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# Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

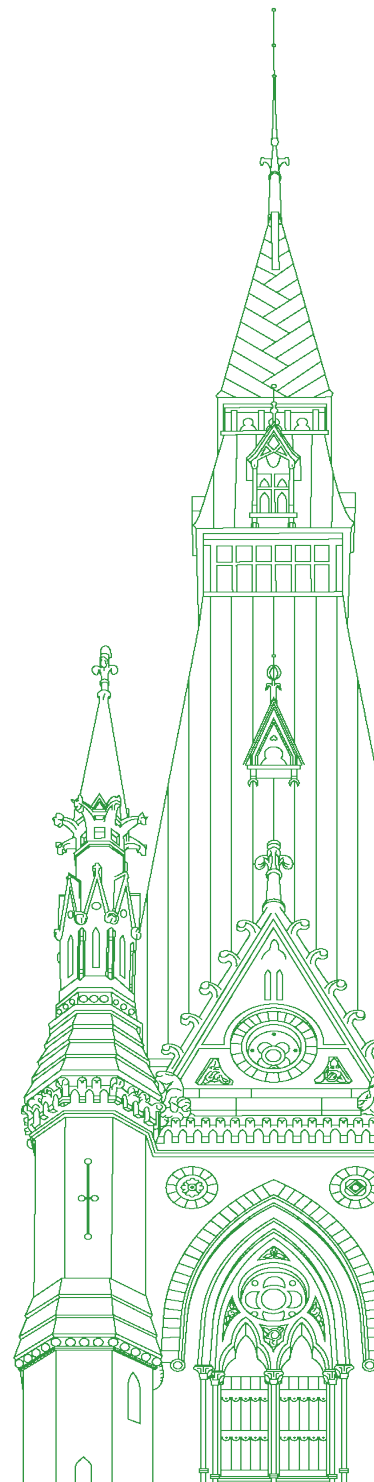
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Chair: Ahmed Hussien



# Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Thursday, April 30, 2026

• (1535)

[English]

**The Chair (Hon. Ahmed Hussen (York South—Weston—Etobicoke, Lib.)):** Good afternoon, everyone. I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 33 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Pursuant to the order of reference of the House of Commons on Tuesday, February 24, 2026, the committee is meeting on Bill C-219, an act to amend the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Act, the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act (Sergei Magnitsky Law), the Special Economic Measures Act and the Broadcasting Act.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

I would now like to welcome our witness, the sponsor of Bill C-219, James Bezan, the member of Parliament for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman.

Up to five minutes will be given for opening remarks, after which we will proceed with rounds of questions from our colleagues.

I now invite you, Mr. Bezan, to make your statement of up to five minutes.

Welcome.

**James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, colleagues.

I wish to give a quick overview of the life and the sacrifices made by Sergei Magnitsky, who was a proud Russian anti-corruption freedom fighter.

Sergei was a Russian lawyer, auditor, husband and father of two. He was a man who believed in the rule of law. Most importantly, Sergei was not afraid to stand up for what he believed in. Sergei uncovered the largest tax fraud in Russian history, and the proper course of action was obvious to him. He immediately decided to testify against those corrupt officials. Sadly, he was arrested, detained, tortured and eventually murdered by officials of the Russian government almost 17 years ago.

None of the individuals who were responsible for the death of Sergei Magnitsky have been brought to justice.

Shortly after the murder of Sergei, an international campaign began to hold kleptocrats and gross human rights violators to account.

In 2012, Bill Browder and Russian opposition leaders Boris Nemtsov and Vladimir Kara-Murza of the People's Freedom Party travelled to Canada to call on the government to adopt Magnitsky sanctions to protect Russian human rights and pro-democracy activists by applying visa bans and asset freezes to the people who killed Sergei Magnitsky and other Russian human rights defenders.

In 2012, the United States adopted Magnitsky legislation, followed by the European Parliament in 2013.

On February 27, 2015, Boris Nemtsov was assassinated outside the Kremlin.

In March 2015, resolutions calling for the Government of Canada to adopt Magnitsky legislation were adopted by the House of Commons and the Senate. Former Senator Raynell Andreychuk tabled Bill S-226, the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act (Sergei Magnitsky Law), on May 4, 2016, and I tabled the equivalent legislation, Bill C-267, on May 5 in the House of Commons. On October 18, 2017, Bill S-226 received royal assent with the support of all parliamentarians. This legislation ensured that Canada will not be used as a safe haven for foreign officials responsible for corruption and gross human rights violations. It is also a tool to protect our values abroad while protecting our sovereignty here at home.

As time passes, we have seen where there are loopholes in the original legislation, and we're trying to close those shortcomings with Bill C-219 right now. Using the name of Sergei Magnitsky in all of our sanction regimes delivers a strong political message against Putin's brutal dictatorship and his equally corrupt allies around the world.

Mr. Chair, I wish to point out that in the preamble of Bill C-219, the Sergei Magnitsky international anti-corruption and human rights act, there's a call for the government to work with its allies to establish an international anti-corruption court for the purpose of arresting and prosecuting corrupt foreign officials. We know that grand corruption—the abuse of public office for private gain by the nation's leaders—thrives in many countries and has devastating consequences.

Grand corruption also has global consequences and often cannot be combatted by the countries or citizens most immediately victimized by these kleptocrats.

An international anti-corruption court is urgently needed to promote democracy and human rights, protect human life and enhance international peace and security. Canada, the Netherlands and Ecuador issued a joint statement in November 2022 to establish an international anti-corruption court in The Hague, and that work must continue.

I just want to give a quick overview of the bill, Mr. Chair.

Bill C-219 will require the Department of Foreign Affairs to publish an annual report to advance human rights internationally, including the names and status of prisoners of conscience.

It would amend the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act (Sergei Magnitsky Law) and the Special Economic Measures Act to, for the very first time, define transnational repression and sanction foreign nationals who commit it right here in Canada as well as elsewhere.

It would ban immediate family members of sanctioned foreign nationals, so Canada cannot be used as a safe haven.

It would require the government to table in Parliament the names of foreign nationals and entities that are added to our sanctions list.

It would require the RCMP and FINTRAC to report to the minister on the making, administering and enforcing of all our sanctions.

It would allow us, as parliamentary committees, to recommend names and entities to be sanctioned and require the minister to report back on their decision to the House and/or in the Senate.

It would establish timelines for the forfeiture of frozen assets.

It would amend the Broadcasting Act to immediately revoke licences for media outlets that are operated by sanctioned entities and individuals or by the states that the House or Senate has recognized for committing genocide.

Finally, passing Bill C-219, the Sergei Magnitsky international anti-corruption and human rights act, is needed to protect Canadian values, members of our diaspora communities and the victims of kleptocracy and aggression by corrupt foreign states and their proxies.

I am open to working with all parliamentarians to make reasonable amendments that will strengthen this bill.

I'm happy to take your questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, MP Bezan, for your opening statement.

We will now go to questions from members, beginning with MP Ziad Aboultaif.

You have six minutes.

**Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Bezan, congratulations on your bill. Thank you for advocating human rights and the safety of Canada and Canadians through your continual efforts up until now.

One of the major concerns for Canada's national security is foreign interference. This includes the work of foreign adversaries influencing our system of government and intimidating people on Canadian soil, and even the threat of sleeper cells, which may have infiltrated communities across the country in preparation for committing violence, intimidation or other crimes. Many of our adversaries, including China and Iran, among others, may seek to do harm to Canada.

What role do you foresee for this important legislation you have introduced in addressing these concerns?

• (1540)

**James Bezan:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to my colleague for his great question.

This bill is about making sure we can close some of these loopholes. Think about the definition in the bill for transnational repression. It is about ensuring that our communities here.... Over the years, we've heard from members of the Persian, Taiwanese and Hong Kong communities, as well as from the Falun Dafa and the Uyghurs, about how they have been targeted by other states that have come here and essentially tried to coerce them, or worse, with physical intimidation.

We need to make sure that.... There are individuals doing that on the ground here, as we saw with the Chinese police stations, which the Communist Party of China used to intimidate their nationals here who are now Canadian citizens. In the case of Michael Chong, one of our colleagues, his family in Hong Kong was potentially targeted, as discovered by CSIS and the RCMP.

We must strengthen the regime we have to ensure that we can protect Canadians who are here by birth or who have chosen to become Canadians. These individuals deserve our utmost protection, so let's hold to account those individuals going after foreign nationals here in Canada.

**Ziad Aboultaif:** Thank you.

Your bill also proposed amendments to the Broadcasting Act. Simply speaking, it would make it more difficult for foreign nations to spread their propaganda products on Canadian airwaves. How do you propose to license them and to identify those who disseminate the message for foreign adversary regimes?

**James Bezan:** We're suggesting in Bill C-219 that we take immediate action when the House and/or the Senate declares that a country has committed genocide or declares that it is being sanctioned by the federal government because of its activities in a country or, for example, as we've witnessed with Russia and its aggression against Ukraine.

The nexus for adding this to the bill and for making the amendment to the Broadcasting Act is that it took forever to get Russia Today—RT TV—taken off the airwaves in Canada. This shouldn't take months. In this case, it took over a year to have it removed from the airwaves in Canada.

We need to act more quickly. As we see more nations committing atrocities or being more aggressive with their neighbours in their regions, we have to be prepared to immediately remove the state-owned or oligarch-owned media that is being used to transmit their propaganda across the airwaves and into Canada.

**Ziad Aboultaif:** Can you speak to the importance of consultation and collaboration with the diaspora communities, law enforcement and relevant regulatory bodies, such as the CRTC, in this fashion?

**James Bezan:** We've done lots of consulting with diaspora communities. We have received support from the Persians, the Belarusians and, of course, the Ukrainian community, and from members of the Russian community who want a free and democratic Russia. We've heard from the Falun Dafa, the Uyghurs, the Hong Kongers and the Taiwanese, among others, who are all in favour of this. They want the opportunity to appear at committees and bring forward evidence to show where there have been human rights abuses against their people in their homelands.

What we're witnessing with the ongoing forced labour and reprogramming of Uyghurs in China is a case in point. They would love to come here and talk about that, especially with the new report that was recently tabled and released by the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China. IPAC has supported this, as have international integrity initiatives, which are also calling for an anti-corruption court to hold to account those who are committing gross human rights violations.

**Ziad Aboultaif:** This is a quick question. Some diaspora communities face the regime back home based on repression, which seeks to intimidate, harass and all kinds of stuff. How can Bill C-219 prevent these agents from operating within our country? What mechanism exists to hold sponsors of these acts accountable through sanctions or other means?

• (1545)

**James Bezan:** I think that, with the new definition for transnational repression and with the increased penalties that are going to be available aside from the sanctioning, also going after frozen assets and putting a timeline on the forfeiture of those assets to the benefit of the victims could go a long way in curbing the activities of these corrupt regimes or individuals who are abusing their positions as public authorities.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. You are right on time.

We'll go next to MP Rob Oliphant.

You have six minutes.

**Ziad Aboultaif:** Thank you.

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

To begin, I want to make sure that we welcome our new members to the committee. You'll find this is a highly functional and

collaborative committee compared to maybe where you've been, so welcome.

I also want to thank Mr. Bezan for this work and for his engagement.

I also want to thank you for mentioning Senator Andreychuk. I think I probably learned more about the world, diplomacy, Africa, Magnitsky and everything from former Senator Raynell Andreychuk than from any other human being. I know you'd like to change the name to the Magnitsky law. I might propose the Andreychuk law because of Raynell's work, not only in Canada but with establishing the statute of Rome and the International Criminal Court. Her work is profound in the world. I hope she's listening in her retirement. Maybe she's doing something better, but I don't know.

Thank you also for honouring the work that you and she did in 2016 on this.

The world's obviously changed since 2016. We have had some organic changes to IRPA and some organic changes through the way we do our regimes, the three regimes that we do sanctions under.

I know that Bill C-281 in the previous Parliament is probably the basis for Bill C-219. What is the process you used out of Bill C-281 from the last Parliament to this one? What consultations did you do, and how have you changed your ideas or thinking to present this bill?

**James Bezan:** I appreciate that, and I appreciate the collaboration, Mr. Oliphant, that you and I have had on this bill and the work that we continue to do together on advancing human rights around the world.

I'm glad you mentioned our friend Raynell Andreychuk. She is a true Canadian hero. What a life she's had, not just as a senator but as a jurist on the bench for many years, a human rights activist and, of course, an ambassador. She is one of my mentors and somebody I look up to. I will always treasure the times that we had to work together. I should have reached out to let her know that this was moving forward today, so I'll do that after. The beauty with CPAC is that it's always online. You can see it anytime.

You know, with this bill, we looked at Mr. Phil Lawrence's previous legislation, which did make it through committee and third reading in the House and went over to the Senate. We did pick some of the definitions out of there. The first couple of clauses come right out of Mr. Lawrence's bill.

On the previous bill I tabled on a Magnitsky update, we had further consultations as things continued to evolve with the aggression that we've seen over the last three years. In our conversations with the diaspora communities and with the diplomatic corps and colleagues, it was decided that this is the proper course of action. Our work with academics and human rights activists like Marcus Kolga, Irwin Cotler, Bill Browder and Vladimir Kara-Murza was all brought to bear in what you see as the final piece of legislation that's here at committee today.

**Hon. Robert Oliphant:** Thank you.

I think you're aware that the government is broadly supportive of the intentions of the bill and broadly supportive of updating these acts to ensure that they're not stuck in a previous time that's almost a generation ago now in the way parliaments are so quickly adapting.

We will, however, be proposing some amendments to make sure that it fits the machinery of government, that we don't have duplication and that we don't cause conflict between bills. We want to make sure that there's not undue red tape because, if we have our officials only reporting and doing stuff, they can't do their work, which we need them to do. We'll want to make sure that, at its core, the people whom this bill is meant to protect, human rights defenders, are protected and not put at risk. That will be the substance of our changes.

In the bill, you use the term “prisoner of conscience”. We tend to use the term “human rights defender”, because prisoners of conscience may or may not be human rights defenders. Could you explain how you maybe see those two terms as different?

• (1550)

**James Bezan:** I want to make sure I'm on the right tab here regarding prisoners of conscience. Just so you know, BillC-281, which passed right through the House of Commons, including this committee, in the 44th Parliament, actually had the definition of prisoner of conscience, and it was supported by all parliamentarians.

When you look at that definition, which we lifted from the bill and brought back here—it was clause 6 in the old one—that goes a long way. Amnesty International was also first to coin the term prisoner of conscience. That is by far the better definition for the people for whom we're advocating.

With regard to human rights defenders, yes, most prisoners of conscience and political prisoners are human rights defenders. However, it sometimes goes beyond that, and I don't think we should try to pigeonhole ourselves into just standing up for human rights defenders, when we're also going to be supporting political prisoners and prisoners of conscience who are standing up against government corruption. We're talking about those who are standing up against what we're witnessing right now in Russia. People in the streets who stood up against Vladimir Putin for his invasion of Ukraine, were thrown in jail. They may not necessarily fit into the definition of just being human rights defenders.

**Hon. Robert Oliphant:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You know the Bloc Québécois supports the bill. However, I'd like to make a few comments that are really meant to be constructive. We've raised a couple of issues.

I noticed in Bill C-219's clause on the Broadcasting Act, the text in the English version is identical to the one found in Bill C-281. I don't know if it's a translation error, but the French version is slightly different. As I read it, the choice of words could influence a court's interpretation.

I raise this issue because I'd like to avoid any discrepancy between the English and French versions. I don't know if you'd be willing to make an adjustment, if need be. I find it hard to understand why the text is identical in English but not in French. That's all. I can send you both versions; it's quite easy to see.

Would you be agreeable to making sure the French versions of Bill C-219 and Bill C-281 are identical, as is they are in English? I'm just talking about the broadcasting part.

[*English*]

**James Bezan:** I wasn't aware there was a problem between the English and French and between Bill C-281 and Bill C-219. We're definitely willing to work with the legislative clerk to ensure there is consistency and that nothing is different in the French version versus the English version. I appreciate your bringing that to my attention.

[*Translation*]

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** That's perfect. Actually, someone could use the French version in court and say that it doesn't match the English version.

[*English*]

**James Bezan:** This is the time to fix it.

[*Translation*]

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** That's correct. That's what committees are for, even when the governing party holds a majority. I've never seen anything like this.

There's something else. I raised it during my 10-minute remarks on the bill. The bill says the Minister of Foreign Affairs must table an annual report in the House on the measures the government has taken to advance human rights internationally. That report would include the names and status of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience around the world and what the Canadian government is doing to support them. The report would also include—and this is where it's important, so I'll read this section to make sure it's clear—“a description of the Government of Canada's communications with the families of prisoners of conscience and its consultations with civil society on matters of human rights.”

I have some concerns about that. I'd like us to work together to clarify things. Can you explain to me the intent behind this part of the bill?

• (1555)

[English]

**James Bezan:** We know there are some Canadians, as well as those who have ties to Canada, who are being held as political prisoners of conscience.

You know, I did discuss this with Michael Kovrig and how it applied to his case. He believed that when we shine the spotlight on people who are being imprisoned.... His case was one of hostage diplomacy, but he was still a political prisoner. When you base it upon people like Jimmy Lai, someone who fought for democracy, freedom of speech and freedom of the press.... Jimmy Lai is not a Canadian, but he has family here. He has investments in Canada. This is someone with whom we're all very familiar. When we can raise the profile of these individuals, yes, I think it's in Canada's interest—and in the best interests of those wrongfully held by foreign states—that we publish their names, so people understand what's being done to help them.

I take your concerns seriously. They're similar to what I've heard from the government. We need to make sure we aren't compromising things like privacy or, potentially, any state secrets, but at the same time, we should know what efforts are being made to free these individuals.

[Translation]

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** I think detainee information should be released if the family wishes it. However, as drafted, the bill implies the opposite, even though the minister could decide to exclude certain information. I think we need to determine whether doing the opposite wouldn't be preferable, that is to first obtain the family's consent to publish the information related to political prisoners in the minister's annual report.

I don't know if you're prepared to support an amendment that suggests the opposite, that is to obtain the family's consent before publishing the information in an annual report.

Would you?

[English]

**James Bezan:** I'm definitely open to reasonable amendments. That, to me, is very doable and is one that would balance off the needs of the family and the concerns they might have to ensure their loved ones are protected.

The downside of it, as well—and I understand this—is that it could result in more transnational repression of their family members, whether they're still back in the country of concern or here in Canada.

[Translation]

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** How much time do I have left, Mr. Chair?

[English]

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds.

[Translation]

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** I'll use those 30 seconds to thank you, because I think this bill is fundamental and extremely important. It's going to change the way Canada behaves.

I sincerely thank you for the work you've done. We, as a committee, have work to do to improve this bill and make it even more effective, but the principle of the bill, we owe it to you, Mr. Bezan. I congratulate and thank you. A lot of people thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

[English]

We have MP Kronis to start off the second round of questions.

You have five minutes.

**Tamara Kronis (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, CPC):** Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

I want to echo the thanks of my colleague from the Bloc Québécois. You've taken on a really complicated topic, you've reviewed it and you've really put something comprehensive forward. A number of us sit on the human rights subcommittee of the foreign affairs committee in addition to being here, and this means a lot to us.

As we've said quite a lot lately, democracy is something that dies in the darkness, and you've really taken steps to shine a light on that darkness through this bill, which addresses six key areas. It brings forward human rights accountability reporting. It defines and recognizes transnational repression. It expands sanctions. It brings asset forfeiture and enforcement timelines into line and into a stronger regime. It helps with transparency and parliamentary oversight, and then it takes that additional step to deal with issues of foreign influence and broadcasting controls.

I get a lot of correspondence from Canadians whose families are targeted by foreign regimes and from others who are concerned about transnational repression, foreign interference and disinformation and, of course, the presence of war criminals in Canada. They want Canada to act on things.

We've talked a lot about the importance of this bill theoretically. I'm wondering.... You must have spoken to a number of Canadians who shared their personal stories with you. Do you think you could talk a bit and expand a little on the way in which this is going to make a difference and matter to Canadians?

• (1600)

**James Bezan:** In our frequent conversations, different diaspora communities have some horrific stories. They may have family members back in China who are being held in forced labour camps for Uyghurs, or they may be members of the Falun Dafa community whose loved ones were captured and tortured and had their organs illegally harvested. The individuals who carried out these grotesque human rights violations enriched themselves and still have free ability to travel wherever they want.

You can look at the number of deaths that have occurred in Ukraine because of Russia's aggression and attacks. Families have often lost loved ones to sexual violence from Russian soldiers as they invaded over the lines in places like Irpin and Bucha. I've been there and met with the families, and they have loved ones back here. There's no recourse for them against the monsters who carried these things out under the direction of Vladimir Putin.

I talked to people in the Persian community who watched their loved ones thrown into prison outside of Tehran and then executed. The brutality that takes place on the streets is... All they wanted was freedom, democracy and human rights, the things that we take for granted, which are being denied in so many other countries around the world. If we don't stand up and hold the people who are carrying out these atrocities and these genocides to account, nothing will ever change.

How do people become genocidal maniacs? They almost always start by being a corrupt foreign official who is stuffing their pockets illegally out of the government coffers at the expense of the citizens they're supposed to be representing and providing the public good for. You can look at somebody like Viktor Yanukovich when he was president of Ukraine. He stuffed his pockets and ran away to Russia as soon as the people turned against him. He was prepared to take away all of their rights and their civil liberties. In the process, he engorged himself on the public purse for his own personal benefit.

**Tamara Kronis:** I want to thank you for that comprehensive answer.

I know that the bill does define transnational repression specifically as "tactics used by a foreign state to intimidate, harass, surveil or threaten individuals or groups located outside the state borders". I am certain that Canadians who are experiencing those things will take some comfort from the fact that the Government of Canada now clearly defines that activity as being something that is offensive to our values and criminal.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Next, we go to MP Anita Vandenberg. You have five minutes.

**Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Bezan, for bringing a very good bill before Parliament.

I would note that a lot of us worked together across party lines for the first Magnitsky bill and also later on things like getting Vladimir Kara-Murza honorary Canadian citizenship. Also, Ms. Kronis mentioned the work we do across parties on the Subcommittee on International Human Rights, where I do see quite a bit of overlap.

In looking at the bill, I wondered if you could reflect on a few things that I have a few questions about.

One of them is under the Broadcasting Act. Obviously, Russia Today is a very evident, very obvious example. When you look at the way this part is worded—and obviously, broadcasting and press freedom is a fundamental tenet of our democratic society—it says if a broadcaster is "vulnerable to being significantly influenced". In-

stead of just saying "sanctioned", you also mention a genocidal foreign actor.

I wonder if it's possible that there could be examples of something fitting into that phrasing that maybe isn't as obvious as something like Russia Today. Why did you choose that particular wording, and would you be open to finessing that a bit to make sure that it doesn't capture broadcasters that really shouldn't be banned?

• (1605)

**James Bezan:** I would say this: I know some people think this could be an infringement on freedom of the press or freedom of expression, trying to censor what people are listening to. In our experience, though, a lot of corrupt regimes use these state broadcasters for propaganda. RT is by far the best choice. We know state television, whether out of Beijing or Iran.... They're all propaganda machines.

If we are going to ensure that... When we decide, as Parliament or the Government of Canada, that we're going to sanction the broadcaster itself, the state sponsor, or the kleptocrat or oligarch who owns it, it should be an immediate thing that happens. We cancel that licence so they can't continue to broadcast.

**Anita Vandenberg:** I think we all agree that it should be much quicker.

**James Bezan:** It shouldn't take forever, though. That's what happened with RT. It took far too long to get them taken off the air.

**Anita Vandenberg:** I think we all agree that it should be very quick. It's just about the potential for unintended interpretations.

We can look at that.

**James Bezan:** We need more clarity. I'm definitely open to working across party lines to figure out what works for all of us. Ultimately, at the end of the day, we want to get this right.

**Anita Vandenberg:** I think we all agree on that.

The other thing I am wondering is this: You talked about disclosure. We may need exceptions for when, for instance, disclosing sanctions we're doing to allies might tip off a perpetrator, so that they're able to evade them. It would lead to the exact opposite. They would start evading and covering up what they're doing because of that disclosure.

Is it possible to build in some exceptions that would allow, in those cases, the cabinet or the minister to not have to reveal it, if it might have that unintended consequence?

**James Bezan:** For sure, at the end of the day, we want to make sure those entities, individuals or states are not using Canada as a safe haven. Yes, if the goal is to freeze their assets so that these are forfeited down the road for the benefit of victims or the state they're invading, let's be smart about it.

At the same time, at the end of the day, we have the regulations that are filed under the current sanctions regime, through SEMA or the Magnitsky Law. Already, there is some of that transparency there. Let's just make sure it's being done and reported back to us as parliamentarians, so more Canadians understand what we're doing and why we're doing it.

**Anita Vandenbeld:** Can you give examples of other, like-minded countries that have similar kinds of clauses or legislation?

**James Bezan:** Yes, we're looking through it. Definitely, the United States and the European Union have, by far, the best sanctions laws. What we're trying to do is coordinate to ensure that we align with them. The U.K., of course, has been playing some catch-up after leaving the European Union, but they are trying to fashion their own Magnitsky law off the European Union's law. Other OECD nations have good Magnitsky-type legislation. We're seeing this in the Baltic states especially, and in Eastern Europe.

The more we can coordinate and align.... It's about ensuring that we are moving in coordination and having that maximum impact. There are behind-the-scenes talks among our allies and friends to ensure that, when we do bring forward a needed sanction against an entity, it has maximum impact.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We go, next, to MP Brunelle-Duceppe.

You have two and a half minutes.

**Anita Vandenbeld:** Thank you.

[*Translation*]

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Bezan, I do have some concerns about the bill as it relates to freedom of expression under international law and human rights.

The amendments your bill proposes to the Broadcasting Act limit the issuance or renewal of licences for any broadcasting undertaking vulnerable to being significantly influenced by a foreign national or entity that has committed genocide or is the subject of an order or regulation under the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act or the Sergei Magnitsky Act.

I just want to give you an opportunity to explain why. Do you think this really infringes on freedom of expression? I agree with what you're doing, but, since various concerned groups are pressuring the MPs who are going to legislate on the bill, I'd like to hear your comments and explanation as to why this part of the bill is important and why it doesn't necessarily infringe on freedom of expression.

• (1610)

[*English*]

**James Bezan:** Colleagues, we know that, besides RT TV, there are a number of radio broadcasts that are also transmitted across this country by organizations or agencies that are essentially proxies for the regimes that all of us are all too aware of. They are using our airways to poison Canadians against the very people this proposed act is aiming to protect. If we are going to protect our diaspora communities, if we're going to protect those who are living under these dictatorships and theocracies and despots who are abusing

their human rights, then we shouldn't allow them to transmit their propaganda, either directly or through their proxies here in Canada, whether by radio or by television.

Regarding the issue of freedom of speech, we're not stopping Canadians from saying what they want. We're going after those who have already been identified and sanctioned by the Government of Canada, or an entity or state that Parliament has decided has carried out a genocide. To my mind, there's no way we'd want to give them any bandwidth to promote their hate and disdain for the people they are persecuting back in their own countries.

[*Translation*]

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** I'd like to ask another question. It's not a trick question.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Be very quick.

[*Translation*]

**Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Parliament has recognized the Uyghur genocide. However, on various radio and television stations, we hear people who disagree. In that case, what do we do? Even the Prime Minister refused to call what is being done to the Uyghurs in China a genocide, even though Parliament has recognized it.

In that case, what should we do about Bill C-219?

[*English*]

**James Bezan:** I'll just say this. If it's genocide and we have called it "genocide", I believe there are grounds to ban the Chinese Communist Party from being able to use our airwaves, either directly or through their proxies, to say that Canada has got it all wrong and that there's been no genocide, when all of the facts point to the Uyghurs being....

You and I are members of Hong Kong Watch and the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China. We recently received reports from an insider who was part of the Chinese militia and police, who has escaped and is now spreading all of the information on how China has gone from overtly using forced labour of Uyghurs, as well as reprogramming and brainwashing, to now covertly doing it by moving people quietly across the country into other areas where they are still subject to forced labour.

Why would we allow people who are practising slavery to use our airways to promote what they're doing in China as not a human rights violation?

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We go next to MP Grant Jackson. You have five minutes.

**Grant Jackson (Brandon—Souris, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate your having me here today. It's always a pleasure to question a fellow Manitoban.

Congratulations, MP Bezan, on your legislation making it to this stage. Having worked with you for the last year, I know this is something you're extremely passionate about and an expert in. We appreciate your leadership within our team and across Parliament on this issue.

I'm curious about some of the more financial pieces of this legislation. I understand there are some components of the bill that deal with agencies working together, like the RCMP and FINTRAC, etc.

Could you go into a bit more detail about how this legislation will improve Canada's ability to identify and act against the financial resources of bad actors?

• (1615)

**James Bezan:** We want to make sure that when we do move forward with actually applying sanctions against an individual, entity or state, the legislation has teeth. There was a report published in March of last year by Global Affairs Canada on the evaluation of their sanctions operations. It pointed out that the sanctions bureau was understaffed. They didn't have the resources to go out there and ensure that our sanctions regime is working. Compare that to the Brits, the Americans, the Aussies and the European Union, where they have a much more robust desk to actually ensure that sanctions are being carried out. We want to ensure they're having a financial impact on those we are targeting to ensure they're not using our secure financial system, our relatively stable real estate market and our rather easy citizenship requirements to come here and hide their wealth, hide their families—in some cases their girlfriends or boyfriends—and shelter here when they should be facing the music back in the regimes where they are carrying out their kleptocracy and/or atrocities.

If we're going to stand up against those corrupt individuals, then we have to make sure we increase the powers of the RCMP as well as FINTRAC and provide proper reporting on all these transactions of over \$10,000. We need to make sure that reporting is being coordinated on those sanctioned individuals back into the Global Affairs Canada sanctions desk. That's the only way we're going to have teeth.

I realize that Global Affairs Canada is looking at how they can make those improvements now, but if we legislate those changes and provide the increase in the reporting and tracking of individuals and money—you know what they always say, follow the money—you'll find out exactly how they are getting around the system.

**Grant Jackson:** On that note, the bill requires forfeiture proceedings within 12 months, I believe.

**James Bezan:** That's on the frozen assets.

**Grant Jackson:** That's on the frozen assets side. Do you think the government currently has the legal and/or administrative capacity to meet that timeline?

**James Bezan:** Yes, definitely on the frozen assets. There were updates to SEMA in 2022 by the government on frozen assets and making sure that we can freeze the assets of different governments, oligarchs and others who have been sanctioned on the list.

We know that there is through the.... What's the name of that one bill? I'll have to get back to you. There's another piece of legislation

that deals with the issue around forfeiture of assets. That is something else that is already in place.

However, all you have to do is look at the great big Antonov sitting at the end of the Pearson airport. That's a Russian frozen asset that's been sitting in limbo for the last three years. There is \$23 billion of Russian cash in Canadian dollar accounts that have been frozen, again, for three years. What we're saying is that we shouldn't be sitting on these things for that length of time. Let's actually forfeit those assets and get them in the hands of the victims.

**Grant Jackson:** What does that look like to you? I come from the provincial level, where we have a criminal property forfeiture fund. Police services and also victim services organizations can apply annually for funding, to have their operations funded through those resources. What would that look like if this bill were implemented at the federal level?

**James Bezan:** The changes that were made by the government in 2023-24 actually provide a framework for how they go about forfeiting those assets to go to the benefit of the victims. Whether that's going to rebuilding in Ukraine or compensating families that had their houses blown up by Russia, as an example, they would make that determination. They can't use more than what assets were forfeited for. If those assets are worth \$23 billion, they can then use \$23 billion. All this bill does, since that framework is already in place, is say let's get this thing done in 12 months.

• (1620)

**Grant Jackson:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We go next to Braedon Clark.

You have five minutes.

**Braedon Clark (Sackville—Bedford—Preston, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Thank you, everybody, for welcoming us all to the committee. It's great to be here.

Mr. Bezan, thank you for your work. It's really important and timely, as many other members have said. I remember about 10 years ago reading *Red Notice*, which is Bill Browder's excellent book that I would recommend to everybody. It's about Sergei Magnitsky and the whole case. It's really good work that you're doing.

I wanted to touch on something that Mr. Jackson was just raising around property and asset seizures, which are of course an important part of any kind of sanctions regime. As was mentioned, there are timelines on the government without any exceptions for things like judicial reviews or appeals, which obviously are not uncommon when assets are seized. I'm wondering if, in your view, there is any room for exceptions or exemptions to allow for those judicial processes, which could certainly come forth, while also respecting the fact that asset seizure needs to be a part of a robust sanctions regime.

**James Bezan:** I believe the current regime on frozen assets under SEMA actually provides for that judicial balance. Individuals who say, “Hey, look, you guys may have sanctioned XYZ, but I’m actually AB over here, and there’s a mix-up in names, or it’s a family member that I’m estranged from,” can still make those cases.

There’s definitely an issue, as we witnessed on the Iranian assets that are currently being seized here in Canada. It’s still not completely resolved. We have the Iranian embassy here, as well as the Iranian consulate in Toronto, and their diplomatic residences in Toronto and Vancouver and also here in Ottawa.

We know there was a court order from the Ontario Superior Court that the downing of Ukrainian airlines flight PS752 was an act of terrorism. It awarded damages to the families of those victims. As we know, over 80 Canadians and permanent residents killed on that flight were from Canada. Those families sued and were awarded compensation. Unfortunately, those assets haven’t been forfeited to pay the families of those victims.

I know there’s some diplomatic red tape and the Department of Justice is actually fighting this in court on behalf of the regime in Iran. Let’s remove some of those blockades. That’s why the 12-month timeline again comes into play. We shouldn’t allow foreign states that have been sanctioned to wiggle out of their responsibilities by playing diplomatic games and using our court system to hang on to their own assets when we have people and families who lost loved ones in such a terrible terrorist attack.

**Braedon Clark:** Mr. Bezan, your bill obviously lays out a certain number of criteria that would trigger sanctions on that list. Global Affairs Canada deals with a huge number of consular cases as well—more ordinary cases, I guess I would say—with over 7,000 as of March 2024.

In your view, what would be the mechanism to switch between those two worlds, so that we make sure for Canadians abroad, who deal with difficult situations all the time—and there are thousands of those—that those services are provided in a timely and efficient manner, while also recognizing that there’s another system here that you’re proposing and that also needs to work effectively. How do

we make them complementary rather than perhaps overlapping at times?

**James Bezan:** First and foremost, I appreciate the amazing work that consular services do in helping Canadians in need, often including those who are temporarily incarcerated.

I think that ultimately, in the regulations that will come into play in this and the discussions we’re going to have between Parliament and government, we can find a balance there to ensure we are going after those who are prisoners of conscience. They weren’t given legal process. They aren’t there because of actual violations of laws that also would be violations of laws here in Canada. I think there are ways in which we can measure it off, but we want to stop things like hostage diplomacy. We want to stop those who, like Jimmy Lai, are thrown in jail because they believe in democracy and the freedom of the press. That’s where I think we draw the line and say, “Okay, these people are being held because of their beliefs, their strong defence of democracy and human rights or their political views, and they shouldn’t be in jail.”

We are coming up on Iranian accountability week, where we will highlight political prisoners who are being held in Iran. Often, those political prisoners have family ties here in Canada. Sometimes we’re successful as parliamentarians in getting people released, and other times we’re not, but I think we need to continue to hold these corrupt regimes to account for the inhumane activities they’re carrying out, and this is a good way to do it.

• (1625)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

That concludes your appearance, Mr. Bezan. Thank you very much for appearing before the committee, answering all those questions and making your statement.

We will now briefly suspend to go in camera.

Thank you.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*





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