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Chair: Mr. Ali Ehsassi



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• (1550)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 111 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Before we get started, I want to explain to everyone that last week we were having many challenges with translation. We're trying to ensure, hopefully, that this is not going to be our experience here today.

Before we begin, I'd also like to ask all members and other in-person participants to consult the cards on the table for guidelines to prevent audio feedback incidents.

Use only an approved black earpiece. Keep your earpiece away from microphones at all times. When you are not using your earpiece, place it face down on the sticker placed on the table for this purpose.

Thank you all for your co-operation.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format.

I'd like to take a few minutes for the benefit of members and witnesses. Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. You may speak in the official language of your choice. Interpretation services are available. You have the choice of floor, English or French. If the interpretation is lost, please inform us immediately.

In accordance with the committee's routine motion concerning connection tests for witnesses, I can assure you all that the clerk has kindly looked into that and she's run all of the tests in advance.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, February 16, 2023, the committee will commence its study of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and the current human rights situation in Iran.

Now I'd like to welcome our two distinguished witnesses. We're very grateful to have you both here. You have many years of advocacy under your belts, but I recognize full well that you have been very busy over the course of the past two years.

I'd like to welcome Ms. Nazanin Afshin-Jam, who is a human rights and democracy advocate appearing on behalf of the Iranian Justice Collective. As well, we have Mr. Saeid Dehghan, who is a human rights lawyer and director of Parsi Law collective.

You will each be provided five minutes for your opening remarks, after which we will open it up to questions from the members.

Once again, you get five minutes for opening remarks, and then you have to make sure you wrap it up if it's running over. If you see me holding this cellphone up, it means you really should be wrapping up within 10 to 15 seconds.

With all of that having been explained, we'll start off with Ms. Afshin-Jam.

The floor is yours. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

• (1555)

Ms. Nazanin Afshin-Jam (Human Rights and Democracy Advocate, Iranian Justice Collective): Thank you, Chair and honourable members of Parliament. On behalf of the Iranian Justice Collective, a non-partisan group that echoes the voices of Iranian Canadians and freedom-loving Iranians inside Iran, I thank you for this invitation to speak on this critically important issue for all Canadians: listing the IRGC on the terrorist list under the Canadian Criminal Code.

As we all know, the House of Commons unanimously has voted to have the IRGC proscribed twice now—once six years ago and again just a few weeks ago today. Today I'll dispel myths about the IRGC and speak to the nature of this repressive force domestically and internationally, and I hope to table some policy recommendations from our team to support making this a reality.

First, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps is not equivalent to the Iranian army. They are two separate forces. The duty of the army, like any army, is to protect Iran's borders, sovereignty and people. After the Islamic revolution in 1979, a paranoid Ayatollah Khomeini, the supreme leader, created the IRGC as a counterweight to the army in case of a *coup d'état*, and to specifically protect his Islamic regime and defend it against any threats internally or externally—in other words, to suppress anyone who got in the way of his power and expansion of extremist jihadist Islamist ideology.

The IRGC's role increasingly became more powerful in foreign policy, and it now controls over 30% of the economy. One can equate it to a large, corrupt mafia group comprising 150,000 members involved in money laundering, transnational terror, selling drugs on the black market, expropriation of property, extrajudicial killings, targeted assassinations, cyberwarfare and the spread of Islamist propaganda. Being economically enmeshed with large industries—including manufacturing, shipping and banking—finances its activities, weapons acquisitions, covert operations and nuclear program.

Internally they exist to quell all internal dissent. Any time you have seen video footage of women in Iran being beaten and dragged screaming into police vans because of not properly wearing a hijab or of Christians arrested for worshipping in underground churches or Kurds being gassed or children being executed or peaceful protesters being intentionally shot at, blinded, raped or tortured, these are all the acts of the IRGC and its paramilitary subgroup, the Basij. My own father was tortured and almost executed at their hands.

There are no proper trials in Iran because there is no rule of law. Judges are allowed to mete out rulings based on ordained knowledge coming from God—sham trials lasting five minutes with no proper legal representation—resulting in thousands of innocent political prisoners being executed, and even the journalists reporting on the matters or lawyers representing them are jailed. Iran has the highest number of executions worldwide per capita, with 800 people hanged last year alone. The United Nations fact-finding mission report on Iran concluded that the violations of human rights amounted to crimes against humanity. This gender-apartheid regime and the IRGC have no regard for human life.

Outside of Iran, the IRGC uses other terrorist groups in the axis of resistance as their proxies to carry out terror and to expand their extremist anti-west, anti-Israeli ideology. Iran is the biggest state sponsor of terrorism, responsible for allocating billions of dollars to fund and train Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis and other terrorist factions in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, not to mention helping Assad's regime in Syria, which killed half a million people.

They continue to foster ties with other authoritarian regimes like Russia, providing them with drone-launched glide bombs used against innocent Ukrainians. I just had lunch today with the Nobel peace laureate from Ukraine, and she expressed this concern on behalf of the Ukrainian community as well.

Please note that the regime is continuing with nuclear proliferation, with uranium enrichment at 65%, which will be an existential threat to not only Jews but to our whole western civilization and way of life. If we do not do something now, their terror will spread like cancer and cost us even more—politically through foreign interference, economically through cyberwarfare and money laundering, and in lives through terrorism here in Canada.

● (1600)

I'd be happy to provide specific examples for each of these three groupings.

The U.S. designated the IRGC a terrorist organization in 2019, and the EU member states seem to be headed in that direction. We

expect Canada to be in line with our closest allies and to seal the deal once and for all.

I have a network of 90 Iranian diaspora groups made up of legal experts and other technocrats who are ready to help any task force that is set up to draft a strong Iran policy to combat these security concerns and work through any impediments slowing this designation.

We want to keep Canada safe. We want Magnitsky sanctions enforced to keep these regime officials out and their assets frozen and to reverse the narrative that has been established that Canada is a safe haven for these criminals, while satisfying the aspirations of 80% of Iran's population, who want an end to this regime and a free, secular and democratic Iran.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Afshin-Jam.

We will now go to Mr. Dehghan.

You have five minutes as well. The floor is yours.

Mr. Saeid Dehghan (Human Rights Lawyer and Director of Parsi Law Collective, As an Individual): Thank you.

Honourable members of the foreign affairs and international development committee, good afternoon. I would like to thank you for providing me this opportunity to deliver remarks regarding the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, or IRGC, and the current human rights situation in Iran. In my brief remarks, I would like to share my perspective and concerns and offer some recommendations.

As an Iranian human rights lawyer, I have acted as counsel and represented over 130 defendants who have faced politically motivated prosecution before the Iranian courts, and I have as well represented Iranian citizens and dual nationals appearing before revolutionary courts.

I can confidently state that the Iranian judiciary has no independence in such cases and that so-called security judges presiding over these cases simply rubber-stamp decisions dictated to them by organizations associated with the security apparatus, particularly the intelligence organization of the IRGC.

During the first decade of my legal work, the IRGC interfered in all of these cases behind the scenes, and the basis for decisions rendered was never codified in judicial rules or regulation; however, starting in 2015, as the IRGC commanders assumed an even tighter control of parliamentary prosecutors, they also legislated a process that would be favourable to the security establishment by codifying it in the code of criminal procedure.

These new regulations empowered two security and military organizations acting at the behest of the IRGC to act as judicial officials. This meant that members of the intelligence organization of the IRGC and Basij were now fully authorized to manipulate and predetermine the outcome of proceedings regarding prosecutions that occurred before the revolutionary courts, using article 29 of the code of criminal procedure.

Following these sinister developments, I believe that the entire legal and judicial framework of the Iranian court system collapsed. The Iranian court system has no semblance of justice or of judicial independence. Three years ago, I analyzed this development in detail in an article entitled “Legal Collapse: The Last Crisis of a Political System” that was published by the BBC.

This collapse has come about because members of parliament as well as members of the Guardian Council do not represent the innocence of people and do not act to safeguard what is usually referred to as the public interest. Instead they represent the political leadership of the theocratic regime and the intents of the IRGC; therefore, it should come as no surprise that they will legislate laws and regulations that are merely concerned with protecting the state apartheid and demonstrate absolutely no regard for the public interest or the rule of law.

As we have seen in the aftermath of the “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement, instead of implementing justice, judges merely act in accordance with the oath they have taken to protect the supreme leaders and serve the Islamic revolution. They will prosecute innocent protesters with the utmost cruelty and harshness.

• (1605)

The IRGC effectively controls all the political, economic, judicial and social levers in Iran, and even cultural institutions, like an octopus with multiple arms. We are witnessing the consequences of this domination in the form of gender apartheid, which complements and reinforces long-existing ethnic and religious-based discriminations.

In conclusion, I would like to offer the following two recommendations.

First, the Canadian government should lead global efforts to recognize gender apartheid as a crime under international law, or more specifically, to codify gender apartheid as a crime against humanity. Much like racial apartheid represented a most serious and unacceptable international crime, so does gender apartheid. The Canadian government should work with like-minded countries and allies to draft a resolution recognizing gender apartheid, just as resolution 3068 effectively defined racial apartheid as an international offence and crime in 1973.

Second, the Canadian government should target the overwhelming economic interests of the IRGC with smart sanctions so that the IRGC's security and intelligence arms are substantially weakened and their repression and their implementation of gender apartheid are no longer permitted.

Both of these actions are urgent and time sensitive. I urge you to pursue them as high priorities.

Thank you for your attention and concern. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

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

We now go to the members for questions.

MP Epp, you're up first. You have six minutes.

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to both of our witnesses for your excellent testimony and for your advocacy.

I'd like to begin with Madam Afshin-Jam.

You talked about the repression inside Iran and also alluded or spoke directly to repression outside, transnationally.

Can you talk more specifically about the repression here in Canada? How is it carried out? Is it done through an external terrorist group?

There have been reports of up to 700 agents. Can you elaborate on that?

• (1610)

Ms. Nazanin Afshin-Jam: Absolutely. Even though in April of this year the regime launched 300 missiles directly into Israel from Iranian soil, traditionally they carry out their terror through proxies or criminal gangs. They were found guilty by Argentinian courts for the 1994 bombings of a Jewish community centre in Buenos Aires, killing 85 people, and the embassy as well. Just a few days ago, it was reported in the news that the regime had hired a top European gang to plant a bomb in the Israeli embassy in Sweden.

Here in Canada, Hells Angels gang members were hired to carry out an assassination plot against a dissident Iranian couple in Maryland, Washington, for \$350,000. Eastern European gang members were also hired by the regime to assassinate a top activist in New York. Luckily, they caught the perpetrators, but Jimmy Sharmahd, a German national and U.S. resident, was not so lucky: He was kidnapped and now faces the death penalty in Iran.

Journalists at Iran International news agency have also had attempted assassination plots against them, and the U.K. found that there were 10 foiled kidnapping or assassination plots there. CSIS also identified at least three Canadians on a regime target list. Of course, you all know about the shooting down of the PS752 flight carrying 176 people, with 55 of those people being Canadians and 30 of them permanent residents. The IRGC was responsible for that.

I myself have been threatened numerous times that if I did not stop my activities, I would be targeted or my loved ones would be. Just a few weeks ago, my organization, Iranian Justice Collective, was here on the Hill meeting with parliamentarians, and one of my colleagues, when she returned back home, had a call from her mother, and was then passed on to an IRGC official. He had said to her that if she didn't stop her activities, she would end up like the women that she's trying to defend. We escaped Iran to feel safer here in Canada, yet we're always looking over our shoulders when we're doing speeches, when we're rallying. We're always scanning the audience to see who's there.

As you mentioned, investigative piece by Global News found that there were 700 IRGC regime affiliates here in Canada. Nine of them are set to be deported, but what we're suggesting is that instead of deporting them, we hope Canada exercises its universal jurisdiction and opens trials against them and sets an example that human rights abuses cannot go ahead with impunity.

Mr. Dave Epp: You've also touched on cyberwarfare. How are they doing that here?

Ms. Nazanin Afshin-Jam: Yes. Cyberwarfare is also a huge problem. It's one of the largest and most sophisticated cyber-armies, alongside Russia's and China's, costing hundreds of millions of dollars in damages to western institutions, critical infrastructure, high-value businesses and government agencies. These activities include using ransomware and targeting hospitals.

The headline in the Globe and Mail in August 2023 read "Cyber-criminals in Russia and Iran will threaten Canada's security and economic prosperity, say intelligence agency and RCMP". Its cyber-army is in the tens of thousands, and they're hired also to spread online propaganda, spread disinformation and create dissent among the Iranian opposition.

Mr. Dave Epp: Thank you.

Mr. Dehghan suggested two recommendations. I know the IJC has also put forward recommendations. Do you agree with the two recommendations put forward by Mr. Dehghan, and what other recommendations might you have?

Ms. Nazanin Afshin-Jam: Absolutely. I support the campaign to end gender apartheid in Iran. I'm actually a core member, core person, in a group of Iranian and Afghan activists who launched the campaign to end gender apartheid. What we're trying to do is expand the legal definition of apartheid to include not just race but gender as well. We're trying to codify it in international law so that those who are responsible for these crimes can hopefully be prosecuted one day in the International Criminal Court, but also, symbolically, for me, this campaign isn't just about gender issues specifically.

I know that as parliamentarians, you can't come straight out and say that you are for regime change in Iran, but you can support a campaign like ending gender apartheid. Former prime minister Brian Mulroney championed ending racial apartheid in South Africa. He convinced people like Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher to have the political will to stand behind a campaign like this, and I believe we can champion the same to end gender apartheid in Iran.

• (1615)

Mr. Dave Epp: Thank you.

I want to get one question in to Mr. Dehghan.

The Chair: Mr. Epp, you only have five seconds left.

Mr. Dave Epp: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I'm so sorry about that, MP Epp.

Next we go to MP Zuberi. You have six minutes.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today. I want to thank you for your courage, strength and advocacy on this very difficult issue, which I know takes quite a toll on you personally and on those around you. I just want to acknowledge that fully.

Having legal training, I'd like to start off with Saeid, please.

I'd like you to elaborate more about the judicial system. You said that you have represented 130 individuals, if I gathered correctly, both in the Iranian courts and also at the revolutionary courts.

Has there been an erosion of the justice system over the last years? Is there a distinction between these two courts?

About the basic principles of due process and the right to mount a case, can you speak about these basic principles in law as they relate to those first two points, please?

Mr. Saeid Dehghan: Let me speak Farsi for the answers in the Q and A section, please.

[Witness spoke in Persian, interpreted as follows:]

I would like to speak about the courts of Iran. The truth is that revolutionary courts in Iran, in all of the cases I had there, you can for sure say that none of them.... The revolutionary courts are under the security judges. Under their leadership, they provided order according to what they have sworn. The result is that none of them have anything to do with any of the judgements. They are all political decisions.

From point A, from the time of arrest, it's like kidnapping. Without any judicial system, they go to security courts. They go into these courts, and then investigators from the Sepah interrogate them without representation. Under torture, they will admit to certain items. That is been taken, and then the order will be in just three courts in the whole country. Those are the revolutionary courts I am talking about.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: Thank you.

As for the civilian courts, how drastically different...or to what extent are basic principles respected?

Please give a succinct answer. We also understand that Iran is not Canada, but we still expect some semblance of process.

Mr. Saeid Dehghan: It's a good question.

[Witness spoke in Persian, interpreted as follows:]

I have to insist that civil courts are different from revolutionary courts. Civil courts are independent. They are specialized. Perhaps there is some sort of corruption in there, but we are not talking about those courts. We are talking about the revolutionary court and sometimes the criminal court.

The civil courts are totally different. Because of the religious rules, they come into play, but I have to insist that civil courts are totally different. I am just referring to the revolutionary courts.

• (1620)

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: This is for our second witness.

You mentioned an important point about where America is with respect to the IRGC. You also mentioned that the EU is looking at this issue.

I want to ask this question so that we can get it for the record: Have any European nations yet listed the IRGC?

If we know this, it'll help us in our... Please.

Ms. Nazanin Afshin-Jam: No. Officially, no European country has yet listed it, although the European Parliament unanimously called for the designation. Josep Borrell, the head of the European Council, said that they needed more legal proof that there was terrorism or terror on European soil. There is a lot of proof, so that, I think, is just a political excuse.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: I understand. I just want to get one last question in.

First, however, if any intimidation is directed toward you personally or those around you because of this testimony, please do let us—the committee—know later on.

In the last seconds that remain, how can we, from here, support individuals who are targeted within Iran in a way that will help people? Do you have any suggestions on how we can effectively do that from here?

Mr. Saeid Dehghan: *[Witness spoke in Persian, interpreted as follows:]*

You can just look at some of the cases in Europe from 1997. The Boroumand foundation provided a report. Just recently, a woman from France was killed in Iraq. Another one was Masih Alinejad; there was the intention to kidnap her. There is enough proof.

The Chair: Thank you.

We now go to Mr. Bergeron. You have six minutes.

[Translation]

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

I would like to thank both witnesses for being with us today. I also thank them for the work they do every day to defend human rights in Iran.

Ms. Afshin-Jam, in your presentation, you were careful to distinguish between the Iranian army, or armed forces, and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. You said that one function of the Iranian army was to, quote unquote, protect the public. You also told us that Ayatollah Khomeini created the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps to counterbalance the army and prevent it from carrying out a potential coup d'état.

Since 1979, has it ever felt like the Iranian army was working to protect the public?

Ms. Nazanin Afshin-Jam: My French is rusty so I'll answer in English.

[English]

Under the shah, there was the Iranian army. There were those who were under his.... The army continued on after the 1979 revolution. Many were executed at that point, but some were.... I would say that the function of the army is to protect the sovereignty and territory and, to a certain extent, to protect the lives of those inside Iran from, let's just say, war from outside.

Those who are in positions of power generally have some adherence to the supreme leader and to the tenets of the Islamic republic. I wouldn't say that everybody in the Iranian army is safe or trustworthy, but definitely, at the core of the IRGC, their main role—their only role—is to protect the Islamic regime establishment.

That's why you'll note that the name “Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps” doesn't have the word “Iranian” in it. They're not there to protect the Iranian people; they're there only to protect their regime and the expansion of this Islamist ideology.

• (1625)

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: You have called for stronger sanctions under the special economic measures and, more specifically, the Sergei Magnitsky Law.

To date, the RCMP has frozen assets totalling just \$79,000. These numbers are from May 2024, just a few days ago.

Do you really believe that sanctions are a good way to put pressure on the Iranian regime?

[English]

Ms. Nazanin Afshin-Jam: I think we should definitely list the IRGC, but in the meantime, we should continue to sanction those who are part of this regime.

The Canadian government has already listed a number of officials from the Islamic regime, but we definitely need to add more. In fact, the Iranian Justice Collective has done a new report that we have started to circulate to members of Parliament from all parties. You should be receiving it in your emails in the next few days. It names 20 top officials who are part of the Iranian judiciary and the court system, and we have it listed under the words “TOOMAJ sanctions”.

Toomaj, of course, is a rap artist who's become a hero inside Iran for his lyrics—lyrics against oppression inside Iran. He's now on death row, so we use his name to honour him and to use the acronym “TOOMAJ”, which stands for “targeting oppressive officers to mitigate abuse in the Iranian judiciary”. We've listed 20 names, although this is just 20 among so many others.

I'd also like to point your attention to a website called face-sofcrime.org, where there is an organization by the name of “Justice for Iran” that has created a database of regime officials. It provides their pictures and it cites their titles and what they're criminally responsible for, the types of human rights abuses that they're responsible for. This is a really good tool to refer to our border agencies, you parliamentarians or other security forces inside Canada, such as the RCMP, if there are citizens from Iran trying to come into Canada, because it lists who is implicated in human rights abuses or crimes against humanity.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Both witnesses referred to the system—

[English]

The Chair: You have two seconds left.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Two seconds?

[Translation]

Alright.

I will get back to it later, then.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Next we go to MP Abouttaif, but I understand—

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): I think it may be me.

The Chair: Oh, my apologies, Madam McPherson. You have six minutes. The floor is yours.

Ms. Heather McPherson: I know you're always getting mixed up. I understand, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much to the witnesses for being here, and thank you for this important testimony.

I brought forward the motion to do this study in this committee because of what we saw during the Woman, Life, Freedom movement and the calls that I've heard from members of my community, members of the Iranian community who have been asking for this work to be done. Your advocacy over the last number of months and years has been vital for us to be able to do the work.

The goal of this study is to find out what Canada can do, what more Canada needs to do, to help support Iranian Canadians and help support Iranians who are having their human rights taken away from them.

You spoke about the disproportionate impact on women, the gender apartheid that we see against women. Just this morning, actually, I saw online that there are political prisoners, women political prisoners in Evin Prison, who have requested that Narges Mohammadi have her trial undertaken in public.

For me, I'm interested.... You talked a little bit about the use of torture and how the regime is doing things in secrecy to inflict pain and suffering on the Iranian people. In this particular situation, can you talk a little bit about why it's so important that this trial is done in public, and what that indicates for how this regime is working right now?

Perhaps I would start with you, Mr. Dehghan.

• (1630)

Mr. Saeid Dehghan: [Witness spoke in Persian, interpreted as follows]

I think the answer to your question is contained within it. When there is a trial, although there are regulations, the trial is political, and the trial has to be in Arabic, yet in 43 years or so, we have not seen one trial that is public. It shows that when everything is done in a clandestine fashion, it is not a trial. It is already decided.

Narges Mohammadi is also convicted of propaganda against the regime. This is exactly the most political accusation. Again, it took place behind court doors and without a jury. This shows that because of the corruption of the judicial system, this security work, there is absolutely no relation to the Islamic Republic.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Ms. Afshin-Jam, would you like to add anything?

Ms. Nazanin Afshin-Jam: I'll just repeat basically what Mr. Dehghan was saying.

Inside Iran, as I said, there is no rule of law. There are no proper courts. When they're doing this, they're making an example.

Basically, Narges Mohammadi, for those of you who are not aware, is the Nobel Peace Prize laureate.

Oftentimes these trials are kangaroo courts, so they're not proper trials. The victim is normally not given proper legal representation, and if they're going to allow this publicly, it's going to be just a trick to try to show the international community that there's some semblance of order.

However, let's not forget that oftentimes victims are forced into confessions. They're tortured behind the scenes or they're told that their family members will be raped or killed if they testify, so it is all a circus act. I hope it is public just so that the international community can see for themselves, but it's not to be trusted, ever.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Of course. We saw that after the horrific attack on civilians in the downing of PS752, when they shot innocent people and murdered them. What we saw was the intimidation that was then directed towards the families of those who had lost their lives in Canada and in Iran.

You spoke as well about Toomaj, and we know he has been sentenced to death. We know there is targeting of cultural personalities, artists, authors and folks who are representing the Iranian people, and the targeting of them is a message as well.

What more should Canada be doing? We have members within Parliament.... My own colleague Bonita Zarrillo has been very outspoken in her support for Toomaj.

What else can we be doing to protect folks in these situations? Also, what does it mean to Iranian people when the cultural icons of their country are being murdered?

Ms. Nazanin Afshin-Jam: That's a good question.

For those of you who don't know, Toomaj is a prominent rap artist inside Iran who is loved by most Iranians not only because of his art and songs but more so because of his bravery and the courage in his lyrics, which touch the population's hearts and minds and address all the social ills committed by this regime, such as corruption and the oppression of all the citizenry. He has become a hero, really—a larger-than-life figure—inside Iran. The regime has imprisoned him, tortured him and injected him with unknown substances, and he now has a death sentence against him.

There's a petition signed by over 500,000 people asking the international community to pressure the Islamic regime into giving him a stay of execution. I think that's the only thing you can do as parliamentarians. When I used to run the Stop Child Executions organization, we noticed that parliamentarians who were pushing on these individual cases were the ones who were giving this stay of execution.

Therefore, continue saying their names and exacting a price for these crimes against humanity and these abuses. That means listing the IRGC, imposing Magnitsky sanctions and getting more—

Okay. I'm sorry.

• (1635)

The Chair: I'm sorry. I'm going to have to cut you off.

We will now go to MP Aboultaif. You have five minutes, sir.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to the witnesses, and welcome to the committee.

I'll go quickly to a question for both of you, if each of you wants to answer.

I feel that there is a level of hesitation in moving forward and acting on listing the IRGC as a terrorist organization by the governments in Europe and Canada. Could you explain that? Is there a wisdom we don't know about? What can you tell us?

Can I start with you, Ms. Afshin-Jam?

Ms. Nazanin Afshin-Jam: I wish I had that answer. In fact, that's a question that we have posed repeatedly to members of Parliament here in Canada, in the U.K. and in Europe, asking, what is the hesitation?

There are a few things that come up sometimes. One is that they say that they're afraid of targeting innocent people, the forced conscripts. In Iran, adult men have to do two years of military service. It's mandatory. The question, therefore, is whether innocent people will be targeted if they are trying to come into Canada, and the answer is simple. For those who are conscripted, at the end of their two-year term, they are given an identity card that says the day that they enlisted and the day that their service ended. If it shows that it's approximately in that two-year mark, then one can differentiate them from somebody who has spent their life serving the IRGC.

Also, people have the choice. When they do their military service, they can choose the army or the IRGC, so already they are making an informed decision by choosing. For those who have low clerical jobs working in an office at the IRGC, again, their position is listed on the identity card, so we can bypass them, if that's the real concern here, but we're never given the real reason.

That's why I say to please let us know what the impediment is. We have the legal experts. We have the task force that is happy to solve these matters. If it's a question of cost in terms of getting more RCMP, more CSIS members to control this, well, you have to ask yourselves, what is the cost of a human life?

I know it's coming here to Canada. We are already seeing assassinations happening and kidnappings. The next thing you know, we will have terrorism on Canadian soil, and then how will each one of you be able to look in the faces of the Canadian public and say why we did not list the IRGC on the terrorist list?

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Dehghan.

Mr. Saeid Dehghan: [*Witness spoke in Persian, interpreted as follows:*]

Considering that, I think we need to make sure that we really differentiate between those who are in the army. We have no option. There is an option whether they choose the Sepah, the police or the army when they are forced to go there.

First of all, the IRGC must be announced on the list of terrorists, and then we can separate and differentiate the other people.

This is just like the Taliban in Afghanistan, with the difference that Sepah is in the shadow of the government, which has taken over the public. In the 1990s, in South Africa, apartheid was done there. This is like an octopus whose extended arm has covered the people of Iran.

All we have to do is add this one item to it. This is something that Canada has to take over, and it has happened in the past.

• (1640)

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: How much time do I have?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Then I have just a quick question to Ms. Afshin-Jam.

Are we out of control on the IRGC activities in Canada? If we decide to act on it the way we should, do we still have the capacity, and are we going to be able to do that?

Ms. Nazanin Afshin-Jam: I'm sorry—

The Chair: Please go very quickly.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Are we going to be able to control the activities of IRGC in Canada the way we'd like to? I ask because I think they are deeply rooted. Do you agree?

The Chair: Answer very briefly, please, because we're considerably over time, so if you could, answer in 20 seconds.

Ms. Nazanin Afshin-Jam: That investigative piece found that there were 700 Islamic regime affiliates here, so of course they're among us, but we have to prevent more from coming and we have to deport those who have been defined as having committed crimes against humanity or human rights abuses.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

First of all, I wanted to thank you both. You've done a terrific job demonstrating how horrific the human rights situation in Iran is and how unprecedented it is as well. I truly can't think of another country where a Nobel Peace Prize laureate languishes in jail. I can't think of another country where the most eminent lawyer actually is in jail, and I certainly can't think of another country where the most popular singer and rapper, just because he was singing songs, has been sentenced to death.

Thank you for all of those explanations.

Now, if I could, I'll ask a couple of quick questions to Mr. Dehghan.

Essentially your testimony is that the legal system is a complete and utter sham. There are no legal principles that lead to individuals being sentenced to death. Am I correct in assuming that if you are convicted of something in Iran, there's almost no chance that you could get a lawyer of your liking to represent you?

Mr. Saeid Dehghan: Actually, no. There are a lot of lawyers in jail, such as Arash Keykhosravi, Mohammad Najafi, Amirsalar Davoudi and Khosrow Alikordi. They are in jail.

About this law, parliament in 2015 said that only lawyers approved by the head of the judiciary can represent defendants in revolutionary courts. Therefore, they cannot choose an independent lawyer of their own choice.

[Witness spoke in Persian, interpreted as follows:]

[Inaudible—Editor] what I want to explain, it is only lawyers who have been approved by the government, so only they can defend those who are against this. The lawyers who are defending these people are those who have sworn to defend the government. That's why you can see that the press and the artists are on one side, and the lawyer who is defending them will be incarcerated and detained *[Inaudible—Editor]*

What it means is that the government chooses only their own lawyers for the defence of those who are against the government.

The Chair: Thank you.

Then, just to clarify on a question that was asked previously, you said the revolutionary courts are controlled by the intelligence ministry and things of that nature, but anyone who's charged with a politically motivated charge has to go through revolutionary courts. Is that correct?

The cases of most individuals who, for example, displayed courage and were arrested on the streets would go to the revolutionary court. Is that correct?

• (1645)

Mr. Saeid Dehghan: *[Witness spoke in Persian, interpreted as follows:]*

Yes, unfortunately, that is the case. Ten years ago, in 2016, this political law was passed. This political law, which is very unprecedented, was accepted after 34 or 35 years, but immediately in 1996, 1997, 1998, there came the farmers of Khuzestan, and then we came to women's freedom, which were all peaceful demonstrations. Not even one file has been attended to in political court. Even the case of Narges Mohammadi is not public. It has gone to the revolutionary court. I think that is sufficient evidence that these are only special branches, and they are conducted by judges who have no control at all. They have only their stamp, which is the leader's decision only.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that comprehensive response.

Now, if I could pick up, Ms. Afshin-Jam, where you left off, you were concerned about terrorist acts happening on Canadian soil. Why are you so concerned? What are some of the facts that you're aware of that all the members here should be familiar with as well?

Ms. Nazanin Afshin-Jam: As I said, there have been examples in the U.K., in the United States and in Europe of assassination plots. An activist was assassinated in the Mykonos restaurant in Germany. As I said, there have been bombs at different Israeli embassies, including a few weeks ago in Sweden, and we've had terror here in Canada, and I don't trust.... Your hand is up, so that's okay. It's your own question.

The Chair: It's just that we're over the time. Thank you very much.

Ms. Nazanin Afshin-Jam: I just know it's a matter of time.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We now go to Mr. Bergeron. You have two and a half minutes, sir.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Both witnesses talked about the gender apartheid system. This fact was also reported by Javaid Rehman, the United Nations rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, last February.

Mr. Dehghan, you said that this apartheid system perpetuates discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities.

For the benefit of committee members and the people tuning in, can you elaborate on the link between the apartheid system and discrimination against religious and ethnic minorities?

[English]

Mr. Saeid Dehghan: [Witness spoke in Persian, interpreted as follows:]

When one speaks about a regime that supports its regulations in apartheid, we just talked about racial apartheid. What we suggest today about gender apartheid in international law is because it's not just the gender apartheid; it's racial, and it's also minorities. We have to remember that the order for LGBTQ people would be execution if they are gays or lesbians. Even the Bahá'is in Iran don't have permission to go to university. They cannot hold a job. They don't have national ID cards. They cannot live anywhere.

Three or four days ago, at one of the farms in the north of Iran in Mazandaran, they came and they took their rice and destroyed their rice lands. Although they own that land, under such conditions, it's not just racial apartheid; it's generally that the whole government is intertwined with the issue of the hijab. It's like an octopus. It's one of those crushing tools.

For minorities, even Baha'is, to flee from Baluchistan to Kurdistan in itself is a crime, and we have to really look into it at the highest level of decisions.

• (1650)

The Chair: Thank you very much. I'm terribly sorry about that.

We now go to MP McPherson. You have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much.

Thank you again for your testimony, to both of you.

Ms. Afshin-Jam, you spoke about Iran's role in the global community and you spoke about nuclear proliferation. We know the threat that is shown within the Middle East. I'm interested in any information you might have with regard to how Iran is working with Russia and the implications from those connections, not just in the Middle East but also in Ukraine and around the world.

Ms. Nazanin Afshin-Jam: As we all know, all these authoritarian regimes are banding together. They share intelligence. They basically operate from the same book of repression. They share ways to repress their own people. Of course, they help one another financially by buying each other's oil, etc., and as I mentioned, by providing drones. The regime is responsible for providing all those drones to Russia for use against Ukrainians.

I forgot what the first part of the question was.

Ms. Heather McPherson: It's just about the connection there. I'm trying to get your sense of the connection between Russia and Iran and the implications of that connection.

Ms. Nazanin Afshin-Jam: I don't have specifics. I'm not an expert in that domain. I just know that they collaborate, all of these dictatorial regimes and their leaders. We see them meeting. They, of course, have that BRICS organization together.

We, as western liberal democracies, need to do the same and band together with our allies. That's why I stress so much that we

need a strong Iran policy. We need a strong policy for many of these countries, but specifically that's what we're talking about here. If we don't do that, then we're going to face the consequences.

We see it here on our campuses. A lot of the Islamist ideological propaganda is coming from Iran, and a lot of the funding goes to certain madrasas and mosques that are spewing anti-Israeli and anti-western hate propaganda, and they're trying to enlist people to be part of this extremism. We need to take a stand against all kinds of extremism.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Of course.

Mr. Dehghan, is there anything to add from your side?

The Chair: I'm so sorry, Madam McPherson. We're out of time. We're actually 20 seconds over, unless you wanted to ask a question that he could respond to in a written submission that he could send to us.

Ms. Heather McPherson: It's fine, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: At this point, I want to thank our two witnesses. That was incredibly helpful. Thank you for your expertise and perspective, and thank you also for your courage and conviction. I certainly hope that things will improve in Iran.

Thank you very much.

We will turn to the second panel in two or three minutes.

Thank you.

• (1650)

(Pause)

• (1700)

The Chair: Welcome back, members. We will resume our hearing on the situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

We now have a new panel. We're very grateful to have here with us three experts who have been working very hard over the course of the past two years.

Here in person we have Dr. Nimâ Machouf, who is a researcher.

We have, in person, Mr. Hamed Esmaeilion, who is familiar to you all and is a board member of the Association of Families of Flight PS752 Victims.

We're also very grateful to hear from two witnesses who are joining us virtually. We have Dr. Hanieh Ziaei, who is a political scientist and an Iranologist and the Raoul-Dandurand chair at UQAM.

We have as well Mr. Kouroshe Doustshenas, who is, as I indicated, also a member of the Association of Families of Flight PS752 Victims.

We have three opening remarks, as I understand.

We'll start off with Ms. Machouf, and then Dr. Esmailion and Mr. Doustshenas will split their time, and then we will go to Dr. Zi-aei.

Madam Machouf, welcome. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

I would be grateful if you would all look over to me once in a while. When you see this signal, you really should tie it up within 10 to 15 seconds.

All of that having been explained, Dr. Machouf, the floor is yours. You have five minutes.

• (1705)

Dr. Nima Machouf (Epidemiologist, researcher, As an Individual): Thank you very much.

With your permission, I will do my talk in French.

[*Translation*]

Freedom of expression is the bedrock of democracy. In Iran, freedom of expression never existed, not during the Shah's time, nor—and even less so—since the establishment of the Islamic Republic. The first victims of repression were women and the press.

Today, I want expressly to speak, as have my colleagues, in fact, about the sexual apartheid that reigns in Iran, that is, a system of systemic and institutionalized segregation of women. The obligation to wear the veil in public is only the visible part of the discrimination that exists in Iran. Since the establishment of the Islamic theocracy in Iran in 1979, women have been legally worth half as much as men. Women inherit half of what men inherit. In terms of legal testimony, it takes two women for their testimony to be equivalent to that of a man, even in the case of premeditated murder. If a man murders his daughter, he will not be punished, because she belongs to him. A mother cannot apply for legal documents, such as a passport for her children, because the woman's signature has no legal value.

Furthermore, a woman has no right to be a judge. Ms. Shirin Ebadi, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2003, is a case in point. She lost her right to practise after the revolution. Nor are women allowed to run for the country's presidency. Many sports are forbidden to women. A woman cannot study, work or travel without her husband's permission. Polygamy is permitted for men. A man can divorce his wife at any time, unconditionally, without her even knowing, whereas a woman must convince a judge, with valid reasons, to obtain the right to divorce. Incidentally, this partial right was obtained after many years of feminist struggle in Iran. After a divorce, custody of the children is given to the father or any other male in his family, unless the child is disabled.

These are just a few examples. Iranian women are resisting, and despite the systemic discrimination they experience, 60% of those on university benches are girls, and much to the chagrin of the authorities, women are occupying the country's social and economic scene.

I've told you about women's rights, but human rights in general are flouted, and repression is brutal. Freedom of expression and the

right of association do not exist. The media are censored. Internet access is controlled. Any protest is violently repressed. You've probably heard more about it since the assassination of Mahsa Zhi-na Amini and the Women, Life, Freedom uprising.

In four months of protests, 600 people were killed in the streets, including more than 50 children. Tens of thousands have been arrested, of whom 22,000 have been granted amnesty, according to the Iranian government. Many received death sentences. Incidentally, several of you have taken part in the campaign to sponsor political prisoners threatened with execution, and we are very grateful to you.

Over the past two years, the government has also attempted to disfigure the protest movement. It specifically targeted the eyes of demonstrators in the street. More than 500 people have lost their sight.

Iran is now under electronic surveillance. More than a million women who continue to resist the regime's diktats and who appear in public without wearing the veil have received violation notices by text message, they have had their cars confiscated, they have been fined and sent to prison, and they continue to resist.

Every year, the UN Special Rapporteur denounces the violation of human rights in Iran. Prisons are full of prisoners of conscience. Amnesty International regularly denounces the use of torture, rape, electric shocks, mock executions, forced confessions and arbitrary executions.

• (1710)

In recent years, chemical torture has been added to physical and mental torture. Strangely, several suicides were recorded on release from prison; prisoners were committing suicide within days of their release. These same chemical weapons were used during the Women, Life, Freedom uprising. The aim was to spread terror in girls' schools. Thousands of pupils were poisoned and hospitalized between January and April 2023. I'm talking about underage girls here.

In 2013, the Canadian Parliament recognized the massacres of political prisoners in the 1980s as crimes against humanity, where around 9,000 prisoners were executed and thrown into mass graves in Khavaran. These 44 years of Islamic rule have been accompanied by 44 years of resistance. People have tried everything: confrontation, reform and civil disobedience. Iranian society is young, ebullient and, above all, determined to put an end to this regime of terror. However, we are facing a monster.

I hope to have time to talk more about this as I answer questions from committee members.

[*English*]

The Chair: Dr. Machouf, we're considerably over our time already. Hopefully, we can cover that in response to members' questions.

We now go to Dr. Esmailion and Mr. Doustshenas.

You have five minutes. The floor is yours.

Dr. Hamed Esmailion (Board member of the Association, Association of Families of Flight PS752 Victims): Thank you, Mr. Chair,

Thank you, members of the committee.

Fifty days before the downing of flight PS752, more than 1,500 peaceful Iranian protesters were brutally murdered over a few days when the regime cut off the Internet and unleashed its vicious armed forces upon people in the streets in what became known as the Bloody November massacre.

The Boroumand foundation reports that over the past 45 years more than 540 cases of assassinations and bombings have been carried out around the world by the Islamic regime through the IRGC. Over the past decades, this nefarious organization has become a source of terror for Iranians and much of the world.

When we speak of the IRGC, we are referring to a vast nefarious military organization that has a stranglehold on all of Iran's resources, from mines to airports, from the film industry to sports, trading ports, factories, the bazaar and the currency trade, and even to a monopoly on provincial governorship posts. It is a monstrous entity that has no mercy on teachers, workers, artists and ordinary citizens, persecuting, imprisoning, torturing, raping and murdering with impunity to disrupt civil society and destroy any efforts by the people to organize peaceful resistance.

The murder of a beautiful young Iranian woman, Mahsa Jina Amini, opened a new chapter in the book of crimes against humanity by the Islamic regime. During the Woman, Life, Freedom revolution in 2022, when tens of thousands took to the streets in Iran and around the world, the United Nations' fact-finding committee reported at least 551 killings by IRGC forces.

Many of the victims were children and youth who were horrifically murdered around the country. Baluchistan, Kurdistan, Mazandaran and Tehran have suffered the highest casualties during the recent uprising. In only one day, at least 104 citizens were murdered by the IRGC in Baluchistan. Over 130 citizens were blinded by shots to the face.

Toomaj Salehi, the famous Iranian rapper, and many other young Iranian protesters are currently under threat of execution. Many activists are in prison around the country. So far, many young protesters have been executed, while thousands have been arrested and suffer under extreme prison conditions. In only the last year, the Islamic regime has executed 798 citizens, without any accountability towards the people of Iran or the international community.

All of these atrocities emanate from the top echelons of the power in the Islamic regime that is concentrated in the IRGC. This nefarious organization is a menace not only to Iranian society on all levels; it is also a threat to the security of the entire Middle East and the world. Calling the IRGC what it truly is and officially declaring it a terrorist organization is an urgent, necessary action that must be taken without delay in Canada and the rest of the free world.

The families of the Flight PS752 victims' association stand with all the survivors of the victims of this brutal organization in making this demand.

I will pass this on to Mr. Doustshenas.

• (1715)

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Esmailion.

Go ahead, Dr. Doustshenas.

Mr. Kourosh Doustshenas (Representative, Association of Families of Flight PS752 Victims): Thank you, Mr. Esmailion. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

On January 8, 2020, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard launched missile attacks against Ukraine National Airlines' flight PS752 shortly after takeoff from the Tehran international airport. The crew and 177 innocent passengers—many of whom were destined for Canada, including an unborn child—lost their lives in the terrifying attack in southwestern Tehran.

The missile attacks against Flight PS752 were not the first nor the last of the heinous crimes committed by the IRGC against Iranian Canadians. A few years earlier, Iranian-Canadian photojournalist Zahra Kazemi and environmentalist Kavous Seyed-Emami were murdered by the Islamic regime and the IRGC.

The families of the PS752 victims have suffered persecution, threats and inhumane treatment by the Islamic regime over the last five years. UN Human Rights Watch has reported an escalation in torture and mistreatment of families of victims in Iran.

Last October, Mrs. Zarabi, who lost four of her loved ones in the downing of flight PS752, attended the funeral of a young woman named Armita Geravand, who had been murdered by the regime. Mrs. Zarabi was arrested and severely assaulted before being dragged on the ground into custody. A mourning mother of another victim was brutally beaten by IRGC forces at her child's gravesite. Some PS752 families have been banned from leaving Iran to attend the anniversary ceremonies of Flight PS752 victims in Toronto. There are many instances of persecution, threats, and arrests—even some kidnappings—during the anniversary ceremonies that families hold in Iran under severe security conditions.

In the aftermath of the downing of Flight PS752, the victims' families and activists believe that there has been much ambiguity in the Canadian government's position towards the IRGC. On the fourth anniversary of the downing of Flight PS752, we heard from our Prime Minister that he will take the necessary measures in this regard.

Seven months remain until the fifth anniversary of the downing, and we all know that the association expects a clear and swift response to our demand. We believe that since Canada has suffered most from the actions of the IRGC outside of Iran, it must be the first country to officially put the IRGC on the list of terrorist organizations. We hope that this will happen without any further delay.

Thank you kindly.

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

We will start with the questions from the members.

No—my apologies. We have one more witness. Dr. Ziaei is joining us virtually.

My apologies for that: You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Thank you, Dr. Ziaei.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hanieh Ziaei (Political Scientist and Iranologist, Raoul-Dandurand Chair, UQAM, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Can everyone hear me well?

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, we can hear you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hanieh Ziaei: Mr. Chair, honourable members of the committee, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for this opportunity to speak on the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, or IRGC, in Iran and the current situation in Iran.

It's crucial to distinguish legitimacy from legality when addressing the question of power in Iran. From my research into the ideological-political system of the Islamic Republic of Iran, it is clear that the regime's legitimacy is crumbling considerably. This is illustrated by recurrent protest movements, systematic challenges and increasing absenteeism at elections. For example, in the parliamentary elections of March 1, 2024, turnout was just 41%, the lowest since the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979.

I can also give the example of the euphoric reaction following the announcement of President Raisi's death. This reaction is indicative of the state of mind of a significant part of the Iranian population. This sense of relief and joy highlighted the deep opposition and accumulated exasperation regarding a regime perceived as oppressive, authoritarian and illegitimate.

This lack of political legitimacy profoundly weakens the authority of any regime, even if it is not democratic, and this forms an essential basis for assessing its stability and acceptability to the people, in this case the Iranian people.

Iran is currently governed by a political system considered by part of its population to be anachronistic. The Islamic Republic of Iran presents itself as a theocracy, while the country's women and young people aspire to a clear separation between the religious and political spheres. Even non-democratic regimes have to rely on a legitimate and legal basis to maintain their power. Yet how is this regime legitimate in the eyes of the Iranian people, especially after the many testimonies we have heard today?

The actions, practices and deeds of the Islamic Republic of Iran are profoundly illegitimate and illegal, both under international law and international conventions, as are the many human rights abuses it perpetuates. Numerous examples of these abuses have been reported to you by committed collectives such as the Iranian Justice

Collective, notably by Ms. Nazanin Afshin-Jam, Mr. Saeid Dehghan and Ms. Nima Machouf. This is therefore corroborated by the many testimonies of those present here.

I will now talk more specifically about the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Its power has grown considerably since its creation in 1979. Originally, it was a military organization founded to protect the revolutionary values of 1979. Its independence from the traditional Iranian army has enabled it to become an influential and formidable armed force.

The IRGC is not only a military force, it has also become deeply involved in Iran's economy, politics and intelligence services. The strengthening of its means of action and influence has made it a key player in the Iranian political landscape.

The IRGC has transformed itself into a real power within Iran. It controls key sectors of the economy, notably the oil and gas industries, and owns numerous companies that serve as front companies. In addition, it plays a central role in suppressing internal dissent and projecting Iranian influence abroad, as well as supporting various non-state groups in the region.

Today, the Iranian people are courageously fighting against the forced Islamization of society. This is an ideology that, despite the efforts of the IRGC, has partly failed. The Women, Life, Freedom movement is a poignant illustration of this. This struggle for freedom and human rights is not only vital for Iran, but also has repercussions throughout the region and the world.

Islamization by force is a terror that weighs heavily, threatening peace and stability not only in Iran and the Middle East, but also in Europe, Canada and the world, as witnessed by repeated attacks and hostage-takings targeting western nationals.

To conclude, I would say that it is imperative to actively support the Iranian people in their fight against this oppressive ideology.

• (1720)

The future also rests on your political and institutional capacity to highlight the illegitimacy and illegality of the Iranian regime before all international and national bodies. Your role as a defender of democratic and humanist values can considerably strengthen the ability of Iranians to overcome this state repression and re-establish a political system that respects human rights and fundamental freedoms. The international community must stand resolutely alongside those fighting for a free and democratic Iran by vigorously denouncing human rights violations and applying targeted sanctions against their perpetrators.

Thank you for your attention.

• (1725)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We now turn to the members for their questions. I should say that it's more in the nature of rapid-fire questions, given some of the time constraints we have.

For the first round, each member will be provided with three minutes, and we'll start with MP Hoback.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): I'm going to have to be very quick here.

Hanieh, I'm just kind of curious. One of the things that we've seen is that these bad actors are showing up here in Canada. What can we do to deal with these bad actors when they're on Canadian soil? How do we identify them? How do we work with the community to identify them?

Then, should they just be deported, or should they actually face trial here in Canada when they are intimidating Iranian citizens and the Iranian diaspora here in Canada?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hanieh Ziaei: Thank you for your question.

Ms. Nazanin Afshin-Jam highlighted the fact that today, collectives, associations and the Iranian diaspora are starting to compile data accompanied by photos and identification elements. The Canadian government also has the means to first identify these people on Canadian territory. Today, with digital technology, it is easy to identify these people arriving on Canadian soil. The work could obviously be done in collaboration with the Iranians, who are also in the process of gathering all these data, photos and identification materials.

This is really work that needs to be done with the organizations mentioned here and by Ms. Nazanin Afshin-Jam at the beginning of her presentation. It needs to be done on a regular basis, and in the short, medium and long term. It would therefore be very important to set time targets for the tasks to be carried out. The Iranian diaspora can also be an ally for the Canadian government.

[*English*]

Mr. Randy Hoback: Again, I just want to make sure that there's a system in place so that if somebody is facing threats and intimidation here in Canada or their family members are facing that back in Iran, it is identified and there's actually a mechanism to deal with it.

I'm running out of time here. I'm sitting here trying to figure out why the IRGC isn't a terrorist organization. I cannot see why this hasn't happened yet. Can anybody give me some insight into what's holding things up? This is crazy.

Nina, what do you think?

[*Translation*]

Dr. Nima Machouf: We don't understand it either. As my colleague mentioned earlier, the reasons given by the government are that, if it puts the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps on the list of terrorist organizations, this could perhaps lead it to sanction more than necessary. People could therefore be unfairly punished. However, there are already sanctions in place against Iran. Transactions are restricted, for example.

In general, since members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps arrive here with a lot of money, they are able to slip through the cracks of the system. On the other hand, people who are arrested because of their banking transactions, such as artists who have

been to Iran and come back to present a project, are told that their project will be accepted. So we have to use the right means.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you. Yes, you're well over three minutes.

We now go to MP Oliphant. You have three minutes.

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

Thank you to all the witnesses in both panels. It's always helpful.

I'm going to turn to the families of the PS752 group. I want to give you notice that I may be asking our committee to bring you back because I think your work is critical to Canada's commitment in the world. I'd hope that you are in more of our accountability sessions, but I do want to give you a chance to say a few more things.

I want to talk particularly about the experience of foreign influence on family members and survivors, as well as on activists in Canada who may have spoken out against the regime in Canada.

It could be either Hamed or—I never use your last names—Kourosh who speak to that. Thank you. You have the rest of my time to talk about this.

Dr. Hamed Esmailion: Okay.

As I testified at the foreign interference commission a few months ago, I think we need to believe in the extent of the foreign interference of the Islamic regime in Canada. This is the first step that we have to take.

I gave an example there. We have a former banker of the Islamic regime, Mahmoud Reza Khavari, here in Canada. We had the former chief of police, Morteza Talaei, in Canada. The former minister of health, Ghazizadeh Hashemi, who intimidated and threatened the families of PS752, was in Canada last summer. He said that when he went back, there would be retaliations against the families' actions. We had the current speaker of the house of the regime, the man who was nominated for presidency today in Iran. His son applied to come to Canada a few months ago, and he started a lawsuit against the Canadian government, saying that it was not accepting him fast enough as an immigrant here in this country.

As I said, we have the former banker, the former chief of police, the former minister and the speaker of the house. Who's next? I'm not surprised anymore if I see the supreme leader of Iran walking on the streets of Toronto, you know. This can happen any day, and we are talking about hundreds of them. This is just the tip of the iceberg.

I think none of you would be comfortable if you knew, for example, that the son of the current speaker of the house is your neighbour in Canada and that the chief of the police was working out in a gym two kilometres from my house, three kilometres from where my wife and my daughter are buried because of PS752. Do you feel safe in this condition? I don't think so.

I want to talk about money laundering as well. If you could observe a lot of currency exchange stores that we have north of Toronto, you will see the amount of money that comes to Canada from the IRGC for money laundering. That is why we don't feel safe in this country.

Thank you.

• (1730)

The Chair: Thank you.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Is that time?

The Chair: Yes, that is time, Mr. Oliphant, I'm afraid.

Now we go to Mr. Bergeron.

You have three minutes, sir.

[*Translation*]

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

My question is for Ms. Ziaei.

Ms. Ziaei, you mentioned the enthusiasm that followed the accidental death of President Raisi in the helicopter crash on May 19. Elections will be held on June 28. You also mentioned the low turnout at the last presidential elections.

What are your predictions for these elections, given what may appear to be a contradiction, i.e., the enthusiasm following the death of the president, on the one hand, and this low turnout, on the other? What can we expect on June 28?

Ms. Hanieh Ziaei: We can expect the same high abstention rate. Iranians also sometimes have this opportunity to demonstrate their dissatisfaction with this regime and show that they no longer consider it legitimate or, above all, representative. It is therefore possible that Iranians will not go to the polls. This is one hypothesis. It's also possible that this will lead to other types of demonstrations.

The main question for the weeks, months and even years to come revolves above all around the succession of the supreme leader. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei is old, and is thought to be ill. President Raisi was a possible candidate, the assumption being that his position as president was a stepping stone to the supreme leader's seat.

The whole debate will focus more on the succession of the supreme leader than on the elections. Indeed, we know that, in the end, it is the supreme leader who has absolute power. He delegates responsibilities to other organizations, but he holds veto power at the top of the hierarchy, which is very pyramidal as far as institutional power is concerned.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Chair, do I have any time left?

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, you do. You have 40 seconds left.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I'd like to go back to the elections.

You've given us a bit of an indication of what's likely to happen on June 28, but what do you think will happen after that?

Can we imagine that there will be a palace revolution, or, on the contrary, will the power structure be confirmed and maintained?

Ms. Hanieh Ziaei: As we've seen in all the presidential elections, there may not be any real change. It remains a clan, a fairly closed political class. A distinction is made between reformers, conservatives and ultraconservatives, but in the end, none of these trends challenge the system or the Islamic Republic of Iran. This is why the regime's legitimacy will continue to erode.

The Iranian population wants definitive change, i.e., they don't want to move from a conservative government to an ultraconservative one, or even to a reformist one.

• (1735)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We next go to MP McPherson. You have three minutes.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for your testimony. It is so horrific to hear about the gender apartheid, the instances we're seeing, the repression, and the pain that you must feel, sir, to have your wife and child be... To be so close to somebody who was responsible for their deaths is absolutely appalling. I apologize that this has happened to you.

This study is meant to look at why the IRGC is not being listed as a terrorist entity. What are the reasons the government has given?

We've heard from the member from the Conservatives. He doesn't understand and we don't understand and, Dr. Machouf, you've told us that you don't understand why this hasn't happened.

Can you take some time to tell us what it would mean to the Iranian community in Canada if the IRGC was listed as a terrorist entity? What would that mean for you and for people across this country?

[*Translation*]

Dr. Nima Machouf: Thank you for the question.

For us, it would mean a lot more security. In fact, the aim of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, as my colleagues explained, is to guard and protect the Islamic revolution in Iran and, above all, to export it. My colleagues also spoke of the numerous attacks committed against opponents of the Islamic government. The Abdorrahman Boroumand Centre has listed 540 such attacks over the last 40 years. These assassinations and attacks were fomented outside Iran's borders by the Iranian government with its armed wing, the Pasdaran.

Some attacks have fortunately failed, but there are many threats. Before coming here, I asked people if they'd received any threats, because you hear a lot about people receiving threats and not feeling safe here. I received messages from students in Toronto who said that several of them had received anonymous threats by phone. They were told that they had their photo and knew their identity. They were also told that if they didn't stop their activities against the Iranian government, their families would be contacted and summoned. In Iran, when you want to arrest someone and you can't find them, you arrest their family members. They take them hostage in the hope that the person will come forward. They were also told to forget about any possibility of returning to the country, even if they were also told that, if they ever decided to come back, they would be delighted to welcome them. So there are threats like that, but there are others.

In Montreal, we saw a case where a lecturer at McGill University, Soroosh Shahriari, had no qualms about inciting people to hatred and the elimination of opponents. He rejoiced in the fact that the Iranian government would eliminate its opponents quickly.

So there's no hesitation in making threats. There have also been other attacks. An Iranian diplomat who was arrested in Belgium and sentenced to 20 years in prison was recently exchanged for a Belgian hostage held by the Iranian government. They do this kind of thing. So people feel threatened.

[English]

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

For the next question, we go to MP Chatel.

MP Chatel, you have two minutes.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sophie Chatel (Pontiac, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to address Ms. Ziaei.

Ms. Ziaei, after the death of Mahsa Zhina Amini, it was hoped that the uprising of the people would bring about changes in favour of democracy and human rights.

In your opinion, what measures could Canada and the international community adopt to promote human rights and democratic movements in the country?

You talked about imposing targeted sanctions and strengthening the ability of Iranians to defend themselves and their rights.

What would you suggest in this regard, a little more concretely?

• (1740)

Ms. Hanieh Ziaei: I would recommend officially listing the IRGC as a terrorist group. That's really what's being asked for as a priority, today. We absolutely must demand an end to the death penalty, not just for the Iranian rapper Toomaj Salehi, who is sentenced to death. We must demand the release of all artists, militants, activists, intellectuals and journalists in Iranian prisons. These people should not be in prison.

We shouldn't be seeing people with this kind of profile in prisons. It's become a culture house. Evin prison has become a culture house. They're not criminals—

[English]

The Chair: Dr. Ziaei, I sincerely apologize for interrupting. There wasn't much time left anyway. The interpretation was on and off. If you could graciously provide a response to MP Chatel's question in writing and submit it to us, we would be very grateful indeed. I'm sorry about that, but the translation has been experiencing some problems.

We now go to Mr. Aboultaif. You have two minutes.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you. My question is to Mr. Esmailion.

You mentioned the money-laundering situation. I'm sure we're probably aware of many aspects of it. In which areas do you believe that the regime, the IRGC, is performing this type of money laundering in Canada? How severe is that?

If you have any assessment to give us, that would be good for the report. Thank you.

Dr. Hamed Esmailion: I think the majority of this money goes to real estate in Canada, especially in big cities like Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal. Among Iranians, when there's somebody involved in corruption, usually they say, "Okay, we will find him in Vancouver next month." This is a saying among Iranians inside the country.

Let me give you an example. A friend of mine, about two or three years ago, decided to bring all his savings from Iran. He wanted to declare that to CRA. When he asked the currency exchange store, "Okay, how should I declare that to the CRA?" the answer was, "What's the point? I bring in millions of dollars every day, and there are no consequences. There is no investigation or supervision."

I think that would be the right answer to your question.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We now go to Mr. Bergeron. I apologize, but you only have a minute, so it should be a very rapid question.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I would like to ask Ms. Ziaei a brief question.

Ms. Ziaei, Iran took over the presidency of the Social Forum of the United Nations Human Rights Council in November 2023, despite its extremely heavy human rights record. In 2023, Canada announced its intention to stand for election to the UN Human Rights Council for 2028-2030.

Do you think this is relevant, given how little credibility the council often has due to the fact that authoritarian regimes sit on it?

Ms. Hanieh Ziaei: I can tell you, in any case, that this choice has been openly criticized by the Iranian population and by people all over the world. Obviously, no one expects this kind of country to be part of the council. It really is the height of paradox. Indeed, it's quite astonishing, in every respect.

What will Iran bring to the table? Will it talk about the fact that the death penalty exists in Iran, and that artists, intellectuals and journalists suffer psychological torture in particular? Earlier we spoke of chemical, physical and psychological torture. What exactly will Iran be talking about? What cases will it really defend?

I would very much like to know what is going to be put on the table for discussion and negotiation, with a country like Iran holding the presidency.

• (1745)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we go to MP McPherson for the final question.

Again, you have my apologies. You get only one minute.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much.

Mr. Esmaeilion, you know that many people died in PS752. We had many from Edmonton Strathcona.

I'll put the same question to you that I just put to Dr. Machouf: What would be the impact on the families if the IRGC were listed as a terrorist organization?

Dr. Hamed Esmaeilion: Let me give you an example from two weeks ago in Iran.

My father is 75, and my mom is 74. Now they are banned from leaving the country and travelling to Canada. It happened about six months ago, when they decided to come to the fourth anniversary. Two weeks ago in Iran, three plainclothes officers went to their house and summoned them to go to the intelligence service. My father had to answer questions related to my activities here. This is just one example from hundreds of families.

As my colleagues said today, we don't really understand why the IRGC is not on the list, because I think the impact is great on the families. I mean, then we see that our government is doing something. Sometimes we hear that they're worried about the safety of Canadians, but they have already killed Canadians.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That concludes all the questions.

I want to take this opportunity to speak on behalf of all the members.

We're very grateful for your attendance here today and for your incredibly helpful testimony.

Thank you, Dr. Machouf.

Thank you, Dr. Esmaeilion.

Thank you, Dr. Ziaei.

Thank you very much, Mr. Doustshenas.

This meeting is adjourned.

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