swear allegiance and basically to stay silent. The entire city has been changed forever.

Regarding immigration, I think that right now there is a time issue. The Wall Street Journal has published an editorial regarding the escape routes. I think the escape routes are closing.

In 1949, when the Communist Party of China took over China, a lot of people said, "We can go back to Hong Kong from China, no problem," but overnight—I believe it was in 1950 or 1951—the border was closed. Families were separated until the 1980s, when they could actually apply. That day will come. The people are talking about it and, boom, it will happen, so time is of the essence.

My proposal is for as many people as possible to come in with a work permit, as simple and as easy as what a BNO five-plus-one can do. They can do it quickly. People can come, and then they sort out all the issues so that they can apply for this or that. We don't need to change a lot of programs but just get them in here sooner. That would expedite their coming over safely, after the pandemic, of course. Then they can tap into all the resources that we have and the programs, and then we can do a little bit of a twist there to improve all the programs. I think we need drastic measures.

Mr. Brian Wong: I would just like to add a couple of points here.

Actually, right now the Hong Kong government is trying to keep people's money. Even if they let people go, those people have the equivalent of our CPP. They're supposed to get it after they retire, but some people may not be able to get it if they leave Hong Kong. It is thus better to let them come as soon as possible. I think this is the lesson of the thing.

The other thing to enlarge the lifeboat is to let people work even if they are studying. Let them make their living, because right now we only allow people who are wealthy, who have enough money, to come to study. If we let them work, they can contribute to Canadian society. I think we would be making a good future for them, because they would have Canadian experience and then, after they graduated, could find a job more easily.

However, one thing I would like to bring to your attention is that when we allow people to do the application, I would encourage you to do the background check, because the CCP government might let some spies come in as well, according to our experience.

I totally support what Dominic just shared: A lockdown can happen any time. That's what happens.

• (1655)

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Reverend Wong. The time is up.

We will now move on to Madam Normandin.

Madam Normandin, you have six minutes for your round of questioning.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for their very informative, but above all very concrete testimonies, with very concrete recommendations.

I'll ask one question with a long preamble. I invite all three of you to take the time to answer it, since you talked—you in particular, Ms. Wong—about putting in place more vigorous measures, since those that currently exist are perhaps a little too restrictive.

I'll draw a parallel with a situation we experienced last week. The House, on the initiative of the Bloc Québécois, voted unanimously in favour of granting Canadian citizenship to Raif Badawi. Mr. Badawi is a Saudi blogger who has spoken out against the Saudi regime, which is why he's in prison. Newspapers revealed that the Minister of Immigration would not grant citizenship to Raif Badawi because, he says, dual citizenship is not recognized in Saudi Arabia anyway. Therefore, he would not be able to benefit from our consular services—which is somewhat similar to the situation in China. There is also concern that a negative reaction from Saudi Arabia could have as negative an impact on Raif Badawi.

I'd like to hear your thoughts on this fear that may originate in the government if we were to call for strong action. Would it be legitimate to fear for the safety of foreign nationals and fear reprisals? Should we put in place special measures to protect them anyway?

[English]

Ms. Cherie Wong: I think we need to continue a strong stance. China is an international bully. They aren't retaliating against Canada for what Canada is doing, but they are actively going through every liberal democratic country on this planet to challenge us, to challenge our standard and see whether or not we will stand up for human rights.

We need to be prepared to accept some of the costs that we will incur from standing up to China, but Canada is not alone on this international stage. We have allies across the Five Eyes in the democratic allies that we have, and we can stand together and accept some of these consequences. We see that the U.K. has already braved it, and Australia and New Zealand are coming up with new measures. We are thus not alone, and I think we can continue to take a strong stance.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Pastor Tse, you have the floor.

[English]

Rev. Dominic Tse: I would like to assist you on addressing the fear factor. When you're dealing with a bully, if you are afraid, you are giving more reason for the bully to bully you, but if you stand firm, the bully knows that there's a limit to his bullying and then he will back off.

I think the Chinese government, being a bully, knows the logic, and apparently in Canada we have our issue, what about our two Michaels, and so on, and that we shouldn't do anything. However, we have our two Michaels, and if we don't stand firm, there will be many more Michaels, because every Canadian in China will become a Michael. We need to stand firm.

Look at what happened to Australia. They stood firm, and then eventually they didn't suffer that much. They enjoyed cheaper lobsters and still sold their coal. We can enjoy cheaper lobsters. Why not? Actually, we're not that weak. We have the Five Eyes. We have our allies, and when we begin to stand firm....

I really encourage the government, with all the parliamentarians, to stand firm. Then China knows there are limits and they will begin to realize that the game changes. It's up to us to stand firm.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Go ahead, Reverend Wong.

[English]

Mr. Brian Wong: According to Mao's strategy when he fought the civil war, if their enemy steps back, they will go forward, but if their enemy steps up, they will retreat. This strategy is adopted by the Chinese government right now. If we step back, if we have fear, they will just come forward. Therefore, Canada has to stand firm, otherwise the Chinese government will just keep bullying the democratic countries.

• (1700)

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

I'd like to ask you another question about the study permits that were part of the November 12 announcement. They are generally granted if the agent has reasons to believe that the person has sufficient funds to support themselves and return to their own country. However, in this case, it is intended to be used to keep the person in Canada long term.

Should different instructions be given to agents who grant permits to be more permissive in the case of Hong Kong?

[English]

Rev. Dominic Tse: I would like to address this issue. A friend of mine applied and she got rejected for that very reason. It's a contradiction because we're encouraging our students to have the three-year Canadian experience program to stay. We encourage the people we train. We spend money to train them to stay. At the same time, we only need those people who don't want to stay.

Do you know what I'm saying? This is a contradiction. I'm with member Ms. Normandin that we should modernize our instruction to the officials. The study permit is not something that you—

The Chair: Pastor Tse, I'm sorry for interrupting. The time is up. We will now have to move to the next speaker.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Kwan, you have six minutes for your round of questioning. You may please proceed.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses.

My first question goes to Ms. Wong. You outlined a number of special measures that you think the Canadian government should undertake. I wonder whether you would be in support of calling on the Canadian government to stop all the removals of Chinese nationals in Canada—that is to say, for Canada to suspend removals of Chinese nationals during this period.

Rev. Dominic Tse: Yes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

That was in fact a measure that was adopted, by the way, when Chinese nationals were faced with the crisis with Tiananmen Square back in 1989. It would be a duplication of that kind of measure.

Related to that, with the Tiananmen Square immigration measures, the government of the day also put forward specific instructions to officials at IRCC, which at that time was called CIC, to note “all persons who have in some way individually embarrassed their government”, referring to the Chinese government, “and in so doing have exposed themselves to severe sanctions should they return.” That was one of the reasons recognized by the Canadian government at that time.

Do you think the Canadian government should be instructing officials to adopt that type of perspective as well, given the situation that Hong Kongers are faced with today?

Ms. Cherie Wong: Yes, and I think the Canadian government should consider issuing travel documents directly from consulates to enable more Hong Kongers, whether they are in Hong Kong or in a secondary country waiting to be resettled in Canada, to get that document to resettle here.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: With the Tiananmen Square initiative, the Canadian government issued what is called a minister's permit for people who were abroad so that they would be able to exit that country in order to come to Canada. In this instance, doing a similar thing would then be the Canadian government adopting a measure providing minister's permits for individuals who are abroad so that they would be able to exit Hong Kong to come to Canada.

At the time the Tiananmen Square situation was happening, Canada applied this measure, which was for those who were sponsoring loved ones here in Canada, to those who were abroad. While the application was being processed, a minister's permit would be issued so that they could get here without having to wait through a long processing time.

Is that what you are calling for?

Ms. Cherie Wong: Yes, and I think this kind of measure should be inclusive of individuals who may not hold a Hong Kong SAR passport as well.

• (1705)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

The urgency of this situation is clear, because we've heard about mass arrests and heard that people are rapidly facing very difficult circumstances. We know of individuals who are in Hong Kong—former legislators, for example, who had given up their Canadian citizenship—and who were pro-democracy activists and the like and are now at risk. There may be many other Canadians who are

abroad who, for whatever reason, have given up their Canadian citizenship.

Do you think that the Canadian government should bring forward a measure to reauthorize Canadian citizenship to those who are in Hong Kong at the moment and have given up their Canadian citizenship?

Ms. Cherie Wong: Absolutely I do, and I foresee that there will be permanent residents of Hong Kong who may be out of status, whether because of imprisonment or of having been forced to renounce their status. I think the Canadian government should consider expanding that amnesty to those who lost their status for various reasons.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: With other countries, for example in dealing with the LGBTQ2+ communities, the Canadian government put forward a pilot program, which has now become a permanent program, working with NGOs abroad and in Canada to support refugee status of LGBTQ members who were being persecuted because of their sexual orientation.

In that way, we could duplicate this kind of program for the people of Hong Kong so that we can ensure a refugee initiative would be in place for the people of Hong Kong outside of the UNHCR component.

Is that something you think the Canadian government should do, adopt a pilot program for the people of Hong Kong?

Ms. Cherie Wong: I think in fact it should be a permanent program for Hong Kong, but absolutely, yes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Okay.

One issue in family reunification is the limited definition of who can apply for sponsorship. It is for spouses and dependent children, and then to a much lesser and limited degree, based on a lottery, for parents and grandparents.

Do you think the Canadian government should expand our family reunification initiative so that extended family members, for example, could get sponsorship from their loved ones here in Canada?

Ms. Cherie Wong: I do absolutely, and I think there should be an expedited process, waiving the lottery and points system, to enable loved ones to reach Canada immediately. We know that many of those Canadians who are in Hong Kong are hesitant to leave because they don't want to leave their family members behind. An expedited and a shorter process will definitely be very helpful.

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Ms. Kwan. Your time is up.

We will now move to our second round of questioning.

Ms. Dancho, you have five minutes for your round of questioning. Please begin.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I really appreciated that last round of questions. I thought there were some excellent responses, particularly to my colleague Madam Normandin. I think her question was a very good one: If Canada were stronger, should we be fearing for the safety of Hong Kong Canadians and the like? I think that's a very good question.

The Conservative Party here has always, for the last number of months—and this has been escalating—said that we need to be stronger, that we need to stand up very firmly, with our allies, to the bully that is China. We have been disappointed with the Liberal government's response to date and continue to push for this.

For those in Canada who may be watching or who may hear Conservatives talking a lot about Hong Kong or China but who don't have any attachment to Hong Kong, I'd love it if each of you could just respond to the two following questions, just to give people who don't know what's going on a bit of a perspective.

Why should Canadians who don't have these connections care about what's happening to Hong Kong? I know that's a very obvious question, but if you could just give me your frank response, that would be great.

On the second part, to Ms. Normandin's question, why should Canada stick its neck out a little bit to help Hong Kong? I think you answered this quite well last time, but if you could just further reiterate your thoughts I would really appreciate the perspective from each of you.

Perhaps we could start with Ms. Wong.

Ms. Cherie Wong: Yes, absolutely. Hong Kong and Canada have always had a very close relationship. Canada is one of the few nations that defended Hong Kong against the Japanese invasion, so there is a very long history there.

As well, Canada is one of the signatories to the Sino-British Joint Declaration, the international agreement that has outlined the one-country, two-systems Hong Kong autonomy, and so on. Therefore, I think Canada has a responsibility beyond the people but to this agreement. We witnessed this agreement between the U.K. and the Chinese government that Hong Kong will remain autonomous for 50 years.

That has very quickly been breached. For Canadians at home, I know all of us hold democracy and human rights as core values with being Canadian, so it's not a huge reach to ask Canadians to support Hong Kongers who are facing immense political and state violence.

• (1710)

Ms. Raquel Dancho: That was well said. Thank you.

Mr. Tse or Mr. Wong, who would like to go first? We have a few minutes left.

Mr. Brian Wong: Hong Kong is an international city. These days, we are in a global age and every country affects the other. We need to support Hong Kong because Hong Kongers hold democratic values as we do. If we let the totalitarian governments influence the world more, the democratic countries will be weaker. Therefore, we need to help Hong Kongers to come.

Second, we have 300,000 Canadians living in Hong Kong. We should care, shouldn't we?

I'll just leave those points to Reverend Tse.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: That was well said, sir.

Mr. Tse.

Rev. Dominic Tse: Thank you. I would like to address that.

Hong Kong is unique. It is the modern-day Berlin. It's the front between liberal democratic values versus the totalitarian regime, the China system, the China way. There's a clash of civilizations between the totalitarian way and the liberal democracy that Canada holds dear, and this is the battleground.

We are Berliners, JFK said, and I'm saying, "We are Hong Kongers." It's not that we have a connection to Hong Kong but we cherish the same values. We cannot let Hong Kong fall. We cannot let them down. I'm speaking as a Canadian. I think we should do so.

Another question is this: Is it worth it? Who are these people?

There is something bigger at play. If Hong Kong falls, there's a domino effect and we might not have the same Canada. We are a small country. If the bully keeps bullying others, we might not have the same Canada that we have right now. This is a battlefield; we are Berliners.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I appreciate your responses very much and I took them to heart.

I, 100%, cannot agree more. There are 300,000 Canadians there and we need to care about this.

I really appreciate your earlier comments and the former questions about standing firm to a bully or else that bully will keep advancing. The point is very well made to say that if Hong Kong falls, there will be someone next and that this totalitarian regime will continue to encroach on the democratic freedoms of other countries.

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting. Your time is up.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you for your responses. I very much appreciate it.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: We will now move on to Ms. Dhillon.

Ms. Dhillon, you have five minutes for your round of questioning. You can please proceed.

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses for being here today.

I'm going to ask the question of any of the witnesses who want to answer.

As we all know, COVID-19 has impacted the level of difficulty that the department encounters when dealing with immigration cases. Although the state of operations at IRCC has changed drastically since the beginning of the pandemic, shifts to remote work coupled with system modernization have increased departmental capacity from 38% to 90%. This heightened capacity will allow the government to address the processing of new streams adequately.

Can you please tell us if there is a widespread fear amongst would-be applicants in Hong Kong that IRCC will have trouble processing other claims? If so, how do you think we should address this?

Ms. Cherie Wong: I think many Hong Kongers are familiar with long-winded bureaucratic processes. However, when it comes to the issue of immigration and asylum and leaving a place of violence, that urgency is a lot more clear. We recommend that the IRCC maintain a higher level of staff, even during low periods, to compensate for the potential influx of individuals and applicants after COVID restrictions have been lifted.

• (1715)

Mr. Brian Wong: As we know, the infection rate of COVID in Hong Kong or in Taiwan is comparatively much lower than it is in Canada. I think we still need to have a safe border. When people come in, just separate them to live in their own house or in a hotel for 21 days, or even do a test when they arrive in Canada. I don't think that this cannot be done. This is for safety, the humanitarian way of understanding.

Rev. Dominic Tse: I would like to address that. Given the reduced staff and the reorganization of work, I think of the capacity of the department to process a large number of applicants overseas. I mean, it's not going to be great, so instead of having them wait in line overseas, we can bring them in on some temporary measure and process them here in the safety of Canada. This is what I am proposing.

The same process happens, but Hong Kong people can come in, post-COVID, on a tourist visa or a work permit or something. They can come in and be processed here rather than waiting in line outside of the country, because that door may be closed while they wait. Then they cannot come anymore, so I think time is of the essence.

I just want to emphasize that though we are short-staffed, we are in a competition, racing against time and against the regime, but also racing against other competitors. The other Five Eyes nations want to get the best of the immigrants. I think Canada can do better and streamline the process. Bring them in first and process them later. I think that would help us sort out the bureaucratic problem.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Thank you. These are very good suggestions.

My next question is also for all of you because you all have amazing input and different perspectives, but are still able to paint a global picture. The Hong Kong measures have been crafted to allow students and recent graduates to arrive in Canada, as they are well-suited to integrating into Canada.

Can you please inform members of the committee of the demographic characteristics of the residents of Hong Kong from an im-

migration perspective, and how well suited they may be as candidates for residency in Canada?

Third, have you received feedback from residents of Hong Kong about the networks of immigration measures that are available to Hong Kongers?

Thank you so much. If you need me to repeat the question, I can.

The Chair: You just have 10 seconds.

Mr. Brian Wong: I would say that we will try our best to raise support for the people who come from the churches or other social—

The Chair: Sorry for interrupting, Reverend Wong. The time is up.

We will now have to move on to Madam Normandin.

Madam Normandin, you have two and a half minutes for your round of questioning. Please proceed.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'd like to continue along the same lines as my colleague Ms. Dancho, who addressed the same issues as me.

Canada needs to stand up a little more to China. This could even indirectly benefit other populations in China who are currently facing persecution. I'm thinking of the Uighur community, for example.

Would this send a message that would be useful not only to the people of Hong Kong, but also to other people in China?

[*English*]

Ms. Cherie Wong: My other written submission is an earlier version of our policy recommendation submitted to IRCC in June. It includes listing all applicants from Hong Kong and China and the surrounding regions to less complex claims, so that asylum seekers and those who are fleeing state persecution can basically navigate the asylum processes a little quicker and have an expedited process.

• (1720)

Rev. Dominic Tse: Madam Normandin, I fully support Canada taking a strong stance, because there are countless people in China, especially in Xinjiang province, the Uighurs and others, even Christians.... I have a friend in China, a fellow pastor, in prison right now. I don't know him personally, but there are pastors in prison. They need to hear a clear, moral voice from a country such as Canada, a small country that is willing to stand up to the bully and say, "This is not right". We're doing it. It's at some cost, but we can bear it. Canada has always been a small country with a strong voice. I think we ought to do it again.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

Reverend Wong, would you like to add anything? I see he can't hear me. I'll ask a quick question then.

I was talking about study permits that are difficult to get because of a lack of guidelines. Should there be the same clear guidelines for issuing electronic travel authorizations, despite the criminal record of some Hong Kong nationals?

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Wong: I'm sorry. I don't quite understand the question. Can you ask it again?

The Chair: I'm sorry. The time is up.

Mr. Wong, you were not able to hear the question?

Mr. Clerk, can you have a look? Did we lose connection with Reverend Wong?

The Clerk: I'm checking now.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Madam Chair, I don't know if my question has been translated or heard correctly. If you would give me more time, I could rephrase it and get a quick answer.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, I think there were some connection problems.

Madam Normandin, can you please repeat your question? We'll have a quick answer from Mr. Wong.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

I was talking earlier about study permits, which are difficult to get due to the lack of guidelines, because students are refused on the pretext that they won't return home. Should there also be guidelines for issuing electronic travel authorizations? A person can't get an electronic travel authorization if they have a criminal record. Under China's national security law, a person can have a criminal record, but it isn't necessarily relevant to Canada.

[*English*]

The Chair: Let's have a quick answer from Reverend Wong.

Mr. Brian Wong: I think the Canadian government has already made the judgment that certain crimes from 2019, regarding the demonstration or the pro-democratic movement, were not—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting. We will have to end here.

Now we will move on to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, You have two and a half minutes for your round of questioning.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

VFS Global is a company contracted by the Canadian government to process immigration applications in visa application centres abroad. The parent company of VFS Global is backed by a sub-

siary of the state-owned Chinese Investment Corporation. It has been reported in the public media that VFS Global has had at least one major security breach of personal data. It was noted that IRCC has no record of this and that the Canadian government was not notified of this breach.

Given the situation going on in Hong Kong, and as things are unfolding, I'm wondering whether any of the witnesses have any concerns about the Canadian government using VFS Global to do this work.

Mr. Brian Wong: Yes, I'm very concerned.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Do you think the government should bring that service back in-house and that this be done by Canadian officials?

Mr. Brian Wong: Yes, I do, as soon as possible.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: That would include terminating the current contract as well?

Mr. Brian Wong: Yes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

I will go to Mr. Tse for the same question.

Rev. Dominic Tse: I was terrified when the news was announced. I was hoping that this would not happen. I think we all know that the Chinese government has the right to require any information from any Chinese organization to be handed over to security. Every potential Chinese organization or citizen can be a potential spy for the Chinese government, even though they don't want to be. They will be coerced, and there's nothing they can do to say no.

I'm not saying that people are bad, but I think a wise decision is to bring it back in-house. We're handling sensitive personal data that could mean life and death for people. We must bring it back home.

● (1725)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'm going to go to Ms. Wong.

Ms. Cherie Wong: We know that the Xi Jinping regime has been increasing control over private corporations, so there is definite concern with giving biometric data to a Chinese state-owned company, especially under the knowledge that many Hong Kong activists' biometric data has already been illegally or arbitrarily collected by the authorities. There are many concerns, and I think Canada should bring those services back in-house.

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting. The time is up. We will now move to Ms. Dancho.

Based on the time, there will be three minutes each for Ms. Dancho and Mr. Dhaliwal.

Ms. Dancho, you can start. You will have three minutes.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My understanding is that 200 Hong Kong activists, mostly young students or even high schoolers, fled by boat to Taiwan. I wonder whether you know how they're doing and what options you think Canada should be offering them. I personally feel that we should be doing something for these brave activists, but nothing has been announced to date. If you could comment on that, it would be great.

Ms. Cherie Wong: Taiwan doesn't have a formal asylum scheme, so I believe Canada should consider issuing travel documents for those who are in Taiwan without status to travel to Canada and resettle here, whether to claim for asylum, to study or to work.

Mr. Brian Wong: If Canada could have an office to assess their asylum application in Taiwan or even in Hong Kong, that would be great, so that they could apply for asylum status overseas. Then they could ask for or fundraise for support after they come here.

Rev. Dominic Tse: I want to add a quick comment.

Besides the activists who fled by boat to Taiwan, many people have immigrated to Taiwan because it's fast and it's closer. However, I know a majority of them would not want to stay in Taiwan for good, because it's too close to China. What about a war breaking out? They want to come to the west. There are thousands of them. There's a Hong Kong group community right there in Taiwan. I think we should attract these people to come to Canada.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: That's good feedback.

Mr. Wong.

Mr. Brian Wong: As I just said, open an office over there.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: That's great feedback. We have about 30 seconds left. Mr. Tse, would you like to make any closing comments?

Rev. Dominic Tse: I want to say a few more things about Taiwan. Even though we do not have diplomatic relationships with Taiwan, I think we have some kind of office in Taiwan. If we raise its level of operation without changing something, it would enable a lot of work to be done through the Taiwan office. There will be more people going to Taiwan, and the people who go to Taiwan are safe because Taiwan checks the backgrounds very stringently. We can thus use Taiwan as an intake point for non-criminals, people who are good, to come to Canada. That's a possibility. I think the government should consider it.

Thank you.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you.

The Chair: We will now move on to end this round of questioning with three minutes of questioning from Mr. Dhaliwal.

Mr. Dhaliwal, you can please start. You will have three minutes for your round of questioning.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Madam Chair, earlier Madam Dancho asked the question about parents and grandparents—those 10,000 applications.

Madam Chair, I want to tell the witnesses that 30,000 more applications are going to be taken this year, in 2021, the highest ever since 2006 under both the Conservative government and the Liberal government. This is the highest number of applications, what this minister and this Parliament will take.

Do you think these 30,000 applications will help people from Hong Kong as well?

Ms. Cherie Wong: Absolutely, yes.

• (1730)

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Is there anyone else?

The answer is yes...? Okay.

You fellows mentioned that there are 300,000 Canadians living in Hong Kong. Do you have the number of them working for Canadian companies?

Mr. Brian Wong: Not me.

Ms. Cherie Wong: I don't have that number. I believe it may be something GAC or IRCC would have.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: How many of those 300,000 Canadians who are there are willing to come back?

Ms. Cherie Wong: If there are measures to enable Canadians to bring their extended family members back to Canada with them, there will be a lot more who are seeking to come back, but at the moment, most people who I know who are Canadian and in Hong Kong do not want to leave their family or spouses behind.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: What are some of the other temporary measures that we should take when it comes to immediate family? I understand. In our culture as well, immediate family also includes cousins, nephews, aunts and so on. If we look at the IRCC's definition of immediate family, what steps can the government take that will help other than opening up to these 30,000 applications?

Ms. Cherie Wong: If their family members are able to go through an expedited pathway to obtain PR status, meaning they are able to work and study here in Canada, I think that would be an improvement to the measures that exist right now.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: How about the number of students? Have you seen the number of students escalate in the last little while since this problem arose in Hong Kong?

The Chair: Please give a quick 20-second answer.

Ms. Cherie Wong: Being an international student here is very expensive. However, many families are looking into sending their kids here because they're afraid of state violence.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Thank you.

Mr. Brian Wong: Let them work here.

The Chair: Thank you.

With that, we come to the end of this meeting.

I will take this opportunity to thank all of our witnesses for appearing before the committee as we continue our study on the special immigration and refugee measures for the people of Hong Kong. Thanks for your important input. On behalf of all of the members, I want to thank you for appearing before the committee today.

I would also like to thank you, members, for today's great work. I will update you on the future meeting. Thank you. The meeting is now adjourned.

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