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Chair: Mr. Ali Ehsassi



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• (1700)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.)): We will commence. Welcome to meeting number 32 of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

I'd like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses and the members. Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mike and please mute yourself when you are not speaking.

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

I remind everyone that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

Before we proceed with our distinguished witnesses today, there is the matter of the election of a vice-chair.

Before we get into that, I'd like to welcome two new members of this committee, members well known to the House: Mr. Randy Hoback, from Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, and Mr. Dave Epp, from Chatham-Kent—Leamington, Ontario. They will replace Mr. Marty Morantz and Mr. Ziad Aboultaif. I think I speak on behalf of everyone on this committee when I thank them for their collaboration with other members of this committee.

Therefore, since Mr. Morantz is no longer a member of the committee, the clerk will proceed with the election of the first vice-chair.

Thank you.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Ariane Gagné-Frégeau): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Pursuant to Standing Order 106(2), the first vice-chair must be a member of the official opposition. I am now prepared to receive motions for the first vice-chair.

Mr. Michael Chong.

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

I move that Mr. Garnett Genuis be nominated for the position of vice-chair of this committee.

The Clerk: Thank you.

It has been moved by Mr. Michael Chong that Mr. Garnett Genuis be elected first vice-chair of the committee.

Are there any further motions?

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion?

Thank you.

I declare the motion carried and Mr. Garnett Genuis duly elected first vice-chair of the committee.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: Congratulations, Mr. Genuis.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, January 31, 2022, the committee resumes its study of the situation at the Russia-Ukraine border and the implications for peace and security.

It is now my pleasure to welcome two incredibly distinguished witnesses for the purposes of our committee today. First we have Ms. Evgenia Kara-Murza, advocacy coordinator of the Free Russia Foundation, and, of course, wife of unjustly imprisoned Russian opposition leader, Vladimir Kara-Murza.

We also have a second guest, someone who is well known to all the members of this committee. We are incredibly honoured to have Professor Irwin Cotler, our former Minister of Justice and someone who has often shared his expertise with us. Today he is here in his capacity as the founder and international chair of the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights and as the special envoy of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Community of Democracies on the case of Vladimir Kara-Murza.

Each of you will be provided five minutes for your opening remarks, after which members will have the opportunity to ask you questions.

That being said, I would like to say at the outset that this hearing is starting somewhat late, and unfortunately Mr. Cotler is required to leave at 5:25 because of another engagement and another commitment, while Ms. Kara-Murza can stay with us only until 5:45.

Without further ado, Ms. Kara-Murza, the floor is yours for your opening remarks, for five minutes.

Ms. Evgenia Kara-Murza (Advocacy Coordinator, Free Russia Foundation, As an Individual): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends.

First of all, I would like to say how grateful I am to be offered this platform to continue my husband's hugely important work on behalf of political prisoners in the Russian Federation on behalf of Russian civil society.

I would also like to say how deeply honoured and humbled I am to have Professor Irwin Cotler, a towering figure in the struggle for human rights around the world, as an ally in my struggle, in my fight, for the release of my husband, Vladimir Kara-Murza. Thank you so very much, Professor.

For almost eight months we have been witnessing a bloody massacre of the Ukrainian people by the Russian army, sent to Ukraine by an increasingly deranged dictator in the Kremlin. It seems the world has finally realized, or has been forced to stop closing its eyes to who Mr. Putin truly is, and is now watching in horror, thinking about what else this madman is capable of.

People like my husband, Vladimir Kara-Murza, have known it for over two decades, and have tried time and again to warn the world about the danger of appeasing a dictator and looking for compromises in dealing with a bully who sees every compromise as his opponent's weakness.

The horrible truth about this war is that it was not unexpected, but came as a result of over two decades of impunity that Vladimir Putin has enjoyed while oppressing his own people and carrying out his other military campaigns. For years he's had the opponents of his regime murdered, both in Russia and on foreign soil, and has broken numerous international laws by leading a war in Chechnya, by invading Georgia, by annexing Crimea and by bombing Syria, all of this with no serious repercussions for himself or the regime that he's built. Emboldened by continuous impunity, Vladimir Putin ended up believing that he could get away with pretty much anything and launched a full-blown war of aggression against our closest neighbour, killing thousands and displacing millions.

The aggression against Ukraine goes hand in hand with a massive-scale repression in Russia.

In his Nobel lecture in December 1975, Andrei Sakharov named 126 prisoners of conscience in the Soviet Union. Today, according to Memorial, Russia's most respected human rights NGO, there are 500 political prisoners in the Russian Federation. According to Memorial itself, this number is pretty conservative, since the NGO uses very strict criteria to determine that someone is a political prisoner, and dozens of cases are still being reviewed.

In her Moscow Mechanism report, released in Vienna on September 22 of this year, OSCE rapporteur Professor Nussberger pointed out, "Even though the time frame for the mission was extremely short, the rapporteur was able to collect much more material than could be included in the report. This is due to the enormous dimension of the human rights problems civil society in Russia is facing."

According to OVD-Info, an independent media project on human rights and political persecution in Russia, since February 24 of this

year, 19,335 people have been arbitrarily detained across the country. Over 4,000 administrative cases and hundreds of criminal cases, including against my husband, have been opened against anti-war protesters.

Since February, protests have never stopped and detention stories are becoming increasingly horrific.

Russian journalist Maria Ponomarenko, who is facing up to 10 years in prison for a Telegram post about the Russian bombing of a theatre in Mariupol, was sent to a psychiatric hospital for a so-called "evaluation", during which she was tortured and injected with unknown substances. Thus, we are witnessing the revival of punitive psychiatry that was widely used against Soviet dissidents. This case is awfully reminiscent of those of Natalia Gorbanevskaya and Viktor Fainberg, two of the seven people who went out into the Red Square to protest against the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and were then sent to a psychiatric hospital to be treated for insanity. Anyone contradicting the official narrative was then, and is again, being portrayed as either a criminal or an insane person.

Poet and activist Artyom Kamardin was beaten and raped with a dumbbell by police officers during his arrest for reciting anti-war poetry at an anti-mobilization event in Moscow. He was denied hospitalization and is now facing a prison term for, as the official police report said, "inciting hatred...with a threat of violence".

● (1705)

While he was being raped, his girlfriend Alexandra Popova was being beaten and threatened with group rape in the next room. Police officers were pulling her hair out and putting super glue on her face.

Andrei Pivovarov, Lilia Chanysheva, Yuri Dmitriev, Aleksei Gorinov, Igor Maltsev, Ilya Yashin, Aleksei Navalny, Alexandra Skochilenko, Dmitry Talantov, Victoria Petrova, Darya Ivanova—I could read these names for hours.

One of those charged for spreading, as the government calls it, "fake news" about Putin's war in Ukraine is my husband, Vladimir Kara-Murza. He refused to be intimidated, despite two assassination attacks on him, perpetrated by a team of FSB operatives in retaliation for his tireless advocacy for the introduction of personal targeted sanctions against criminals and murderers of the Putin regime, the same advocacy for which Boris Nemtsov paid the ultimate price when he was assassinated on the Bolshoy Moskvoretsky Bridge in Moscow in 2015.

Since his arrest in early April, Vladimir has been designated as a foreign agent by the Russian authorities and as a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International. Just over a week ago he was awarded the Václav Havel Human Rights Prize by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, by the Václav Havel Library and the Charta 77 Foundation, and at the same time was charged with high treason by the Russian government. My husband, the father of my three children, is now facing up to 24 years in prison for standing up to the regime of murderers and for believing that our country deserves a better future.

As Elie Wiesel said in his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech:

What all these victims need above all is to know that they are not alone; that we are not forgetting them, that when their voices are stifled we shall lend them ours, that while their freedom depends on ours, the quality of our freedom depends on theirs.

I am here today because their voices need to be heard and my husband's voice needs to be heard—the voice of my partner, my best friend and the father of my children, who has risked his life, time and again, to make sure the world knows that a lot of Russians reject this regime and everything it stands for.

I am here today to ask the global democratic community to find ways to acknowledge these brave Russians and to recognize their fight, because these people give us hope that Russia has a future.

Thank you very much.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Kara-Murza.

We now go to Professor Irwin Cotler.

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Founder and International Chair of the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

May I say how delighted I am to be able to join Evgenia, Vladimir's partner in their joint heroic odyssey on behalf of the Russian people, on behalf of the Ukrainian people, on behalf of the struggle for democracy and human rights and indeed on behalf of our common humanity.

Vladimir is the ultimate Russian patriot and dissident in the best tradition of the father of the Russian dissident movement, Andrei Sakharov. What Sakharov once said of Sharansky, when he said the trial in the then Soviet Union of Anatoly Sharansky was the trial of human rights, can now be said of Vladimir Kara-Murza: The persecution and prosecution of Vladimir Kara-Murza are really the persecution and prosecution of the best of what Russia is all about.

Vladimir, like his hero Boris Nemtsov, the democratic leader of the Russian opposition, who was tragically assassinated in February 2015, has himself been the target of two assassination attempts.

Vladimir, like Václav Havel, who spoke truth to power, has now been awarded, as Evgenia said, and rightly so, the Václav Havel Human Rights Prize but has been prosecuted by Putin for seeking and speaking the truth.

Vladimir, an award-winning journalist, has had his expression not only silenced but criminalized. Vladimir is an incredible film-

maker. Just yesterday evening we saw one of his films on a Russian heroic cleric, Father Edelstein. The title of the film was *My Duty to Not Stay Silent*, to not be complicit with evil. Indeed, that is the duty and the responsibility of all of us. This committee is in a position to break that silence and to take the necessary action.

Vladimir, a global architect of Magnitsky sanctions, now personifies the need to impose Magnitsky sanctions on all those involved in his arbitrary arrest, detention, persecution and prosecution. Indeed, in each and all of these, there is a clear Canadian connection. Vladimir has a clear Canadian connection. He came to Canada in 2011 when I was a member of the foreign affairs subcommittee on international human rights. I tabled the first draft of what was to become the Magnitsky legislation. It was Vladimir who came here with Boris Nemtsov, along with Bill Browder, to support that legislation. When he was asked at that point whether the legislation was anti-Russian, he said that no, it was the most pro-Russian legislation you could find. This is legislation on behalf of the Russian people. I would say this is legislation on behalf of the Canadian people in protection of Canadian sovereignty, security, economy and human dignity.

Vladimir, therefore, personified these objectives and paid a price. He came to testify in 2015 before this foreign affairs committee. He was a principal witness when we were considering Magnitsky legislation. He went back to Russia. He was targeted for assassination and poisoned, and he almost died. In 2017, when the committee reconvened after an election, Vladimir again was a principal witness before this committee, which led to the adoption of such legislation. He went back to Russia and was again targeted for assassination and poisoned and almost died. He emerged and is a hero of the struggle for democracy and human rights in Russia and beyond. The global Magnitsky sanctions are but one expression of that initiative of his, which is protective, as I say, of the Russian people and protective of democracy.

It was Vladimir, as Evgenia has mentioned as well, who warned against indifference and inaction in the face of Putin's culture of corruption and criminality.

• (1715)

It was Vladimir who warned us that when Putin bombarded and assaulted Chechnya, when he invaded Georgia, when he annexed the Crimea, when he bombarded Syria and when he was engaged in massive domestic repression, it was the silence, the indifference and the inaction of the international community that not only indulged this culture of corruption and criminality but also incentivized this culture of impunity.

Evgenia has been bringing this message just as Vladimir was bringing you that message all these years. The importance, therefore, to stand up now in your hearings with regard to Ukraine....

Putin probably said this: If the international community did nothing with Chechnya, with Georgia, with the Crimea, with Syria and with my massive repression—he wouldn't say that—why should they care if I go into Ukraine, which is not an independent country anyway, which is not an independent people, which is part of us, etc.?

It's a whole culture of misinformation, and our indifference and inaction incentivize impunity. It is our responsibility to act.

I will close by saying this. While it is essential that we provide—and have been providing, and need to provide even more—military support, economic support, humanitarian assistance and sanctions to the Ukrainian people, it is particularly important as well, in terms of Vladimir's case as a looking glass into all that I've mentioned, that we impose targeted Magnitsky sanctions on all of those engaged, as I said, in his arbitrary arrest, detention, persecution and prosecution; that we, as Evgenia said, support Russian civil society; that we support the 19,000 who have been arbitrarily arrested and detained, for whom Vladimir stands as a looking glass; and that we take his case and cause as a need for us to take the necessary initiatives.

I'll be happy to elaborate on any questions with regard to protecting against arbitrary detention, protecting media freedom, protecting and promoting democracy and human rights, and imposing necessary sanctions and the like.

Thank you for your attention. I'll be delighted to respond to any questions, but mostly to hear Evgenia and her testimony.

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Cotler.

We'll open it to questions from the members.

Again, I would just remind you that Professor Cotler has to leave in approximately eight minutes, and Ms. Kara-Murza in approximately half an hour.

Mr. Chong, you have six minutes.

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

Thank you, Mr. Cotler and Madam Kara-Murza, for your opening remarks.

Madam Kara-Murza, I want to convey, I think on behalf of all members of this committee, our thanks for your being here and for your bravery, your dedication and your stoicism in the face of the persecution of your husband. We very much appreciate your taking the time to testify in front of us today.

You're one of the few people who have come to our committee with eyes and ears on what is going on in Russia today. Most of the contact with the outside world has been cut. I know that we talked about this earlier privately, but I'd like to go on the record about it today.

The New York Times reported this week that western intelligence has estimated that about a third to half of all the 200,000-strong invasion force are casualties. That's an astounding number of some 67,000 to 100,000 casualties that the Russian military has suffered since it began its invasion of Ukraine on February 24.

My question is this: What are your Russian contacts telling you about the impact of these casualties on the Putin regime?

• (1720)

Ms. Evgenia Kara-Murza: Thank you very much for your question.

For a very long time, Vladimir Putin avoided declaring mobilization because he knew that this would be a very unpopular measure. For a very long time, he wanted the majority of the Russian population to not be affected by war and for it to be somewhere “out there”.

The majority of the soldiers had been drafted from Russia's poorest regions, the ethnic minority regions where people live below the poverty line. Many of them were signing the contracts because they considered it to be their way out of poverty. That does not excuse it, but it's just to demonstrate how the regime has been exploiting ethnic minorities in Russia and how it has been using these people to fuel the war.

Now, after the declaration of the mobilization.... This is not a partial mobilization. The law itself on mobilization does not have the word “partial” anywhere in it. This means that Vladimir Putin will be drafting as many soldiers as he needs to buy time to get to the winter, to wear you out, to wear out the global democratic west, to wear Ukrainians out and to cover the front line with corpses of Russian soldiers.

Now that this mobilization is affecting the majority of the Russian territory, I do believe that we will be seeing some changes. I mean, the changes that have already been happening suggest that. In the absence of free media, free elections, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and all basic fundamental freedoms, people do not have any ways to express their frustration anymore. Very often, they're switching to partisan movements.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you for that answer.

I have two quick questions on how we can support Russian civil society and the Russian opposition in Russia and, more specifically, how we can counter the disinformation that's being spread by the regime in Russia and provide the Russian people with good information.

My first quick question is this: Are there any credible public opinion pollsters in Russia?

Ms. Evgenia Kara-Murza: Opinion polls are very often used by the regime nowadays to create the semblance of overwhelming support for Mr. Putin and his regime. Those results of opinion polls are claiming that the majority of the Russian population stands behind Putin and his regime.

However, what I've said in my remarks shows a different picture. Had Vladimir Putin really enjoyed that overwhelming support of the Russian population, he would not be resorting to mass repression, the use of punitive psychiatry, and widespread torture, violence and brutality by police. He would not need to do that. The number of political prisoners, which grows by the day, shows that the situation in Russia is not as the regime wants to portray it.

Just two weeks ago, I was speaking at the OSCE Warsaw Human Dimension Conference and mentioned the number of political prisoners according to Memorial. Then it was 488. Today this is 500, and it grows. It continues growing by the day.

I would discourage you from trusting the results of opinion polls conducted in a totalitarian state by state-controlled pollsters.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you for that answer. I have a very quick second question.

We no longer live in the age of long-distance shortwave broadcasts that we once used to provide information around the world to populations of authoritarian regimes. Some people suggested that Canada should be funding virtual private networks and VPN technology to allow Russians access, through these VPNs, to information in Russian from credible outside sources.

What do you think of that idea?

Ms. Evgenia Kara-Murza: I can tell you that the number of VPN services installed since February has skyrocketed in Russia. People are looking for access to independent, objective information.

The entire media space in Russia has basically been cleansed. There is nothing independent or objective left anymore that is readily available to the majority of the Russian population.

People who have Internet access in Russia are trying to find ways to access that independent information. A countless number of Russian journalists were forced to leave the country, and they continue their very important work of producing informational content for the Russian-speaking population. By installing VPN services, the population get that access, so this is a very good measure to support countering propaganda.

We also need to consider one very important thing: Vladimir Putin knows how powerful a tool propaganda is. This is why he began his rule by closing down one independent TV channel after another. By 2003, the majority of the Russian population who rely on TV as their main source of information had no access to a single independent TV channel. That's since 2003. That's 19 years of hearing the exact same message over and over again: Russia is a great country surrounded by enemies; everyone out there wants to see us on our knees; everyone wants to see Russia's demise; and everyone out there hates you. It's been 19 years of that.

Since February, the last three remaining major media outlets—Radio Echo Moscow, the Dozhd TV station, which operated only online, and Novaya Gazeta—were all forced by the government to close down their operations. They moved outside of Russia and they continue their very important work, so they should be supported.

Vladimir Putin has been putting billions of dollars into his propaganda machine to maintain the level of aggression and misinformation in society that would allow him to continue with warmongering, severing the majority of the Russian population from real information about what is happening in Ukraine. The independent media outlets that have been forced out of Russia and are now operating from outside of course have nothing similar to the funding of

propagandist media. Their funding cannot be compared, so their work needs a lot of support.

• (1725)

The Chair: There were six minutes, but we're way over that. We're hitting almost 10 minutes now, so we'll allow other members to ask questions.

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): On a point of order, could I ask that the other parties get an equal amount of time?

The Chair: Yes. There would be an—

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Could we divide the remaining time [*Inaudible—Editor*] the reality, because then Ms. McPherson will not have time.

I'll just put that out there.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Well, that's....

The Chair: Next we'll go to Mr. Oliphant.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Thank you both for being here.

While I am loath to make speeches and I like to ask questions, I want to start by saying that one of your comments struck me. If there is one message I want you to take back with you, it is that we will not be worn out. Neither the Government of Canada nor, I believe, the Parliament of Canada is going to be worn out by Putin and his war. I want you to take that back.

It's not easy, because fatigue sets in, but I think we are energized by two things. The first is the dissidents, who continue to be brave in Russia and continue to speak, continue to work and continue to act. The second is the people of Ukraine, who continue to fight and act. That is empowering to us. Please take that message back with you.

Following up on Mr. Chong, there are a couple of areas I want to talk about.

When we look at and are trying to discern the difference between Russians and Putin, it blurs, because he has such massive support at times. In your understanding—and I know you don't have complete access to all this sort of information—is it respect for Putin, is it fear of Putin or is it fatigue and powerlessness that seem to be the enemy of enabling Russia to be what Russia should be?

Ms. Evgenia Kara-Murza: First of all, I don't believe that Vladimir Putin has ever enjoyed the overwhelming support of the majority of the Russian population, because the last free—but not fair—election, according to international organizations, took place in Russia in 2003. That's 19 years of stolen elections.

Vladimir Putin re-elected himself as president time and again in the absence of any alternative. All his opponents who could have provided this alternative were either killed, like Boris Nemtsov, or thrown in prison, like Alexei Navalny. That basically describes how much support he has.

When we talk about the Russian population, I think it is very difficult to assess or evaluate the state of mind of Russian society as a whole in the absence, again, of free media, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of expression and free opinion polls—all the basic freedoms. How do you assess the state of mind of these people?

Yes, many of them have been brainwashed because of, as I already mentioned, 19 years of propaganda. The majority of the Russian population rely on TV as their main source of information. In bigger cities, of course, they have access to Internet. When you move into the country, there are no public toilets, let alone Internet. They don't know what a VPN service is.

Yes, many of them have been brainwashed. Many of them have been scared into silence because when people are being raped while being arrested, of course it is done to scare the rest of them into silence and to intimidate them by showing what might happen to them if they even risk doing anything of the kind.

I just want to say that you and I see all the pictures that are being thrown out there by Russian propaganda with these Z people, those who put kids in Z shapes in the snow in the streets. This is a very aggressive part of society, but it is a minority. You are seeing this because there are no independent media and the only media in Russia are propagandist media. This is the only image that they want to throw out there for you to rely on.

• (1730)

Hon. Robert Oliphant: One of our problems as a democratic liberal democracy is we don't always have the tools to fight that propaganda machine in any way. An analysis of what's going on is important in order for us to have the right tools to do it.

Your husband was very clear that international presence, international persistence and naming is important. Those have been themes he's had.

This question may be to Professor Cotler.

Irwin, I had forgotten I had met Vladimir until you told us about the meeting in 2011. What should Canada be doing in terms of that? We now have Sergei Lavrov saying he will downgrade the western presence of Russia because we're the enemy. We need to speak, we need to be present and we need to name. What do we do and how do we do it?

Hon. Irwin Cotler: I've just been notified that I must go, so I'll do it quickly with some one-liners in terms of action items.

Number one, Canada led the way on adopting the declaration against arbitrary detention in state-to-state relations. Vladimir is a case study of that. He's a citizen of the U.K. as well as of Russia. We are convening these signatories to that declaration in February. We should use his case as a case study for the mobilization against arbitrary detention.

Number two, we are also co-chairs of the Media Freedom Coalition. Media freedom has been not only silenced but criminalized in Russia, as Evgenia said. We should use our chair and leadership at the Media Freedom Coalition, again with Vladimir's case as a case study.

Number three, in speaking now as a special envoy for the Community of Democracies, I will say that Canada has now just assumed the chair of the executive council of the Community of Democracies. Again, this is an opportunity within that forum of the Community of Democracies to highlight Vladimir's struggle for democracy in Russia and Ukraine and on behalf of all of us.

Number four, with regard to Magnitsky sanctions, I'm glad that Canada's taking the lead in imposing targeted sanctions, but we have to internationalize the Magnitsky sanctions, so we should take leadership in developing a concerted international strategy with regard to Magnitsky sanctions.

Finally, I'll just mention one other thing with regard to Putin's aggression. While there are legal and judicial remedies for war crimes, crimes against humanity and so on, there are not for the crime of aggression. We need to support the establishment of an independent tribunal for the crime of aggression so that Putin and all those who are aiding and abetting in this crime of aggression against the Ukrainian people can be brought to justice.

Thank you.

• (1735)

Hon. Robert Oliphant: You normally have six action items, and you only had five today.

Two and a half extra minutes can go to the NDP and the Bloc.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Oliphant.

We now go to Mr. Lemire.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Privyet. Spasiba.

Your testimony tells us that we must be firm and strict in the face of Russian measures. I hope your message will be heard around the world and reach the Russian people. Your bravery does you great honour and I'm touched by it. I can feel the love you have for your people, that drives us to want to take action.

My first thought is for your husband, with some concern for his condition. Is there any way to find out how he is doing? What are his detention conditions? Are you in contact with him? Is there anything more we can do as Quebeckers and as Canadians?

Ms. Evgenia Kara-Murza: Thank you very much for your question and kind words.

Vladimir is still being held in a detention centre in Moscow awaiting trial. I have not spoken to my husband, nor have I seen him since April. My contact with him is through his lawyer. I am very lucky, because his lawyer is also a family friend. He was Boris Nemtsov's lawyer before he was murdered. After the murder, he worked on his assassination report with Vladimir and Margareta Cederfelt, president of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. I believe they became friends. I have full confidence in him. I am sure he will do his best on my husband's case.

Of course, the decision about my husband has already been made. Since he has been charged with high treason, he now faces a prison sentence of up to 24 years in a strict regime. I know that the only way my husband could get out of a Russian prison would be if the regime were to collapse. It is my goal to make sure that day comes as soon as possible. That is the purpose of my work and everything I do now.

[English]

I call it putting my small nail in the coffin of this regime.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: You have all but answered my second question, which sought to know what cause you and your husband are supporting. Therefore, how do you assess how far your voice travels on the international stage and the response of countries like Canada, but also the United States and other superpowers?

Ms. Evgenia Kara-Murza: Please forgive me, but I'm going to have to answer in English, because I'm afraid I won't find the right words. I want my message to be clearly understood.

[English]

I think we all understand that the condition for this region and for all of Europe to be finally at peace with itself and with everyone is that the regime in Russia fall.

There are, in my opinion, three key factors that would bring this day forward, and I'm trying to carry this message everywhere I go.

The first key factor is, of course, Ukraine's victory—Ukraine's victory on Ukraine's terms, which means that every single Russian soldier has to leave the Ukrainian territory, including the illegally occupied zones. Ukraine has shown everyone how resilient they are, how strong they are and how amazing they are in fighting, and not just for themselves. They're not fighting just for themselves: They're fighting for democracy. They're fighting for freedom. It is the quintessential fight of the good against the evil, and I think they deserve all of the help and support. If they need more weapons, they should get more weapons. If they need more humanitarian help, this is what they should get, because they're fighting for all of us, and their fight is admirable.

The second key factor that would bring the downfall of the regime closer is, I believe, sanctions—both economic sanctions, which would cripple Russia's economy and make it more costly for the regime to continue the warmongering, and then targeted personal sanctions, because they target specific individuals implicated in gross human rights violations and they also send a very clear signal to Russian civil society that the global democratic community sees a difference between the regime, which has been oppressing its

people, and Russian civil society, which tries to oppose the regime and fight back.

The third key factor, which I already mentioned, is support for Russian civil society, for all those people who find courage to go out and protest and say no to this war, for all those Russian NGOs, Russian journalists and human right activists who were forced to leave the country to be able to continue their very important work from outside.

In my work, I very often rely on the information they can provide. I rely on information that Memorial can provide on political persecution, the number of political prisoners and individual cases. I rely on the information that OVD provides. All of these organizations have their people on the ground, working to provide this information and make it possible for us to carry the message further.

I believe these are the three factors that would bring the downfall of the Putin regime closer. This will make it possible for those Russians who stand up to Putin to make sure that Russia can never be turned into an authoritarian or a totalitarian regime again. This will mean that we will be able to start building that whole and free Europe that all of us want to see.

• (1740)

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: My time is up.

I especially thank you for your excellent French and I wish you the best of luck.

Spasiba.

Ms. Evgenia Kara-Murza: Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lemire.

We now go to Ms. McPherson.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Thank you, Ms. Kara-Murza.

I know that you do have to leave now, so I won't ask you any questions, but I do want to take a moment to tell you...

You spoke to me on Tuesday. We were able to sit down and talk, and I'm deeply moved by what you've done and your strength. You talked about your husband and his integrity. You spoke of how it's not always easy to live with a man with such integrity, but I look at you and I see somebody with such incredible integrity and strength. To describe yourself as a small nail in the coffin is wrong; you are a giant force that is doing so much for the Russian people.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Heather McPherson: I know I speak on behalf of all of us when I say that we will continue to raise your husband's name in the House of Commons. We will continue to talk about your husband and all those who are being detained. We will continue to fight for Ukraine and we will continue to fight to make sure that Vladimir Putin cannot continue to oppress the people of Russia.

Thank you.

Ms. Evgenia Kara-Murza: Thank you so very much for giving me this incredible opportunity to address you all, and thank you very much for all of the insightful questions.

I could talk for hours, because there are so many messages and there is so much rage inside of me because this person has turned my country into a country aggressor. I will keep putting my nail in deep because I will never forgive him for what he has been doing to my family and for what he has been doing to my country. I do very much appreciate all of the help, support and solidarity that I've seen here during my visit.

Thank you so very much.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

• (1745)

The Chair: Ms. Kara-Murza, allow me to say thank you ever so much for your powerful and compelling testimony. You have not only provided us with information about the continued prosecution and persecution of your husband; you have also reminded each and every one of us that we have individual obligations as well as collective obligations.

Much as was underscored by the other members, allow me to say that each of us recognizes full well that we have to continue to stand by you. We have to continue to ensure that our government

does work with the Government of the United Kingdom. I certainly look forward to very soon, hopefully, having the honour of having your husband once again in our Parliament.

Thank you very much.

Voices: Hear, hear!

Hon. Robert Oliphant: I know that photos aren't allowed in a committee meeting except with unanimous consent. Perhaps you could do a photo, if you have time for a photo, with the members of the committee.

The Chair: Is it agreed unanimously?

A voice: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: Sure. We can suspend. Perhaps that's the better approach.

We will suspend and go in camera. For members joining us on Zoom, please use the second link that was provided.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, there's an issue that I didn't want to raise in public. Could we come back briefly in public before we go in camera?

The Chair: We can do that once we come back. In camera you can introduce a motion, right?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Yes, but it's a substantive issue that should be done in public. Can we just...?

I mean, I'd like to operate by consensus—

The Chair: No. I'm sorry.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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