

**63 OVERVIEW REPORT: FEDERAL ENTITIES
APERÇU DE RAPPORT : ENTITÉS FÉDÉRALES
(Dann)**

1 Merci.

2 **LE GREFFIER:** Order, please. À l'ordre, s'il
3 vous plait.

4 This hearing is in recess until 1 o'clock
5 p.m.

6 La séance est en pause jusqu'à 13 heures de
7 l'après-midi.

8 --- Upon recessing at 11:43 a.m.

9 --- L'audience est suspendue à 11 h 43

10 --- Upon resuming at 12:59 p.m.

11 --- L'audience est reprise à 12 h 59

12 **THE REGISTRAR:** Order please. À l'ordre,
13 s'il vous plaît.

14 This sitting of the Foreign Interference
15 Commission is back in session. Cette séance de la
16 Commission sur l'ingérence étrangère est reprise.

17 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** So good afternoon. I'm
18 going to turn to the panel for the rest of the afternoon, so
19 just forgive me.

20 Bonjour.

21 **--- PANEL DISCUSSION: DIASPORA EXPERIENCES WITH ELECTORAL**
22 **INTERFERENCE/DISCUSSION DES PANÉLISTES: EXPÉRIENCES DIASPORA**
23 **AVEC L'INTERFÉRENCE ÉLECTORALE :**

24 **--- PANEL INTRODUCTION BY/INTRODUCTION DES PANÉLISTES PAR MS.**
25 **KATE McGRANN:**

26 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** My name is Kate McGrann;
27 I'm a member of the Commission counsel team.

28 This afternoon's panel is representatives of

1 diaspora groups; they'll be sharing their experiences and
2 those of their communities to provide information and context
3 through the Commission's Stage 1 hearings.

4 I'll introduce our panellists, and then we'll
5 begin with today's panel presentations.

6 Dr. Hamed Esmaeilion is a novelist, dentist,
7 human rights activist, and Director and spokesperson for the
8 Association of Families of PS752 Victims. Flight PS752 was
9 shot down in the early morning of January 8th, 2020, three
10 minutes after taking off from Tehran's Imam Khomeini
11 International Airport, by at least two missiles -- pardon me;
12 two missiles of Iranian's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

13 The Association of Families of PS752 Victims
14 seeks to unite grieving families; keep the memories of the
15 passengers alive; and seek justice.

16 Yuriy Novodvorskiy is a long-time critic of
17 the Russian regime, and a Director and founding member of the
18 Russian Canadian Democratic Alliance. The Russian Canadian
19 Democratic Alliance seeks to unite the Russian community in
20 Canada and to advocate against the Russian Regime.

21 Jaskaran Sandhu is a lawyer and cofounder of
22 Baaz News, which is a news outlet of record for Sikh and
23 Punjabi diaspora communities. Mr. Sandhu has been actively
24 involved in the Sikh community, with a particular focus on
25 advocacy for the last 15 years, including as a board member
26 and Executive Director of the World Sikh Organization.

27 Mehmet Tohti is a Uyghur-Canadian activist,
28 the Executive Director of the Uyghur Rights Advocacy Project

1 and cofounder and former Vice-President of the World Uyghur
2 Congress.

3 Grace Dai Wollensak is a National Director of
4 the Falun Dafa Association of Canada. She is the coauthor of
5 a report released by the Association, titled, *Foreign*
6 *Interference and Oppression of Falun Gong in Canada*. This
7 report details the instances of oppression experienced by
8 Falun Gong at the hands of foreign state actors of the
9 People's Republic of China.

10 She's also a member of the Canadian Coalition
11 on Human Rights in China, an initiative led by Amnesty
12 International. She's advocated for the human rights of Falun
13 Gong practitioners since 1999, and acts as a government media
14 contact on behalf of the Falun Gong community in Canada.

15 Unfortunately, Mr. Cheuk Kwan is prevented
16 from joining us today by unexpected circumstances.
17 Fortunately for us, we are instead joined by Ms. Winnie Ng,
18 who is a long-time advocate for the Chinese-Canadian
19 community, and, among other things, serves as co-chair of the
20 Toronto Association for Democracy in China.

21 With those impressive introductions out of
22 the way, turn to our first panellist, Dr. Esmaeilion.

23 Would you please describe your community or
24 communities?

25 **--- STATEMENT BY/DÉCLARATION PAR DR. HAMED ESMAEILION :**

26 **DR. HAMED ESMAEILION:** Thank you very much.

27 On behalf of the Association of Families of
28 Flight PS752 Victims, I want to thank the Madam Commissioner

1 and her team for their efforts in this all-important
2 endeavour and giving me the opportunity to offer my
3 testimony.

4 Like many in the Chinese and Russian and
5 Indian communities, several hundred thousand Iranians have
6 made Canada their home. They're deeply concerned by the
7 increasing threat posed to Canadian democracy, our civil
8 society, and the communities who strive to participate in the
9 cultural mosaic that makes this country so special.

10 I would like to first start by emphasizing to
11 this Commission the urgent importance of officially include
12 Islamic Republic of Iran in the terms of events in the
13 mandate of this Commission. But this inclusion, this
14 Commission will be able to garner the cooperation and input
15 of other security, diplomatic, and intelligence organizations
16 in order to reach a more accurate and comprehensive view of
17 the extent of the threat the Islamic regime poses to Canadian
18 society and the Iranian-Canadian community.

19 As we all know, Iran is fundamentally a
20 diverse, multiethnic society with people of different faiths
21 and ethnicities making up the rich cultural tapestry of
22 Iran's national identity.

23 The first immigrants from Iran are reported
24 to have arrived in Canada in 1901. By 1979, the Iranian
25 community in Canada was no more than a few thousand scattered
26 around the country. In aftermath of the revolution and
27 Islamic takeover of the government, the Iranian community in
28 Canada has grown exponentially. Current estimates indicate

1 that there are over 400,000 Iranians residing in Canada with
2 a high concentration of Iranian-Canadians in Ontario.

3 While initially most Iranians are refugees
4 that fled the brutal repression and persecution of the
5 Islamic Republic regime over the past four decades, Iranian
6 residents of Canada include students, academics,
7 entrepreneurs, and skilled workers from all walks of life.

8 The Islamic regime has not been oblivious to
9 these facts, and since the 1980s, the Islamic regime has
10 focused on Canada for various reasons, including, among
11 others, Canada's vicinity to the United States and the
12 opportunities they may seek in the political and clandestine
13 agenda.

14 In the aftermath of what became known as the
15 Woman, Life, Freedom uprising in September 2022 that was
16 sparked by the brutal murder of Mahsa Jina Amini, Iranian-
17 Canadians made history by coming together in the largest
18 gathering in a political rally organized by my association
19 and other activists in Toronto. On October 1st, 2022, over
20 50,000 people came together in Richmond Hill to express their
21 solidarity with the brave young men and women in Iran and
22 their opposition to the brutal Islamic regime in Iran.

23 While the majority of Iranians who have
24 immigrated to Canada are secular, they have not demonstrated
25 a clear tendency to organize around ideological or partisan
26 institutions. Despite the growing number of immigrants from
27 Iran, engagement in the Canadian democratic institutions has
28 been sporadic at best, with only a handful of Iranians

1 finding their way into provincial or federal political
2 positions. Ontario has had a few MPPs and provincial
3 ministers from among Iranian Canadians, and so far only two
4 MPs have reached the federal Parliament. We are yet to have
5 any ministers in the federal government from members of our
6 community.

7 Behind the political arena, Iranians have
8 made remarkable progress in academia, business, arts and
9 culture, medicine, and many other fields in Canada. This,
10 unfortunately, has brought Canada and the Iranian community
11 in this country squarely in the crosshairs of the Islamic
12 regime and its nefarious plan to not only cause division and
13 mayhem in the Iranian-Canadian community but to also disrupt
14 the Canadian political system in an effort to peddle
15 influence in favour of its policies. I will talk about these
16 in my next comments.

17 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Before I turn to our next
18 question, I have been reminded that I need to slow down so
19 that the translators who are assisting us can follow us and
20 translate along. So I'm reminding myself, and I'll also take
21 this moment to remind our panellists that if you could slow
22 down, that would be very useful.

23 Turning back to you, would you please
24 describe the forms of foreign interference that your
25 community experiences?

26 **DR. HAMED ESMAEILION:** To pick up where I
27 left off in this first part of my comments, I would like to
28 bring into focus how the Islamic regime in Iran seeks to

1 interfere in the political system of democratic countries
2 along the activity -- along its activities to disrupt and
3 divide the Iranian communities around the world.

4 As I noted earlier, the Islamic regime has
5 demonstrated to have a special interest in Canada, and as
6 such, it has made efforts on many levels to further its
7 agenda using the leverage it can muster through the Iranian
8 community in this country.

9 We can consider this effort in two main
10 categories: first, to interfere in Canadian political affairs
11 in service of the regime's interest; and second, to monitor
12 and survey the Iranian community in Canada and identify
13 political and civil rights activists who seek to promote
14 democracy in their home country, but also, to use its
15 operatives to intimidate, harass, sometimes even threaten
16 community members with the intent of blocking any dissent or
17 organized efforts to expose the corruption of the regime in
18 the international arena.

19 Furthermore, there are several reports that
20 have become public, exposing terrorist conspiracies
21 throughout Canada aimed at the United States that have been
22 planned, funded, and directed by the Islamic regime in Iran.

23 As an example, two years ago there was
24 reports about a kidnapping plot of a well-known reporter in
25 the United States and there were reports that there were
26 three Canadians on the list of the kidnappers, but we never
27 heard any report from our government or any report from
28 intelligence services who those people were and what was the

1 plan. There is an existing indictment about that in the
2 United States.

3 Let me give you other examples for each of
4 these main categories that merely represent the tip of a much
5 larger and nefarious iceberg of interference by the Islamic
6 regime in Canada.

7 If I go to my personal experiences, I've been
8 targeted for -- on social media. I've been targeted in
9 Canada if I go to some experiences, verbal attacks, physical
10 attacks. Like 20th of May last year was one of the examples.
11 I'm sure police has a report of that, and we had a gathering
12 in Toronto.

13 When I was in Toronto in last October in
14 downtown Toronto, there was a person approached me, he was on
15 a motorcycle, and then he stopped and he was searching his
16 pockets for something, and then I had to leave the area, go
17 back to the hotel, report to the police. And RCMP and
18 police, I'm sure they have the reports. They were only a few
19 examples.

20 Like, when I go to some names of the former
21 officials of the Islamic Republic, I can say that a former
22 Minister of Islamic Republic, when he was here, he threatened
23 me too. So I will get to that.

24 But once when I went to a grocery store, in
25 the spring of two years ago, when I went back, I had two flat
26 tires on one side. I reported that to the police and still I
27 don't know what RCMP did or what your police did, and I
28 didn't get any report back.

1 So about what they do in Iran. My parents,
2 they're banned to leave the country. My mother is 73 years
3 old. My father is 74. They planned to travel to Canada in
4 November to participate in the fourth anniversary of the
5 downing of Flight PS752. Their passport was confiscated and
6 now they know that they can't leave the country, at least for
7 six months. We don't know what happens after six months.

8 And I can say about other family members of
9 the victims in Iran, also they have been tortured, they have
10 been prisoned. And we have several reports supporting that
11 fact.

12 A very small minority of Iranians in Canada
13 are engaged directly or indirectly as either sympathizers or
14 sometimes even overt operatives of the Islamic regime. It's
15 a small minority, however, leverage is financial advantages
16 that mostly originate from inside Iran and political backing
17 advantages that -- political backing from the Islamic regime
18 to create institutions disguised as community advocacy
19 groups, media, social media, or even research institutes, but
20 effectively seek to undermine the majority of the community
21 that opposes the regime, as well as to meddle with the
22 influence Canadians or influence Canadian government and non-
23 government institutions in favour of the regime's agenda.

24 The level of sophistication of these plans is
25 highly disconcerting to our community and many of us are
26 making our best efforts to identify and expose these covert
27 and overt activities that we find highly dangerous and
28 disruptive. Hence the importance of including the Islamic

1 regime in the Terms of Reference of this Commission.

2 This small minority has demonstrated the
3 intent and capacity to cause division in the Iranian Canadian
4 community while creating an atmosphere of fear and
5 intimidation here in this country.

6 Many Iranians who participate in public
7 events, such as the massive October 1st rally, wore masks to
8 avoid being identified by the regime operatives. A
9 documentary that was made about Flight PS752 had to anonymize
10 many crew members in the final credits of the film because
11 they were in fear of persecution and threats by regime
12 operatives.

13 Another highly concerning example is a
14 multitude of revelations of the increasing number of Islamic
15 regime officials who have sought and been granted permanent
16 residency in Canada or got visas to come to Canada.

17 When I go to examples, we have the person,
18 Mahmoud Reza Khavari. He is a former banker and he was the
19 head of National Bank. He immigrated to Canada in 2011 and
20 he was involved in corruption. And I'm sure the Canadian
21 Government and the intelligence services, they have reports
22 about him.

23 We have Morteza Talaei. He was the former
24 Chief of Police of Tehran. He was seen in Richmond hill two
25 years ago working out in a gym. This is a person who was the
26 Chief of Police of Tehran at the time of killing Zahra
27 Kazemi. He was the Chief of Police who founded Morality
28 Police in Iran, the same organization who killed Mahsa Amini

1 and other innocent girls in Iran.

2 We have Hassan Ghazizadeh Hashemi, the former
3 Minister of the Islamic Regime that was seen vacationing in
4 Montreal, Canada last August.

5 I go to that threat right now. When I raised
6 the issue on Twitter and I wrote to our government, this man
7 had an interview with some media outlets inside Iran and he
8 said:

9 "When I come back to Iran, the
10 actions of Hamed Esmaeilion and the
11 foreign media will be retaliated."

12 (As read)

13 But he was free to walk in Montreal, go visit
14 Casa Loma in Toronto a day after, and finally he went back
15 without any consequences.

16 Now I know that he can't come back to Canada,
17 but we have concerns that how a former Minister of the
18 Islamic Regime can come to this country, threaten the
19 activists here, and just freely go back?

20 I'll go to another name. Son of the current
21 speaker of the Islamic Parliament in Iran, Es'hagh Ghalibaf.
22 He even initiated a lawsuit against the Canadian Government
23 to obtain a visa to come to this country. Hopefully -- you
24 know, I'm happy that we heard his visa finally got rejected
25 after the outcry of the community.

26 Another person is Iran's representative in
27 ICAO, International Civil Aviation Organization. He lives in
28 Montreal. Farhad Parvaresh. Not only because of denial and

1 his role after the downing of Flight PS752 in misinformation
2 campaigns, but this person had connections with Quds Force,
3 is the person who was the head of Iran Air for years, for
4 smuggling weapons to Syria with commercial airplanes. But
5 this person is in Montreal and he is representing the Islamic
6 Regime.

7 These are merely the high-profile names that
8 have been exposed and unfortunately indicate the severity and
9 the scale of this highly dangerous problem for Canada and the
10 Iranian Canadian community.

11 I would like to emphasize that these are not
12 benign attempts by regime officials to seek a better life in
13 Canada, but serious indicators of money laundering at best,
14 but also efforts to increase the presence and influence of
15 regime operatives in Canada.

16 I share our community's concerns that there
17 may be thousands of other lesser-known regime affiliates,
18 officials, and operatives, who have found their way to Canada
19 and the threat their presence poses to our society and
20 communities.

21 Last but not least, an example of how regime
22 operatives have breached the very depths of our democratic
23 institutions in order to interfere and have an influence.

24 Just recently, a member of the Iranian
25 community in Canada sought to run for as a member of the
26 federal Parliament. The intensity of the smear campaign
27 against him went far beyond the normal fervor of political
28 competition in Canada. We believe that this is indicative of

1 a much more sophisticated and multi-layered attempt by the
2 regime and its operatives to hinder the participation of
3 Iranians opposed to the regime in the Canadian democratic
4 institutions.

5 On the other hand, there are examples of
6 organized support for those who are known to be aligned with
7 the Islamic regime in Iran. There are many alarming reports
8 of a certain member of the federal Parliament to be
9 supporting regime sympathizers and even meeting with regime
10 officials and Parliamentarians in Canada.

11 Again, these are just the tip of the iceberg
12 that is visible to us, and we fear that these examples are
13 indicative of a much more serious and dangerous problem that
14 must be investigated and dealt with.

15 Let me end with another example. The Islamic
16 regime has a stranglehold on every aspect of social,
17 political, economic, cultural and civil life in Iran. The
18 sports is, of course, no exception. Every sport category is
19 closely monitored and influenced by various security,
20 intelligence, political and even military arms of the regime.

21 All international sporting events are
22 carefully orchestrated by the intelligence, propaganda and
23 military establishment of the Islamic regime. Every sport
24 team, most especially soccer teams, are accompanied by
25 multitude of those operatives who not only seek to direct and
26 monitor the athletes, but also disguise the state covert
27 operations under the guise of sporting events. For example,
28 the entourage of a given soccer team usually reaches over 50

1 individuals in number, but nearly one-third of those
2 individuals having no connections with the given sporting
3 events.

4 Shortly after the downing of flight PS752
5 where 177 innocent civilian lives, including that of my wife
6 and nine-year-old daughter, was taken, we heard rumours of a
7 so-called friendly soccer match that was planned to take
8 place between the Canadian and the Islamic Republic national
9 soccer teams. It was planned to be held in B.C. Place in
10 Vancouver.

11 Against the backdrop of the tragic murder of
12 so many Iranian Canadians, this was outrageous to us, the
13 families of the victims, but also to the community as a
14 whole. Given the lack of diplomatic relations between Canada
15 and the Islamic Republic regime, one wonders who was behind
16 the planning and execution of such an event.

17 Who were the liaisons on behalf of the
18 Islamic regime here in Canada? Who supported or sponsored
19 the event, and why? We were asking how were the visas for
20 the entourage being processed.

21 Ultimately, we believe that this was an
22 attempt to sports wash the criminality of the Islamic regime
23 and to bury the story of flight PS752.

24 Fortunately, the community came together and
25 posed not only serious questions surrounding this nefarious
26 plan, but also helped to put an end and cancel the event.
27 Again, this example demonstrates the level of sophistication
28 and nefariousness of the Islamic regime's scheme to influence

1 and meddle the community and political discourse in Canada.

2 Thank you.

3 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** The last question for now
4 is, would you please describe the impact that foreign
5 interference has had on your community?

6 **DR. HAMED ESMAILION:** Yeah. As I explained
7 before, I notice every time we go to rallies several members
8 of the community, they wear masks, sunglasses, hats to not be
9 identified.

10 There are reports that when they travel to
11 Iran, the cell phones get confiscated, they get persecuted,
12 interrogated. Their family members are under pressure. Even
13 we have had members who met Canadian Parliament members here
14 and their family members in Iran have been pressured or have
15 been interrogated.

16 So this is the least that I can say but, as I
17 said before, it doesn't let the members of the community to
18 get engaged in -- especially in political levels. We have
19 organizations here that they don't have any relations with
20 the civic organizations in the community, with the cultural
21 organizations in the community like Tirgan civic association,
22 civic organizations like us or even political members of the
23 community like our Parliament member, Mr. Ali Ehsassi, but
24 they are everywhere and they get funded by -- unfortunately,
25 by our governments.

26 We have reports of some organizations that
27 have been funded by Department of National Defence or
28 Canadian Armed Forces. And these are the questions on the

1 table, that who are these people and what are intelligence
2 services organizations they know about because the
3 community's fearful to ask and to act because we know that
4 they have endless financial resources and they can initiate
5 lawsuits against everyone.

6 Even now, when I'm testifying right now, I
7 have to be very careful because we are ordinary people and
8 it's not easy to fight with some organizations that they have
9 financial resources and they know people and they get the
10 best support not only from Iran, from other countries like
11 Russia, China, the government of Russia, government of China.
12 And I hope that this Commission will start to add Iran to the
13 terms of references.

14 One of the other things that I have to say,
15 when we go to Department of Justice in United States, we go
16 to website, there's several people that you see that have
17 been charged with foreign interference, but we don't see any
18 Iranian name in Canada that have been pursued by Department
19 of Justice.

20 Recently, there was a person, Salman Salmani.
21 He was the Deputy Minister of Interior Affairs in Iran. At
22 the time of flood in November in 2019, 1,500 people got
23 massacred in the streets of Iran and this person came to
24 Canada and got -- obtained a visa and he was here.

25 Like fortunately, the Canadian government,
26 they found him, but now they're deporting him instead of
27 putting him on a trial for crimes against humanity. This is
28 what the families of the victims have asked for several

1 months and our association is supporting, too.

2 When they see there's no consequences, I
3 mean, the community doesn't feel safe and they're worried.
4 And when these -- you know, these names that I mentioned,
5 when these terrible people are here in this country and when
6 they see that some organizations are very active, that's why
7 the community doesn't feel safe to participate in lots of
8 activities.

9 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Thank you very much.

10 We'll now turn to our next panelist, Mr.
11 Yuriy Novodvorskiy.

12 Mr. Novodvorskiy, would you please describe
13 your community or communities?

14 **--- STATEMENT BY/DÉCLARATION PAR MR. YURIY NOVODVORSKIY:**

15 **MR. YURIY NOVODVORSKIY:** Bonjour, and good
16 afternoon, everyone. Thank you for having me here.

17 My name is Yuriy Novodvorskiy, and I'm here
18 to represent the RCDA, the Russian Canadian Democratic
19 Alliance.

20 I was born in Russia, but for the most
21 several decades have lived first in the U.S. and now as a
22 permanent resident in Canada. I have been opposed to the
23 Russian regime for many years, but only became involved in
24 activism in 2022 following the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

25 And in September 2022, we connected with
26 other Russian activists across Canada in different cities to
27 create the RCDA, an organization based on the values of
28 democracy, human rights, anti-imperialism and, in particular,

1 sovereignty, and the rights and the freedoms of its people
2 against the foreign interference and the repression.

3 Thank you very much.

4 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Thank you.

5 Dr. Esmaeilion?

6 **--- FINAL REMARKS BY/REMARQUES FINALES PAR DR. HAMED**

7 **ESMAEILION:**

8 **DR. HAMED ESMAEILION:** Thank you very much.

9 I want to thank you again for inviting me.

10 And the last thing I want to say, you asked
11 my friends here about the level of support they got from
12 different organizations here.

13 So we work and cooperate with the government
14 for taking the case of Flight PS752 to the International
15 Court of Justice. It was submitted last year. This year
16 they submitted another case in International Civil Aviation
17 Organization. Our request for supporting our case in
18 International Criminal Court is still pending. Our request
19 to put IRGC in the list of terrorist organizations is still
20 pending.

21 It's very important for the community to see
22 the entirety of this organization to be listed as a terrorist
23 organization.

24 If I go to RCMP, from what I heard from my
25 friends here and from our experiences, okay, RCMP didn't open
26 a criminal case for PS752, let alone protecting the activists
27 or really any Canadian activists. That's why I hear from
28 friends that they have turned their houses to fortresses with

1 cameras and, like, security tricks, because you're on your
2 own and there is no protection.

3 And the last thing, it's about IRCC. I
4 mentioned a banker, a chief of police, the Minister, the
5 current Speaker of the House of the Islamic regime. They
6 have -- they're already here, or they've been here, or
7 they're planning to come here. That's why we have deep
8 concerns that we don't have any political relationship.
9 These two countries, they don't have open embassies. But why
10 we see the flow of Islamic regime officials in this country?
11 And this is the reason that the community is not getting
12 involved in lots of activities.

13 I urge the Commission again that -- to add
14 Islamic regime of Iran to those rogue states that are in the
15 Terms of Reference here. Thank you.

16 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Thank you.

17 And turning to Zoom. Ms. Ng?

18 And it may be that she is not with us. And
19 by that, I mean she's no longer in Zoom.

20 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** I just want to make sure
21 that it's not a technical issue.

22 **MS. KATE McGRANN:** Yeah. It seems that she's
23 no longer in the Zoom platform.

24 **COMMISSIONER HOGUE:** Oh, okay. So we are at
25 the end of our day.

26 I want to thank you all deeply. Having
27 accepted to come forward and share your views, as well as
28 your community's views and experiences, in my mind, is very,