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• (1535)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 36 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Pursuant to the order of reference of the House of Commons from 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.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses.

Appearing as an individual, we have Marcus Kolga, director of DisinfoWatch. He is joining us by video conference. From Hermitage Capital Management Ltd., we have Sir William Browder, who is the head of the Global Magnitsky Justice Campaign. He is also joining us by video conference. We have Kate McInnes from Arendt Chambers, International Human Rights and Justice. From the Free Russia Foundation, we have Vladimir Kara-Murza, vice-president.

Up to five minutes will be given for opening remarks, after which we will proceed to rounds of questions

I now invite Sir Browder to make an opening statement of no more than five minutes.

Sir Browder, go ahead.

Sir William Browder (Head of the Global Magnitsky Justice Campaign, Hermitage Capital Management Ltd.): Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

My name is Bill Browder. I'm the head of the Global Magnitsky Justice Campaign.

I'd like to begin with the name of this bill, because names matter enormously in this work. Bill C-219—

The Chair: Mr. Browder, I apologize for interrupting. Give us just a second. There's some technical issue we have to resolve.

Go ahead. Please resume.

Sir William Browder: Bill C-219 would rename Canada's Special Economic Measures Act the Sergei Magnitsky global sanctions act. This is not a cosmetic change; it is a statement of moral purpose.

Sergei Magnitsky was a Russian tax lawyer who uncovered a \$230-million fraud carried out by Russian government officials. Rather than being thanked, he was arrested, imprisoned without trial, denied medical care and beaten to death in a Moscow detention centre. He was 37 years old. He died in 2009.

When his name is embedded in law, it tells the world—every abuser, every corrupt official and every torturer—exactly what these sanctions are for and exactly whom they are named after. That clarity has a power.

Here is a striking fact that underscores exactly why renaming matters. Canada's Magnitsky act, the Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act, was used basically once—in 2018—in its entire existence to sanction Russian officials responsible for Sergei Magnitsky's murder. Every subsequent human rights sanction that Canada has imposed—roughly 1,000—has been made under SE-MA, which was updated and broadened as a direct consequence of the Magnitsky act.

In other words, the law that carries Sergei's name has been used once, while the law that doesn't carry his name has been used 1,000 times to do exactly what the Magnitsky act was intended to do. If these sanctions exist to hold human rights abusers accountable—and they do—then it's only logical and only just that they carry the name of the man whose murder inspired them.

This is not only a moral argument but also a practical one. When Canada and its allies seek to coordinate and harmonize Magnitsky sanctions, as they increasingly do, having Canada's equivalent law operating under a completely different name creates real confusion. Diplomats, parliamentarians and civil society organizations working across jurisdictions must be able to identify, compare and align their sanctions regimes quickly and clearly. When every other country calls it a Magnitsky act and Canada does not, that alignment becomes harder than it needs to be.

Bill C-219 would correct both the injustice and the anomaly. I can think of no better illustration of that power than the man sitting in the hearing today—Vladimir Kara-Murza. He played a key role in the passage of 35 Magnitsky acts around the world. He was one of the earliest and most courageous advocates for the entire global movement. He survived two assassination attempts by poisoning with military-grade chemical agents and kept going. When Putin launched his full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Vladimir publicly condemned it and was arrested. He was sentenced to 25 years in a remote Siberian penal colony on fabricated charges of treason.

Canada was the first country in the world to impose Magnitsky sanctions on his persecutors, in November 2022, while he was still behind bars. That was Canada's Magnitsky act working exactly as it was designed—not waiting for a conviction in some distant court, but acting swiftly and decisively to impose a cost on the individuals responsible for an outrage.

On August 1, 2024, Vladimir was released as part of a larger prisoner exchange with Russia—the largest prisoner exchange with Russia since the Cold War. Canada's Parliament also granted him honorary citizenship. He is alive and free, in part, because of the pressure the Magnitsky sanctions created. There is proof of concept sitting in this room.

Now, Bill C-219 would make Canada's law significantly stronger. Let me briefly outline the most important upgrades. It would extend sanctions to cover transnational repression—authoritarian regimes reaching into democratic countries to silence dissidents. Russia, China and others do this constantly. I'm personally a victim of this. Canada's law must be able to respond to it.

The new law would extend consequences to immediate family members of sanctioned individuals. Right now, a sanctioned oligarch's wife and children can live freely in Canada, attending university and owning property. That loophole guts the deterrent effect of sanctions. This bill would close it.

This new bill would create parliamentary accountability, requiring the minister to respond when a committee recommends sanctions and requiring orders to be tabled in Parliament. This matters because the greatest weakness in every Magnitsky regime is the gap between recommendation and action. Governments receive lists of sanctionable individuals and simply do not act. Accountability to Parliament is the remedy, and it establishes mandatory annual human rights reporting by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, ensuring that Canada's commitment to prisoners of conscience is documented, tracked and publicly visible.

- (1540)

I spent 15 years working with parliaments on these laws. The countries with the strongest Magnitsky regimes are the ones whose laws have real teeth—where abusers know their assets can be frozen, their visas denied and their family members held accountable. Vladimir Kara-Murza is proof that these laws save lives. Bill C-219 would make Canada's law one of the strongest in the world and I urge the committee to pass it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your statement.

I now invite Mr. Kolga to give an opening statement of up to five minutes.

Marcus Kolga (Director, DisinfoWatch, As an Individual): Mr. Chairman and honourable members, thank you for the invitation and privilege to appear before you today.

I'm joining you to express my support for Bill C-219. I had the great honour of working with my fellow witnesses today, Sir Bill Browder and Vladimir Kara-Murza, to lead the Canadian civil society campaign for the original Canadian Magnitsky law, which was also introduced as a private member's bill by James Bezan. That law was designed to ensure that Canada would not become a safe haven for corrupt officials or human rights abusers—or a place for their assets. Ironically, that work and my ongoing advocacy for human rights and democratic values have contributed to my inclusion on both the Russian and Chinese sanctions lists.

Bill C-219 strengthens the core purpose of Canada's sanctions legislation. It addresses four important gaps. It recognizes transnational repression as sanctionable conduct. It automatically prevents the direct family members of sanctioned perpetrators from using Canada as a refuge for wealth and privilege. It improves parliamentary oversight, and it closes a vulnerability in Canada's broadcasting system.

I'm going to focus on two of those amendments.

The first is the recognition of transnational repression. Public Safety Canada identifies transnational repression as a form of foreign interference that can include harassment, threats, surveillance, hacking and intimidation. These tactics are designed to intimidate and silence targeted Canadians and prevent them from participating freely in democratic life.

Transnational repression is happening in Canada. I refer you to reports I co-authored on transnational repression that have been submitted to the clerk, including one written for the Hogue commission.

Canadians and people living in Canada are being targeted by authoritarian regimes because they advocate for democratic freedom. They defend human rights. They expose corruption. They organize within their communities. For that, they are monitored, threatened, harassed, smeared and endangered. Those targeted include activists, journalists, minority communities and diaspora groups, including Uyghur, Tibetan, Hong Kong, Iranian, Belarusian, Ukrainian and Russian communities in Canada. Bill C-219 gives Canada a direct tool to respond. Sanctions allow Canada to impose consequences on those who direct, finance, enable or benefit from transnational repression, even when they cannot immediately be prosecuted in a Canadian court.

The second important amendment is to the Broadcasting Act. Canada's information environment is vulnerable to foreign authoritarian influence. State-controlled broadcasters operate as components of authoritarian information warfare and are deployed to whitewash and deny gross human rights abuses, genocide or repression, and to intimidate and discredit critics. Bill C-219 does not censor Canadian viewpoints. It does not restrict legitimate journalism. It addresses broadcasters and licensees that are subject to control and influence by regimes that have been identified as having committed genocide or have been placed on Canada's sanctions list. This clearly applies to entities such as Russia's RT and Iran's PressTV. It should also apply to Chinese state-controlled broadcasters, such as CGTN and CCTV.

Chinese state media has faced international scrutiny for broadcasting forced confessions and denying CCP-directed genocide and mass human rights abuses against Uyghur and Tibetan minorities. In 2021, the United Kingdom's broadcasting regulator, Ofcom, revoked CGTN's licence after concluding that its ownership and editorial structure were incompatible with U.K. broadcasting rules. We must not allow Canada's public airwaves to be exploited by foreign authoritarian governments that normalize repression, whitewash atrocities or obscure the crimes of authoritarian regimes. Bill C-219 helps close that gap.

Finally, this bill honours the spirit of Sergei Magnitsky. Sergei exposed significant corruption at the heart of the Putin regime nearly 20 years ago, and he paid for it with his life. He was the canary in the coal mine. Tragically, too many western governments failed to recognize what his persecution and death revealed about the gross criminal nature of the Putin regime. Canada's Magnitsky law was built on a simple principle: Corrupt officials and human rights abusers should not enjoy impunity while their victims suffer.

- (1545)

Bill C-219 updates this principle and recognizes that repression no longer stops at borders. It recognizes that authoritarian regimes use family members, proxies, assets, media platforms and information operations to extend their reach. It sends a clear message to perpetrators that Canada will not be used as a safe haven, a platform or a laundromat for authoritarian abuse.

Members of all parties have already expressed support for Bill C-219, including NDP MP Heather McPherson, Liberal MP Yvan Baker and Bloc MP Mario Simard. I urge the committee to approve it and return it to the House for quick passage and implementation.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go next to Mr. Kara-Murza for your opening statement.

Vladimir Kara-Murza (Vice-President, Free Russia Foundation): Thank you so much, Chair Hussen, Vice-Chairs Chong and Brunelle-Duceppe and members of the committee, for convening this important hearing and for the opportunity to testify before you.

The morning after I received my 25-year prison sentence in April 2023, my cellmate switched on the television to watch the news, and I heard that the ambassadors from Canada, Great Britain and the United States were being summoned to be reprimanded by the Russian foreign ministry for crude interference in Russia's internal affairs, an activity incompatible with diplomatic status.

Russian state propaganda never tells the real story, so they did not explain what the activity actually was, but given the timing, it was not difficult to guess. A few days later, I learned that the ambassadors, Alison LeClaire, Deborah Bronnert and Lynne Tracy had held an impromptu press conference on the steps of the Moscow City Court to denounce my sentence as unlawful and to demand my immediate release.

A few months earlier, Canada had become the first country in the world to sanction the Russian officials responsible for my imprisonment. A few months later, this Parliament voted to grant me the incredible privilege of becoming an honorary Canadian citizen.

I want to take this opportunity to thank members of both Houses of the Canadian Parliament, first and foremost, Tom Kmiec, James Bezan, Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe, Senator Pierre Dalphond and Senator Ratna Omidvar for their solidarity and for not letting the world forget.

As I testify before you today, thousands of political prisoners remain behind bars in Russia. These are people who committed no crime, who broke no law and who are only "guilty" of having the conscience and the courage to stand up to a murderous dictator and a brutal war. I believe that the free world has a moral obligation to stand with them.

• (1550)

[Translation]

Of all the provisions of Bill C-219, which I strongly support, the most important but also the most personal for me is the requirement to publicly report on the status of prisoners of conscience and on the Canadian government's efforts to secure their release. If passed, this measure will send a powerful message of support to all those imprisoned around the world for their political and religious beliefs, and will set a historic precedent by supporting prisoners of conscience not only with words but also with concrete actions.

[English]

I strongly support all the main provisions of Bill C-219. I support renaming the Special Economic Measures Act as the Sergei Magnitsky global sanctions act, because this worldwide movement for accountability originated from the quest for justice for Sergei Magnitsky and because his name has long become synonymous with accountability for human rights abuse. I support adding transnational repression to the list of sanctionable offences, because dictatorships engage in this egregious practice to intimidate and silence their critics all over the world, including here in Canada.

I support extending visa bans to immediate family members of those sanctioned, because violators too often hide behind relatives to avoid accountability. I strongly support the provision to empower committees of this Parliament to initiate individual sanctions against human rights abusers, because, in my experience, parliamentarians have always been at the forefront of the global fight for accountability.

Going back to John Peters Humphrey, an original drafter of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Canada has a long and proud history of leadership when it comes to human rights and human dignity. In 2017, Canada became the second country in the world to pass the Magnitsky human rights sanction law and the first to pass it unanimously. By adopting the amendments proposed in Bill C-219, the Canadian Parliament would send a strong message that human rights remain at the heart of this country's policy and that abusers and crooks will never be welcome.

[Translation]

By adopting the amendments proposed in Bill C-219, the Parliament of Canada will send a very strong message: Human rights remain at the heart of this country's policies, and abusers and crooks will never be welcome there.

[English]

I thank you very much for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your statement.

We go next to Kate McInnes for your opening statement of up to five minutes.

Kate McInnes (Principal, Arendt Chambers—International Human Rights and Justice): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

That's a hard act to follow, but I'll give it a shot.

I appear today on behalf of Alex Prezanti of Artemis Chambers in London and myself to address our submission.

We focus on the two changes that Bill C-219 will make to the Magnitsky law as it pertains to transnational repression. The first is the inclusion of a definition of transnational repression, and the second is a new sanctionable ground targeting those who commit it.

Canada has already shown great leadership in using its existing Magnitsky powers to respond to transnational repression in its most visible forms; the sanctions imposed following the murder of Jamal Kashoggi are the clearest example. What Bill C-219 must now do is ensure that these powers extend to the less obvious, but far more prevalent and more insidious, cases, by which I mean the proxy networks, community infiltrators and criminal intermediaries who carry out the vast majority of transnational repression campaigns in Canada today.

As drafted, both provisions contain gaps that will materially limit what the minister is able to do. I hope that our amendments can help ensure this bill is fit for purpose.

On the definition, there are at least three gaps. The current draft defines transnational repression as “tactics used by a foreign state”, which excludes the proxies who carry out many of these campaigns. It fails to capture the full spectrum of tactics used to perpetrate transnational repression, including things like digital repression and abuse of Interpol mechanisms. Lastly, the current draft limits the purpose of transnational repression to silencing dissent, which excludes identity-based targeting.

Our recommended language is found within the written submission, but what I see as the more technical problem and where I want to spend the bulk of my time is the attribution standard in the sanctionable ground found at proposed paragraph 4(2)(e).

To sanction someone under the new provision, the bill will require that they act as “an agent of or on behalf of a foreign state”, meaning there will have to be a provable formal relationship between that person and the government directing them. This ignores the reality that proxy operations are the dominant model of transnational repression today. These operations are specifically designed to sever or obscure the evidentiary trail that the current drafting will require.

The standard in the current draft is therefore too high; it also creates an odd inconsistency with existing legislation. Canada's foreign interference act, which governs criminal prosecution of analogous conduct, uses the much broader test of "acting at the direction of, for the benefit of or in association with a foreign" state. This means that the bill, as drafted, actually sets a higher attribution standard for sanctioning a transnational repression perpetrator than Canada already sets for convicting someone of such conduct as an indictable offence. That cannot be Parliament's intent. I note that the U.S. global Magnitsky order and the EU's equivalent regulations are broader than this.

Our proposed fix is straightforward. Per the language proposed in our submission, a person could be designated if they, first, acted at the express or implied direction of a foreign state; second, acted in association with a foreign state or its agents; or third—and most importantly—acted in a way that knowingly advances a foreign state's transnational repression. That third limb is critical because it would catch the perpetrator of transnational repression who knows what they're doing but who has no formal government relationship. The knowledge requirement operates as a proportionality check and a kind of safeguard, with the effect of excluding small fish who don't know what ends their conduct is serving. Because sanctions law requires only reasonable grounds of belief, rather than proof beyond a reasonable doubt, we believe this is a realistic standard calibrated to what the evidence can actually show.

I want to spend the remaining couple of seconds I imagine I have by reminding the committee that the victims of transnational repression are watching this process. They want to know that Canada can respond when a foreign state reaches into their lives, not just through official channels but through the proxies, community infiltrators and criminal intermediaries who are the primary conduits of transnational repression today. Bill C-219 is the right response to a real and documented threat. The amendments we propose do not expand its ambition, but they do ensure it can deliver on the ambition it already has.

Thank you very much. I welcome your questions.

• (1555)

The Chair: Thank you very much for your statement.

I will now open the floor to questions from members, beginning with MP James Bezan.

You have six minutes.

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

To all our witnesses, thank you for your advocacy and for the work you have done on this file, memorializing the name of Sergei Magnitsky and making it synonymous with standing up for human rights, standing against corruption and standing against kleptocracy. Each of you has been a champion on that front. I'm so glad that all of you are here speaking in support of Bill C-219.

We talk often about how Canada can be used as a safe haven. The sanctions regimes have always targeted individuals and entities, but there's always the importance around immediate family members. There are definitely some who would like to see that def-

inition be very tight, referring only to spouses, partners and immediate family members who are dependants, rather than being broader and including siblings and children who are non-dependants. However, those family members are often used to shelter illicit wealth gained through corruption and then moved into Canada and other regions.

I want to get feedback from each one of you on what you feel is the right definition around "immediate family members".

Vladimir, kick us off, please.

• (1600)

Vladimir Kara-Murza: Thank you so much, James. That's a really important question. It goes right to the heart of this issue.

I would say this: Let's look at what the other side is doing—the crooks, the abusers, the bad guys. Let's see what avenues they use to try to hide from and evade the sanctions. Three examples that spring to my mind are from Russia. Senior Putin regime officials, or Kremlin-connected oligarchs, in the last few years—especially since the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022—have tried to evade sanctions by hiding behind their family members. They were not necessarily immediate and not necessarily dependants, to answer your question. Sergei Lavrov, Putin's foreign minister; Dmitry Peskov, Putin's press secretary; and Alisher Usmanov, one of the top Kremlin oligarchs all hid behind not dependants but siblings, adult non-dependent children, spouses and so on.

The best way to go after these loopholes is to first see what they are. How are these people evading? How are these people hiding? After that, we can go and close those gaps. I believe this is exactly what your bill is doing.

James Bezan: Thank you.

Go ahead, Kate.

Kate McInnes: I think I'm going to have a different opinion from many of the speakers today. I will preface this by saying that I work as a criminal defence lawyer in Vancouver in addition to my international human rights law practice.

The Magnitsky law's preamble equally emphasizes the rule of law and human rights. The rule of law is not just ensuring equality before the law. It's making sure that when we dole out punishments, they're going only to the people who deserve it. I think the provision as drafted runs the risk of a collective punishment or guilt by association argument, particularly with respect to the exemption.

The exemption, as I understand it, is where the minister “has reasonable grounds to believe” that the family member received no “material or financial benefit”. I see that as a safeguard, but it's essentially structured as an opt-out rather than a principled legal threshold. To improve this section, I think you could require the minister to have some positive grounds that these family members did receive some sort of material benefit. As currently drafted, the onus runs the opposite way. It makes these family members prove their innocence rather than have the minister demonstrate the basis for this restriction.

This isn't just my opinion. I think the current drafting would be quite difficult to justify under Canadian law and under our international human rights obligations as well.

James Bezan: Okay. I would question this on the basis that these aren't Canadian citizens for whom the rule of law under Canadian law would apply; these are people who are using us as a safe haven. It should be their onus.

I'll ask Marcus and Bill to comment.

Sir William Browder: Let me step in.

I have spent the last 17 years going after the people who killed Sergei Magnitsky and after the people who committed other similar types of human rights abuses and getting them added to Magnitsky acts in different countries. I've seen first-hand how it works.

What I've seen very clearly is that the sanctioned individuals, when they have some glimpse that they're going to be sanctioned, will then move money into the names of family members. It's not an unusual thing. It's almost a regular thing.

One of the reasons we're having this discussion right now and why, James, you put this together is that we've had nine years to look at what happened since the passage of the Magnitsky act, at what works and what doesn't work. I can say, with 100% certainty, that the bad guys look for ways out of their dilemma.

Most of the people who are sanctioned have a lot of money, and they move the money into the names of individuals. We saw this on many occasions with Sergei Magnitsky's killers when the Magnitsky act was first put in place, and we've seen this after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. It's not an unusual thing. It's almost a pervasive thing for these people to move assets into the names of their family members, and those family members should not be then excused from this type of thing. As you've written in the law, there is a provision if somebody has not done this, but I would say that, in 99% of the cases, that's what happens.

This is an absolutely excellent proposal and, for what it's worth, it makes it much less profitable to be a human rights abuser or a kleptocrat if you know that your family members are going to get taken down with you.

• (1605)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We go next to MP Rob Oliphant.

You have six minutes.

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for coming forward today.

I want to focus on one particular aspect, and that is the publishing of names of human rights defenders, or prisoners of conscience, as they may be called. Before I get there, I want to put on record that the rule of law is the rule of law, and that we don't need to ever advance our country away from the rule of law to advance goodness. It's a bedrock, and I think that as we consider this bill, we will need to be very careful that we never veer away from the rule of law just because the bad guys do. We don't want to become the bad guys.

Thank you, Ms. McInnes, for your comments.

I want to focus a bit on publishing.

Mr. Kara-Murza, thank you for everything. Thank you for your testimony here, and not only here and now, but at other points, as well as for your persistence and your courage. I want to have you tell us a little about the story of your release and the processes. There are public processes, but I assume that there were private processes as well, which you may or may not feel comfortable disclosing. If you put together the key protagonists—Russia and the United States—and then you add in six allies of the United States into discussions that were highly sensitive, this eventually involved 16 prisoners being released and a number of countries releasing prisoners...to gain release.

Can you tell us a bit about that process? I know that in your understanding, with the publication and the public nature of you and your cause, you feel helped. How did it help and how could it have hindered?

Vladimir Kara-Murza: When the security officers woke me up in my prison cell in Omsk on the night of July 28, 2024, and told me I had 10 minutes to wake up, get dressed and get ready, I was certain they were going to lead me to a nearby forest and execute me. Instead, they took me to the airport, flew me to Moscow and took me to the Lefortovo FSB prison, where, after several days—we all still had absolutely no idea what was happening—we were taken down into the prison courtyard, put on the bus, driven to the airport, put on a plane and thrown out of the country, sent to Ankara, where the exchange was physically implemented on August 1, 2024.

This is to say that I had absolutely no idea that any of this was even happening. Up until late July 2024, I was certain I was going to die in that Siberian prison. This exchange was a miracle; that is still the only way I can describe it. If you're interested in the intricacies of the process of how this was organized, the two best people to talk about this would be my wife, Evgenia, who spearheaded this campaign, and my good friend, Sir William Browder, who is with us at this hearing today. They are really the leaders of this whole process, both in public and in private. Bill would be able to answer your question much better.

I would say with absolute certainty that the only way our exchange became possible is that, over the two and a half years of my imprisonment, you and your colleagues here made sure that our names were not forgotten. You held hearings. You passed resolutions. You put our names out there into the public domain. Nobody's going to exchange a prisoner if nobody knows that the prisoner exists. I think, as Bill will confirm, the way these lists were essentially drafted.... Also, there were eight countries involved in that exchange. As Bill mentioned, it was the largest east-west prisoner exchange since the time of the Cold War. There were 24 people in total, and there were 16 people on our side, freed from Russia. Eight of them were foreigners, and eight of them, including myself, were Russian political prisoners. The eight people Putin got from the other side were his spies, hackers, murderers and so on.

I believe that the most powerful message that western democracies sent with this exchange was to make sure that it included not only their own citizens, not only the Germans and the Americans.... You know, governments have a legal obligation to advocate for their own citizens. They did not have a legal obligation to advocate for me, for Ilya Yashin or for Oleg Orlov. To me, the insistence of western democracies that the exchange include us, Russian prisoners of conscience, was the most powerful statement imaginable. It was a statement, first of all, of solidarity and support on the part of the free world with all those Russian citizens who were imprisoned for standing up against Putin's dictatorship and against the war in Ukraine.

• (1610)

Hon. Robert Oliphant: I would agree that, in your case, it worked. The case of Mr. Navalny, who had horrendous treatment and no doubt died at the hands of the Putin regime, had as much or more public attention, including an Academy Award-winning documentary about his life, and it didn't work. In fact, one could argue that perhaps it was counterproductive.

Why are you insisting, as this legislation is, that the publication of a name of every dissident would be helpful in every case, when you could be dealing with complex cases in which multiple countries are engaged in negotiations that may be productive, as they were in yours, or may not be productive, as in the case of Mr. Navalny? I could name hundreds of other people in whose cases this may not be productive. Do you have a sense of the difference in the cases, of whether nuance could be important, and of whether doing individual and particular cases should be at the discretion of the minister—not just on privacy...?

The Chair: We are out of time, unfortunately, so we'll have to come back to that.

Vladimir Kara-Murza: Will there be a second round?

Hon. Robert Oliphant: It'll come back.

The Chair: Next is Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you. The question was super interesting, Mr. Chair, and I would like Mr. Kara-Murza to be able to answer it.

By the way, thank you to all the witnesses. We do have some exceptional people testifying today. I want to thank them for being with us for this important discussion.

So, Mr. Kara-Murza, I would like you to answer the question Mr. Oliphant just asked you. I think you had an answer ready.

Vladimir Kara-Murza: Okay, thank you very much.

I don't know which language I should use to answer.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: You can answer in whichever language you prefer here. In French or in English, as you wish.

[*English*]

Vladimir Kara-Murza: I'll try to be brief in answering the previous question so that Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe gets a chance to ask his own question too.

On Alexei Navalny's case specifically, I'm sure many members of this committee have seen the recent large exposé published in *The Wall Street Journal*, an article that detailed the way in which the negotiations for our exchange began. They began in autumn 2023, while Alexei Navalny was still alive.

The reason they were delayed so much—it happened only in August 2024—was that a former German foreign minister, Annalena Baerbock, who is the current president of the UN General Assembly, was blocking the decision by the German government to release FSB hit man Vadim Krasikov. He was in prison in Germany, and he was part of the exchange from the other side. She was blocking it as a matter of principle. It was her position that, “We can't let a murderer go.” However, while she was blocking it, Alexei Navalny was himself murdered in a Russian prison; that was in February 2024. After that, former German chancellor Olaf Scholz overruled her and said, “We're not listening to you anymore. This exchange is going ahead because, otherwise, they're going to kill all of them.” My personal view is that, in the future biographies of Miss Annalena Baerbock, this is what she'll most be remembered for. That was specific to the case of Mr. Navalny.

As for the general point that Mr. Oliphant made, I can speak not just as a former political prisoner myself but as a historian who spent a long time researching and studying the Soviet dissident movement and political imprisonment in the Soviet Union. I had the honour of knowing many of these people. I made films and wrote articles about them. The one thing that never works, specifically when it comes to political prisoners—since we're talking about this issue here—is so-called “quiet diplomacy”. When somebody tells you, “Oh, we're going to raise it privately. We're going to make sure we'll discuss it with them in a polite way”, that's the best way of knowing they're not going to do anything about it. The only defence, the only hope, the only lifeline for a political prisoner who is sitting in a prison cell in Siberia, in Xinjiang, in Venezuela or wherever it may be, is publicity, advocacy and public attention. I am, in a very literal sense, living proof that this is the case.

Thank you so much, Mr. Duceppe.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you for your answer, Mr. Kara-Murza.

Mr. Kara-Murza, I would like to ask you another question, since we're lucky to have you as a witness today.

Bill C-219 serves a fundamental purpose. There are currently thousands of political prisoners around the world. In Russia alone, there are thousands.

We also want to understand what you can tell us about how vulnerable a political prisoner is when in prison. Where can he find hope that one day he will be released? What happens when you're in a cell and don't necessarily have contact with the outside or any human contact at all? How do people manage? Why is Bill C-219 so important for the life of a political prisoner?

● (1615)

Vladimir Kara-Murza: At the beginning of this conversation, I referenced our mutual friend Irwin Cotler, who said that the worst nightmare for a political prisoner is being forgotten. Before I was imprisoned myself, while I was advocating for other Russian political prisoners, I used that phrase often, but honestly I didn't really understand it until I experienced it myself.

When a totalitarian regime or a dictatorship arrests and imprisons a political opponent, the goal is not just to punish that person and put them in jail. The goal is also to demoralize the person, isolate them, make them believe that everyone has forgotten them, that what happened doesn't matter and that they are there for nothing. In fact, that's what the Putin regime is trying to do with all the people who are in prison.

I can't tell you how important it was for me to know, through the letters I received and from what my lawyers said when they visited me, that it was not true, in fact, and that the world had not forgotten. It's important to know that the free world, the democratic world, is expressing solidarity with all those people in Russia who are imprisoned by Putin's dictatorship for speaking out against the regime or the war. When I talked about the exchange that took place in August 2024, the most powerful message for me from western countries, democratic countries, was to include not only

their own citizens in that exchange, even here at home, but also Russian political prisoners.

I don't have enough words in any language I know to express how important it is not only for the democratic world to support political prisoners in totalitarian countries, but to do so publicly. Speaking publicly is the most important defence for someone who is imprisoned for years and years by a totalitarian regime without ever having committed a crime, just because of their political views or religious values.

As I said a few minutes ago, of all the provisions of Bill C-219, the most important and most personal for me is precisely that one. It's the requirement for public reports—and I want to emphasize the word “public”—as regards political prisoners in totalitarian regimes, so that it's impossible for those dictatorships to make political prisoners believe that the world doesn't know what's going on and that the world has forgotten them.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

James Bezan, you have five minutes.

James Bezan: I want to direct my first question to Marcus Kolga.

Mr. Kolga, we were just hearing Vladimir Kara-Murza's description of how important it is that we have public advocacy for prisoners of conscience. Vladimir is living proof of that. Another one is Michael Kovrig. I know he's written about it. I've talked to him about it. His comment was that sunlight is by far the best disinfectant, and it's by far the one that brought him his freedom as well. Can you comment on that?

Marcus Kolga: Thank you for the question.

Vladimir has clearly articulated the need to constantly bring up these cases. I think the same happened in the case of the two Michaels. Their freedom was thanks to the fact that there were members of Parliament who regularly made statements on their behalf. Opinion pieces and articles appeared regularly, so their cases weren't forgotten.

There's another important aspect to all of this. That sort of attention puts pressure on the government as well. It doesn't allow the government to simply ignore these cases. It puts pressure on them so that they keep bringing these cases up and so that they do negotiate for their eventual release. That's exactly what happened with the two Michaels.

I would also add that MP Bezan and many others, such as now-retired MP McKay, regularly brought up Vladimir's case in statements and in various motions. I think that at least two or three motions were passed during his incarceration. These are important in terms of maintaining the public eye and media attention on these cases. This is very important in terms of the process of having them freed and, ultimately, defending their rights.

• (1620)

James Bezan: Mr. Kolga, you're one of the people I consulted when I was drafting this legislation, especially on the definitions, including transnational repression and prisoners of conscience. Do you feel that the thresholds in the definition of transnational repression are too high or too low?

Marcus Kolga: I'm always for lowering thresholds in terms of the application of sanctions. If there is a way to lower that threshold, I fully support it.

What's important in Bill C-219 is that there is a definition of transnational repression at all. Currently, in our legislation, we don't have a clear definition of transnational repression. This would be the first of its kind, so having that included in Bill C-219 is fundamentally important.

James Bezan: One of the concerns that have been raised by government officials is the definition of "prisoners of conscience" and maybe changing the term to "human rights defenders". In the minds of all of the witnesses, is prisoner of conscience the right terminology? I want to get feedback on that.

Sir Browder, you could go first.

Sir William Browder: I've worked on a number of different cases of people who have become prisoners of conscience, and not all of them are human rights defenders.

Let's start with Sergei Magnitsky, for example. Sergei Magnitsky was a tax lawyer who uncovered a massive government tax scam and exposed it. They wanted him to retract his testimony against corrupt officers. They wanted him to bear false witness against me and others. He wasn't a human rights lawyer. He wasn't an activist. He wasn't even a politician. He was a prisoner of conscience because he wanted to do the right thing. He was killed for that. He wouldn't be captured under this government's definition.

You can look at Jimmy Lai. He is a newspaper publisher who just wanted to publish his newspaper and tell the truth. He wanted to free Hong Kong. He wasn't a human rights defender, but he's now imprisoned and he's a prisoner of conscience.

I want to react, if I could, for two seconds to the previous comment that was made about how it could be a bad thing to raise these issues and call someone a prisoner of conscience. I can tell you that in 100% of the cases, it's a good thing for governments to name and shame, to label authoritarian regimes as acting out badly and arresting people who shouldn't be arrested, and to name prisoners of conscience. It's never a bad thing. It's always a bad thing to keep these things quiet and to do quiet diplomacy. It's a typical foreign ministry thing to say, "Let's just keep this really quiet." Nobody who's a victim of this wants that to happen, and keeping it quiet never helps them.

The Chair: Thank you.

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

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

Vladimir Kara-Murza, I have to say how incredibly happy we are to see you here, well and free. I have to give kudos to your wife, who has testified at this committee, and others. There was a

tremendous amount of work across the parties, particularly when we worked across party lines to ensure that you got your honorary citizenship. It is inspiring to see you here today and know those efforts made a difference.

It also encourages us to keep going on cases such as Jimmy Lai's and others. We know that, even if it feels as though nothing is happening, our activism as parliamentarians makes a difference.

You mentioned in your opening remarks that you were aware that ambassadors had spoken on your behalf, that you were not forgotten and that your name was being mentioned. We think about the impact that has on the regimes that are holding prisoners of conscience. What impact does that have on the prisoner?

What impact does knowing you're not forgotten have on your own morale and the will to keep going?

• (1625)

Vladimir Kara-Murza: Thank you so much, Ms. Vandenberg, for your kind words, first of all, and for all the amazing efforts and leadership that all of you, across parties, engaged in in the two and a half years I was in captivity.

To answer your question, shortly after I was—

[*Translation*]

Abdelhaq Sari (Bourassa, Lib.): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Since people are watching us, I would like to mention that the camera has been on Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for a while now.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: That's what I was trying to say.

Abdelhaq Sari: We still like you, but we would like to see the witness as well.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, that's kind.

[*English*]

Vladimir Kara-Murza: To answer your question, shortly after I was transferred to Omsk, after my 25-year sentence came in, the prison's security operations officer came into my cell. Of course, all the correspondence a prisoner gets has to be censored by the prison administration. A lot of these letters do not go through. A lot of them do get through, but they're still read by these guys in the prison office. He came in and asked, "What is honorary Canadian citizenship?" That's how I found out I'd received it. It was because somebody wrote it to me in prison and the officers read it.

I do not have enough words to express how much that moral support matters, because when an authoritarian regime imprisons a political opponent, the goal is not just to punish that person and imprison them but also to isolate, demoralize and make them feel that everybody has forgotten them, that nobody cares and that this was all for nothing—these sacrifices were for nothing.

Every time another resolution is passed, another hearing is held and another name is mentioned in a parliamentary speech, it could be literally life-saving for the prisoner sitting in those conditions, especially if they're in solitary confinement, which is how I was imprisoned. You sit in this tiny, three-metre by four-metre cell, day after day, week after week and month after month. You have nowhere to go; you have nothing to do, and you have no one to speak to, which is the worst thing of all.

As you know, according to the United Nations standard minimum rules for the treatment of prisoners, solitary confinement of more than 15 days is considered to be a form of torture. I was in solitary for a straight year, with no pause, in Omsk. This was how Alexei Navalny was held. This was how Soviet prisoners of conscience were held back in Communist times. That is intended both to torture and to isolate. Breaking this isolation and letting those prisoners know they're not alone and they're not forgotten... Frankly speaking, nothing can be more important than that.

Every time I speak to a big, international audience and somebody stands up and asks, "What can I do to help political prisoners? I'm not a parliamentarian; I'm not a journalist, and I'm not a government official. What can I do?" I always say to please take a few minutes in the day to write to political prisoners. There are human rights groups that facilitate this and have these special websites where it's really easy to go and select a political prisoner and send him or her a letter. Only somebody who has been in this situation personally can appreciate how much hope, how much light and how much warmth there will be in the piece of paper the prison guard hands you through the feeding slot in your cell door.

This public attention is incredibly important, and not only morally or symbolically: Very often, it can mean better prison conditions. It can mean less or no torture by the prison officials, because, of course, it's more difficult—going back to this discussion about public versus non-public—to torture somebody and create impossible conditions if people are talking about that person, the light is switched on and the spotlight is on them.

I will give one example from a few months ago. Alexei Gorinov is a Moscow municipal councilman who is serving a seven-year prison sentence for calling for a minute of silence at a district council meeting in Moscow in memory of the Ukrainian kids killed by Russian bombs. He got seven years in prison for that. He's sitting in solitary confinement in Siberia as I speak. He was held in this horrendous cell with no running water and no mattress in the brutal cold. Dmitry Muratov, the editor-in-chief of *Novaya Gazeta*, a prominent, independent Russian news publication and a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, wrote a public appeal to the International Committee of the Red Cross on his behalf. That appeal was published everywhere. The Red Cross responded. The next day, Alexei was transferred to a better cell with a mattress, running water and better conditions.

It may seem a small thing, but if this is your life and this is how you exist every single day, it is literally life-changing.

• (1630)

The Chair: Thank you.

Vladimir Kara-Murza: To go back to the exchanges, nobody would include prisoners in international exchanges if these prisoners were not known. The only way these exchanges, such as the one that freed me and the one that freed hundreds of political prisoners from Belarus last year, for example... As you know, this was led by the current American government, for all the many questions about it. It did this. Hundreds of political prisoners from Belarus have been released as a result of the actions of the current U.S. administration. The only reason this happened is that people like Maria Kolesnikova, Sergei Tikhanovsky and Ales Bialiatski were known, talked about and the subject of international attention.

Please don't let any cynic ever tell you that this—all of these hearings and all of these resolutions—is unimportant. Why do you talk about these things? They save human lives, and I'm living proof of that.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go next to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: For months now, many of us have been calling on Canada to grant honorary citizenship to Jimmy Lai, who is currently in an appalling situation in the jails of Hong Kong.

The Chinese foreign minister is in Canada today. He's just arrived. Isn't this an opportunity to shine a more significant spotlight on Mr. Lai's case?

I would like you to tell me about Mr. Lai's case, Mr. Kara-Murza, because you are familiar with it. I would like you to tell us how much it would change Mr. Lai's life if Canada did that. That is in fact what we've been asking the government for months now.

Vladimir Kara-Murza: I think this is a very good day to be talking about this. That's right, the Chinese minister is here in Ottawa this week.

I know Sebastien Lai, Jimmy Lai's son. I know his daughter, Claire. I actually saw her last week at the Freedom House ceremony, where Jimmy Lai was honoured with the Freedom Award. She was there to receive the award. This story breaks my heart, as do many other stories of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience around the world.

Jimmy Lai's only crime, if I can put it that way, was publishing honest information about what's happening in Communist China. As you know, he was the head of Apple Daily, Hong Kong's leading pro-democracy newspaper. Because of that, the Chinese communist regime gave him a prison sentence that is really a life sentence, given his health and age. In my opinion, there is only one thing that can save Jimmy Lai's life. This is important. We're not just talking about politically motivated illegal imprisonment, which is already unacceptable in itself. In this case, it's a matter of saving his life. In my opinion, the only thing that can save Jimmy Lai's life right now is for western governments to take a major and very public stand. That includes not only Canada, especially since the minister is here right now, but also the United States. Trump said he was going to talk about Jimmy Lai's case when he was in Beijing. I don't know if he did or not. We know that Jimmy Lai is still in prison.

It is very important that this issue be addressed, especially by G7 countries, including Canada. When there are formal negotiations, for example, between Canada and China, as is the case today, leaders must not talk only about investments, business, money and so on. They have to actually talk about human lives. In my opinion, nothing is more important than that.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go next to MP Michael Chong. You have five minutes.

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

I'd like to speak to the part of the bill that deals with removing authoritarian state-controlled broadcasters from the public broadcasting airwaves in Canada. There is a problem with that section of the bill. It wasn't properly drafted. Amendments are coming, so I don't want to speak to the technical problems of that part of the bill. Rather, what I would like to hear from witnesses, if they have an opinion, is....

First, Russia Today was pulled from the airwaves here in Canada in 2022. It was pulled from the airwaves of many European democracies as well. CGTN remains on the airwaves here in Canada, but it has been removed from the public airwaves of a lot of other democracies.

Could any of you tell this committee which authoritarian state-controlled broadcasters have been removed from licensed broadcast airwaves in other democracies, whether it's the Iranian state-controlled broadcaster, the Russian one or the PRC one? Marcus Kolga, I think, mentioned something in his testimony, so I know he has an opinion on it. Maybe we'll start with him.

• (1635)

Marcus Kolga: Sure. I'll try to be brief. Thank you for the question.

In Europe, RT and all Russian state media have indeed been pulled from most airwaves. In many parts of Europe, RT is also inaccessible online. If you go to RT's website, you are blocked from seeing information on that platform. RT's feeds on platforms like YouTube are also blocked. I think this is extremely helpful because,

nowadays, you don't need a cable or satellite connection to access that media.

The U.K. has banned CGTN and CCTV for airing confessions on their broadcasts. This was done quite some time ago. That same question came up at the CRTC in terms of licensing CGTN and CCTV a number of years ago, but I don't think it went anywhere. CGTN and CCTV are equally dangerous to RT. These platforms are being used to weaponize information against the western world, including for Canadians in the English-speaking and Chinese-language media information spaces. Canada is a bit of an outlier in terms of allowing those Chinese state media platforms to remain on Canadian broadcast systems.

I'll also add one other point about RT.

A situation has come up whereby there appears to be some evasion around the removal of those channels from our broadcast systems. There are two companies—one is eTVnet and another is based in Germany—selling devices in the Canadian marketplace. They cost around \$15 or \$20 apiece. They're somewhat like Amazon fire sticks. The user can purchase this device, put it on the back of their television and get the full array of Russian state media on that television. By some estimates, up to 40% to 50% of Russian diaspora members use these devices to get around that broadcast ban.

Preventing broadcasters like CCTV and CGTN from broadcasting is one thing, but we also need to look at this issue more broadly in terms of the platforms being used to broadcast information via the Internet.

Hon. Michael Chong: To clarify, you mentioned that RT has been largely removed from the airwaves in Europe and the U.K. I know CGTN and CCTV have been removed from the airwaves in the U.K., but what about the European Union?

Marcus Kolga: It's a good question. I'm not sure if there's a complete ban on their broadcasting in Europe. I don't know the details on exactly which countries have removed those state broadcasters from their airwaves. This is something I can look into and get back to the committee on.

Hon. Michael Chong: Maybe the other witnesses can....

Am I out of time?

Okay. Thank you. I'll take the next round to—

The Chair: Before I turn to MP Sari, I know Sir Browder and Mr. Kolga have to leave.

I know you had only one hour, so I want to—

Sir William Browder: I can stay on for a few more questions.

The Chair: You can continue on. Okay. On behalf of the committee, thank you both for allowing us to continue with a few more questions.

I'll turn to MP Sari.

You have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Abdelhaq Sari: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much to the witnesses for being with us. At the risk of repeating what my colleagues have already said, we are very pleased and honoured we are to have them with us today.

I'll get right to it.

There is something intriguing in what you and my colleagues are saying: Despite the adoption of laws like the Sergei Magnitsky Law, which we are talking about a lot today, the results we are seeing on the ground in a number of western countries are sometimes problematic.

How do you assess the results so far?

I would like short answers, because I will then have questions for other people.

• (1640)

Vladimir Kara-Murza: To my mind, the best way to assess them is by the reactions from the other side, the reactions of those targeted by laws like the Sergei Magnitsky Law, in this case Vladimir Putin's regime in the Kremlin.

I myself have been poisoned twice by Putin's FSB, Russia's federal security service, precisely because of my work on the Sergei Magnitsky law. The 25-year jail sentence I received in April was handed down by Sergei Podoprigrorov, the same judge who sent Sergei Magnitsky to jail. That was a very clear message from the Kremlin.

There are few things those people hate more than such targeted sanctions. For years and years, those people wanted to steal money from us in Russia but spend it here in the west. The Sergei Magnitsky law puts an end to that hypocrisy.

Abdelhaq Sari: That's the answer I wanted to hear, and you said it well.

Thank you once again for your testimony, because it influences our thinking and very understanding of Bill C-219, which is before us now.

I would like to take you a step further. How can you explain the gap between our intent behind a law and the implementation issues that sometimes arise in practice?

I could turn to the two experts, and I invite Ms. McInnes to answer the question as well.

More specifically, which of the mechanisms proposed in Bill C-219 do you think would be the most important to ensure the bill is implemented or to do away with this culture of hesitation?

[*English*]

Kate McInnes: Thank you very much for the question.

I believe that, in an earlier session, Mr. Bezan noted that this is all about closing loopholes.

I can give you an example from my own practice. I hope you can appreciate that I'm going to speak in broad brush strokes, because it's a live issue.

Currently, I'm working to address a slew of assassinations that a state committed historically and across a number of different countries. We found that the individual who orchestrated this on the ground was a community leader and a loyalist to that regime, but they had absolutely no hard and fast connection to it.

My concern is that, under the current drafting of the bill, an individual like this—who is really a heavy hitter— would fall through the gaps. That's very much a loophole in the legislation as currently drafted.

Based on our amendments, he would be caught, because the question is whether he knowingly facilitated transnational repression, for instance. The answer in this case would certainly be yes.

That's one example of how creating tight, well-drafted legislation is very important to capturing the chain of command of these operations, because it's extensive. As I mentioned, authoritarian states are at pains to make themselves as elusive as possible and make it difficult to connect these things back to the head honchos in China, Iran, Russia or wherever.

[*Translation*]

Abdelhaq Sari: I don't know if the other two witnesses can add anything.

What could also help us is that we live under the rule of law. What can guide us so that we always strike that balance between maintaining the rule of law and the implementation of the measures proposed in Bill C-219?

[*English*]

Sir William Browder: Can I say something?

I want to say that because I'm one of the principal advocates of the Magnitsky act, I get approached by many people who have been victimized by different regimes in different countries. They want to use the Magnitsky act to impose sanctions on the people who have been there, the people who have perpetrated these crimes. This is not true just in Canada; it is true all over the world.

I tell them that they should apply to the foreign ministry of Canada using your Magnitsky act, submit their evidence, find members of Parliament who can support their cases and bring those cases up in Parliament, along with the application to the foreign ministry, with the hope to get those people sanctioned.

I would say that in almost all cases, they would submit their recommendations. There may even have been media attention to it. The government would then do absolutely nothing. I would say that in the vast majority of cases, the government would do absolutely nothing.

We end up in this situation. The members of Parliament who brought it up can get no answer from the government about why they did nothing, whether they should or should not have and what their reasoning was. That's one of the reasons this provision basically asking the government to be accountable to Parliament is such an important thing.

I can't imagine that anyone sitting in this room today would object to that. There's no reason anyone should object in this Parliament to having the government more accountable to parliamentarians. That—

• (1645)

The Chair: Thank you.

Unfortunately, we're way over the time.

We'll go next to MP Chong. You have five minutes.

A voice: You said....

An hon. member: I'm sorry, Mr... No, that's not true.

No, we're starting a new round with Michael. I'll then get to you.

Michael Chong, go ahead, for five minutes.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I want to continue with the question and give the other witnesses an opportunity to respond about authoritarian state-controlled broadcasters like CGTN, CCTV, the Iranian state-controlled broadcaster and the Russian ones.

What is the status of those state-controlled broadcasters on public airwaves—not over the Internet, but on public airwaves, broadcast airwaves—in other democracies? Could you tell us what you know about that, if anything?

Vladimir Kara-Murza: Thank you so much for the question.

I can speak to the Russian state propaganda outlets. I don't want to call them media, because they aren't.

As Marcus said a few minutes ago, in the vast majority of democratic countries both in Europe and North America, these Kremlin propaganda outlets were taken off the air shortly after the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. In my view, that was way too late, because for years and years, these propaganda mouthpieces poisoned the minds of a lot of people in the free world, but I guess it's better late than never.

I want to make a point that these dictatorships and these propagandists for dictatorships very much like to engage in these hypocritical “arguments” about how this is against democracy and against freedom of speech: “Why are you denying us?” The same people who have destroyed any basic tenets of democracy in their own country, Russia, are trying to hide behind these tenets when they want to continue having access to audiences in the free world.

I want to remind members of this committee that it is established international case law that propagandists act as accomplices to crimes, including war crimes and crimes against humanity, that are being committed by the actual dictatorships. As members of this committee will know, Nazi propagandists were tried and sentenced at Nuremberg. As members of this committee also know, the lead-

ership of the so-called radio Mille Collines was tried and sentenced for the Rwanda genocide by the international tribunal.

These people probably didn't kill anybody with their own hands, but you can kill with words as well. You can create an atmosphere in which thousands and thousands of people are being killed. I think it is way overdue, but absolutely right, that democratic countries like Canada shield themselves from the poisonous propaganda spewed by these totalitarian regimes, be they in Moscow, in Beijing, in Tehran or wherever else.

Hon. Michael Chong: Madame McInnes, do you have any view on this?

Kate McInnes: I have no view on it. I have nothing to add.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you.

I'd like to ask a question about clauses 6 and 15 of the bill, which would replace the discretionary framework for forfeiture and disposal of property seized or restrained under the two current acts with fixed timelines requiring the minister to apply for forfeiture within 12 months and to dispose of the forfeited property within 30 days. This is a big shift from a discretionary approach to a time-bounded mandatory approach.

I'm wondering, Sir Browder, if you or any of the other witnesses have any views on this part of the bill.

Sir William Browder: When we first came up with the Magnitsky act, the idea was that we didn't want the perpetrators of crimes and corrupt officials to enjoy the benefits or the fruits of their criminal activity. The idea was to freeze their assets. It was sort of a half-baked idea, because we hadn't fully thought through what we would do with those assets once they're frozen.

Since then, I've worked with various of your colleagues in Canada on what is called the frozen assets repurposing act, which is this concept of taking those frozen assets and repurposing them for the benefit of victims. Since then, I've worked on the concept that the frozen Russian central bank reserve should be confiscated.

I'm not specifically familiar with the mechanisms in the provision that you mentioned, but I would say that this is the logical next step: Once you've frozen these assets that belong to corrupt individuals and human rights violators, something should be done with those assets. How that should be done I will leave to the legal experts, who are probably more familiar with the issues than I am.

• (1650)

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you.

Madame McInnes, do you have any views on this as a Canadian?

Kate McInnes: I wouldn't want to say anything about this without doing a bit more research. I apologize for that. Twelve months strikes me as quite a quick turnaround, but it's always good to set deadlines. That's my only comment at this point.

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Guilbeault, you have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd also like to thank all of our guests. I, too, am always impressed by the high calibre of our witnesses, particularly today, as Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe pointed out earlier. So I thank them for being with us.

I think we all agree on the principles. What we are trying to do in asking you questions is to try to find the best ways to put the principles we agree on into practice. So I have three questions, which I would ask you to answer quickly.

The first is about the list. I would like to come back to what my colleague Mr. Oliphant was saying earlier. I don't have the kind of experience that many of you have in human rights, but I do have some experience in diplomacy. I think there's a significant difference between, on the one hand, giving the government of a democratic country the discretion it needs to try to save a person's life in the best possible way and, on the other hand, having conditions imposed on it by an authoritarian country.

I have witnessed negotiations or, in some cases, have participated in negotiations where discretion was needed to reach an agreement. In addition, I think my colleague made the point earlier that it's difficult to have a rule that will apply in every case. Sometimes it also takes a certain amount of discretion to find the right way to achieve the objectives. That's the first point I wanted to make.

With respect to the CRTC, I'm obviously not against that principle, but you have to understand that in Canada, we don't have legislation or regulations that enable us to tackle what's happening online, that is to say, all aspects of digital publications. So a system would have to be created. Even if we gave the CRTC the power proposed in Bill C-219, it would apply only to traditional publications, meaning print media, television and that kind of thing, while everything is moving increasingly online.

So I'd like to hear your thoughts on that. What countries have established those kinds of systems? Would we, for our part, be prepared to work towards that?

My last question is about clause 6 of the bill, which my colleague Mr. Chong was talking about. Once again, it's difficult for governments to dictate strict deadlines for independent tribunals since there can be appeals and reviews.

This is a question that, rather than being very specific, is perhaps directed more generally to you, Ms. McInnes. Legislation cannot replace the power of the courts. So how can we provide a framework for that?

Vladimir Kara-Murza: Thank you very much for your questions. I will answer the first question, particularly as regards discretion with respect to the situation of political prisoners.

I think it's important to divide your question in two.

Part of it has to do with technical negotiations, such as those to organize a prisoner swap. It has to be discreet, of course, or else it won't work. For example, every time journalists ask me if any work

is under way for more political prisoner exchanges or to release Russian political prisoners, I always say that I have no comments to make. In that sense, absolutely, discretion is needed, otherwise nothing will happen.

As I already said when I answered your colleague's question, in my case, for example, I had absolutely no idea that anything was happening with the prisoner exchange. It was exactly the same thing for all my other colleagues who were part of the same exchange; I asked them about that afterwards. It's interesting though that people in other countries knew. The Americans and the Germans knew that there would be an exchange. We Russians didn't know anything. So there was complete discretion, and that's how it should be done, definitely.

As to the other part of your question, in terms of campaigns and advocacy in support of political prisoners, by definition, that can only be done publicly. You can't advocate for a political prisoner in secret. It just doesn't work. That's what I was talking about when I said that this part must absolutely be public. In addition, it can help improve the conditions of political prisoners. As we've already discussed with Anita Vandenbeld, knowing that they're not forgotten gives them tremendous moral support.

• (1655)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go next to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I'll turn to you, Mr. Browder, since I don't think you have much time left with us. It's good to see you again. It's been a long time since we've seen each other.

You've previously stated that the most effective Magnitsky laws were those that made it possible not only to freeze the assets of individuals, but also held to account the people around those same individuals.

If Bill C-219 is passed, do you think it will be a way for Canada to have possibly the toughest or, in any case, one of the toughest Magnitsky laws in the world?

[*English*]

Sir William Browder: This would be a step forward. This is a discussion that we have with all different countries about the Magnitsky act. Everybody—all activists—has the same complaint, which is why we allow these people's family members to enjoy the fruits of their crimes in these countries when these people are sanctioned. It's shocking that Sergei Lavrov, the foreign minister, was sanctioned, yet I believe his stepdaughter lives in a 5-million-pound apartment in London. She's allowed to do that, and there's nothing they can do about it.

Yes, Canada could be the leader in this whole thing. So far, this is not a concept that has been taken up by other countries. It's a concept that has been proposed by human rights campaigners all over the world to different countries. It's something that Canada can lead on.

I should point out something in my whole story about the Magnitsky act that is important for everyone to know in a broader context, which is that I was able, along with Vladimir, to get the Magnitsky act passed in the United States in 2012. We said to ourselves that we needed to have Magnitsky acts in other countries, because otherwise, people will avoid America and that will be that. I knew that most countries wouldn't follow the American lead; even back then, there was a lot of anti-Americanism. There's certainly a lot more now.

I asked myself, "What's the next country that could really set off a chain reaction in terms of legislation?" I said to myself that Canada is that country. I probably flew to Ottawa 20 times between 2012 and 2017. Marcus Kolga used all of his great experience with the political process to shepherd me, Vladimir and others through Canada. In 2017, the Canadian Parliament unanimously passed the Canadian Magnitsky act. Following that, it was like a domino effect. Everybody else said, "Well, if Canada is doing it, then we should do it." I can say with 100% certainty that was the case: When I went to the European Union, when I went to the U.K. and when I went to Australia, everybody looked at the Canadian example.

• (1700)

The Chair: Thank you.

Sir William Browder: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next, we'll go to Ziad Aboultaif.

You have five minutes.

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

Thanks to the witnesses.

Mr. Kara-Murza, your work as an advocate and journalist has exposed you to the depth of the intentions of Russian foreign interference efforts. To what degree do you believe that Canada remains vulnerable to Russian interference, and how do you assess the effectiveness of the Canadian sanctions regime?

Vladimir Kara-Murza: Thank you so much for the question.

We know that the Kremlin has global tentacles, and its security services certainly have global ambitions. This was the case in Soviet Communist times as well.

In 1992, a year after the collapse of the Soviet regime, when there was a court case going on at the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation with regard to the Soviet Communist Party, some of the archives of the former Communist Party's central committee were partially and cautiously declassified. Even from that small number of documents that were made public, the world was shocked by how far those tentacles from the Kremlin reached, in-

cluding here in Canada, the United States and countries across western Europe.

The organization that came to power in Russia together with Putin in 2000, 26 years ago, is the same old Soviet KGB, just with a different abbreviation in its name. It's been doing exactly the same thing. We know about the massive media disinformation campaigns. We know about attempts to influence elections. We know about instances of transnational repression, which is one of the issues being addressed here in Bill C-219.

Because Canada is such an important part of the international community—Bill Browder was just saying how important it was to get the Magnitsky law passed here in Canada, and I fully concur with his assessment—and because Canada is a member of the OSCE, because it's a member of the G7 and because it's one of the most important countries in the world, it is very clearly one of the key targets of Kremlin attacks and Kremlin campaigns in all sorts of different ways, from propaganda and disinformation to physical attacks in terms of transnational repression.

I believe it is very important for this country to put up its defences against any potential attacks and close any potential gaps, loopholes and weak spots that could leave it vulnerable to hybrid aggression by the Kremlin, because that's its preferred method now. It's not going to send tanks or planes here, but what about hybrid attacks and hybrid aggression? It will very much do that, and it is important to be on guard against that and be defending yourselves against that.

Ziad Aboultaif: We've spoken of the implementation of the laws. We've made the first attempt. Of course, we've got the Magnitsky law in place, and Bill C-219 is supposed to further strengthen the regimes that we have in order to fight back, because we're always going to be vulnerable and we're always going to be subject to those attacks, especially because we are Canada.

How important is it for our other allies to be at the same level? Are we, as Canada, at the same level, let's say, as the United States and the United Kingdom in how strong our regime is and, on the implementation side, how effective it is?

Vladimir Kara-Murza: Thank you so much for this.

One of the biggest problems for many years and many decades has been that dictators have long learned how to work together very effectively. The dictators' club is very tightly knit. They coordinate, they co-operate and they share—I'm not going to call them best practices—worst practices among themselves. It is long past time that democracies learned to coordinate and co-operate with similar effectiveness, and I think one of the most important areas in which this should be a priority is the area of sanctions.

Many years ago, when Bill and I were beginning this global campaign for accountability, there was an interparliamentary body, an interparliamentary forum committee, specifically on Magnitsky sanctions. It was chaired by Irwin Cotler, who was then a member of the Canadian Parliament, and it included legislators from different places in the world: the U.S., countries across western Europe, the European Parliament and so on.

It would be a very useful and very important idea to go back to similar formats of creating some sort of interparliamentary body or interparliamentary format to share the best practices for how to defend democracies against dictatorships and how to put these sanctions in place against human rights abusers, violators of the rule of law and crooks. How can they be shared and strengthened, and how can democratic nations work together against dictators at least as effectively as dictators, unfortunately, are working together against democratic nations?

There are already, of course, existing forums and bodies in which this work can take place. One obvious one is the parliamentary assembly of the OSCE, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, of which Canada is a full member. Another potential body is the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, of which Canada is an associate member, and Canadian parliamentarians do take regular part in these sessions.

It's important to use formats such as these to share best practices and copy them across the board so that the democratic world stands united against these threats, as opposed to allowing the Kremlin to find weak spots among democracies to see where it can find vulnerabilities and where it can try to damage them more.

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next, we'll go to MP Clark. You have five minutes.

Braedon Clark (Sackville—Bedford—Preston, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses for being here today. It's been a real honour for all of us to hear your testimony.

Mr. Kara-Murza, I'd like to ask you this question first, and then I'll invite Ms. McInnes and others to comment as well. One of the challenges of dealing with bad actors, as it were, is that they often get to adapt, move and change faster than governments. They're not constrained by laws, regulations, morality and all of these other things that constrain many of us in these institutions.

I know we're dealing with the bill right now, but I'm curious about your thoughts on what we should be thinking about next. How can we make sure that our sanctions regimes in Canada, and internationally, are as proactive as possible, as opposed to dealing with things once something has already taken place, which unfortunately is where we often find ourselves.

I'll start with you, Mr. Kara-Murza, and then go to Ms. McInnes.

I'm not sure if our other witnesses are able to stick around and answer as well, but I'd be happy to hear from them too.

Vladimir Kara-Murza: Thank you for your question.

First of all, I would say that it's important to have areas of expertise on which you're able to build in order to find the best solutions and the most effective ways to counter these dictatorships. In this sense, Canada is an immensely rich country because here you have diasporas from all of these nations suffering under dictatorial rule across the world. Canada is one of the most multinational, multi-faceted countries on the face of the earth. Nobody knows Russia better than Russians. Nobody knows Venezuela better than

Venezuelans. Nobody knows Iran better than Iranians, and so on. It's really important to draw on that expertise and to work with these communities.

When it comes to Russia, organizations such as the one I represent, the Free Russia Foundation, which is a civil society organization now in its second decade of operation, have been founded by Russians, operated by Russians and led by Russians—anti-Putin, pro-democracy, anti-war Russians, to state the obvious. Those country-specific solutions, at the end of the day, have to come from people who know these countries best.

I'm absolutely certain that the same principle should apply when you're dealing with China, Cuba, Iran, Venezuela and all of these dictatorships. In this sense, Canada is in a much better position than most countries because you have access to these amazingly diverse resources of knowledge and expertise about these countries. This will help you fine-tune these solutions to make sure that they apply in the most effective way possible.

In what is unfortunately my area of expertise—political imprisonment—if this provision of Bill C-219 were to go through and were to be adopted, this provision on the public reporting for prisoners of conscience would make Canada the first in the world. Yes, there are interparliamentary bodies that have specific mandate holders on the situation with political prisoners. They are the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's American Congressman Steve Cohen and, with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Swedish parliamentarian Azadeh Rojhan. They're leading the portfolios on political prisoners, but no country on the national level has ever had such a mandate.

If Canada does this, it would be groundbreaking and immensely important. You led the way and, in many ways, showed the example of the Magnitsky law almost a decade ago; I believe that this would also show a very good precedent for other democratic nations to follow.

One particular tool that I want to emphasize, which is contained in Bill C-219, is actually the empowerment of you—parliamentary committees. This is not a comment on any particular country or political party; it's just a general comment from the experience I've had over many years of working in this area.

As a matter of rule, as a matter of practice, government bureaucrats, diplomats and people who belong to the executive branch are always very reluctant to stand up to these dictatorships and to put human rights issues on the table and on the agenda of these international negotiations, because they're cautious. Your job is to be nice to these people if you're a professional diplomat. Very often, though, it means being nice to murderous, criminal, corrupt dictatorships, whereas in my experience, leadership of principle on these issues—on issues of human rights—has always come from parliamentarians.

The only country, for now—before this provision is, I hope, adopted here in Canada—that allows parliamentary initiative on sanctions is the United States. The U.S. Magnitsky.... Both the Russia-specific Magnitsky act and the global Magnitsky act provide an opportunity for leaders of key congressional committees in both houses to initiate sanctions against specific people.

I can tell you that some of the most important sanctions we were able to secure in the United States of America, for example, were sanctions against General Alexander Bastrykin, the head of Putin's so-called law enforcement system—his main tool of oppression—or sanctions against Ruslan Geremeyev, a close operative of Kremlin-appointed Chechen henchman Ramzan Kadyrov, who was one of the organizers of the assassination of Boris Nemtsov and many other people.

These sanctions were put in place only because there was congressional initiative to make sure these sanctions were in place. It puts the government in a position of either having to sanction these people or having to explain why they are suddenly protecting murderers, crooks and human rights abusers.

To me, one of the most important provisions of Bill C-219 is this provision that would allow committees, such as this committee, to pass motions and then put the government in the position of having to either sanction these crooks and abusers or explain why they're unwilling to do so.

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you.

We go next to MP Rood.

You have five minutes. You're on the list.

Lianne Rood (Middlesex—London, CPC): I didn't know I was asking questions.

I thought another member was taking it.

I'm sorry.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I can speak on his behalf, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Lianne Rood: Mr. Ziad can ask them. Okay.

I can ask one question after.

I'm sorry.

Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you, Chair.

Clause 5 of Bill C-219 would render “Immediate family members” of sanctioned foreign nationals ineligible for a visa. Given recent events, such as the incident that happened with the Iranian individuals and IRGC members and family, how can Canadians be confident in the government's screening mechanisms?

I would ask any of the witnesses to weigh in on this, if possible. I asked earlier about how we can make sure that the implementation of the sanctions regime we have is working effectively and protecting Canadians as well.

Kate McInnes: Mr. Kolga might be the better person to speak to this.

Marcus Kolga: I can't necessarily speak to the screening process, but I can speak to the effectiveness in terms of enforcement of our sanctions regime. We have not been very effective. To date, there have been only three cases of sanction violations that have been prosecuted. There are many other cases.

One glaring example is the Tenet Media case. This is a case of a group of North American online influencers—including three Canadians—that was funded by the Russian state media platform RT. Two employees of RT used \$10 million U.S. to set up this media platform. The Department of Justice indictment that was brought against these two RT employees includes evidence that money was funnelled from RT, a sanctioned entity on our sanctions list. Money was funnelled to the Canadian personal accounts of two Canadians. If that's the case, that would indicate to me a clear violation of our sanctions laws. When these cases do come to light—as they were brought to light by the Department of Justice—they need to be investigated. They need to be prosecuted.

If we're not enforcing our sanctions regime, then they lose teeth and ultimately their deterrence effects. Enforcement is key. Canada has to do a much better job of enforcing our sanctions.

Ziad Aboultaif: On the same note, many diaspora communities, not just a single one—in this specific case, the Ukrainian community—are subject to interference, especially by Russian propaganda. We hope that this bill will curb the foreign interference using Canada's mainstream and ethnic media channels.

Knowing what this bill will include, how much will this assist or help to curb the interference and those influences? Basically, it's all kinds of harassment and other human rights violations against these given communities. I'm just giving an example of the Ukrainian community, but every other community can be subject to those kinds of violations. How can this bill help?

I will give this question to Mr. Kara-Murza.

• (1715)

Vladimir Kara-Murza: One of the most important aspects of the bill is that it contains a specific definition of what transnational repression is, because it's a multi-faceted phenomenon. It works in many different ways, from harassment and disinformation to actual physical attacks, as you know well. Frankly, it is high time that Canada puts a very firm red line that this is not something that will be acceptable going forward, and there will be real consequences against people, dictatorships or regimes in foreign countries if they engage in this kind of behaviour. There will be real accountability for this behaviour. Yes, I think this bill goes a very long way towards doing that.

Ziad Aboultaif: If there's a message—and I'm not putting anybody on the spot here—to us as parliamentarians and to any Canadian government in place, what would you say we need to do to make sure that we show some seriousness about how to deal with interference?

We are very vulnerable. We are open. We're a multicultural society. We have to deal with many threats from every agent out there: Russia, Iran, China and many other countries. The influence against certain communities is almost a daily story that we hear about. If there's a message to tell us, what would that be?

The Chair: Could we have a very quick response, please?

Vladimir Kara-Murza: It's very important to differentiate between cultures and nations on the one side and the regimes on the other, because the regimes always like to claim that they represent those nations, which they have no claim to, for obvious reasons. It's not about curtailing broadcasting in the Russian language or in Farsi or whatever, because that's what they will try to pretend: that this is an attack on the language and culture.

No, it's very important to draw the line clearly: Cultures, languages and the diversity of this country—the beauty and richness of this country—will always be welcome, but for those malicious attempts by these regimes to hide behind the cultures and languages to enact channels of propaganda and misinformation, those will be prevented in the most effective and strictest way possible.

The Chair: Thank you.

We go next to MP Mona Fortier.

You have five minutes.

[Translation]

Hon. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier—Gloucester, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for joining us today. This committee has been engaged in a very rigorous study for some time now, and we are very grateful to the witnesses for their participation.

We've been discussing a number of issues for nearly two hours now. For my part, I'll ask a question that's more open-ended. You may have an opportunity to bring up points that haven't been raised yet.

Do you think we should include certain limitations in this bill?

Do you see any gaps that we haven't discussed yet that you could share with us?

I will give all the witnesses an opportunity to answer the questions. I will give each of you about a minute to share your comments.

I'll start with Mr. Kolga, who is joining us by video conference.

[English]

Marcus Kolga: Thank you very much for the question.

No, I don't think there are any limitations that I'd place on this legislation, but I may suggest adding a private member's bill that was introduced in the Senate, Bill S-214, by Senator Donna Dasko. It is also an amendment to our sanctions legislation.

It essentially allows cabinet to make a decision in terms of asset seizure. It would complement the time limit that has been introduced in the current bill, Bill C-219, in compressing the times of applying that seizure. This is something that the committee could look at. Bill S-214 just passed third reading in the Senate. It may be a good idea to consider adding it.

• (1720)

Hon. Mona Fortier: Mr. Browder is next.

Sir William Browder: The one thing I would say is that we've talked a lot over the course of the last two hours about enforcement.

My experience in Canada—and for that matter, the United Kingdom and other places—is that the people who are tasked with enforcing these laws don't have resources to do the enforcement.

It's not a very expensive process to review sanctions and designation files and to make decisions. I suspect that.... I was talking a lot about how all these people come and make proposals for sanctions and never hear anything back from the government. Some of that may be political—that the government doesn't want to talk about certain issues—and some of it may be incompetence. There are not enough people looking at these files. They just sit somewhere in a dusty room.

There has been a lot of discussion over the years about how much money is available to the foreign affairs department to do this, but there need to be some quite explicit discussions and allocations of funding. We're not talking about huge amounts of money. We're talking about a few million dollars. That would make a big difference in terms of enforcement.

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you very much.

Next is Madame McInnes.

Kate McInnes: I identified a number of limitations and gaps in my written submission, as well as my initial spiel. If there's anything that you take away from what my addition here has been, it's that transnational repression is basically proxy-mediated here in Canada, as well as very often abroad.

The people who can tell you about those proxies and about the structures are people in Canada themselves and the victims themselves. Chinese students at universities or those who visit Persian or Rwandan cultural centres who experience transnational repression need to be here and sharing their views with you. There need to be channels for them to do so.

Thank you very much for your question.

[Translation]

Hon. Mona Fortier: Thank you.

What are your thoughts on this, Mr. Kara-Murza?

Vladimir Kara-Murza: I think it would be important to add one thing to this bill. We have already heard arguments regarding the term “prisoner of conscience” or “political prisoner”. It has been proposed to replace it with “human rights defender”. I think it's very important to retain the concept of “prisoner”, as human rights defenders are not necessarily always in prison, and political prisoners or prisoners of conscience are not necessarily always human rights defenders, as Mr. Browder has already said.

In my opinion, there is a way to avoid a situation where people would say that this is an arbitrary term, where they would wonder what it means because there would be different definitions to describe what a political prisoner or a prisoner of conscience is. I had found this information before you asked your question, Mrs. Fortier.

Mr. Chair, I don't know if this is allowed under the committee's rules, but, if possible, I would like to ask you to add to the record of this committee the resolutions that were adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. I'm talking about resolution 1900, which was adopted in 2012. It is published in English and French on the website of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Hon. Mona Fortier: If you have the document with you, you can just send it to the committee so that we can include it in our study.

Vladimir Kara-Murza: Okay, that's perfect.

I found this information on the website. It's the resolution that provides the definition of political prisoner. I'll read paragraph 3:

The Assembly reaffirms its support for these criteria, summed up as follows:

"A person deprived of his or her personal liberty is to be regarded as a 'political prisoner':

a. if the detention has been imposed in violation of one of the fundamental guarantees set out in the European Convention on Human Rights and its Protocols (ECHR), in particular freedom of thought, conscience and religion, freedom of expression and information, freedom of assembly and association;

b. if the detention has been imposed...

I won't take up any more time, but you can find this text on the website.

In my opinion, it would be very important to define what a prisoner of conscience is and what a political prisoner is.

Since Canada already has observer status with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, I think you can work from this definition. I know that human rights organizations in Russia, such as Memorial, have been working for many years now based on this definition of a political prisoner adopted by the Council of Europe.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Finally, we'll go to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Mr. Chair. In fact, the Bloc Québécois always has less speaking time than the other parties.

Ms. McInnes, I didn't have time to ask you any questions, precisely because I have less speaking time.

Regarding the aspect where parliamentarians could be responsible for imposing sanctions rather than the government, do you not see that as a step forward if Canada were to adopt such a mechanism?

• (1725)

[English]

Kate McInnes: I'm sorry. Can you repeat your question?

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: The bill allows parliamentary committees to adopt motions that would sanction entities or individuals.

Wouldn't the implementation of such a mechanism be a step forward for Canada?

[English]

Kate McInnes: Certainly it would, if there was some form of oversight to it. That's spoken as a true criminal defence lawyer, I know.

I hope there would be some level of oversight to ensure that the correct decisions are being made.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you for your answer.

Mr. Kara-Murza, my dear friend, I will let you have the last word. We have about a minute and a half left. If there is anything that hasn't been said, or if there is a way to convince people of the merits of this bill, I give you the opportunity to speak.

Vladimir Kara-Murza: Thank you for this opportunity, once again.

I wanted to conclude this meeting by saying that this is not just a formal process; these are not just resolutions, meetings or words. The words contained in this bill have a real and very significant impact on people's lives, especially on the lives of people who are imprisoned for political or religious reasons.

As I said at the beginning of this meeting, I personally support all the main provisions of this bill, but nothing is as important to me as the need for a public report from the Government of Canada regarding prisoners of conscience and political prisoners.

In response to the question Ms. Fortier asked, I would like to reiterate that I think it would be important to provide a definition of what a political prisoner is and what a prisoner of conscience is. Resolution 1900, adopted in 2012 by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, could serve as a basis. That work has already been done.

In closing, I would like to say that it is very important for every member of this committee to remember that what is happening here today will have a very real and significant impact on the lives of many people around the world. In many cases, this is about being able to save lives, and there is nothing more important than that.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much. That brings us to the end of the period for questioning.

I want to really thank all the witnesses for your time and testimonies. I want to particularly thank Mr. Kolga and Sir Browder on behalf of the committee. I know how late it is for both of you, as you're joining us from Europe. Thank you so much for your patience and generosity in giving of your time.

Thank you to both witnesses who are here in person.

I want to tell the committee that—if it's agreeable to all of you—we should meet informally with the visiting President of the Parliament of Greenland, who is expected to be in Canada. With your permission, I hope we can ask the clerk to organize an informal meeting with the President of the Greenland Parliament on Tuesday, June 9, in the morning.

Is that agreeable?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you.

Our next meeting will be on Tuesday, June 2, regarding the study on the security situation in the Balkans.

I adjourn the meeting. Thank you very much.

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