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Chair: The Honourable Jim Carr



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• (1140)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Jim Carr (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.)):
Good morning, everyone. I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 22 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

We will start by acknowledging that we are meeting on the traditional, unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of November 25, 2021. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

Members and witnesses participating virtually may speak in the official language of your choice, and you will see those choices at the bottom of your screen of floor, English or French.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, February 17, 2022, the committee is resuming its study of the rise of ideologically motivated violent extremism in Canada.

I would like to welcome the witnesses here with us today. We have Jane Bailey, full professor, faculty of law, University of Ottawa; Dr. Garth Davies, associate director, institute on violence, terrorism, and security, Simon Fraser University; and Tony McAleer, author and co-founder of Life After Hate.

This is the thirty-second warning to everybody. Colleagues know it well. Witnesses will get to know it well. I have leeway of 10 seconds but no more, and if I have to cut you off, I have to cut you off. Everybody has been warned, and that's the rule as to how we manage time around here.

I would now invite Dr. Jane Bailey to make an opening statement of up to five minutes.

Jane Bailey, the floor is yours.

Professor Jane Bailey (Full Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Ottawa, As an Individual): Thank you very much for inviting me to appear before you today.

I'm a law professor at the University of Ottawa, and I co-lead The eQuality Project, which is a SSHRC-funded initiative that focuses on young people's experiences with privacy and equality in digitally networked environments, including experiences relating to tech-facilitated violence.

Like those of you in the chamber, I appear today on unceded Algonquin territory. I want to acknowledge and thank the Algonquin peoples who have cared for, and continue to care for, this land.

You have heard and will hear from many witnesses with specific expertise in ideologically motivated violent extremism, or IMVE, from numerous perspectives, including psychological, security and technological. The perspective I bring today is a more general one that is based on my research and policy submissions on tech-facilitated violence, including work related to Internet hate speech targeting members of marginalized communities. It was initially inspired by having acted many years ago as junior co-counsel to a complainant in the first Internet hate speech case to be heard by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal under the former section 13 of the Canadian Human Rights Act.

I was pleased to see that the motion initiating this study aims to eventually enable government to table a comprehensive response. IMVE targeting members of marginalized communities forms part of a spectrum of hatred and violence against them. That spectrum both reflects and is reflective of a broader and complex context that is rife with social inequality and systemic oppressions. Development and implementation of a nuanced, multipronged national strategy will be essential to meaningfully address the complexity of IMVE and other forms of hate in a way that affirms and respects the rights of members of marginalized communities to fully participate in all aspects of public and private life, free from violence and hate.

Criminal law should form only part of that strategy. Criminal law's post hoc nature and its disproportionate use against members of marginalized communities means that some will have good reason not to see criminal law, or even law in general, as a meaningful solution when they are targeted by hate. For this and other reasons, approaches beyond legal measures will be necessary, including proactive ones aimed at structural and systemic factors. At all costs, we must avoid solutions that do further harm to marginalized communities who are simultaneously disproportionately targeted by both hate and discriminatory state surveillance and violence.

I turn now to seven considerations for developing a multipronged national strategy prioritizing a survivor-centred, substantive, equality-focused approach.

One, centre members of affected communities in policy processes like this—including women, Black, indigenous, Jewish and Muslim peoples, people of colour, and members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community—to ensure that understanding the diversity in their lived realities is prioritized in this process. It also means centring the expertise of researchers who are members of those communities, including those from disciplines outside of law, criminology and security studies, and centring the experience of community organizations that are trusted by and serve those communities.

Two, reject approaches that make targeted individuals and groups responsible to avoid harm. Instead, focus on the responsibility of society as a whole, individual perpetrators, and the role that the underlying “data in exchange for services” commercial model that currently characterizes digital networks plays in shaping the environment in problematic ways.

Three, better support marginalized community members targeted by hate through such measures as funding trusted community agencies that serve them and, with respect to tech-facilitated violence, creating an administrative body that they can contact for assistance.

Four, support proactive human rights-based educational and outreach initiatives aimed at dismantling underlying systems of discrimination and dehumanizing stereotypes that undermine marginalized community members' right to full and equal participation.

Five, ensure that the central and important goal of defending the rights of members of targeted communities does not become an excuse for unnecessary expansion of police powers and surveillance.

Six, improve the responsiveness of the criminal justice system for survivors who do wish to pursue that avenue with social context training for law enforcement officers, prosecutors and judges that centres principles of substantive equality.

- (1145)

Seven, recognize that although IMVE is part of a spectrum of violence experienced by members of marginalized communities, the complexity of IMVE and other forms of violence—

The Chair: You have 10 seconds, please.

Prof. Jane Bailey: —on that spectrum raise unique considerations requiring tailored measures rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you. They're coming soon enough.

I would now like to invite Dr. Garth Davies to make an opening statement of up to five minutes.

The floor is yours, sir, whenever you choose to take it.

Dr. Garth Davies (Associate Director, Institute on Violence, Terrorism, and Security, Simon Fraser University, As an Individual): Thank you very much for inviting me to speak with you today.

I am an associate professor of criminology at Simon Fraser University and the associate director of the institute on violence, terrorism, and security. I've been researching extremism for so long now

that when I began we called it terrorism. That's just a broad background.

Ideologically motivated terrorism, or IMVE, along with organized crime and ghost guns really are the most pressing public safety issues in Canada today. When we tie IMVE in with the transnational nature that we see, for example, in the Ottawa occupation with the anti-democratic trajectory of the extreme right, we also have a threat to national security as well.

There are numerous circumstances that are and have been implicated in the rise of IMVE, which would include, but are not limited to, anger about globalization, unease at the speed of social change, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the efforts of ideological entrepreneurs to promote IMVE, and the exacerbating and accelerating effects of the Trump presidency, which coincided with a broader international tilt towards populism and authoritarian governance.

What the occupation of Ottawa demonstrated, I think, was how quickly specific issues can become subsumed into the toxic quagmire of grievances that motivates extremists. The flexibility and breadth of these narratives allow extremists to speak to and connect with a potentially massive, receptive audience.

Within the IMVE social ecology, law enforcement, intelligence and national security agencies face a series of interrelated, hard problems. The first is the mainstreaming of extremist ideologies and the consequent normalization of hate, polarization and othering.

The second would be the weaponization of conspiracy theories and disinformation. Conspiracy theories are no longer what they once were, what we would call old-school conspiracy theories, which actually required some evidence. Now innuendo or just plain fabrication, outright lies, are sufficient.

There is a grey area of radicalization that is becoming increasingly more important. This is personified in the story that everyone knows about Aunt Margaret. She suddenly starts talking about *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and her family members are saying, “What the heck has happened to Aunt Margaret?” We need to understand the reach that these radicalization efforts are actually having.

The central role of the Internet and social media in facilitating IMVE is an essential tenet of this committee, so they are well aware of that.

Finally, there is a significant challenge potentially in the increasing nexus between the online and offline environments, again as demonstrated by what happened in Ottawa. Based on my research and the hard lessons of the past 20 years that we've learned collectively, I would like to offer some cautions about how Canada may respond to IMVE.

The first is that it is critical to recognize that IMVE is simultaneously international, national and local in nature. In referring to the terms of reference for the committee, I'm a bit concerned that IMVE may be perceived as something that is foreign to Canada. It most assuredly is not. We must pay attention to the made-in-Canada aspects of the problem and the community-specific natures of the problem.

Understand that we cannot counter emotion with facts or rationality. IMVE is fuelled by an emotional narrative. It's a mistake to think that we can counter that with corrections or with statistics or by simply rational talking.

Funding is not a major concern here. I know it's good that we're talking about funding. I know that it is a major emphasis of this, and there's an emphasis on doing something, but it should not overshadow our concerns. Funding is not driving this. GoFundMe and other platforms are not driving IMVE in Canada or anywhere else.

We cannot rely on social media platforms and tech companies to do the heavy lifting for us, nor should we want to rely on these companies. Algorithms are not magical, golden bullets. They are helpful, useful tools, but much more needs to be done from our side. I have great concerns about Facebook, or now Meta, determining what I or anybody else can or cannot have access to.

• (1150)

Finally, we should not be focused on predominantly negative measures. There will be a lot of discussion about deplatforming, about kicking groups off the Internet. We should be very wary of this if for no other reason than it signals to these groups—

The Chair: You have 10 seconds, please.

Dr. Garth Davies: —that we are afraid of them and that we need to essentially not be afraid of these—

The Chair: Thank you.

Dr. Garth Davies: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, sir.

Now I will call upon Mr. Tony McAleer.

Sir, thank you for coming, for showing up in person. We get to enjoy your company.

For the next five minutes, you have the floor for an opening statement.

Mr. Tony McAleer (Author and Co-founder, Life After Hate, As an Individual): Thank you for having me.

My name is Tony McAleer. I'm the author of *The Cure for Hate: A Former White Supremacist's Journey from Violent Extremism to Radical Compassion*.

I spent 15 years in the violent far right in Canada and the U.S. as a follower, a recruiter and a leader. I left that movement in 1998 and began a journey of transformation and healing that involved over 1,000 hours of individual and group counselling with a coach and mentor who, ironically, was Jewish.

In 2010, I decided to help others who were where I once was and co-founded the U.S.-based, non-profit called Life After Hate, which

has helped over 700 people leave violent, far right extremist groups behind.

My experience of getting into and out of these organizations and ideologies has led me to consult and advise governments of all levels over three continents, including two prime ministers in Austria and New Zealand.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

While the challenge of the rising tide of ideologically motivated violent extremism is nothing new, the speed at which ideas are spread and the recent trend of mass murders make this a dangerous global terrorist threat.

We remember Anders Breivik, murderer of 76 people in Norway; the Christchurch mosque massacre in New Zealand; the AME church in Charleston; the Oak Creek Sikh temple in Wisconsin; and the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh.

Closer to home, the mosque shooting in Quebec City, the mass vehicular homicides in London and Toronto, the rise of anti-Asian attacks and assorted hate crimes against indigenous, Black and LGBTQ2S communities create a climate of fear that tears at the fabric of our society.

This is a complex problem that requires a thoughtful and nuanced response. Often well-meaning but expedient solutions can cause unintended consequences and be counterproductive. The responses fall into three main categories: technological, law enforcement and public health.

Technology is the arena in which these ideologies are spread, the Internet and social media. Again, this is a complex area, and great care must be exercised to set healthy limits to freedom of expression.

In the 1990s, I operated the Canadian Liberty Net, a computer-operated messaging system that contained anti-Semitic, anti-immigrant and Holocaust-denial messages that was subject to a Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, an injunction and ultimately a trip to the Supreme Court of Canada.

The more the hate line was suppressed, the more callers dialled in and were drawn into the world of intolerance. At its peak, it received 300 calls per day. The court proceedings became a powerful recruiting tool, an example of unintended consequences that has become known as the Streisand effect. Banning something makes it more popular.

Policy to tackle online hate should be carefully considered to avoid overreach and the appearance of politicization to avoid this effect.

On the Internet, content does not necessarily go away; it goes somewhere else. Content from large platforms gets pushed onto smaller platforms that often don't have the capacity to moderate.

Of the two other main responses, law enforcement and public health, the latter has the greatest gaps and opportunities, and I will focus there.

By the time a person gets involved in violent extremism and appears on the radar of law enforcement, several opportunities have already been missed. While there's a growing network of providers, social workers, counsellors and psychologists, for example, for interventions, a more robust effort can be made to engage and train existing resources in the community to utilize their skill set in a way they hadn't considered by creating the opportunities to intervene further upstream, long before law enforcement becomes involved. Training school counsellors would be an example of this.

Currently based on the number of conversations I've had with several municipalities, there seems to be almost no primary prevention.

Believe it or not, ideology is not the primary drive as to why people join these movements. Yes, it is a factor, but identity, belonging and a sense of meaning and purpose are far greater draws, according to research. The lack of these are the result of vulnerabilities that these movements exploit. The ideology is the pill one swallows to obtain these important drivers.

• (1155)

Research has shown that 15% of the general population has had two or more adverse childhood events: trauma, abandonment or neglect, for example. But of those in ideologically motivated violent extremism, 66% had four or more. Although trauma often creates the vulnerabilities, it's important to note that trauma is not a predictor. There is a whole host of anti-social outcomes, addiction, for example, that are possible from these vulnerabilities, of which violent extremism is but a small sliver and a very dangerous and harmful sliver, nonetheless.

The Chair: Colleagues, we now move into the first round of questioning, and to lead us off I will call on Mr. Van Popta for a six-minute slice of questions.

• (1200)

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here with us, and our apologies again for the delay. Thank you for your patience.

Professor Bailey, I'll start with you. Thank you very much for your testimony. It was very clear and concise, and thank you for that.

Professor, I know from your earlier testimony and some of what you've published, and also from statements that you have made at previous committees, that your focus has been on technology-facilitated violence against women and youth in particular. It's very important work.

Today's study is about ideologically motivated violent extremism. You did touch on that, but perhaps you could just expand on the relationship between the primary focus of your research and the study we are undertaking today.

Prof. Jane Bailey: There certainly are connections between the work I have been doing and IMVE. First of all, young people have, at least historically, been primary targets for radicalization initiatives, and in terms of hateful attacks we only have to look at incel extremism in Canada and elsewhere in the world to understand the

degree to which women are the subjects and objects of attack by very violent and misogynistic physical violence and rhetoric.

Obviously we cannot in this context or in any other context, whether it be child pornography or anything else, draw direct causal connections between these issues. I'm not trying to do that, but they certainly seem to be related to each other and therefore certainly are a cause for concern.

I also think my work with young people related to the Internet is also important, because it has helped me to understand a little bit better what young people prioritize in terms of what issues they see and what sorts of supports and solutions they would like to see there.

While the young people we have spoken with definitely see room for legal responses to the kind of extremist content that's the subject of this hearing, there is a whole other part of the spectrum that young people are very interested in and, I think, are concerned about and want to have other kinds of approaches to that deal more swiftly with removal of content and so forth.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Good. Thank you so much for that.

In your testimony you touched on a national strategy and you gave us seven points. I scribbled them down as quickly as I could. Your point number three was to reject approaches that focus on victims having to defend themselves, and number five was to do so without expanding policy services or police powers.

A colleague of mine has introduced a private member's bill on stopping Internet sexual exploitation, which builds on recommendations from a study in the ethics committee on MindGeek and other platforms that were using pornography without consent. The intent of the bill is to prohibit platforms from using pornographic material without the consent of people, and they need to be 18 years old.

This is a quote from a press release:

It is time to place the burden of due diligence and corporate responsibility on companies rather than survivors and law enforcement.

What do you say about that? From your testimony, I'm assuming that you agree with that.

Prof. Jane Bailey: I think it's complicated, as all of these issues are. Absolutely, yes, I think that we have had a tendency in the past to focus on things, especially with young people, like safety planning—how to stay safe, what you should do and what you shouldn't do—and less on the environment that creates an ecosystem that leads to problems for young people in particular.

I do think we do need to be thinking beyond.... The analogy that I often use is that we not only need to teach our kids how to safely cross the road, but we also need to have rules and regulations about what people using the road are allowed to do and what they're not allowed to do. Consent is a very important component of sexual expression, whether that expression is posted online or not.

The one thing that I would want to emphasize, to go back to Dr. Davies' points, is that we have to be careful about the degree to which we rely on private entities to be making these kinds of decisions for us.

• (1205)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I would now like to turn to Ms. Damoff for her six minutes of questioning.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thank you so much, and thank you to all of our witnesses. This has been very enlightening testimony today.

Mr. McAleer, you've been quite outspoken against deprogramming for people who have fallen into extremist views. What recommendations would you give to the government to assist us to help people from joining these far right extremist groups, and also to leave those groups? What recommendations would you give to us for that?

Mr. Tony McAleer: There are two aspects to that. There's what we can do before people get radicalized and what we can do after people get radicalized. There are already fairly robust intervention services within the country. Obviously, these could be improved, and public safety is working towards that.

But I think it's important that there are already existing resources in the community, whether they be social workers or psychologists, or even school counsellors, who have the ability to intervene in these situations, but they don't have the cultural nuance and cultural sensitivity training to deal with that particular population. Rather than build whole programs with dedicated individuals like psychologists, I think a lot could be done with empowering local resources that already exist and giving them the training they need to do that.

On the prevention side, I think there's a huge gap in primary prevention. When we talk about primary prevention, we're not talking about individuals. We're talking about addressing communities and building resilience that helps to inoculate them against the.... These are not ideologically specific services or programs, but programs that create a resilience in young people or older people so that they are less likely to be drawn in by these seductive ideologies.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Do you think there's a lack of awareness amongst these people of, for example, white supremacist movements and that they do not necessarily have the awareness that this could be a problem for a young person?

Mr. Tony McAleer: I think that's changing, but I think it certainly was the case. Until the last couple of years, we were very focused on responding to ISIS and al Qaeda-inspired terror threats, and ignored the white supremacist terror threat, but I think that's changing. That certainly is important.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you.

Ms. Bailey, you mentioned in your testimony something about a "survivor-centred" approach. I haven't heard that term before.

What kind of recommendation should our committee make to ensure that what we are doing does take that survivor-centred approach?

• (1210)

Prof. Jane Bailey: It is central to my submission and it connects back to the prior question I was asked regarding the outstanding bill.

Survivor-centred approaches are approaches that take into account and centre on what it is that survivors of particular kinds of violence want and need. What are the sorts of responses, remedies and solutions that they're looking for?

I can recommend to you a paper by general counsel at LEAF, Pam Hrick. It focuses on survivor-centred responses to tech-facilitated violence that is gender-based. I can provide that afterward.

The point is that this helps us to avoid the problem I also identified, which is developing solutions that may not just not help people, but may do more harm than good, particularly to the most vulnerable members of our community. I don't know if that's helpful or not, but that's what I mean by survivor-centred.

Ms. Pam Damoff: If you could provide that paper to the clerk, that would be terrific.

Prof. Jane Bailey: Absolutely.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you.

Dr. Davies, do you think the government is doing enough tracking and analysis on extremism in Canada? If not, what more should we be doing?

Dr. Garth Davies: I think we are not. Within the agencies that are tasked with doing this, there are simply not enough resources to deal with the broader picture. Many of our agencies are tasked with dealing with day-to-day threats or things that are imminent. In terms of analyzing data, the projection of long-term consequences or even potential threats coming down, we simply don't have enough resources dedicated to that. There are no central databases trying to track what kinds of events or who we are interested in.

There are attempts that are ongoing, and there is some—

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Dr. Garth Davies: —really good work being done right now by Stats Canada.

More could be done. We're moving in the direction, but there's more to go.

The Chair: I will now invite Ms. Larouche to use her six minutes of questioning.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being with us today. I took a lot of notes on what they are telling us.

Mr. McAleer, in your opening remarks, you mentioned that you had travelled to Austria and New Zealand, among other places, as part of your deradicalization efforts.

During these trips, did you notice any practices or measures that Canada could learn from to prevent the radicalization of certain groups and recruitment?

[English]

Mr. Tony McAleer: Absolutely. As we try to get exit programs—those are programs to help rehabilitate and get people to leave these groups behind.... These groups are fairly new in North America. They've been running for 20 years in Europe.

I would point you to the Radicalisation Awareness Network, RAN, which is part of the EU. It's an EU body which studies that and looks at youth, schools, prisons and rehabilitation in open settings. It's a vast source of information and best practices that we could learn from.

• (1215)

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Thank you very much, Mr. McAleer.

Professor Bailey, I'd like to come back to the "incel" movement that was mentioned earlier and the disproportionate impact that online hate messages can have on women and some marginalized communities. It's particularly women who are targeted.

Are we currently doing enough to address online hate? I know that the Standing Committee on the Status of Women has looked at this issue.

Some feminist groups are calling for online hate legislation. They believe that such legislation could be a tool to fight these misogynistic movements.

What are your thoughts on that?

[English]

Prof. Jane Bailey: The recommendations I've made to this committee are also recommendations I've made with respect to discussions around online harms and the online harms bill. I think the short answer is that we don't do enough to address systemic misogyny and other intersecting forms of oppressions in this country. I think that is clear. It leaves women, from particular communities especially, exposed to not just online hate but also offline hate and violence.

I really commend the idea.... Dr. Davies' note is certainly consistent with the research that we've done with young people. To any extent that any of us have any inclination of thinking that offline and online are segregated spaces, that is just absolutely not the world that young people in particular are living in. I think in a COVID era, and even now, post-COVID, the same is true for adults.

I think we have to be doing a lot of thinking around violence underlying systems of oppressions generally, and not trying to focus on online as if it's somehow disconnected from the rest of the problems that we already have in the world. There is way more to be done, absolutely.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Thank you very much, Professor Bailey.

Dr. Davies, you spoke during your opening remarks about the occupation of downtown Ottawa. In an article published last year on

radicalization, you also stated that the pandemic had created a perfect storm for radicalization. Ultimately, what happened in Ottawa is probably directly related to that.

Can you clarify what you meant by "perfect storm for radicalization" and explain the link to the pandemic?

What action do you think the government could take to address this issue?

[English]

Dr. Garth Davies: Thank you very much for reading my article. I'm so excited.

By "perfect storm", what I was thinking of was that the far right has always had significant mechanisms or been oriented towards weaponizing any kind of opportunity: Never let a good opportunity go to waste. I'm sorry to speak about the pandemic in those terms, but that was exactly what happened. With more eyes in front of computers and a more captive audience, the pandemic itself made it so that the right—

• (1220)

The Chair: You have 10 seconds, please.

Dr. Garth Davies: —was able to key in on a variety of issues that it always does, including the fear of government, etc.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. MacGregor, the six-minute slot has come to you. Go ahead whenever you're ready.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Wonderful, thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses for joining us today and helping guide our committee through this important study.

Dr. Davies, I would like to start with you if I can.

You've provided some cautions in how Canada responds to this problem. You mentioned that we can't be relying on social media platforms to be doing the heavy lifting on their own. That's become very apparent. We had both Meta, which is the parent company of Facebook, and representatives from Twitter here. With Facebook in particular, they were trying to stress how many employees they have who are combing through posts on a daily basis looking for this stuff and that they have, in their opinion, a very robust "terms of service". But when it came to the convoy that made its way to Ottawa, which then turned into an illegal occupation, we still had a situation where one of the lead organizers, Pat King, was live-streaming himself on Facebook, spreading all of this vitriol and very concerning messages, and still Facebook did not engage and shut him down.

I know that there are dangers with deplatforming, that it has consequences, but that's the major struggle that we have as policy-makers. What kind of system should we be setting up? We've had other witnesses recommend that we set up some kind of an office of an ombudsperson who has those investigative powers, who can see the social media algorithms, who's making sure that those companies are, in fact, following their terms of service.

Ultimately, if you were to be a member of this committee, what would you like to see as a solid recommendation coming out of our report, in how we ensure that social media platforms are governing themselves accordingly and that there is transparency and accountability to the Canadian public?

Dr. Garth Davies: To rephrase a little bit, my concern is that we are even thinking in terms of what it is that we expect of them, beyond simply following—as you put it—their terms of service. If we look at this from the perspective of the extreme right, all of these attempts essentially feed their narrative. We are essentially providing them with the fuel that they need. Every attempt to try to deplatform or to identify content that needs to be shut down actually allows them to say, see, look, they're afraid of us. They don't want these ideas out there.

It also raises questions about what the nature of discourse is in a democratic society.

Outside of the things that we can identify legally—you can't call for violence; there should be no advocacy of direct violence—in terms of your specific question, I think we have to have more of a tolerance. I know this is not going to be a popular opinion. I don't like the things that I read. I lived in this world of vitriol and absolutely toxic garbage, but unless it is crossing very definitive red lines in terms of what it's calling for in violence, I have grave concerns about our trying to legislate that. I have more concerns about requiring any of these social media platforms to start doing that.

I would also caution the committee that this can be interpreted by social media in a variety of ways. For example, from the far right, we have seen requests that their perceptions of extremism—for example, Black Lives Matter—should be deplatformed. I don't think anybody in this room would agree with that, but that is a real possibility if we start going down this road of who should and shouldn't be making decisions about what kinds of things we do and don't want to have access to.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you for that.

Mr. McAleer, do you want to add any thoughts on that subject? I also notice that you didn't really have enough time to finish your opening statement so is there anything that you wanted to conclude on, any specific points you wanted to give?

Mr. Tony McAleer: I was at the end anyway, but I would just reiterate that these responses need to be carefully thought out and nuanced. It's a whole-of-society response. We need to use a scalpel, not a sledgehammer. That's what I would add in.

Regarding social media companies, I've spent time in Silicon Valley, I've been to Facebook and met with Twitter and all of that, for a number of years, and it's a very difficult problem. If you move it off one platform, it doesn't disappear. It's not gone. It shows up on another platform. Each time, you push it down the line. Not all social media companies are based in Silicon Valley or Canada. For some of these platforms, the further down the line you go, it's two guys in Poland, it's their side hustle. They have zero ability to moderate.

Just because we can force it off one platform doesn't make it disappear. I think we have to be cognizant of that. It's like playing Whac-a-Mole.

• (1225)

The Chair: You have 10 seconds. You're giving them back. Thank you. Your generosity is appreciated.

Colleagues, we now move to the second round of questions.

I would invite Mr. Shipley to begin a five-minute round whenever he's ready.

Mr. Doug Shipley (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

I'll start with Mr. McAleer. Thank you for being here today, sir.

I find your background and your story quite fascinating. I would imagine that you, as a former member of a white supremacist group, would have extensive knowledge of how they generate the capital necessary to maintain an organization.

Could you elaborate on some of the knowledge you have in that field?

Mr. Tony McAleer: It's changed quite a bit since then. With the anonymity of the Internet, the ability to raise money is very different. When I was involved, there wasn't a great deal of money. If you were going to be involved in it, it was a good way to go broke.

Having said that, I think that with cryptocurrency and these different platforms, and the anonymity or perception of anonymity, social media creates communities of everything—good or bad. Once you can find a community, you can raise money and raise donations.

It was much more difficult to find and build those communities 20 or 30 years ago.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Thank you.

That's actually a nice segue into my second question about communities and the sense of belonging. You touched on that theme a little bit today. I'm intrigued by that, so I'd like to touch on it a bit more.

I think you mentioned that a lot of people who get involved in these groups are looking for a sense of belonging or community, as we just talked about. Do you feel that any government policies from any level could push people more towards extremism, if they feel like they're being pushed out of day-to-day society and if they feel they're not belonging in a certain group?

Mr. Tony McAleer: Certainly. Around the world, globalization has alienated people. These policies are happening at a very high level.

It's very much possible for different programs to further alienate people. There are always unintended consequences. What are the unintended consequences? I think it's very possible for governments to increase that sense of alienation, if that's the question you're asking.

Mr. Doug Shipley: I believe you touched on how you've personally helped over 700 people leave hate. Thank you for that. That's tremendous work.

Mr. Tony McAleer: It's Life After Hate, not me personally. It's the whole team.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Seven hundred is still a tremendous number. It's great work.

What would you say the government could do more to incentivize people? You've obviously had great success in doing it with your group. What could government be doing more to try to help this cause?

Mr. Tony McAleer: Going back to what I'd said earlier, there are people who have the skill sets to engage people who are radicalized—like social workers, psychologists and stuff. They are already in society and might be better placed.

Again, the example I'll use is a school counsellor who has counselling training. They might be better placed to pick up where a kid is going wrong long before it gets to the level where law enforcement is noticing that the kid is going wrong. It's a very cost-effective way, too, to utilize those existing resources.

There are people in the community who know about this stuff and about what's happening with people who are becoming radicalized, long before government in general and law enforcement knows.

Mr. Doug Shipley: Thank you for that.

I have a quick question for Mr. Davies now.

Mr. Davies, a portion of your research focuses on the links between the dark web and extremist organizations. Do you mind explaining how the dark web differs from the regular web? What makes it more effective for extremists to organize on?

• (1230)

Dr. Garth Davies: The dark web essentially refers to that portion of the web that is not easily publicly accessible. The dark web actually constitutes about 90% of the Internet. As much as we all see it as large, the vast majority of the Internet—the dark web—is everything from personalized systems to encoded or encrypted channels that are used.

In terms of how it helps in organization, our researchers found that at this point, terrorists have not been making extensive use of the dark web. That seems to be partly because the encryption software we have available, even commercially right now, is becoming increasingly difficult to crack and much of their communication is actually meant to be public. They're trying to recruit. They're trying to get their cause out there.

In terms of how they're communicating privately, that's a different issue. In terms of wanting to organize, our researchers found that, in fact, the dark web is not a significant element of that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chiang, sir, it's over to you for five minutes of questioning whenever you're ready.

Mr. Paul Chiang (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for taking the time to be with us today and sharing your expert advice.

Mr. McAleer, based on your opening remarks, you're someone with first-hand experience in extremism. Why is it so easy for white

extremist racism to be so easily ignored? Also, how easy is it for white supremacists to get away with what they do?

Mr. Tony McAleer: The short answer to that is nobody likes to look at their own flaws and their own stuff. It's difficult for people to acknowledge that this is happening within their group. It's always happening somewhere else. I think there's that blindness to seeing what's clearly there and open in public. That blindness is exploited by these groups, because they can operate and do things that often do not attract the scrutiny that they should.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Earlier, you mentioned in your answer to another question school counsellors helping young minds—the young students—to get them to not join extremist groups.

What do you think about school resource officers—police officers—who work at high schools? Is that a good program to stop young minds from joining extremist groups?

Mr. Tony McAleer: It shouldn't be the primary focus, but they should be equipped to handle it when it shows up. Like I said, it's a matter of cultural competency training. I think that school threat assessment teams, as opposed to just counsellors, are the more accurate place where that should happen.

Mr. Paul Chiang: I understand that oftentimes a person's hateful ideology can become closely related to their identity. What are some of the ways your organization has been successfully changing peoples' perspectives and steering them away from hateful ideologies?

Mr. Tony McAleer: This is going to sound counterintuitive, and I think Professor Davies said this earlier, but these are emotional things. We're not going to be able to necessarily go and tell a person facts and figures to sway them. The answer is to go in through the heart. At the core of Life After Hate's philosophy is the use of compassion.

I believe that the level to which we dehumanize other human beings is a mirror reflection of our own internal disconnection and dehumanization, and that the answer when we work with these people is to rehumanize them. How do we rehumanize them? We rehumanize them through compassion. When we're compassionate with someone, we hold a mirror up and allow them to see their own humanity reflected back at them when they can't see it on their own.

• (1235)

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you so much, Mr. McAleer.

Dr. Davies, what are some of the things that people often misunderstand about hate and extremism-motivated violence? What are some of the root causes of hate and extremism in your research?

Dr. Garth Davies: It's been said earlier, and I think Mr. McAleer talked about it. The roots of hate often don't start with hate. It starts with a sense of feeling disconnected or a lack of belonging. It's these issues of identity and belonging. Through a series of happenstances, one of the areas that you can end up in is these ecologies or the social milieus where hate is the focus.

One of the things that we misunderstand sometimes is missing the dynamic. For a lot of people, they could have ended up in a variety of other social ecologies. This is where they end up. Addressing that is as much a function of how we do more positive identity-building work and not assuming necessarily that this is about ideology, per se, or that hate was the beginning foundation.

The Chair: You have 10 seconds, if you have one final thought.

Mr. Paul Chiang: How should government address these IMVE priorities—

The Chair: The question will have to linger. I'm sorry, Mr. Chiang.

Ms. Larouche, we'll go to you for two and a half minutes. The floor is yours.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Dr. Davies, what do you think about the new legislation that was put in place in Europe regarding illegal content online?

Could Canada learn from it?

[English]

Dr. Garth Davies: There are comparable circumstances. I'm concerned that Europe is going a bit far in what it's proposing to do, but they also have a very different context and a different history.

I guess my short answer to you would be that we can pick and choose things that are relevant to us, but I would caution against the blanket adoption of those approaches. I think they are overly inclusive.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Professor Bailey, do you also think that this new legislation in Europe goes too far?

Should Canada draw on it?

[English]

Prof. Jane Bailey: From my perspective, I think there is a little more leeway than perhaps Dr. Davies sees.

The reason I say this is that we have to pay attention to other parts of the context. When we leave content out there, who's paying? It's the communities that are targeted. It isn't a zero-cost game. We have to think about what not doing things means for the capacity of members of marginalized communities to actually function in society and to contribute meaningfully.

I also think we have to pay attention to the fact that social media, while it is certainly not ideal for dealing with public values, social media platforms, in fact, are making decisions about content every single day. Their terms of service reserve every right to them about what kinds of decisions they are going to make. There's very little transparency and accountability on that.

It isn't as if they are not already doing this. They are. It's just that we don't have good information as a public to understand what the basis is upon which these decisions are being made.

We also have to recognize—

The Chair: Thank you very much.

If you can finish in five seconds, go ahead.

Prof. Jane Bailey: There's a business model at the base of this that generates hits and profiles for sensationalism. You can't ignore that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. MacGregor, you have two and a half minutes, which will take us to the end of this panel.

Go ahead.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Chair.

I will direct my last question to you, Mr. McAleer.

In his opening statement, Dr. Davies was talking about how we can't counter emotion with facts and statistics. You also echoed that. I think every member of Parliament has had that experience, when we are confronted with conspiracy theories. We try to answer that no, that's not true because of this and this. It's obviously not working as a connection.

As policy-makers and as the public, I think we rightly want to denounce the hateful ideologies that exist. Where's the balance between denunciation, but also that compassion for the individual who's spouting off that belief without othering them?

Obviously, we want to counter their white supremacist views, the neo-Nazism and the hate they are directing against minorities, but how do we find that balance so that we're not othering them and we're finding a way to pull them from the brink that they are at?

• (1240)

Mr. Tony McAleer: That's a great question.

The challenge here is that ideology and identity become intertwined. When we attack someone's ideology, we're also attacking their identity and all the defence mechanisms come up. They either lash out or shut down. How do you get through that?

In *Life After Hate*, there's a saying we have that is "never concede, never condemn". People ask me what they say to their uncle or to Aunt Maggie who's spouting off all this nonsense. I ask them if they want to be right or if they want to effect change. If they want to be right, just tell Aunt Maggie all the reasons why she's wrong. If they want to effect change, listen. It's not about what they say, it's about what they do.

It's that tension between never conceding your values, but never condemning the person. The ideology and the activity is abhorrent, but it's still a human being. It's that tension of never concede and never condemn.

For facts, figures and counter-narratives, there is a place for that for someone who's just coming across this type of information. That's an effective place to deploy that, just not on the back end.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Colleagues, we're at the end of the second round of questioning.

I'd like to apologize to the witnesses for the delay. It's the world of the bell, and we have no option but to listen to the bell and be adherents to its time constraints.

On behalf of all members of the committee and of Parliament itself, I want to thank you for being with us and sharing your expertise and your wisdom on a subject that is timely, controversial and important for Canada. Thank you all very much.

Colleagues, this will be a very quick turnaround. The clerk tells me that the next panel are basically ready, so we'll be back in about two minutes.

• (1240) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1245)

The Chair: Colleagues, that was a quick turnaround, and we're ready to go for the second hour of testimony.

It's my pleasure to welcome in this second hour, Samuel Tanner, full professor, school of criminology at the Université de Montréal—

Mr. Doug Shipley: I'm sorry, Chair, I have a quick point of order before we get into it.

Thank you to the witnesses. I apologize.

We're already tight on time, so I don't plan on taking a lot of time. We're being interrupted a lot lately, and we can't control these issues with the bells at 11 o'clock. It's obviously affecting our committee here.

I just wanted to know, going forward, if our intentions are to be sitting until 1:30 most days so we can adjust our schedules accordingly. Sometimes we have things on, as we all do, and we have certain things with our party that require attendance around 1:30. I just want to know going forward what we're doing today so we can all plan our schedules accordingly.

The Chair: The first thing we have to do is ask the clerk if he has permission from the House of Commons to extend our sitting time. He has been able to do that, so we are able to go to 1:30. We've been able to handle a full round and then half a round of questioning, and that is presumably how we will proceed.

I'm in your hands. If we have even less time than that in the future, we'll have to make other decisions, but I think so far it's worked reasonably well. We'll go to 1:30, if we can buy the half an hour—and the clerk has been able to do that—and then we will have a fulsome conversation with witnesses if we have the extra half hour.

Are there other comments on the point of order or can we proceed?

I'll introduce Michael Mostyn, chief executive officer of the national office of the B'nai Brith. Marvin Rotrand, national director, league for human rights of the B'nai Brith is with us as well. We also have Imran Ahmed, chief executive of the Center for Countering Digital Hate.

Welcome to all of the witnesses. You will have up to five minutes for opening remarks, and we'll start with Mr. Tanner.

Go ahead, sir, whenever you're ready.

• (1250)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Samuel Tanner (Full Professor, School of Criminology, Université de Montréal, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to appear before the committee.

First, I would like to make some preliminary remarks on ideologically motivated violent extremism. This type of extremism and the radicalization process that precedes it poses a threefold puzzle. We have to seek to understand what people think, seek to understand how they come to think what they think, and seek to understand the progression, or not, from thought to action.

To do so, let us assume that the physical and virtual structures in which perpetrators of ideologically motivated violent extremism operate affect the way they view their environment and that this leads them to adopt frameworks that are generally at odds with the ordinary socio-political referents shared by the vast majority of the public.

In this context, access to information, that is, what fuels our understanding and reading of the environment, and the transformation of the information ecosystem caused by the advent of social media, as well as the tools by which we access this information—largely social media—are a central node to consider in the process leading to ideologically motivated violent extremism. My presentation is about the virtual sphere and the role of social media in this process.

A second element that I think is important to mention is the relationship between the context of crisis and uncertainty, on the one hand, and information, social media and ideologically motivated violent extremism on the other.

We are seeing a massive spread information that, to be understood, requires us to trust the sources we are drawing from. However, in a context of uncertainty, crisis or social upheaval, such as the pandemic, immigration crises or opposition to health measures to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, the mechanisms of trust are quite shaken. Digital platforms are becoming tools of mass disruption. This is evidenced in particular by the proliferation of dubious and even false messages and the mobilization of the public around this problematic information.

Social media are communications and marketing tools used by people we can call political influencers. They act in a way that shapes public opinion, not through advertising or product placement, as is done in the most traditional forms of influence, but rather by spreading doubt or a form of ready-thinking. Thus, they propose ideas or easy solutions to complex social, health or political crises and uncertainties. These ideas or solutions resonate with people who, above all, want to be reassured and have a sense of order and security.

These influencers and activists need to develop alternative credibility to traditional sources of legitimacy, such as the authorities, intellectual elites or journalists.

La Meute and its Facebook page are particularly representative of this phenomenon. Remember that this group was originally formed in Quebec on a Facebook page created in the fall of 2015. At the time, we were in the midst of a Syrian crisis, which caused an influx of migrants to western countries, including Canada.

Let's also remember that 2015 was a year marked by a series of Islamist attacks, including the attack on the newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* in January, and the attacks in Paris, France, in November 2015. The cases of young people leaving for Syria, which made headlines in Quebec in 2014, and the shooting that took place at Canada's Parliament on October 14, 2014, had already heightened a feeling of insecurity among the population.

La Meute's Facebook page quickly became a tool and a forum for discussion on these issues, as well as a space for the dissemination of comments from citizens concerned about the situation. They accused the government of endangering the public through its lack of action on the threat of terrorism and its perceived inaction on the Islamization of Quebec and Canada.

So we're seeing the emergence of a populist, identity-based, anti-immigration, anti-multiculturalism, and anti-Muslim discourse, which is very quickly finding a broad audience. At that time, La Meute had 60,000 subscribers. This leads to the emergence of a community of individuals at odds with ordinary socio-political referents shared by the vast majority of the public. Our research shows that social media contribute to trivializing and promoting ordinary racism among citizens. This creates lines of rupture within the population.

Thank you.

• (1255)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Mostyn, and Mr. Rotrand, you have, between the two of you, five minutes for an opening comment.

The floor is yours, whenever you're ready.

Mr. Michael Mostyn (Chief Executive Officer, National Office, B'nai Brith Canada): Thank you very much.

My name is Michael Mostyn. I'm the chief executive officer for B'nai Brith. I'll be sharing my time with Marvin Rotrand, our national director of the league.

B'nai Brith is Canada's oldest grassroots Jewish community organization dedicated to eradicating racism, anti-Semitism and hatred in all of its forms, championing the rights of the marginalized while providing basic human needs for members of our community. We focus on anti-Semitism, but of course, we're concerned with all forms of discrimination. Hate is hate, whatever the source.

There are two quick items that I just want to mention in my statement. First of all, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps of Iran is an entity that my community, and many others, have been asking

for years to designate as a terrorism entity. It must happen on an urgent basis.

Secondly, we need to focus, for IMVE and terrorism in general, on a system that works. Our system is being questioned at the moment. There was a front-page article in the National Post last week-end talking about Khaled Barakat. Khaled Barakat is the leader of the PFLP. That is a listed terrorist organization in Canada. Not all IMVE groups are from the right. It is a Marxist-Leninist organization. It is anti-Semitic. It is hateful. It is active, and one of its leaders is present in Canada. Canadians are questioning why he is here. It is strictly forbidden for members of terrorist groups to enter Canada, or to obtain Canadian citizenship. We have no answers as Canadian citizens.

We need to deal with IMVE. We need to deal with all of the causes. We need to deal with hate, as hate, but at the same time, when there are serious issues with respect to members of listed terrorist organizations here in Canada, Canadians demand answers. We need to all know that our system works, and is effective. We need to have a national strategy and undertaking to deal with this issue holistically.

I'd like to now pass on to my colleague, Mr. Rotrand.

Mr. Marvin Rotrand (National Director, League for Human Rights, B'nai Brith Canada): My name is Marvin Rotrand. I'm a former Montreal city councillor, now national director of the League for Human Rights, B'nai Brith Canada.

Indeed, we do oppose all forms of discrimination while we concentrate on anti-Semitism as our main mission as an organization. We have existed since 1875.

We recently released our audit for 2021 of anti-Semitic incidents in Canada and discovered that we have reached the highest level ever recorded in the 40 years we have been tracking anti-Semitism in Canada. One of the areas where we note a large increase is online hate. During the pandemic, we've experienced less in-person harassment, but online hate has exploded. In fact, the number of incidents tracked in 2021 was 2,799. The bulk of them were online incidents. There has been an increase of almost 100% in online incidents in a mere five years. Clearly, ideologically motivated violence and hate is being advocated on Facebook, YouTube and on podcasts.

I take note of a statement that was made by the Liberal Party during the election:

A re-elected Liberal Government will:

Introduce legislation within its first 100 days to combat serious forms of harmful online content, specifically hate speech, terrorist content, content that incites violence, child sexual abuse material and the non-consensual distribution of intimate images. This would make sure that social media platforms and other online services are held accountable for the content that they host. Our legislation will recognize the importance of freedom of expression for all Canadians and will take a balanced and targeted approach to tackle extreme and harmful speech.

We support this statement, and we support Parliament acting upon it.

We urge the update of Canada's 2019-22 anti-racism strategy, which ends this year. The new strategy should make hate better defined; currently it aims at racism. I would point out that Jews are 1.25% of the Canadian population. According to Statistics Canada in 2020, 61% of all victims targeted for hate were members of religious minorities.

We laud the Government of Canada for its Malmo pledge made by the Prime Minister in October of 2021, and we would urge Parliament in October of 2022 to renew the hopeful promises made within the Malmo pledge.

One of the areas we see as necessary is increased education for Holocaust remembrance as a basis of countering Holocaust denial and distortion. We invite the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to meet to examine best practices. Education is a provincial mandate, but we invite the federal members to follow this as well with the goal of having the provinces improve what is taught in high school, so that when students get out of school, they actually know what the Holocaust is.

Thank you. I'm finished for the moment, Mr. Carr.

• (1300)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Colleagues, we're now ready for one full round of questions, and that's all the time we're going to have.

To lead us off, I will call on Ms. Dancho. The floor is yours.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

My questions are for B'nai Brith. Thank you again for being here today. As a little bit of background, I wasn't familiar with anti-Semitism. I grew up in rural Manitoba, and it wasn't something we were really exposed to. I later went to McGill University, and my first exposure to this were large, from my perspective, very angry protests for the Boycott, Divest, Sanctions movement, or whatever you'd like to call it. That's where I first started learning about these issues, and those images of seeing those protests really stayed with me.

I know recently that McGill University was in quite a bit of hot water regarding their student society. There's a news release on your website that refers to how the student society recently voted "to adopt an extreme 'Palestine Solidarity Policy'", which is a document that accuses Israel "of engaging in 'settler-colonial apartheid against Palestinians', and commits SSMU, the students' society, "to boycott all entities [it calls] 'complicit' in this activity."

Your interpretation of that is that the document is "so broad that it may compel [the students' society] to boycott virtually all Jewish clubs and associations on campus."

I have considerable concerns with this and the impact on Jewish students both at McGill, but also in all universities across Canada. I'd like you to comment on the impact this has on Jewish students, and what it is like for them to attend university under these circumstances.

Mr. Marvin Rotrand: I'm going to let Michael Mostyn begin this. I'd be happy to add a few words, but it's been his file.

Mr. Michael Mostyn: Sure. Thank you very much.

This is absolutely something of great concern to the Jewish community, and certainly to Jewish students on campus, also to their parents. Nobody should have to go on a university campus and deal with issues other than getting a great education here in Canada, but unfortunately Jewish students are regularly made to feel unsafe on campus in various ways. It could be through the political process of unions, and there have been updates at McGill since then. This is something we note on campuses across Canada. They contact our organization and other Jewish organizations. Basically, a lot of this comes down to the fact that Jews are often forced to defend themselves in the face of others proposing who and what they are and what they think, because of their connection as Jews to the Jewish state of Israel. "Zionism" is often treated as a dirty term on campus, and because you're Jewish or you appear to be Jewish, you may get treated with different forms of abuse.

In fact, at the University of Toronto, they had a couple of times when student unions would take the position that even kosher food, which is a religious commandment for Jews, should be negatively impacted. It shouldn't be allowed if you hold a certain political ideology, that of Zionism. Of course, more than 90% of Jews in Canada are Zionists. That is the overall connection between our community. It is something that's disturbing. We consider BDS anti-Semitic—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Sorry to interrupt, but on that point, in 2017, a member of the SSMU's legislative council and board of directors—as you put on your website—"infamously told his Twitter...to 'Punch a Zionist today.'" I actually remember this. Is violence something that your students experience?

Mr. Marvin Rotrand: We do get reports of threats, rarely actual violence on campus, but we should all be worried. This year's audit revealed the number of violent incidents against Jews in Canada went up from nine in 2020 to 75 in 2021—a 733% increase. While at McGill, the board of trustees annulled the student society motion, clearly, there's been a movement at certain campuses to make anti-Zionism the new form of anti-Semitism, denying the rights of Jews to self-determination in their historic homeland, and basically attacking Jews everywhere for decisions made by Israel.

I'd like to say that in 2016 you may recall Parliament passed an anti-BDS motion. We think that Parliament might want to update that. In Germany, Austria and certain countries, advocating BDS is actually illegal. In Canada, the motion adopted by Parliament had no legal force.

• (1305)

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you.

I did want to ask you, in terms of the impact, if you think there's a connection between these movements on university campuses and protests that we see in support of the BDS movement. For example, in Toronto, as I'm sure you're aware, recently there was a large protest from the BDS perspective. They were chanting things like "From the river to the sea Palestine will be free", which is in reference to a one-state solution. Can you comment on whether you think there's a connection between these elements that are happening on university campuses and the extremist, hateful rhetoric we're hearing in many of these protests in Toronto and elsewhere?

Mr. Marvin Rotrand: I do—

Mr. Michael Mostyn: I do—

Mr. Marvin Rotrand: Go ahead.

Mr. Michael Mostyn: We both do, and that is how it's felt generally within the Jewish community.

As a community, we've been complaining for years that if this is allowed on campus, if you are allowed to discriminate and if universities are not enforcing their own policies to protect their students, their faculty and their administration, then eventually we will see spillover into general society. We saw that happen—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you.

I'm sorry to interrupt, but in my last 15 seconds, what role does government play in addressing this issue?

Mr. Marvin Rotrand: Canada has to support the two-state solution as it has done recently in reiterating that Canada has to denounce efforts to portray Israel as an apartheid state, and Canada has to push for democratic expression in Palestine to allow the Palestinian people to finally have voices that represent them—

Mr. Michael Mostyn: Also, implement IHRA—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Colleagues, we have to move back into the agenda.

I inadvertently forgot to give Mr. Ahmed his five minutes of opening comments.

It's back to you, sir, with my apologies. You have five minutes.

Mr. Imran Ahmed (Chief Executive, Center for Countering Digital Hate): Good afternoon.

The Center for Countering Digital Hate is a non-profit that seeks to disrupt the monetized architecture of online hate and misinformation, which has been overwhelming enlightenment values of tolerance, of science and of democracy that underpin our nation's prosperity.

Our organization had been around for six years. We have around 20 staff in London and Washington, D.C. We're independent. We're not affiliated with any political party. We don't take money from governments or from technology companies.

Our research throughout that six years has tracked the rise of online hate, including anti-Semitism. The reason we started this organization was that we were seeing the rise of virulent anti-Semitism and disinformation on the left in the United Kingdom, as well as

seeing that fringe actors, from anti-vaxxers to misogynist incels to racists such as white supremacists and jihadists, are able to easily exploit digital platforms to promote their own content.

The platforms and search engines benefit commercially from this system, and that is one of the central insights of CCDH: There is an economy and an industry around hate and misinformation now that is so profitable that it inherently leads to the sustainability and further proliferation of this industry and to platforms not being incentivized to do more than send a press release when problems are raised.

Put simply, our problems are threefold.

One is the proliferation of bad actors. These are extremists who are sharing dangerous misinformation and hate content online. They're organized and skilled in exploiting platform structures and undermining public safety and democracy.

Another problem is that platforms profit from the spread of extreme content through a system that promotes engagement over any other metric, including public good, safety or anything else, and that companies do not factor in public safety in the design of their products and do not effectively self-regulate through adequately resourcing the enforcement of their own rules.

Another is bad laws, the absence of legislation and global coordination at a scale that will protect citizens through assessing and enforcing common standards and sharing intelligence and metrics about them.

We've published a series of reports on things like anti-Semitism. Our most recent was on anti-Muslim hate. It showed that even when you report anti-Muslim hate to platforms by using their own tools, nine out of 10 times they fail to take it down. That includes posts promoting the Great Replacement conspiracy theory, violating pledges that they made in the wake of the 2019 Christchurch mosque attacks when they signed up to the Christchurch call. That conspiracy theory inspired the Christchurch attacks as well as the Tree of Life Synagogue attacks in Pennsylvania in the United States.

So there are commercial hate and disinformation actors who are making a lot of money from spreading discord and peddling lies. I've used anti-Muslim hate as an example, but we found the same figures with anti-Semitism, with misogyny and with anti-Black hateful content in the past.

Why are they failing to act? The truth is that there is a web of commercial actors, from platforms to payment processes to people who provide appetizing technology that is embedded on hateful content, giving the authors of that hateful content money for every eyeball they can attract to it. It has revenues in the high millions, tens of millions and hundreds of millions of dollars that have made some entrepreneurs in this space extremely wealthy.

For example, the leading anti-vaxxer in the United States, Joe Mercola, claims in court testimony that he's worth \$100 million. That's what this industry is worth.

The creation of this industry has involved a series of moral choices by companies to profit from this hate. To back this up, these greedy, selfish and frankly lazy companies have proselytized the notion that they're right to profit from hate, without criticism, without boycotts, without regulatory action and without even moral opprobrium or justifiable moral opprobrium. It's somehow a God-given right, because a violation of it, they say, would be cancelling them—which is nonsense.

• (1310)

Our experiences in organizations suggest that four things are missing from existing powers globally. One is safety by design being enforced. Second is the power to compel transparency around algorithms and around enforcement of community standards and of the economics. We need bodies to hold companies accountable and set standards so that we don't have a race to the bottom morally. Finally, we need the power to hold social media platforms and executives responsible for the decisions they take.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Again, you have my apologies for overlooking you, Mr. Ahmed.

We've now moved back to the rota of questioning. I would ask Mr. Zuberi to begin a six-minute slot.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to all of the witnesses for being here today and for your testimony. It's very insightful and important.

I'd like to start off with Mr. Ahmed. I think what you just shared with us is really insightful and interesting.

Are you aware of legislation that we are now discussing within our Parliament around online hate? If so, what are your thoughts on it?

Mr. Imran Ahmed: I'm sorry, I'm not. The request to have me appear was last minute. However, I am very familiar with the international efforts on this.

We are actually organizing a conference in Washington in two weeks' time to talk about global alignment on a set of standards by which we would analyze the effectiveness of any legislation. We've invited your colleagues to attend.

Can I just lay out very simply what those standards are? I think it will help to give you the insight you need as to whether or not the legislation you're proposing meets those standards.

One is forcing safety by design. At the moment, companies can act in a profoundly negligent way in designing their systems. In the U.K. and the U.S., for example, there's a big push for ensuring that there is safety by design for children, but there is no reason why that should not be extended to adults as well.

Second is transparency. It's the transparency of how the algorithms work, what their outputs are and the transparency of the economics. Let's not forget that 98% of Meta's revenues come from advertising. There is a reason why content is structured the way it is. It's structured to maximize advertising opportunities. Understanding those economics is absolutely vital. Then there are the enforcement decisions. Why do they decide to take down one piece of content and not another, or to leave one up when they've taken one down of similar content? It's understanding those enforcement decisions.

Third is accountability. Are there bodies setting the standards and also doing independent analysis of the effectiveness of that work? That's the space where you're looking for public-private partnerships because of course not all of that can be done by the state.

Finally, some mechanisms for responsibility are needed, whether that is through civil litigation or criminal responsibility. For companies and the executives, when they create negative externalities which have a cost paid in lives, some of that cost should be borne by the companies themselves economically, to disincentivize the production of harm. Do you have proper mechanisms for responsibility to disincentivize the production of harms in the first instance?

That's our safety, transparency, accountability and responsibility platform that we're encouraging countries around the world to analyze their overall regulatory package by.

• (1315)

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: Thank you for that.

I'd like to shift gears.

[*Translation*]

I'd like to turn to you, now, Mr. Tanner.

[*English*]

You recently wrote a publication called "The Process of Radicalization: Right-Wing Skinheads in Quebec". You mentioned there that you're "identifying mechanisms that shape pathways toward extremism and violence."

[*Translation*]

Could you expand on that point?

Mr. Samuel Tanner: Thank you for the question.

In this report, which dates back to 2014, we sought to draw an initial picture of the extreme right in Quebec. We were interested in different profiles that we had established. Basically, through open sources, we were able to conduct interviews in Quebec with members who had, in one way or another, participated in activities or groups related to the far right.

We realized that these people were deeply in search of meaning and, through a kind of opportunism, found themselves interested in more ideological content, related to immigration and, essentially, to the protection of white suprematism.

We had seen a form of radicalization in that these people first became interested in a group and then found that within that group, people were just drinking alcohol and would eventually get violent with each other. These people would then turn to increasingly ideologically radicalized groups, which was more in line with what they could perceive as a form of extremism of the idea.

I hope that answers your question.

[English]

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: It does, and it's really insightful.

I would like to highlight what Mr. Ahmed mentioned around algorithms being manifest when it comes to social media platforms, as I think that's really important.

In the last 30 seconds I'd like to shift to Mr. Rotrand.

Can I get your thoughts and comments on us as a federal government investing in the new Holocaust museum in Montreal to the tune of \$20 million and how that will help to educate Canadians and Montrealers around anti-Semitism and the Holocaust in particular?

Mr. Marvin Rotrand: We certainly welcome any investment that promotes Holocaust remembrance, but we would also very much like to see an improvement in school curriculum, particularly at the high school level. As well, we would like to see the broadening of the mandate of the special envoy preserving Holocaust remembrance and combatting anti-Semitism. The Honourable Irwin Cotler was just recently named, and the mandate includes preserving the Holocaust.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I would now invite Ms. Larouche to begin her six minutes of allotted questioning, please.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses again for being with us.

I will try to address each of the witnesses.

Mr. Ahmed, during this pandemic, you managed to identify 12 individuals who are known as super-spreaders and who spread fake news. These are humans, not robots. This is no small thing: they were responsible for 65% of the anti-vaccine messages posted on Facebook and Twitter in February and March 2021.

Can you explain how you went about identifying them?

Have these individuals been reported to these platforms and have they been able to keep their accounts?

[English]

Mr. Imran Ahmed: On March 24, 2021, we issued our report that disinformation does...and that showed that 12 super-spreaders

of disinformation were responsible for 65% of the content shared on social media that was undermining confidence in the vaccine. That might sound extraordinary, that 12 people can be responsible for so much of the disinformation, but it's because they're not just individuals; they're often 501(c)(3) or they're limited companies with a front person that are producing the highest quality material.

If you think about the impact that just one British man, Andrew Wakefield, had on the take-up of the MMR vaccine, it then becomes understandable that a small number of highly motivated, highly talented spreaders of misinformation are able to cause so much damage.

This is what happened with that. On the same day that the report came out, Mark Zuckerberg was in front of the House Energy and Commerce Committee in the U.S. Congress. He said that he would take action on it. The President asked him in June, he said, "Look, these people are killers, you've got to take action. Think about if your relative was one of the people who was receiving this information". Even then, only 50% of their accounts and their followers have been taken down.

With the example of Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., they took down one of his accounts on Instagram but not the accounts on Facebook, which is an extraordinary failure. What we've seen is piecemeal enforcement, even when they are identifiable super-spreaders of harm. They are not just super-spreaders of harm, they're super-violators of their own community standards. It just goes to show that they're more addicted to the profits that come with attention than they are to doing the right thing.

• (1320)

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Thank you very much, Mr. Ahmed.

Mr. Tanner, in your research, you were interested in how social media affects policing practices.

Have you studied the influence of social media in the context of countering violent extremism?

Can you tell us briefly about this and about what you have learned from the study of these policing practices?

Mr. Samuel Tanner: Thank you for the question.

Our research hasn't focused directly on how police organizations use social media to counter violent extremism, but rather on how social media is involved in raising the profile of these problematic narratives.

I am uncomfortable answering this question for these reasons.

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: No problem, Mr. Tanner.

I'd now like to turn to the two representatives from B'nai Brith Canada.

Mr. Mostyn and Mr. Rotrand, you said that you are awaiting the implementation of the federal government's online hate content act.

Could you suggest a few things that should be in this legislation to make it as effective as possible?

Mr. Marvin Rotrand: Thank you for the question.

We think it's important to strike a balance between freedom of expression and the safety of religious and racial minorities in Canada.

[English]

I'd like to reflect what Mr. Ahmed said. Clearly, aligning international standards would certainly help, because what we're seeing is the same debate just about everywhere: Powerful new technologies have outstripped the capacity of our laws to regulate hate online. The numbers that we're seeing in our audit are mushrooming every single year.

We would like to see a way to have the companies brought into the process where they have a responsibility, within a reasonable amount of time, not only to take down hateful literature but to find a way to modify their algorithms. It's not an area that I'm personally an expert on. However, we can see on a daily basis—and we are getting more and more complaints from our community—about what's online and how that leads to vandalism and violence in our streets that are aimed at Jews.

Mr. Michael Mostyn: One of the recommendations we've made in the past with respect to online hate as well is a trusted flagger program, so that organizations can have the ability to perhaps flag certain issues when they are racist or hateful. It's a great frustration for anyone interested in making the Internet a safer space, because it's impossible to get through to any of these platforms.

The Chair: You have seven seconds.

• (1325)

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Again, I thank all the witnesses for being with us today.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Finally, I will turn to Mr. MacGregor.

Sir, you have six minutes to take us to the end of the questioning of this round and this panel.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Ahmed, I would like to start with you.

In our previous panel, we had witnesses who both said that we can't rely on social media platforms to do the heavy lifting on their own, but also that deplatforming has consequences, in that some of these actors, by deplatforming them, could spread onto other platforms that are not as carefully regulated. There has been an explosion in alternative social media platforms for that very reason.

I guess this is the struggle we have as policy-makers, because it can be like playing the game Whac-a-Mole. You try to knock someone off of one platform and they pop up on another one.

In your organization's experience, how do you approach that problem, and do you have any recommendations for our committee?

Mr. Imran Ahmed: Let me start by saying that it is vital that deplatforming is a tool available to platforms to remove harms from them. Deplatforming is a vital part of the overall cleaning up of the infrastructure, but also to make sure the outputs of their algorithms aren't malignant. It's the algorithmic amplification of bad actors, the fact that they're given access to enormous audiences and they're amplified....

One of our research reports, "Malgorithm", looked at the way the algorithm works on Instagram. It showed that if you follow wellness, the algorithm was feeding you anti-vax content. If you follow anti-vax content, it was feeding you anti-Semitic content and QAnon content. It knows that some people are vulnerable to misinformation and conspiracy theories and that conspiracy theories, because of the psychology of them—they're driven by epistemic anxiety but they never sate that epistemic anxiety—lead to rabbit-holing.

It was driving people deeper and deeper into warrens of conspiracy theories. Why? Because the commercial imperative is simple. You find conspiracy theories on social media platforms because they are the least regulated spaces in terms of quality control that you have for mass publishing of content.

Deplatforming these people and putting them into their own little hole, a little hole of anti-Semites, anti-vaxxers and general lunatics, is a good thing, because you limit their capacity to infect other people. Also, for trends such as the convergence and hybridization of ideologies.... I went to an anti-vax rally in Los Angeles a few weeks ago, and standing there were members of the Kennedy family, QAnon, anti-Semites, Proud Boys and kooky hippies who smoke ayahuasca. It's an entire mix of people, which is driven by social media convergence.

It is vital that they are deplatforming people so that we don't end up with the kinds of problems that you also faced in Canada a few months ago.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: I'd like to turn to B'nai Brith and Mr. Mostyn.

In our previous panel, we had a former white supremacist who was able to reform himself and now leads an organization that is dedicated to really helping people in the white supremacist movement come out of that. Earlier, I asked him about the struggle we have, where on the one hand we as the public want to denounce hateful ideologies like white supremacy and neo-Nazism, but on the other hand there is a struggle with trying to show compassion and trying to bring those people out of those movements. Mr. McAleer, our witness, was identifying how ideology is so intertwined with a person's sense of self.

Has B'nai Brith had any valuable experience in speaking with reformed members from white supremacist movements, and is there anything your organization has learned from this that would be helpful for our committee to know?

Mr. Michael Mostyn: Those are some excellent points.

There have been some great deradicalization programs used in Canada and abroad to deal with a variety of those radicalized in different ways. Sometimes it's religiously based radicalization. Just like in the criminal justice system, our system of justice has to be able to identify those who can be deradicalized and those who cannot.

We have different sorts of ideas that come into sentencing within our criminal justice system. There have to be deradicalization programs available for those from the far right. If we don't want it to spread, then people have to be given the ability to be educated, and it's very difficult, as you mentioned, to educate those who believe so strongly that their way is right and, in fact, that they are so right they are willing to perhaps engage in violence against those who see things in a different way.

Our recommendation would be to not separate out hate from different ideologies. Hate needs to be treated as hate, but overall it needs to be treated through the lens of public safety. Are these

criminal issues we're talking about? Are these terrorist issues we're talking about? Or are these opinions, perhaps very strongly held opinions, that are not criminal? There are ways to get this out.

People had disgusting things to say far before the Internet. The white supremacists used to slap fliers on people's cars. The Internet is allowing folks to speak longer and, like Mr. Ahmed said earlier, there's nothing wrong with limiting their ability to spread hate.

● (1330)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Colleagues, that brings us to the end of this panel.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for your patience. Our apologies for the late start. It's a moment of this parliamentary session that we have to contend with.

You've been patient and your testimony has been important and enlightening. On behalf of the members of this committee and all parliamentarians, I want to thank you for helping us understand these complex issues.

Colleagues, that's it for today. Have a good weekend, everybody, and we'll see you on Tuesday.

The meeting is adjourned.

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