

**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 8<sup>th</sup>, 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 1<sup>st</sup>, 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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,