



House of Commons
CANADA

Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

SDIR • NUMBER 008 • 1st SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, December 12, 2006

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Chair

Mr. Jason Kenney

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

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• (1110)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, CPC)): Colleagues, this morning we resume the study of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights on the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development with respect to our study of the Canada-China bilateral dialogue.

We have with us the very distinct honour of a special witness in Madam Rebiya Kadeer, who is president of the International Uyghur Human Rights and Democracy Foundation and I believe also now newly elected as president of the World Uyghur Congress. Ms. Kadeer will have an opportunity to make a presentation. She is generally regarded as the leader of the Uyghur people.

It is a particular honour for us to have you here, Madam Kadeer.

Joining Madam Kadeer at the table is Mr. Mehmet Tohti, who is president of the Canadian Uyghur Association. Madam Kadeer's statement is being distributed in its writing, but it will be translated by her translator.

Please go ahead.

Ms. Rebiya Kadeer (President, International Uyghur Human Rights and Democracy Foundation) (Interpretation): First of all, I would like to thank Mr. Jason Kenny for organizing this hearing today.

Also, I would like to express my special gratitude for all those interested parties who are here, who care for the human rights of the Uyghur people, and it is my really great pleasure to come here today to explain to you the human rights violations the Uyghur people are facing in China.

We are the Uyghur people. We are not Chinese. The Chinese government occupied our homeland in 1949, and after that the Chinese government changed our homeland's name from East Turkestan into Xinjiang. We are an autonomous region. Xinjiang means new territory in Chinese.

Our territory is nearly two million square kilometres in size. The fate of the Uyghur people is very similar to the fate of the Tibetans. We are both under Chinese rule, but because the Chinese have covered up our situation, we haven't been able to raise the case of the Uyghur people's human rights violations in the world as successfully as our Tibetan brothers.

Because of interpretation and language issues, now I'm going to turn to my interpreter, who is going to read my full statement for you. Before my interpreter reads the statement, I would like to express my greatest appreciation to the people and the Government of Canada for raising the case of the Uyghur people and even helping gain my release from a dark Chinese prison.

So thank you.

Statement of Ms. Rebiya Kadeer: Ladies and gentlemen of the parliamentary Subcommittee on International Human Rights, thank you so much for inviting me here today to speak about the human rights situation being faced by the Uyghur people in our homeland, East Turkestan, a land that has been under China's administration since 1949 and that has since been renamed the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

This is the first time I have been to Canada, and I'd like to take a moment to tell you what an honour and what a pleasure it is for me to be here. I hope you are aware that all over the world, the word "Canada" invokes in the minds of people, both free and oppressed, an image of a thriving, democratic, peaceful land where the rights and identity of all people are respected and protected. This is an extraordinary achievement on your part and one that I'm sure you as Canadian parliamentarians and citizens are rightly proud.

Personally, during my short stay here, I have already been struck by how well this multi-ethnic, multilingual, multicultural society functions. This society is of course founded on the ideals of respecting and protecting the individual's rights and identity, ideals that are sustained and nurtured by Canada's transparent and inclusive institutions.

The Uyghur people also come from a tradition of a multi-ethnic, multilingual, multicultural society. The government of the first East Turkestan republic, founded in 1933, included people of Uyghur, Uzbek, Kazakh, and Kyrgyz ethnicity, even though the population of East Turkestan was overwhelmingly Uyghur. The first East Turkestan republic was the first democratic Muslim republic in the world at that time outside Turkey and was defined by that crucial feature of any healthy democracy: when a majority rules, a minority is still safe and included. During the time of the first East Turkestan Republic, even the tiniest population was embraced into broader society.

●(1115)

Ladies and gentlemen of the subcommittee, I am reluctant to define and describe people solely in terms of their race and ethnicity. However, this is the way I was brought up and how all Uyghurs, for two generations and counting, have been brought up. This is how we have been taught to understand our world.

We are Uyghurs. Therefore, we are second-class citizens in our own homeland, East Turkestan. They are Han Chinese. They run the government. Therefore, they have the better jobs, better schools, better clinics, and most of all, better lives. If you go to East Turkestan today, you will see for yourself, as clear as night and day, that the Han have, and the Uyghurs have not.

One of the first messages a Uyghur child learns is that Uyghurs are an ethnic minority and that the Han Chinese are the majority, even in those few places in the southern part of our homeland where Uyghurs still constitute over 90% of the population. A Uyghur child learns from a very young age that the Uyghur language is inferior to the Chinese language. Uyghur history is taught as a footnote to the longer and richer history of China. Uyghur culture is weak and in need of so-called Chinese protection. Look at the destruction wreaked on China's own culture, never mind the culture of Uyghurs and the Tibetans. Would you, as Canadians, want to have Canada's culture protected by China?

The Uyghur people are even expected to be eternally grateful that they are protected from themselves by the benevolence of the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese government. In other words, our so-called minority ethnic status, and all the baggage of inferiority that comes with it, has been assigned to us by the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese government.

We reject that status. We reject the identity that the Chinese government has assigned to us. We unapologetically reject the role of being merely child-like innocents who express our naive gratitude to the Chinese Communist Party by wearing gaudy costumes, singing songs, and dancing on the tables at banquets for the entertainment of our Chinese masters.

That is the root of the problem. We reject what the Chinese authorities want us to be. The Chinese political system is completely unable and unwilling to accommodate us as a result. That was the Chinese government's problem with me personally. I played the system in China, and I became the seventh wealthiest person in the whole of the People's Republic of China. I was a member of China's so-called Parliament. I was a senior government adviser. But as soon as I stopped playing the Chinese game, and as soon as I started to use my wealth and influence to offer help to the Uyghur people—help that was not forthcoming from the Chinese authorities—my rapid downfall began.

As I am sure you all know, I was sent to prison on trumped-up political charges. Now the legacy continues with one of my sons, who was sent to prison a couple of weeks ago for seven years, also on trumped-up charges. Another son is due to be tried soon on charges of subversion, which could mean a lifetime in prison for him. We have it on good authority that he has been severely beaten in detention. Trial proceedings against him will probably be delayed until he has recovered.

Uyghurs who insist on being Uyghurs are dissidents in Beijing's eyes. We are subversives or separatists, even terrorists, as far as Beijing is concerned. We are treated with extreme prejudice by the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese government. We are not Chinese Muslims, as the western press often describes us, and we are not Chinese Uyghurs, as the Chinese press often describes us. We are simply Uyghurs.

It is our rejection of China's version of the Uyghur people that has been the cause of the catalogue of human rights abuses against us. These abuses are only now starting to be systematically documented.

The second East Turkestan Republic, which lasted from 1945 until 1949, was the last time the Uyghur people could speak, pray, socialize, and simply exist as they saw fit in their ancestral homeland. Since 1949, the Chinese government has tried everything to eliminate our culture.

●(1120)

Ladies and gentlemen of the subcommittee, I'm aware that saying the Chinese government is trying to eliminate Uyghur culture can seem overly emotive, and that I run the risk of being accused of exaggeration; however, the evidence is compelling. I need not repeat that evidence here for the benefit of the subcommittee. You are no doubt fully aware of the scale and nature of the rights violations being perpetrated against the Uyghur people; otherwise, I would not be here today.

The main purpose of being here today is to discuss what can be done by the Canadian government to help improve the human rights situation faced by the Uyghur people.

Ladies and gentlemen of the subcommittee, the Uyghur people are already heavily indebted to the Canadian government for the recognition and support you have given us. There is a large and thriving Uyghur community here in Canada—Uyghur people who have fled oppression at home, who were offered and accepted sanctuary here, and who today are among the proudest new citizens of this great nation.

That naturally brings us to the case of Huseyin Celil, the Canadian Uyghur currently in Chinese detention. I have no suggestions for how the Canadian government could handle his case better and with more integrity than it is already doing. The Chinese government's treatment of Mr. Celil and the Chinese government's decision to ignore or flout diplomatic protocol and standards in his case are quite typical of the Chinese government's reaction to being legitimately challenged on its human rights record.

The best recommendation we have in this case is for the Canadian government to keep pressing China for consular access to Mr. Celil, which would be the first step toward reviewing the fake charges against him and, hopefully, securing his release back to his young family here in Canada as soon as possible.

On the back of the Huseyin Celil case, we would recommend that Canada should make the human rights of the Uyghur people a top priority in its bilateral relations with the People's Republic of China. Canada's voice is uniquely authoritative in the field of human rights. The Uyghur people's plight is unique in that it not only encompasses the whole spectrum of human rights violations perpetrated against all vulnerable groups in the People's Republic of China, but also has a fundamental bearing on the stability of the entire Central Asian region.

To that end, we also recommend that the Canadian government do what it can to help champion and broker discussions between the Chinese government and the World Uyghur Congress to discuss how best to address and resolve the problems of growing Uyghur despair and discontent in our homeland, East Turkestan.

We would recommend that CIDA continue its invaluable work with HIV/AIDS and environmental projects in particular in East Turkestan, with a possible view to increasing funding for HIV/AIDS projects in response to recent reports of a surge in HIV infections in East Turkestan.

With such a large Uyghur community in Canada, we recommend that funding or other forms of assistance be offered to our sole organization here, the Uyghur Canadian Association, so that the UCA can be an effective and responsible partner to the Canadian government in its ongoing work with Uyghur asylees and its humanitarian projects in East Turkestan.

We would also recommend that the Canadian government send, possibly, a fact-finding mission to East Turkestan with a special focus on the human rights situation of the Uyghur people. The findings of this mission, depending on the levels of access and the contact permitted by the Chinese authorities, could be included as a matter of course in governmental and commercial communications with Chinese interlocutors by representatives of Canada.

We would recommend that Canada offer asylum to any Uyghurs who are cleared for release from the U.S. naval detention facility at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba.

We would also recommend—I would personally plead—that the Canadian government do absolutely everything in its power to ensure the false charges against my sons are dropped and that they are released immediately and unconditionally.

• (1125)

Ladies and gentlemen of the subcommittee, thank you so much for the opportunity to come here today and to submit these recommendations. Thank you all for attending this hearing today.

The Chair: Thank you.

Before we begin with questions, I'd like to take care of a couple of things. First of all, it was my intention when we originally discussed this to have Mr. Tohti as a witness. He didn't end up on the witness list. He was originally a witness in an earlier hearing and we decided to move him to this hearing, so he could appear with Mrs. Kadeer.

I won't ask you, Mehmet, to make a statement.

If any of the committee members have questions about the Canada-China dialogue, I think Mr. Tohti, who is a signatory of the

letter to the Prime Minister, will be well suited to respond to that issue.

Secondly, I'd like to acknowledge the presence in the gallery of Kamila Celil, Mr. Huseyin Celil's wife.

Welcome to Ottawa and welcome to the committee. We wish your husband well.

Thirdly, we began almost 20 minutes late. We had initially scheduled for this to be only a one-hour meeting, but I'd like the committee's support in perhaps some extension of time, so that we all have a chance to get to questions. As well, there is, under committee business, a notice of motion.

We will begin with Mr. Cotler and our question period.

• (1130)

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like as well to welcome you, Ms. Kadeer, to this committee today. You are here, as has elsewhere been described and what has appropriately been described, as the mother of the Uyghur nation. As someone who has followed your case and cause, I want to state as well that I regret your own personal ordeal of imprisonment and that now of your two sons.

As you summed it up by way of analogy, your fate is very similar to that of the Tibetan people, though I believe the condition and the fate of the Uyghur nation is not as well known, and we have to raise awareness of the situation of the Uyghur people.

I must say that you've been an excellent witness. You've actually made some very specific recommendations as to what this committee can do—for example, to press China for consular access to Mr. Celil, to put the whole question of the Uyghur people and the human rights of the Uyghur people on the agenda of Canada-China bilateral relations; to have the Chinese government enter into discussions with the World Uyghur Congress; the CIDA work; a fact-finding mission that we should be sending; and that the false charges be dropped against your sons. I think you've given us a very good inventory of what we need to do.

Let me ask one question. Perhaps you might elaborate upon it.

I know that our chairman, Mr. Kenney, has been very active, among others—singularly active—in terms of trying to seek the release of Mr. Celil. Is there anything in particular that you wish to recommend that this committee might be able to do in that regard in support of Mr. Kenney's work in this matter?

Ms. Rebiya Kadeer (Interpretation): Normally, the response of the Chinese government to a soft approach is to listen to Canadian or foreign concerns, just pat their shoulders, just smile, be nice, let the time go by so that they can waste as much time as possible. That's usually the Chinese approach to foreign inquiries.

For example, one good thing the members of the U.S. Congress did on behalf of my children was that some 72 U.S. congressmen and women signed a letter and specifically sent it to the Chinese President Hu Jintao. That put a lot of pressure on the president, so it helped to gain the release of my two children.

I believe that if the members of the Canadian Parliament could also draft and sign a letter sent specifically to Chinese President Hu Jintao asking him to release Mr. Celil, it would play a big role. The Canadian government should not be soft on the case of Mr. Celil, because otherwise the Chinese government will not take Canada seriously.

It seems the Chinese government has been using trade as a weapon to threaten other nations so that other nations bend their knees to Chinese demands. Actually, the big western trading partners, countries like Canada, should not bend their knees because of trade, because the Chinese government has more to lose if there is any kind of trade problem than Canada or any other country. So the Canadian government or other countries should not be too worried about China's trade threat, but instead should press forward.

Thank you.

• (1135)

The Chair: Madam St-Hilaire.

[Translation]

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Thank you, Madam President, for joining us here this morning.

I have to say that this is basically the first time since we began our hearings that we've been given a clear, concise overview of the situation. I want to thank you for that. I think you were spot on when you said the Chinese government's approach to everything is to just smile. That's an image that constantly flashes through my mind.

My colleague aptly summarized the situation. I would like you to give us a clearer, more direct mandate. I understand that you'll be meeting later with Prime Minister Harper. I can't say what the outcome of this meeting will be. Perhaps it will be a private, or a semi-private meeting. I really don't know. After the meeting, I'd like you to report back to Mr. Kenney so that in turn he can ask the subcommittee to take up your cause and be your voice. I would like us to take up your cause if Mr. Harper is reluctant to take the steps you want him to take. As a subcommittee, perhaps we can do something more, if Mr. Harper chooses not to call for Mr. Celil's release. That's basically what I wanted to ask you.

Welcome to Canada and good luck. The Quebec nation is firmly behind you.

[English]

Ms. Rebiya Kadeer (Interpretation): Thank you very much for what you suggest.

Of course, raising the case of Mr. Huseyin Celil, and not just raising it but demanding that the Chinese government release him immediately and unconditionally, is critical; otherwise the Chinese government can do anything in its prison and may even just torture him to death. It's going to be really terrible if he's tortured or just dies in prison.

Mr. Huseyin Celil is a Canadian citizen, so the Canadian government should absolutely demand his immediate and unconditional release from Chinese custody.

• (1140)

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire: Thank you.

The Chair: Because the interpretation is taking additional time and because we might have to deal with further committee business that could be a complex question, I'm going to decide to extend, if necessary, to 12:30. Because people have adjusted their schedules to finish at 12, we'll try to stick to that as much as possible, but we also have this interpretation issue.

I forgot to mention at the top, as well, that I'd like to invite members of the committee to a reception that I'll be hosting in honour of Madame Kadeer this evening, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., in the East Block.

Mr. Menzies.

Mr. Ted Menzies (MacLeod, CPC): I'll start off. Thank you.

First of all, thank you so much for coming and sharing this most enlightening information with us. We do appreciate that.

Just so you know, on the topic of Mr. Celil, our government—and I'm sure this is shared with all of our colleagues—raises this issue whenever we have an opportunity.

I met with a member of Parliament from China, not this last weekend but the weekend before, and I once again raised the issue. I said it's very concerning for us to have a Canadian citizen in a jail in China.

Your comments about CIDA interested me. Can you tell me what CIDA, our Canadian International Development Agency, is doing in your country and what they're able to accomplish? Hopefully we are accomplishing some things. You spoke about HIV and AIDS. Can you share with us what some of the concerns are, what we may do better?

The Chair: Mr. Tohti, I thought you might be better positioned to answer that question.

Mr. Mehmet Tohti (President, Uyghur Canadian Association): Yes, I probably know more than she does, because in six years as the president of the Uyghur Canadian Association, I have been closely involved in the CIDA project. I sent some recommendations to them.

First, they started a project in the southern part of East Turkestan, which is called the Hoten region. Most of the majority are Uyghurs and are very poor people. CIDA initiated a project there, a poverty reduction program, for three or four years. Unfortunately, the program has expired or ended. I received many letters and phone calls from people in Hoten when Canada recalled the poverty reduction program.

As you can see in a lot of information from Amnesty International or in U.S. congressional reports, there is economic discrimination in the region. A CBC journalist, Mr. Anthony Germain, also recently reported from there.

There are no Uyghurs working in industry. There are no Uyghurs in oil and other industrial factories. All of them are employed by the Chinese. Uyghurs are very poor. They are discriminated against. Therefore, nearly 70% of Uyghurs are unemployed.

It is the main reason to continue the poverty reduction program. If you expand it not only in Hoten but, at the same time, in Kashgar and some other regions, first, it would help the local people to start up businesses, and secondly, it would send a strong message to the Chinese government that they're not taking care of their own citizens and are discriminating against them.

I believe the program should continue. That's one suggestion.

The second one is this. For a couple of years, as the Chinese government did in the SARS epidemic, the Chinese government covered up the HIV situation in the Uyghur region. Unfortunately, East Turkestan has now become the crossroads for drug traffickers from the Chinese Golden Triangle to Central Asia and Eurasia. The famous scenic road has now become a drug road. At the border with Afghanistan and Pakistan, unfortunately, there are also drugs traffickers from that region, because it is the closest land road to enter into the Kashgar region.

It's the reason HIV is now the biggest problem, or the second biggest problem. Yunan is the number one problem for China, and East Turkestan is the number two problem.

People do not have the economic power to buy drugs. Because of some of the social customs or traditions among the Uyghurs, the biggest problem is that there's a stigma, if I can describe it that way. People are not free to go to the clinic because they are ashamed or afraid.

I made one more suggestion to CIDA to open one clinic, do some checkups, and prevent the further spread of this terrible disease. We should work on this area, because the Chinese government is ignoring the problem.

Recently, last week, the Xinhua News Agency, the official Chinese news agency, said that 17 Uyghurs are infected with HIV every day. It is a huge number.

• (1145)

The Chair: You may want to come back on the second round, but go ahead, if you want to.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Very quickly, I have about two or three questions.

I want to thank you for coming.

I have certainly had the opportunity to bring up the Celil case as well, and I have done so. I know this government is committed to bringing forward those issues at every possible opportunity.

The first question is this. What are other countries doing that we could learn from? Canada has taken a stand. We brought forward some cases of human rights violations. You referenced the United States and the human rights bill they brought forward. What are some of the other countries doing specific to the Uyghur people that we could learn from?

What are your views on the new Human Rights Council and on Canadian action that we could perhaps take via this United Nations forum?

The third question is specific to what Mr. Menzies asked. Does CIDA have the ability to direct programming and funds to the Uyghur people, or does it get all passed and vetted through the Chinese government?

Ms. Rebiya Kadeer (Interpretation): In the case of the United States, the U.S. State Department and the U.S. Congress are quite concerned with the case of the Uyghur people. And also, a lot of human rights organizations, certainly in the U.S., have been raising the case of the Uyghur issue together with the case of the Tibetans, so it's pretty high level.

In addition to that, the National Endowment for Democracy, an organization funded by the U.S. Congress, has been funding our organizations. Currently we have three organizations being funded by that organization.

The European Union countries all have been very interested in raising the Uyghur issues, including the members of the European Parliament and British government officials, Sweden, and all the other countries there are raising the Uyghur case as a high-profile case.

We have been raising the case of Huseyin Celil with the other countries as well. We also urge them to raise the case of Huseyin Celil and of my sons' arrest and detention together, so they can raise it directly with the Chinese government to put more pressure on them.

One of our goals is to urge the Canadian Parliament, if that can be done, to introduce a bill to specifically protect human rights and the culture of the Uyghur people.

This time, during my trip to the European Parliament and after meeting with high-level European Parliament officials, they said they were also interested in introducing such a bill.

Another thing that can be done on behalf of the Uyghur people is to fund Uyghur organizations, such as the Uyghur Canadian Association of which Mehmet is president, to be locally active. He could provide you with the latest information, so the Canadian government will be more proactive by getting timely information.

If the Canadian government can give some funding to the Uyghur association here, so the Uyghur association can work professionally toward promotion of the human rights of the Uyghur people, that's going to really help in many ways. Otherwise, for example, the president of the UCA is currently working part-time. Although he has done everything in his power to raise the cases, that is really not enough.

• (1150)

In terms of CIDA's aid and funds, if CIDA directly transfers funds to the Chinese government, then the Uyghur people will never see those funds. It would be much better if CIDA directly opened clinics or hospitals or test centres that could treat AIDS patients instead of just giving money to the Chinese government and letting them do the job. CIDA should also send their own team to supervise and monitor the process.

As well, millions of Uyghur people who fled from Chinese persecution are living in Central Asia. They need protection, and they probably also need refugee resettlement. The Canadian government could help with that.

• (1155)

The Chair: Before we go to the next question, Madam Kadeer mentioned the UCA. I believe that's the Uyghur Congress of America?

Ms. Rebiya Kadeer (Interpretation): The Uyghur Canadian Association.

The Chair: The Uyghur Canadian Association, excuse me.

I don't think Madam Kadeer said this in her statement, but I think it's worth noting that one of her sons was convicted and given a seven-year sentence two weeks ago—the very same day she was elected president of the World Uyghur Congress. Is that correct?

Ms. Rebiya Kadeer (Interpretation): Yes.

The Chair: As well, Madam Kadeer didn't say this exactly, but I believe it's also true that her six-year sentence, or what ended up being limited to a six-year sentence, was for engaging in espionage, which consisted of sending in the mail publicly available newspaper articles to her husband in the United States. Is that correct?

Ms. Rebiya Kadeer (Interpretation): Yes, that's correct.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Marston.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): First of all, I want to say that I feel honoured by your presence here today.

Because of our parliamentary style of democracy here, you will find that oftentimes in our discussions we don't agree with members of the government, even though their interest here in particularly Mr. Celil's case is certainly commendable. One thing I'm very concerned about is ethical trade. Human rights should take a priority at all times.

I've been calling for a special envoy, a parliamentary delegation perhaps, to go to China to take up Mr. Celil's case. Would you see that as being effective?

I would add this: thank you for joining the many voices who have said that we need to push harder at China on the issue of human rights.

As well, you mentioned Guantanamo. How many combatants from your area would be down there?

To Mr. Tohti, I have a question around the dialogue we're looking at. What would you call the main failure of the dialogue?

Ms. Rebiya Kadeer (Interpretation): First of all, thank you very much for your questions and for your concern with regard to Mr. Celil's case. For me it's very important that Canada puts human rights before trade, because that could really help improve the human rights situation for Uyghurs and in China overall.

You suggest that perhaps a parliamentary delegation should visit China's prisons and other places to find out more about Mr. Celil's case and about the cases of people like him. That would really help

with our case, and it would definitely help with the release of Mr. Celil and of people like him, those who are imprisoned for doing absolutely nothing.

In terms of the Uyghurs at Guantanamo, there are different attorneys working on different cases. Initially, for the first five, there was another attorney who worked on their cases. He's still working on the cases of the rest of the Uyghurs there.

There are attorneys working very hard on these cases. Our impression is that they may be released very soon. And if they are released, not as enemy combatants but rather as innocents, I would be really delighted if Canada could give them refuge.

• (1200)

Mr. Mehmet Tohti: The Canada–China human rights dialogue is the topic I love the most, because of six years of non-stop fighting with the Department of Foreign Affairs, with my friend Tenzin Khangsar. Each year before the dialogue starts, or after the dialogue, or before the UN human rights conference in Geneva starts, I have been invited by the Department of Foreign Affairs for a consultation meeting. I was a member of this consultation meeting on behalf of International Uyghur Human Rights and Democracy Foundation.

There are a couple of reasons for the failure. One is lack of understanding of tricky Chinese diplomatic policy. The Chinese foreign policy is based upon one Asian theory: to hang out the head of the sheep and sell the meat of the dog. Put a different label on something and do a different thing behind the table. That is traditional Chinese foreign policy. Talking from different mouths ends up with different sounds.

It is the same case in North Korea—six-party talks, teaching North Korea how to act. Then after the dialogue ends, teach other tactics, because China is the only country that wants this crisis. It is the only country that doesn't want a solution for North Korea. It has to be continued so that western countries need China. It is the same policy.

The second main reason for the failure was that Canada acted very softly. Until 1997 we used to sponsor the resolution at the United Nations conference in Geneva condemning Chinese human rights abuses. Then the Chinese diplomats came to us and said, "Do not support this resolution. Let's have a dialogue." Canada agreed. In the second phase, the Chinese diplomats said, "If you'd like to have a dialogue with us, let's keep it closed-door, without going public." Canada agreed. In the third phase, the Chinese diplomats said, "We would like to improve our judicial system and the police forces. We would like to reform our detention facilities, but we don't have the money. We have money to send a manned mission to space and expand our military, but we do not have money to improve the quality of our citizens." Canada said, "Okay, let's provide the money." So Canada was the order taker; China was the order giver. That was not a dialogue. A dialogue is between two parties. It was a monologue.

The Chinese government assigned four or five diplomats whose primary job was to find answers to the possible questions raised by Canadians. "For Tibetans, okay, we are doing well." If Canada raised the issue of the Panchen Lama: "Okay, he doesn't want to see anyone. He's okay. He's very good." If Canada raised the issue of the Falun Gong: "It's an evil cult." The answers were ready. And as for Uyghurs: "Ah, they are terrorists". It continued for seven years. We spent a lot of resources on it.

That is a brief picture of the dialogue. It ended up that the four or five Chinese diplomats never passed the messages from Canada to upper-level policy-makers. They didn't know. It was just the job of five people to prepare the answers to possible questions. It was not a dialogue. The Chinese government never implemented any suggestions or took any of Canada's suggestions seriously. It was a waste of resources, money, and everything.

Therefore, if there is a dialogue, there should be a mission accomplished. There should be a clear, step-by-step, case-by-case strategy on what we are going to achieve. The Chinese government should know that if we are going to raise the issue of Tibetans, in what timeframe are they going to achieve something? If we raise the Uyghur issue, what is the timetable? What are the steps? What are the obstacles? How can we overcome it? There should be a clear strategy.

• (1205)

Secondly, there should be accountability. That is important. All the bureaucrats at the Department of Foreign Affairs conduct talks with the Chinese government, but the Canadian public doesn't know what is going on, what is said by the Chinese, and what the response of the Canadians is, what it has to do with development. We don't know. So on the format of the China-Canada human rights dialogue, as we've said for five or six years, it is a waste of time. We've wasted a lot of time and a lot of resources. It has to be reformatted.

You have to tell the Chinese government that if they would like to have a human rights dialogue, it has to be a dialogue between governments, not with four or five people. The mandate of the dialogue and the agenda for the dialogue should be part of the Chinese government's official policy. The recommendations should be implemented. There should be follow-ups.

I have a lot of things to say about the dialogue because I'm the one who is frustrated. Imagine repeating the same things for six years. I thank the Canadian Parliament and I thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is the first time the Canadian Parliament has acted. At least I feel that Canadians today have listened.

I love Canada. I am Canadian—proudly Canadian. I want this relationship to be a better relationship, with mutual respect, not humiliation.

Thank you.

Ms. Rebiya Kadeer (Interpretation): Although I'm still not yet a U.S. citizen, it was the United States' firm, hard-line pressure on China that got my release. As you probably know, the Chinese government accused me of being a terrorist, and not only of espionage or anything like that. China released me after the United States took a very strong stand on my case, saying, "You have to release her." Then I was released.

I'm really proud of what the Prime Minister said regarding putting human rights first and trade behind—not trade first, but human rights first. That really means a lot to the Uyghur people and all the oppressed people.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Tohti in particular, I found that to be one of the most useful encapsulations of the issue that we've heard from any of our witnesses. I would like to invite you to perhaps summarize some of those points in writing and submit them to committee. I think it would be quite fruitful as we prepare our report.

For a five-minute round, we go to Mr. Sorenson.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: I have two quick questions.

You mentioned that there are 17 Uyghur people in the naval detention facility in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. What are they there for?

Ms. Rebiya Kadeer (Interpretation): In 1997 there was a big massacre. To us, it was more like a June 4 Tiananmen Square massacre. It happened in the city of Ghulja, which is very close to the Central Asian borders, and a lot of Uyghurs were executed. It was a peaceful protest, but the Chinese government cracked down on that protest very hard.

After 1997, the Chinese government also executed a lot of Uyghur people. As a result, a lot of Uyghurs fled to Central Asian countries. Because they couldn't return—if they got deported, they would be executed—some of them fled to countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan. A lot of them were actually later picked up by Pakistani bounty hunters, because the U.S. paid money for picking up people. These people were picked up and given to the Americans, then the Americans brought them to Guantanamo Bay.

• (1210)

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: But were they fighting with al-Qaeda?

Ms. Rebiya Kadeer (Interpretation): No, they were not fighting with al-Qaeda.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: I got that. I don't understand the language, but I understood that.

I have one other quick question, Mr. Chair.

In the material that you gave us—and I appreciate it—you talk a lot about the Uyghur culture being weak and in need of protection. You speak quite a bit about culture. You talk about how the Chinese government would like to get rid of the Uyghur culture, and you realize that stating "the Chinese government is trying to eliminate Uyghur culture" can seem overly emotive, and that I run the risk of being accused of exaggeration", but that's what they're doing. Can you define for me the Uyghur culture?

Take religion. I don't know much about the Celil case, but I do know what is of concern to Canadians. First of all, he's a Canadian citizen. Secondly, he was sent to China and he's being held. He hasn't been given consular services. All those things go against the values that we have here in Canada. But on religious freedom, is it a religion? Is it religious freedom that is not being protected? What could the Chinese government do to protect the culture of Uyghur people? Religious freedom is one of the issues that I'd like you to speak about.

Ms. Rebiya Kadeer (Interpretation): The Uyghur people have a completely separate set of cultural, historical, religious, and value systems when compared to the Chinese. Even our territory and way of life are completely different from those of the Chinese.

When the Chinese government actually gave us so-called autonomy, the Chinese government promised to respect our human rights, our culture, our language, and our religion. But now, after China's rise, with it becoming this emerging superpower, our language is becoming completely useless right now in terms of education at all levels, because the Chinese government is forcing the Chinese language onto us.

In terms of religion, we believe in Islam. Basically, the Chinese government, after 9/11, immediately labelled us as terrorists. In fact, you see hardly anything that resembles terrorism among the Uyghurs.

As you all know, religion plays a big role in helping the people to keep their morality, in giving them true values. If you visit our homeland today, you will see beautiful mosques and you will even see people praying inside. That's what the Chinese government is basically showcasing, so that foreign delegation people will come and see that.

• (1215)

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: That is my point.

One of the recommendations is that you want us to go on a fact-finding mission: "We...recommend that the Canadian government send a fact-finding mission to East Turkestan". What are we going to see when they get there? When we get there, we're going to see what the Chinese government wants us to see.

The Uyghur people aren't a pluralistic society either. They're a fairly closed Islamic society. Are other religions free in this area? Do you believe in religious pluralism?

Ms. Rebiya Kadeer (Interpretation): Of course, the Chinese government will do everything to ensure you see what they want you to see. The thing is, if you go inside the mosques, they post regulations on the walls specifically saying minors cannot be allowed, that preaching is, for example, for 30 minutes, and they only use their own imams and mullahs trained by the government, not the individual clerics who train elsewhere. In all of those regulations, if you read them, all those imams and mullahs are supposed to strictly follow government guidelines in terms of their clerical activities.

If you just go to mosques and see people praying and try to talk to a Uyghur, and you tap on his or her shoulder and ask them what religious freedom is, or things like that, you can see the fear on their

face. But when they say things, they would say they have their religious freedom and are living their best lives under Chinese rule.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're over our time. I would invite members of the committee again to attend a special reception this evening from 6 to 8 o'clock in the East Block, if they have further questions for Ms. Kadeer.

Madam Kadeer, Mr. Tohti, and your interpreter, thank you very much for your time and your visit to Ottawa.

Mr. Mehmet Tohti: I have just one more request. I gave Mr. Kenney the Chinese number seven secret document. Please read that document, and you'll find the answer about religious freedom.

The Chair: We'll have this translated and distributed to the committee.

Mr. Mehmet Tohti: Yes, and also there is one paragraph to answer a question about whether or not there are Chinese spies in Canada. There is one paragraph; you just have to read it. It is a very clear mission set by the Chinese government on how to conduct, how to be involved with the Chinese communities, how to train them, how to get the information. There is a signature on that document; it was chaired by Jiang Zemin, the Chinese president. There is the Chinese president's signature. That document was just leaked by Ms. Rebiya Kadeer.

The Chair: Thank you again.

The committee will now move to committee business. We have to be expeditious. This is a difficult matter.

Last week, under future business, you'll recall that I proposed a couple of options, one of which was for us to spend an extra hour on an anticipated motion from Mr. Cotler dealing with incitement to genocide by the Iranian regime. The committee decided, in its wisdom, consensually, that we would not hold an extra hour to do additional business, that we would simply hear from the Uyghur witnesses.

Since that time, Mr. Cotler has furnished the clerk with a copy of the motion, which has since been distributed to you. It's the clerk's view that this motion was not received in time for the 48 hours required by the main committee's standing orders. Because of translation, etc., and the receipt of it, it was not distributed to committee members until yesterday.

Mr. Cotler, I understand, would still like the committee to consider the motion, so I'm looking for your direction, colleagues. We discussed this last week. There was a consensus. I made my preference known, which was to actually study the motion this week, but the committee decided otherwise, and now we have a procedural ambiguity, shall we say.

I am, for the purposes of being flexible, prepared to rule that the motion was received pursuant to the 48 hours' notice required, insofar as it was sent on Thursday night to the clerk. I'm prepared to make that ruling, but it's then the committee's decision whether or not we want to proceed to discuss this matter now and vote on it now or, as we decided last week, delay it until our next available meeting.

Mr. Cotler.

•(1220)

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Chairman, I can understand the committee's desire to perhaps put this off. There is a certain urgency to it, apart from its inherent significance, because as we speak a Holocaust denial conference has begun in Tehran in Iran, and President Ahmadinejad has once again repeated his intent for Israel to disappear. We've been witnessing this state-sanctioned incitement to genocide for some time, but it has taken on a particular urgency now, and there are going to be meetings in France and elsewhere this week about this matter.

This is a motion by way of recommendation that goes to the foreign affairs committee. It would be considered there and moved in that parliamentary direction, but it appears to me to be of such urgency that we should at least go on the record today, if we can, by way of recommendation—and it will only go to the foreign affairs committee—with regard to the urgency of state-sanctioned incitement to genocide in violation of the convention on the prevention of genocide, and parties like Canada have an obligation to enforce that convention. I don't know of any parallel or precedent since the Second World War, and even including the Second World War, in which there's been such a sustained and state-orchestrated incitement to genocide.

One example of many that I can give is the parading in Tehran of a Shahab-3 missile draped in an emblem that says “Wipe Israel off the Map”, as the imam screams to hundred of thousands, “Death to Israel” and the like. I think we need to send a message that this kind of state-sanctioned incitement to genocide is simply unacceptable in our age.

The Chair: I think all members would agree. I certainly agree in principle with the objectives of the motion. Some members might be concerned that they haven't had time to study a very substantive motion, potentially with ramifications, but we'll let the members speak to this.

Go ahead, Madame St-Hilaire.

[Translation]

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire: Mr. Chairman, as you so aptly stated, this motion is fraught with meaning and implications. I received it yesterday afternoon, at 12:28 p.m. to be precise. As I noted to my colleague, this is not an insignificant motion. The words “whereas” appears many times, and a number of actions are recommended. The more I read it — I can still hear my colleague — the more I realize that it involves foreign affairs as much as human rights. I think we need to look at this very carefully before we come to any kind of decision. To be honest, I think things are moving a little too quickly, notwithstanding the deadlines. Many times we've received documents in English only. Sometimes I don't object, but this motion is weighty indeed and needs to be properly analysed. I don't doubt that my colleague is acting in good faith, but I have no desire to be rushed on this matter.

•(1225)

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Menzies is next.

Mr. Ted Menzies: I couldn't agree more with Mr. Cotler's reason for concern. I think that's why both he and I raised it in our first meeting. We wanted to bring forward a discussion on it because of

the impending disastrous consequences to the direction this government and this leader are going.

There's a lot in this. I'm very supportive of the intention, but I too would like to have more time to look at it and to understand it. You're suggesting some pretty serious consequences. I mean, he's not a Canadian citizen, so can we even...? I don't understand how we could support this. President Ahmadinejad is not a Canadian citizen; how do we indict him?

There are too many questions in my mind to discuss it at length today, but I agree absolutely, Mr. Cotler, with your concern.

The Chair: Please go ahead, Mr. Cotler.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: I just want to say, Mr. Chairman, that if the feeling is that we won't have sufficient time, given the urgency of it, I'll hold it off until the next meeting.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: The next meeting won't be until February, unfortunately.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: That was the problem.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Even if we did deal with it today and refer it to the foreign affairs committee, it wouldn't be dealt with until February.

The Chair: I appreciate your flexibility, Mr. Cotler. As Chair, I try to be flexible by accepting this as being received, which was not an obvious call. I think we also have to respect the consensus of committee that it's a substantive motion and deserves due consideration. I appreciate your flexibility in that regard, and certainly as an individual member I'd like to discuss with you, Mr. Cotler, how else we as parliamentarians could express ourselves forcefully on these questions in an urgent fashion. I think, frankly, it is of grave concern to the future of peace and stability in the world.

With that, Mr. Cotler, again I thank you.

Mr. Marston.

Mr. Wayne Marston: This is on a separate matter.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Wayne Marston: Tomorrow, for your information, at one o'clock, I'm hosting a round table on the optional protocol to the convention against torture. That'll be in room 112-N, Centre Block, as I say, at one o'clock tomorrow, if anybody has the opportunity to get there.

[Translation]

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire: I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman, but you're moving a little too fast for me.

What are we going to do with Mr. Cotler's motion? Are we going to debate it after the holidays? If I understand correctly, we won't be getting around to it today. Will Mr. Cotler's motion appear on the agenda as a simple motion, or will we be conducting a broader study? I want everything to be clear.

[English]

The Chair: The committee clerk reminds me that in fact, if it's the will of the committee, we don't have to wait until February; we can sit at other times. I'm not sure how to trigger that, but that's a consideration. We have discussed, in general terms, future business. We don't have time to get into that in detail. I think what we'll do here is put this motion forward to the next sitting of this committee for consideration at that time. We would normally have a debate and a vote at that time.

Mr. Menzies.

Mr. Ted Menzies: Can we schedule a meeting with some witnesses to provide a bit of background to this?

The Chair: I think that would be helpful. If it's the will of the committee, I'd be quite prepared to accommodate that.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: My question is for Mr. Cotler. I was watching on the television news on the weekend a convention or conference going on in Tehran, and I noticed that there were some Orthodox Jews attending it. Are you at all aware of the people who had been invited? I saw the Israelis going to that conference. Is it just a sham, in your opinion, or do we know people who are there?

● (1230)

Hon. Irwin Cotler: I should say that the Orthodox Jews who are there are members of an ultra-Orthodox Hasidic sect that do not support the existence of a state of Israel. They are also the ones who demonstrated in Durban at the infamous World Conference Against Racism. They are a standing presence at conferences that speak to either the Holocaust denial or the delegitimization of Israel. I wouldn't draw any inferences from that other than that they are a prop at these conferences. I think the disturbing thing is the presence at this conference of those who are Holocaust deniers themselves, from different parts of the world, as well as racists, who've gone there to join in it in that regard.

The Chair: We do have to run. I know we have to adjourn the meeting, because Mr. Cotler has a press conference right now.

Any members who would like to propose witnesses for our consideration of this matter are invited to furnish those names to the clerk.

Thank you. We're adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

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