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Chair: Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal



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• (1715)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.)): Good afternoon. I call this meeting to order.

We are meeting in public.

Welcome to meeting number 104 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on February 12 and May 1, 2024, the committee is resuming its study of pension transferability, access to the mandatory provident fund and delays in permanent residence and visas for Hong Kongers.

Before I begin, I have to do my usual "holy book" and ask all members and other in-person participants to consult the cards on the table for guidelines to prevent audio feedback incidents.

Please take note of the following preventive measures in place to protect the health and safety of all participants, including the interpreters. Use only a black, approved earpiece. Keep your earpiece away from all microphones at all times. When you are not using your earpiece, please place it face down on the sticker placed on the table for this purpose.

I want to thank you for your co-operation.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. We have resources until 7 p.m., so the hard stop will be at 7 p.m.

I would like to make a few more comments for the benefit of members and witnesses.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking.

For members in the room, please raise your hand if you wish to speak. For members on Zoom, please use the "raise hand" function. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can. We appreciate your understanding in this regard.

All comments should be addressed through the chair.

Members who are regular members of this committee know the procedure I use as chair. If you ask a question of the officials and you feel that the officials are going too long, instead of interrupting them, please raise your hand, and I will stop the clock to let them finish their thought process. Then you can start asking questions, and I will start the clock again.

Before we begin, I would like to welcome two honourable members who are filling in for other members. First is my dear friend, Julie Dzerowicz. The other friend is Julie Dabrusin. Welcome to the committee.

We have two "Julies" here. I just wanted to make sure. I even know the names of their ridings too, you know. One is from Davenport, and the other one is from Toronto—Danforth.

Now I can welcome the witnesses on your behalf.

Is there anything, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, that you want to add?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Chair, this may be a point of order, but I would like some clarification.

Do members taking part in the meeting via Zoom have to turn on their cameras at all times?

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, if the camera is not on, they are not considered present. If a vote is called, I would not take their vote. That is the process. It is up to the members to keep their cameras on. It is not mandatory, but if the camera is not on, they will not be counted as sitting in the committee.

On behalf of all of you, I would like to welcome our witnesses.

I will start with the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. We have director general, immigration program guidance, Michelle Mascoll.

Welcome.

We also have Mr. James McNamee, director general, family and social immigration branch; and Elizabeth Snow, director general, international platform.

Welcome.

From the Department of Finance, we have Mr. Sven Linkruus, director, financial services and trade relations, financial sector policy branch; and Mr. Jeffrey Smith, senior economist, financial sector policy branch.

Welcome to the committee.

From the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, we have Madam Jennie Chen, executive director, greater China political and coordination.

Welcome.

Again, welcome to all of you. You have five minutes to give your remarks. We can start with the IRCC.

Mr. McNamee, go ahead, please.

• (1720)

Mr. James McNamee (Director General, Family and Social Immigration Branch, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you, Chair.

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge that I am speaking today on the traditional unceded lands of the Algonquin Anishinabe peoples.

I would also like to acknowledge that I'm joined here by my colleagues, as already mentioned, from the Department of Finance, IRCC, and the Department of Global Affairs Canada.

Canada stands shoulder to shoulder with the people of Hong Kong. We continue to monitor the situation as they navigate the impacts of the new article 23 national security legislation. While IRCC plays a significant role in the attraction, selection and integration of Hong Kong nationals in Canada, I would like to begin by contextualizing IRCC's role in your study of pension transferability and the access to the mandatory provident fund for Hong Kongers now residing in Canada.

The IRCC is responsible for the issuance of Canadian permanent resident cards, which prove permanent residency status. The cards contain information on the holder, including their nationality and their country of birth. IRCC adheres to international standards set by the International Civil Aviation Organization and international standards organization when determining the three-letter country codes listed on these status documents, drawing the information from the applicant's passport.

In our support of Hong Kong nationals, IRCC has taken concrete action by implementing special measures for those who wish to come or extend their stay in Canada, as well as those who wish to stay here permanently. In 2021 IRCC launched a public policy that allows eligible Hong Kong residents with recently completed post-secondary studies to apply for an open work permit valid for up to three years. That same year, we also launched two permanent resident pathways for Hong Kong nationals with Canadian post-secondary or work experience.

As of April 30, 2024, over 37,300 open work permits have been approved, and 7,300 individuals have been approved for permanent residence under these measures. Demand for these pathways remains high.

To ensure that no one loses their status in Canada while waiting for a decision on their permanent residence application, a new public policy was launched on May 27, 2024, that will give certain applicants to the permanent resident pathways an opportunity to ob-

tain a new open work permit and remain in Canada while they await a decision.

To be eligible, a client's application must have been accepted into processing by IRCC. The client has to have held a work or study permit in the three years prior to their submission of their permanent residence application. Work permits will be valid for up to three years, and may also be issued to eligible family members.

IRCC remains committed to taking action, where possible, to assist Hong Kong nationals in establishing themselves in Canada.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to join you today. We welcome any questions you may have.

• (1725)

The Chair: That took four minutes—good job.

Now I will go to the honourable members for the first round.

We are going to start with my dear friend from Calgary Centre, Mr. McLean.

You have six minutes. Please go ahead.

Mr. Greg McLean (Calgary Centre, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to refer to the last meeting we had because some disconnects occurred in that meeting with regard to the mandatory provident fund and the ability to extract funds from that pension fund once people were in Canada—people of Hong Kong origin, obviously. Therefore, we'd like your input very clearly on how many of those citizens coming over from Hong Kong who are trying to access the mandatory provident fund savings are able to access those, and how many are not able to access those because of delays or not having the proper forms.

Can you give us a quick briefing on that—you know, that subject—first of all, please?

The Chair: Mr. McNamee, go ahead, please.

Mr. James McNamee: Thank you very much for the question. I would like to ask one of my colleagues who is more familiar with the MPF to address the question.

Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Mascoll, go ahead, please.

Ms. Michelle Mascoll (Director General, Immigration Program Guidance, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): IRCC doesn't have information on individuals who may have applied to transfer their pensions, so we don't have any information on that. We're not privy to that information.

Mr. Greg McLean: Thank you.

The problem is that people who come over with the Hong Kong passport through a British national overseas passport and get a Canadian passport have a designation that they arrive with here, that they arrive with on their passport here, that indicates that. The contention is that, as a result of that, they aren't able to access their mandatory provident funds.

Are you aware of this issue?

Ms. Michelle Mascoll: Yes, IRCC has been made aware of that issue for those who may have challenges seeking early withdrawal of their pension as a result of changes that were implemented for the MPF.

Mr. Greg McLean: Can I have a little more fulsome answer, please? Can you tell me how many people have indicated that this is a problem for them?

Ms. Michelle Mascoll: IRCC has not received any inquiries from individuals who have expressed concerns about that.

Mr. Greg McLean: So, when you say that you're aware of it, how are you aware of it?

Ms. Michelle Mascoll: We're aware of it, I guess, through news releases and communications from stakeholders.

Mr. Greg McLean: Okay, thank you.

The issue, of course, is that it came up in March 2021 when the Hong Kong government indicated that it would be changing the accessibility to the mandatory provident fund funds for people leaving Hong Kong on the British national overseas passport. Something changed at that point in time so that Canadians getting Canadian permanent residency certificates were no longer able to access those funds. Did anything change in your department at that point in time to make sure that Canadians who came here could still access those funds?

Ms. Michelle Mascoll: We'll have to come back on that question because I don't have any information at this moment about Canadians who may have come over having challenges accessing....

Mr. Greg McLean: When I say "Canadians", I mean people who are becoming Canadians—from Hong Kong.

Ms. Michelle Mascoll: Okay, we'll have to come back on that question, to see if anybody has specifically raised that. I don't have information at this time.

Mr. Greg McLean: Okay, so, something changed in March 2021 when holders of the British national overseas passport or visa were no longer able to access the mandatory provident funds as well as they could before.

What I need to know is this: The designation that you put on the Canadian passports associated with British national overseas passports is GBN, I believe

Ms. Michelle Mascoll: The three-letter country code that's associated with the British national overseas passport, in accordance with the International Civil Aviation Organization standards, is in fact GBN.

Mr. Greg McLean: We need to be a bit quicker here, please, Ms. Mascoll.

So, GBN is the right answer.

Ms. Michelle Mascoll: Yes.

Mr. Greg McLean: Okay.

Would it be possible to change that since people who are coming over with "GBN" on their passport, their new Canadian documents, are now indicating that they cannot access the funds they've put away for retirement?

Ms. Michelle Mascoll: PR cards are issued to be consistent with the travel document that the applicant has provided, and the country code and associated nationality are issued in accordance with the ICAO standards.

● (1730)

Mr. Greg McLean: Thank you.

There's no change that's going to happen, then, as far as people having trouble becoming Canadian citizens and accessing the same funds that would come over if they came over directly on a Hong Kong to Canadian PR. Is that correct?

Ms. Michelle Mascoll: PR cards will continue to be issued in accordance with the ICAO standards.

Mr. Greg McLean: Thank you very much.

The problem we have here, of course, is that indications are that people cannot access the mandatory provident fund's pension funds, so we're going to have to find a way to make sure they have a good pension in Canada, and that will cost them. It's money they put away. It's a mandatory deduction. Are you aware of whether we're providing benefits, like Canada pension plan investment benefits, to people who live in China?

The Chair: Mr. McNamee, go ahead, please.

Mr. Greg McLean: I'm sorry, but is there somebody from Finance here?

The Chair: Mr. Linkruus, do you want to go ahead? Please go ahead.

Mr. Sven Linkruus (Director, Financial Services, Trade Relations, Financial Sector Policy Branch, Department of Finance): I'm sorry. Was the question whether there's a provision for former Hong Kong residents to receive—

Mr. Greg McLean: Yes, and I'm sorry if it was unclear.

I'm looking for some kind of reciprocity. Hong Kongers who are becoming Canadian permanent residents are not receiving the money they put away for the mandatory provident fund—their pension fund—whereas people who have moved from Canada to parts of the PRC, even to Hong Kong, are receiving CPP benefits. Is there any indication of some consistency of approach to this?

Mr. Sven Linkruus: I'm sorry, but I don't have any information on the reciprocity issue with respect to exchange of pension benefits between Canada and other countries.

The Chair: Thank you very much, and the time is up to six minutes and 30 seconds.

One thing before I go to Mr. Ali, honourable members, is that if you, just like Mr. McLean mentioned, can name the individual or the department your question is going to so that they can prepare beforehand to make sure your answer is properly addressed, that would be very much appreciated.

With that, Mr. Ali, please go ahead for six minutes.

Mr. Shafqat Ali (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here and appearing before the committee.

My question is to the officials from IRCC. We heard many concerns from Hong Kongers that they will not be able to enter Canada because they participated in pro-democracy protests. Can you walk us through the process that immigration officers go through when examining foreign charges and convictions, and whether Hong Kongers who participated in these protests are barred from entering or remaining in Canada?

Ms. Elizabeth Snow (Director General, International Platform, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Within the legislation there are provisions that officers will look at with respect to criminality, but the criminality has to be equivalent to that in Canadian law, so for Hong Kong nationals who participated in protests there would have to be an equivalent part in the Canadian Criminal Code that would find them inadmissible. Based on experience, that is not the case.

Further, officers are also very aware and mindful of the complexities, and are looking at the cases on an individualized basis. They do have sound judgment, so they know there are unique circumstances to take into consideration for Hong Kong.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you.

Through the chair, can you kindly elaborate on the specific services and support mechanisms available for Hong Kong nationals seeking refuge in Canada?

Mr. James McNamee: If I understand the question correctly, applicants for permanent residence, once they are approved, are eligible, of course, for the standard settlement and integration services that IRCC offers. In the case of applicants who are perhaps seeking to come as refugees, they would be eligible for the programs that are available for persons seeking that status. Those services range from settlement and integration services to employment services and related ones in Canada. Those services are available for those who have been approved for permanent residence and are available across the board for all applicants, regardless of country of origin.

• (1735)

Mr. Shafqat Ali: To follow up on the same question, there are two pathways for PR, as you said. Are there any specific services for refugees who are Hong Kong nationals?

Mr. James McNamee: Insofar as we provide a special pathway for them to seek permanent residence if they have been living in Canada, working or studying, as well as if they are here on a temporary basis, they are able to extend that stay through open work permits of various durations.

On May 27, we announced a special public policy that enables anyone from Hong Kong who has previously held a permit to continue to remain in Canada by applying for that new pathway, which allows them to remain for an additional three years. That's to enable them to bridge the gap between the time when they applied for permanent residence and when they may obtain that.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you.

As you know, other ally countries have different measures for nationals of Hong Kong. Are there any specific programs in other countries that Canada should look at?

Do you have any overviews of what other countries might have for programs that are different from ours? Do you have any comparisons or any specific measures that are different?

Mr. James McNamee: I'm not familiar with what other countries have in place for Hong Kong. I will say that Canada has traditionally had one of the most generous pathways for anyone seeking protection and support.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: This question is for the Finance department.

Are there any challenges that insurance companies have had in providing pension benefits to Hong Kongers in Canada who have made claims?

Mr. Sven Linkruus: We are not specifically aware of any identifiable cases that Canadian insurance companies that are active in Hong Kong have had. No specific cases have been brought to our attention.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Are there any challenges that might have come to your attention that Hong Kongers living in Canada might encounter in trying to access their pensions?

Mr. Sven Linkruus: We're aware of the general situation whereby, as we understand it, the rules of the mandatory provident fund are that if you are going to leave Hong Kong, you have to establish permanent residency in your new country and sign some sort of document to say that you're not coming back to Hong Kong. At that point, your application to withdraw those funds would be considered.

We're aware of the general issues that former Hong Kongers have faced, but we're not aware of any specific cases that have been brought to our attention.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Ali. With that, your time is up. We can come back to you for the next round.

With this, my dear friend Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe has six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Mr. Chair. You're the best.

First of all, welcome to all the witnesses.

Mr. McNamee, in your remarks, you said you were concerned about Hong Kong's national security law.

Why are you concerned? Do you feel it leads to human rights violations? Is that the reason?

Mr. James McNamee: We are concerned because the law may put people currently living in Hong Kong in danger. That is why we've put in place programs to help people who would like to leave Hong Kong and those who want to stay in Canada and benefit from our protection.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: You agree that this law is dangerous. At least, you told us you had concerns that international human rights were at stake.

Since you acknowledge that the situation is worrisome in terms of possible human rights violations, shouldn't special measures be put in place for people who are victimized because of the law?

• (1740)

Mr. James McNamee: Canada already has programs to help people in certain situations. We have a refugee program, where we admit a number of people every year who—

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Excuse me, Mr. Chair.

Aren't we talking about Hong Kong, Mr. McNamee?

Mr. James McNamee: Yes, that's right.

Hong Kong citizens can also participate in these programs if they feel they are in danger. However, we also announced measures to help people who would like to leave Hong Kong and those who would like to stay in Canada and benefit from our protection.

We have tools to help them.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: We're just trying to understand. We know you are acting in good faith on this issue.

You acknowledge that the new national security law passed by the Hong Kong authorities violates human rights. Representatives of Canadian financial institutions in Hong Kong appeared before the committee. They told us that they had to operate according to the rules of the countries where their institutions are located. These are Canadian institutions that are saying they can't do otherwise.

You acknowledge that human rights are being violated, but at the same time, organizations like Hong Kong Watch and Canada-Hong Kong Link are telling us that people want to withdraw their money and can't because Canadian financial institutions have to follow the rules of an authoritarian regime. In the meantime, Canada is not putting in place special measures to counter what Hong Kong is doing and allow these people to withdraw their money.

I think everyone here is acting in good faith. What we are asking you is to find a creative way to ensure that these people can follow the rules of Canadian institutions, withdraw their money and survive until they get their coveted permanent residency.

Is your department trying to think outside the box in order to get these people out? As you've acknowledged, they are victims of human rights violations.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. McNamee, go ahead, please.

[Translation]

Mr. James McNamee: First of all, the Department of Citizenship and Immigration has nothing to do with the rules of the financial system.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I'm sorry, but your premise is all wrong.

We are talking about financial transactions related to permanent residency. Your department is responsible for processing applications for permanent residency. Therefore, you have everything to do with what financial institutions are requiring to allow these people to withdraw their money.

I'll let you answer again.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. McNamee, do you want to add something?

[Translation]

Mr. James McNamee: Some of my colleagues who are here with me could explain the rules on how to handle the information we receive on permanent residency.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Mr. Chair, do I have any time left?

[English]

The Chair: You have a minute.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Unfortunately, I get the impression that the department isn't able to think creatively to find solutions to a situation where even it admits that there are human rights violations.

Ms. Chen, you play a fairly major role at the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development. I imagine that you too are concerned about the national security law.

You've obviously heard of Jimmy Lai. Do you think he's getting a fair trial?

[English]

The Chair: Madam Chen.

Ms. Jennie Chen (Executive Director, Greater China Political and Coordination, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Yes, we are aware of the case of Mr. Jimmy Lai, a U.K. citizen currently on trial under the national security law. We have repeatedly expressed concerns to Hong Kong authorities about the trial of Mr. Lai, and others also being tried under that law.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Are you going to advise Ms. Joly, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, to demand the immediate release of Mr. Lai? He is currently being tried under a law that, as has been confirmed, is worrisome in terms of human rights.

• (1745)

[English]

Ms. Jennie Chen: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I can tell you that we have repeatedly expressed concerns about the national security law. Actually, at the recent universal periodic review in Geneva at the Human Rights Council, we called for the NSL's full repeal, because of our concerns about that law.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will go to Madam Kwan.

Madam Kwan, you have six minutes. Please go ahead.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses.

My first question is for the Finance officials.

Yesterday, we were advised by Manulife and Sun Life that in order for Hong Kongers to be able to access their pension funds, they have to, because of the regulations, produce documentation to show that they're either a citizen or a permanent resident in an alternate country.

Could you advise and confirm for us if those regulations are Canadian regulations?

Mr. Sven Linkruus: Those regulations are the requirements of the Hong Kong regulatory authorities in order to release money from the funds. Those are the regulations and rules that the Canadian financial institutions, whose subsidiaries are in Hong Kong, have to follow.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

In accordance with those regulations, are you aware if there are any provisions that would make an allowance for people who, for example, are fleeing persecution and, therefore, may not be able to readily produce documentation to verify that they have secure permanent residency elsewhere? Are there provisions within those regulations that would recognize that?

Mr. Sven Linkruus: I don't have any information on the specific content or, perhaps, exceptions that might be in the Hong Kong regulations.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

I do not believe that they are. I tried to ask the question of both Sun Life and Manulife yesterday, and they didn't answer my question directly, but that seems to be the case.

With that being said, I'm going to go to Global Affairs with my next question.

These are Canadian institutions, and these are individuals—Hong Kongers—who have come to Canada seeking the lifeboat scheme precisely because they've been persecuted, some of them under the national security law and others for their activities in a pro-democracy movement.

In light of this, what action will Global Affairs take to help Hong Kongers access their pension funds for those who are here in Canada?

Ms. Jennie Chen: Like others, I'm not aware of any specific cases that would have been brought forward. If you are aware of any specific cases, we would invite them to bring them to our attention.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, I'm sorry. I can't raise my hand readily here, but that wasn't my question.

The Chair: If you raise your hand, I can see that, Madam Kwan, no problem. I will make sure I stop the clock. Thank you. You're doing very well. That's excellent.

Go ahead, please.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you. I appreciate that.

That wasn't my question. My question was about the regulatory measures that are in place. What action will GAC take to address the regulatory measures for Hong Kongers who are here through the lifeboat scheme, before they have received their PR card or citizenship, to access their pension funds?

Ms. Jennie Chen: This is something that we'll have to take back internally to discuss the best way to approach this with local Hong Kong authorities. We are in regular contact with local Hong Kong authorities. As you know, there's a broad spectrum of issues with which we are dealing with the Government of Hong Kong, and we would be open to having such a discussion with Hong Kong authorities.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: All right. I would ask then for GAC to report back to this committee on what measures you have undertaken to assist Hong Kongers to access their pension funds, the Hong Kongers who are here through the special lifeboat scheme the government provided to them prior to their succeeding in getting their PR status. Could I get confirmation that undertaking will be followed up on?

• (1750)

Ms. Jennie Chen: Yes, I will commit to doing so.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to now go to the IRCC officials.

We know that people cannot access their pension funds until they have PR status and that the current processing time for Hong Kongers is at least 21 months. The government has just introduced an extension of the program because they're not anticipating that Hong Kongers will be able to get their PR cards anytime soon. The extension will be at least three years, and while people wait, they can't access their funds.

What will IRCC do? Will IRCC actually ensure that Hong Kongers' PR applications will be processed within the original priority processing average, which was six months? Will IRCC materialize that for Hong Kongers so that they can expeditiously access their pension funds?

Ms. Elizabeth Snow: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The current processing time for the applications is under eight months. I'm unclear where the 21 months surfaced from, but it is under eight months. There are a considerable number of applications that did arrive in 2023 and that we will process through 2024, but, at the moment, there's no indication that processing will increase to 21 months.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I have provided a spreadsheet to the minister's office with a variety of applications where people are just waiting and waiting. The average processing time is 21 months, if you actually talk to people on the ground about that. I'm happy to share that spreadsheet with officials, for sure, but of course those are not all of the people.

We had a briefing from officials—

The Chair: Ms. Kwan, your time is up. We're at 6:27 right now, so I'll come back to you for the second round.

Mr. Redekopp, you have five minutes.

Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here. I want to pick up on what Ms. Kwan was talking about.

In 2012, the former Conservative government, led by Stephen Harper, signed a treaty with Hong Kong. This was to deal with double taxation issues with regard to income tax. The purpose was to treat taxpayers fairly in each jurisdiction and to prevent tax sheltering and money laundering.

Ms. Chen, do you monitor the People's Republic of China and Hong Kong administrative government for compliance with the treaty, as signed by Prime Minister Harper?

Ms. Jennie Chen: We'll have to get back to you on this particular question.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: You're not aware of this treaty. That's shocking because it's very relevant.

I'll quote article 17 of schedule 1 of the treaty's implementation legislation:

Pensions (including lump sums) arising in a Party and paid to a resident of the other Party in consideration of past employment may be taxed in the Party in which they arise and according to the laws of that Party.

Essentially, it is specifically to deal with pensions that are in one or the other jurisdiction so that people are treated fairly in that situation.

In this treaty, there is no mention of the type of passport one must have in order for it to be applicable. There's nothing that I've been able to find that says that you can't have a BNO passport, or that you need this or you need that.

This is causing a problem because, as we heard from Manulife and Sunlife on Monday, they are conflicted. They have a PR card from Canada, yet it seems like the Hong Kong government, Beijing, has said that they can't take their money out.

Do you agree with my assessment that we have a problem here because the treaty doesn't actually mention that, yet the insurance companies are stuck because they don't know whether to follow Canadian law or Hong Kong law?

Ms. Jennie Chen: Thank you.

As mentioned, we're going to have to take that question and come back to you when we can look to our experts and do a full analysis.

• (1755)

Mr. Brad Redekopp: I take that to mean you'll provide us with a written report on this situation.

You also mentioned that you weren't aware of specific cases. Is there a way for someone to contact you to make you aware of a specific case?

Ms. Jennie Chen: I would welcome any individual cases being brought to our attention here. We are also actively engaged with stakeholders, so any cases can also be brought forward through those channels.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: I want to talk about Hong Kong visa applications to IRCC.

As Ms. Kwan was just mentioning, there are a lot of people struggling whom I've talked to—she has as well—who are waiting and waiting.

With this new measure introduced on May 27, there was a lot of confusion over the acknowledgement of receipt. People were saying that they were trying to apply for things and they weren't getting an acknowledgement of receipt.

Is that a necessary step if somebody is already in the system? Are they supposed to wait for that? What's the situation around that?

Ms. Michelle Mascoll: Thank you for the question.

Our website is being updated to reflect that individuals are not required to submit the acknowledgement of receipt with their application. They can be processed if they don't have that. It's not required as part of the application process.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Okay, that would be very helpful because it's causing a lot of confusion in the community.

The other question I have is a bit more general, but along the same lines. There are 8,000 or 9,000 people currently in the queue, and you mentioned 37,000 who are in the system. We expect those numbers will probably come in through PR applications at some point. The humanitarian and compassionate category only allows for 13,000 people this year and then 8,000. How is the department going to deal with the influx of people processing in that category?

The Chair: Ms. Snow.

Ms. Elizabeth Snow: I believe there was a similar question raised in the committee meeting about Gaza and the Sudan, and the department has made a commitment to come back on this matter. We will echo that sentiment here that the department will come back with more clarity on how the numbers in the H and C category will be parcelled out.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Thank you. I don't have a lot of time left, but I just wanted to, again, reiterate that I saw some data that was from about 800 respondents, and the average application date of that group was back to May of last year. That would indicate that the processing times are quite a bit higher than the six months, or the eight months, as you described today. I think there is some disconnect in what people are experiencing, or what they believe they're experiencing, and what you're telling us, so I just wanted to make you aware of that.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we will go to my dear friend from Davenport, Madam Dzerowicz.

Please go ahead, you have five minutes.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Thank you so much.

I just want to say thanks to all of the witnesses. Thanks for being here and for this great conversation, and to everyone for letting me be part of this conversation.

There are two parts to the study, and the first part is the access to the mandatory provident fund. My understanding is that there is an agreement, the Agreement on Social Security Between the Government of Canada and the Government of the People's Republic of China, which provides for coordination of pension benefits between Chinese and Canadian companies and employees, but it doesn't apply to the mandatory provident fund for Hong Kongers.

Maybe my question is for you, Mr. Linkruus.

Is there any other agreement that could govern or provide some guidance on how to deal with this outstanding issue?

Mr. Sven Linkruus: Thank you.

I'm not aware of any such agreement, but I would have to consult internally with perhaps some of our tax policy experts who deal with these international tax types of treaties.

The Chair: Honourable member.

One person at a time. Please let him finish.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I got so excited, Mr. Chair.

Are you aware of that agreement that I just read out, the Agreement on Social Security Between the Government of Canada and the Government of the People's Republic of China?

The Chair: Mr. Linkruus.

Mr. Sven Linkruus: I am not personally aware of that agreement, but I'm sure there's somebody in another part of the Department of Finance who would have information about that.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: The only reason I was asking was that I wonder if there's an arbitration element in that agreement that could actually apply. But if you're not aware of it, then that would be moot.

Okay, so then I'm going to go to my next set of questions about the second part of this study, which is access of the Hong Kongers in Canada to viable pathways to Canadian permanent residence.

Maybe my question is for Ms. Snow.

What are all the current viable pathways to Canadian permanent residence for Hong Kongers in Canada?

• (1800)

The Chair: Mr. McNamee.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I'm sorry, yes. Thank you.

Mr. James McNamee: Thank you.

Hong Kongers have access to all of the pathways we currently have at the department. Those include family reunification pathways for people who are trying to bring their families over, the eco-

conomic pathways, which include the express entry system, and all the skilled migration pathways.

We also have business program pathways, as well as pathways managed through provincial/territorial governments, in addition to the special pathway that we created in 2021, which will be in effect for another year until 2025. This enables people who have previously worked or studied in Canada to continue to apply for permanent residence and get access to that mechanism. So there are very many pathways that are available to Hong Kong nationals.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Thank you. It seems like we have some long processing times within IRCC, and I'm wondering whether that is impacting some of the applications.

I think you mentioned, Ms. Snow, that on average it takes eight months for a Hong Kong resident in Canada to apply from a work permit to a permanent residence. Is that true?

The Chair: Madam Snow.

Ms. Elizabeth Snow: For the streams, for the public policies we've introduced for Hong Kong, the data is showing that it is under eight months right now.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Okay. That is excellent, as I understand it.

My last questions are for Ms. Chen.

Ms. Chen, is there a concern on the part of the People's Republic of China about Hong Kongers trying to emigrate to Canada? Are there political concerns? Are there any considerations the People's Republic has raised through Global Affairs about Hong Kongers coming to Canada?

Ms. Jennie Chen: The PRC government is well aware of Canada's overall concerns around political developments in Hong Kong, but on this issue specifically, they have not raised it with us.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: I'm trying to think if there's any other....

I think those are all of the questions from me.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left. You might as well use it. Otherwise, I'll go to the next one.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Yes, thank you. Go to the next one.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we will go to my dear friend, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, for two-and-a-half minutes.

Go ahead, please.

[*Translation*]

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

Ms. Chen, I want to follow up on my last questions. I'm trying to get a handle on this.

You said that you expressed your concerns about the national security law to the Hong Kong authorities.

The Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development issued a news release calling for the release of Jimmy Lai.

Thus far, you've been unable to tell us whether the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development agrees with the subcommittee's findings.

Did I understand correctly?

[*English*]

Ms. Jennie Chen: Thank you.

Again, Canada's position on Jimmy Lai is very well-known to the Hong Kong authorities, and so forth. There was a unanimous consent motion in Parliament in December about the case of Jimmy Lai. It is my understanding that Minister Joly also voted in favour of that motion, given that it was unanimous.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you.

Is Canada calling for the release of Jimmy Lai, yes or no?

[*English*]

Ms. Jennie Chen: I would say, again, that the PRC government and the Hong Kong authorities are aware of the unanimous consent motion approved in Parliament, which also included, of course, votes by our Minister of Foreign Affairs.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I just want you to tell us whether the Government of Canada supports the demand for the release of Jimmy Lai, yes or no.

That's the only question I have. It's really not complicated.

• (1805)

[*English*]

Ms. Jennie Chen: To be absolutely 100% clear, we have not specifically requested the release of Jimmy Lai. However, we have expressed serious concerns about the trial of Jimmy Lai.

We continue to work with the U.K. government and others to ensure that we are maintaining a consistent advocacy approach around Mr. Lai. Again, because it is considered an important consular case for the U.K. government, we want to approach advocacy around his case with a great deal of respect and responsibility, but I can tell you that we have been in touch with his legal counsel and his family over time. Again, they are very much aware of the work of the Government of Canada on his case.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: We're being told that the law violates human rights, that the department has concerns about the law, that the trial is a sham, but that Canada is not demanding Mr. Lai's release.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much. Your time is up.

Now we will go to Madam Kwan.

Madam Kwan, please go ahead for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you for that.

I may add that we should actually be calling for the release of all political prisoners in Hong Kong in relation to the national security law and the most recent article 23. I hope the officials will bring that back to the minister as well.

I want to follow up with the IRCC officials, in particular Ms. Snow, on her comment that the average processing time is now eight months. There are about 10,000 people waiting for PR applications to be processed from Hong Kong at the moment. That's as of March 2024.

Can you confirm, then, that those individuals will get their PR applications processed in eight months?

Ms. Elizabeth Snow: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As was raised by another member, there is a limit to the levels for this year of 13,500 with another 8,000 booked next year. We will process according to the levels plan.

At the moment, the processing is under eight months. We don't anticipate that the processing will rise to 21 months, but we will work within the levels that have been approved by Parliament and that our minister is accountable for.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: How many per month are being processed right now for Hong Kongers?

Ms. Elizabeth Snow: The department will have to refer back if you wish to have monthly statistics. What I have is the year to date.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I would like to get monthly statistics. Also, on the question around statistics, I asked at the Gaza meeting for the breakdown of the immigration level numbers related to the variety of different special immigration measures. That was on May 27, so by the end of this week it will have been two weeks.

Can we actually get that information by next Monday? It pertains to this study as well

Can I get a confirmation for that?

Ms. Elizabeth Snow: I will take that back to the department and raise your concern that the committee has been waiting for two weeks.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would actually raise this as a motion and have the committee call on the officials to provide that document. I'd like to get this before we actually adjourn this sitting of the House and still have enough time to go back to it, if necessary.

Mr. Chair, can you confirm if I need a motion to request that undertaking or can direction just be given?

The Chair: You can give the direction and I will ask the questions of the officials—if they can. Otherwise, we can always pass this motion.

I will go to Mr. McNamee, Madam Snow or Madam Mascoll, if they want to respond.

I have stopped the watch because your time is already almost up. Let me figure it out.

Mr. James McNamee: As Ms. Snow indicated, we will take this back and commit to providing that information to you. We are aware that the request is in the system and it's being worked on.

At this time, I can't give you an exact timeline on when it will be done, but requests from the committee are always given priority.

The Chair: Madam Kwan, your time is up

Are you satisfied with that or do you want to address this?

• (1810)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate that, especially in light of the fact that we know that people's pension funds are being withheld until the application can be processed.

We just heard from Ms. Snow that the immigration levels plan is going to impact processing in terms of people getting their PR. I think this is all related and the committee members need to have that information.

I would like to ask for the support of the committee members to ensure that we get that information back from officials by next Monday.

The Chair: Do we have the unanimous consent of the committee?

Is it yes?

Mr. Chiang, do you want to speak to that?

Mr. Paul Chiang (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): I will defer to our departmental official if that's an appropriate time or if they might need more time.

The Chair: Okay.

There is the question now and I will give Mr. McNamee the floor.

Mr. McNamee, do you want to respond to Mr. Chiang's question?

Mr. James McNamee: I would like to be able to come back to the committee with an exact date to be able to produce that information. It is Wednesday now and Monday is coming up very quickly.

The Chair: Basically, Mr. McNamee, you are saying that you would not be able to produce it by Monday.

Is that correct?

Mr. James McNamee: I would like more time, if possible, yes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Greg McLean: I too have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: No, Madam Kwan, you know that your time is up, but I still entertained the question, so there's no....

I have Mr. McLean on the speaking list and I will put you on the speaking list as well.

Mr. McLean, did you want to speak?

Mr. Greg McLean: Yes. Thank you.

I'm sorry, we're talking about some readily available data here. Are you saying we can't get it in a day or two?

The Chair: Mr. McNamee.

Mr. James McNamee: Often the data that we release has to be reviewed to ensure that it is publicly releasable. Sometimes information includes small cell data that identifies individuals, and we want to avoid that wherever possible, so it takes a little bit of time.

Mr. Greg McLean: Well, of course, we're not looking for personal identification; we're looking for numbers. You should have a database of this, and it should be readily available to be able to handle it in a few hours, quite frankly, so I'm challenged by why this can't be produced very quickly here.

The Chair: We're not all experts. I will leave it to the officials to respond.

Madam Kwan, please go ahead.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm just trying to get clarity here with respect to that. Just to be clear, the request for that data was made on May 27, so by next Monday it will have been two weeks—not just a couple of days—for this data to be made available for this committee. It's the same data that we requested be sent to our committee. It's been two weeks, and time is of the essence here.

Am I hearing, then, on the unanimous consent motion that you asked committee members about, that Mr. Chiang is voting no, or is there unanimous consent? I'm just not clear.

The Chair: No, nobody's voting “no” yet. It's only debate right now.

Now, Madam Kwan, the members have questions to ask the officials, and that is fully appropriate. As I said, I'm giving this additional time to discuss it. There's no vote, and no one has said that they don't support it. They were just asking the question to make sure that the officials have the appropriate time.

Every member has the right, as I said, and I have not called the vote yet.

Go ahead, Madam Dzerowicz.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: Since we're still in debate—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'm sorry—

• (1815)

The Chair: Yes, go ahead, Madam Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, can I just finish? I just wanted that clarity on where we're at with respect to that vote, so thank you for clarifying. I very much appreciate that.

I want to have a quick response from the officials with respect to potential data that might compromise individual privacy, such as names and so on. I want to reiterate that the undertaking is about the larger data number and not about the individuals, their names or their specific case in terms of processing.

It is for the government to advise this committee, based on the immigration levels plan of this year under the H and C category of 18,500—next year it is 8,000, and the following year is also 8,000—how they're going to target the various different needs of the special immigration measures and other H and C needs in the global community that IRCC is contemplating and trying to address as well as the protected-persons category.

These are broad numbers, particularly what those targets are for each of those different countries or regions, so that we may know how these numbers will measure up in terms of processing.

I just want to be clear that there's no personal information here.

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz: In the debate, Mr. Chair, I was just going to ask officials how much time they felt they needed, whether they felt they needed one extra week or a couple of extra days. I wanted to see where they were at.

Mr. James McNamee: We're aware of the request, and I believe that it's being acted on as expeditiously as possible. I just can't tell you exactly that it will be ready on Monday, but I will tell you that we're working on it, and it will be ready as soon as possible.

The Chair: That will be appropriate, Mr. McNamee, if I see consensus in the committee.

Mr. McNamee, what do you feel? Whatever you feel confident in, just give the answer. If I need to go to a vote, then I will. If I see the consensus in the committee, then that will work.

Mr. James McNamee: I think in a week's time it would be possible to produce it or to finalize whatever product we are in the process of producing, because the request has been in place now for a while, as Ms. Kwan has indicated.

The Chair: Okay, Madam Kwan and other other members, I think it's appropriate. I see heads nodding, so we'll give the IRCC time to produce the requested information by next Wednesday.

Thank you very much, Madam Kwan. Your time has long been up, so we will go to—

A Voice: It's approved?

The Chair: It's approved—unanimously agreed.

We have Mr. Kmiec for five minutes.

Please go ahead.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Thanks, Chair.

Mr. McNamee, at the beginning here, we were debating this PR card. There is a person who has now corresponded with the com-

mittee saying that she's affected by it. She gave an example, so that's the example I'm using.

At the previous committee on the Canadian PR card, it appears as “GBN”. That's how the Hong Kong government, the Beijing government, is identifying people who came to Canada on a BNO passport. We're told now that these are ICAO rules. Are these standards or recommended practices?

Mr. James McNamee: I will ask Ms. Mascoll to take that question.

Ms. Michelle Mascoll: The ICAO does have a standard for machine-readable travel documents. Contained within there, the country code for British nationals overseas is GBN.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Is it a standard or a practice?

Ms. Michelle Mascoll: It's a standard.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: It's a standard. There are differences between the two. One is like a recommended thing to do. The other one is like an obligation to do it, because we're a member of the ICAO.

In all the discussion here, since you are aware of this issue for certain Hong Kongers who've entered Canada and who become permanent residents—there will be more of them, as thousands more continue to apply for PR and eventually, after all the delays, will get it—have you communicated with the ICAO?

Ms. Michelle Mascoll: I'm not aware of whether we've communicated with the ICAO on this particular issue.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Is it that your branch in the department has not, or are you just unaware of whether anyone in government has communicated to the ICAO that the Hong Kong administration is using Canadian PR cards to identify people they want to oppress transnationally because they're Hong Kongers who are fleeing that country and obtaining permanent residency in Canada?

Ms. Michelle Mascoll: I'm not aware of whether anyone in the Government of Canada has raised that issue with ICAO.

• (1820)

Mr. Tom Kmiec: The ICAO is based in Montreal, so why not?

Ms. Michelle Mascoll: I'm not aware of who would be leading that, so at this time I can't comment on why or why not it hasn't been raised.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Chair, maybe I'll ask GAC, because GAC would be responsible for dealings with these international organizations.

The ICAO is based in Montreal. I'm being told that nobody's communicated the fact that these ICAO standards are now being used to target Canadian permanent residents who are from Hong Kong who entered Canada on a BNO passport. This committee has an example now.

Are you aware of this? Is GAC aware of this? Has GAC communicated to the ICAO?

Ms. Jennie Chen: I'm just learning now that this is an issue being looked at by ICAO. We are aware of their headquarters being in Montreal. The lead for ICAO is actually Transport Canada, but we would be pleased to work with IRCC and Transport Canada officials to ensure that some important messages are delivered. We can look into this issue with ICAO officials.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: To go back to Mr. McNamee, what is the downside? What is the effect? What would ICAO do if the Government of Canada were to change the four different codes, but specifically GBN, to mark, say, "HKG" or "CHN" on the permanent resident cards that are being issued by the Government of Canada? Does somebody monitor this, or can it just be a practice of the government to protect these Hong Kongers who fled, who get PR, to simply issue them one that doesn't show the fact and doesn't make it easy for the MPFA in Hong Kong to target them?

Ms. Michelle Mascoll: I would have to bring that back and discuss it with Transport Canada and other stakeholders across government.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: How is Transport Canada involved in IRCC-issued PR cards?

Ms. Michelle Mascoll: As Ms. Chen indicated, Transport Canada is the lead for ICAO in terms of that communication.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Right. I understand that part. I'm saying as an IRCC practice, why, as a practice, don't you just change it so that you don't show GBN but you show HKG or CHN? It would protect these Hong Kongers who've come to Canada and been issued a PR card. We've done a security record check, background checks on them, and you're showing GBN. That's how they're being targeted. That's how the Hong Kong administration, the communists, know that these are Hong Kongers who fled and permanently do not want to go back.

I'm just saying, as a practice, what would happen?

Ms. Michelle Mascoll: Thank you for the question.

IRCC issues the travel... The PR cards are designed and issued to be consistent with the travel document that's provided by the applicant. We haven't explored them further than that. They continue to be issued to be consistent with the travel document because they're used together.

The Chair: Thank you.

The time is up. It's been five minutes and 41 seconds.

We will go to my dear friend Mr. El-Khoury. You have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to our witnesses for joining us and for sharing some very important information with the committee.

Ms. Chen, my colleague on the other side of the table asked you whether Canada had specifically demanded Jimmy Lai's release. However, your answer was a bit vague.

Can you tell us what arguments or reasons Canada has given for not seeking Mr. Lai's release?

[*English*]

Ms. Jennie Chen: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I've actually just been reminded of the text of our statement at the universal periodic review, when, as I said earlier, we called for the repeal of the national security law. We also asked that they discontinue all cases against individuals charged for exercising their human rights and freedoms.

We made a statement referencing all cases being tried under the national security law.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: I'm sorry, Ms. Chen, but with all due respect, what you just told me is not what I asked you.

I asked you to tell us the specific reasons and arguments behind the fact that Canada has not demanded Jimmy Lai's release. You haven't given me any specific reasons or arguments that could convince the committee.

● (1825)

[*English*]

Ms. Jennie Chen: Mr. Chair, it's been very clear to Mr. Lai's family, legal counsel and other supporters what Canada's position is on his case and, of course, what our position is on the national security law.

We have consistently spoken out about Jimmy Lai's case, and we will continue to do so.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: Ms. Chen, our relationship with China could have a negative impact on the assistance we can provide to Hong Kongers who are seeking Canada's support during their time of need.

[*English*]

Ms. Jennie Chen: I'm sorry. Could you repeat the question?

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: The relationship between Canada and China may play a role in Canada's not being more helpful to the people of Hong Kong and asking for the freedom of Mr. Jimmy Lai.

Ms. Jennie Chen: If I understand correctly, Mr. Chair, the question is about whether or not our relations with the PRC are impacting our ability to conduct advocacy on Mr. Lai's case. Is that correct?

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: Yes and no. I'm asking this question as the chair of the human rights committee.

Until this moment, I have not found convincing reasons why we have not asked for the freedom of Mr. Jimmy Lai.

Ms. Jennie Chen: Thank you for raising that.

We have been focused on human rights in Hong Kong for many years. Our position has been very consistent over many years. We've spoken out multiple times about Jimmy Lai. We have called for the release of all individuals charged under the NSL. We continue to conduct that kind of advocacy.

No, we have not specifically called for the release of Mr. Lai, but I believe our position is quite well understood by his supporters.

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: My question is addressed to Mr. Linkruus and Mr. Smith, probably. During the handover of Hong Kong in the late nineties from the British to China....

The flow of money to China used to go through Hong Kong. How do you see the flow of money now from outside to Hong Kong, and from Hong Kong to China? Are there any obstacles from the Chinese government? Are there any restrictions?

The Chair: Mr. Linkruus.

Mr. Sven Linkruus: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Very unfortunately, I do not have any information about flows of money or investments between Canada and China.

The Chair: Honourable member, you have 20 seconds.

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: I was going to ask Mr. McNamee about what he said.

[*Translation*]

Mr. McNamee, you said that there are concrete, special measures and pathways for those who want to stay in Canada.

Can you give us a general idea of those concrete measures?

Mr. James McNamee: We have public policy measures in place that allow Hong Kongers to stay in Canada as students or workers. We set up a special process that gives Hong Kongers the right to stay here as permanent residents.

The public policy has been in place since 2021, and it will be in effect until 2025. Through the policy, we have already received more than 20,000 applications for permanent residency through these two pathways, streams A and B. We have already accepted close to 8,000 applications, which were made in person.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we will go to Mr. Redekopp.

Mr. Redekopp, you have five minutes. Please go ahead.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to put on record that I'm very disappointed by the answers there today. We have IRCC deferring to Transport Canada for what's on a PR card. I'm shocked at that. We have GAC not understanding that there's a treaty between Canada and Hong Kong. We have Finance not understanding there are treaties to deal with pensions between the two countries. I'm somewhat dumbfounded at the lack of information, the lack of answers that we're getting today from people I thought would have the answers.

In light of that, very quickly, I want to move a quick motion. We need to get the minister here to do the supplementary estimates (A) before the end of June. Therefore, I'd like to move the following motion:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee invite the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship to appear for one hour with officials and invite departmental officials along with officials from the Immigration and Refugee Board to appear for one additional hour, on the Supplementary Estimates A as well as the subject matter of Main Estimates for the fiscal year 2024-25 before June 21, 2024.

• (1830)

The Chair: Thank you. The motion is in order.

Mr. El-Khoury, you are the first on the speaking list. Please go ahead.

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to my colleague, Brad Redekopp, for moving this motion. However, as a member of the immigration committee, I can confirm to you that the agenda of the minister is extremely congested. We have a maximum of two more weeks. I believe it's going to be somewhat impossible for him.

If you would like to modify your motion and postpone it to September and afterward, it's up to you, but this is what I'm saying to you. I am convinced of it.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: I would just say that I respect what you said. I don't know that you speak for the minister, though. He has a choice to make to come to this. I think we just put this on the table and whatever happens, happens.

The Chair: Thank you.

I have the speaking list.

Mr. Ali, please go ahead.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you, Chair.

I agree with Mr. El-Khoury that the time is too close. If we can give a bit of extra time, I think that would be a reasonable ask. We wouldn't have any issue on that. Perhaps we can bring a reasonable time for the minister that would be manageable for him and for us as a committee as well.

I just wanted to add that.

The Chair: I will go to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, then Mr. Chiang.

[Translation]

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

It's not up to us to say whether the deadline is reasonable or not. In any case, the minister will tell us whether he can appear or not. Let's look rationally at the content of the motion. Once everybody agrees, the minister will appear if he can. Everyone seems fine with what the motion says and interested in supporting it. Then, regardless of how much time is left, the minister will tell us whether he can appear or not.

We're not reprimanding him. We're just asking him to appear if he can. Personally, I wouldn't waste any more time on this. We have excellent witnesses and are having great discussions. I'm about to ask Mr. El-Khoury to join the Bloc Québécois.

That said, Mr. Chair, I would like you to call the vote on this motion right away so we can continue this interesting discussion.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: On the speaking list, I have Mr. Chiang, Ms. Kwan, Mr. Ali and then Mr. El-Khoury. Once the list is exhausted, I will call the vote.

Now I will go to Mr. Chiang and then Ms. Kwan.

Mr. Chiang, go ahead, please.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm thinking about the timeline we have. With only two weeks left in this session, we could replace the date with "as soon as possible" for the minister to appear based on his schedule, because he has quite an extensive schedule with commitments across the country, not just in the House of Commons.

Perhaps if we could replace it with "as soon as possible", it may be helpful for the minister to be here.

The Chair: Do you agree with that?

Mr. Brad Redekopp: No, because the supplementary estimates (A) are going to get reported automatically. We need to do this before that.

The Chair: Ms. Kwan, please go ahead.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I think committee members are correct to say that it's not up to us to determine the minister's availability. All we can do, of course, is ask. The minister will say, "No, I'm sorry. I can't come, but here's an alternate date." I think we should really just make the ask and see what the minister comes back with. This is normal practice.

We try to get the supplementaries done as soon as we can, and we have already had to delay that timeline because of other urgent studies, such as the Gaza and Sudan situations. When the minister showed up last time, we talked about that.

I think it's fair to make this request of the minister, and then they'll come back to us and tell us about his availability.

• (1835)

The Chair: There's a date attached to the motion. I would ask the clerk to read this motion just to make sure the members are very clear on what Mr. Redekopp is asking for.

Mr. Clerk, please go ahead.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Rémi Bourgault):

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee invite the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship to appear for one hour with officials and invite departmental officials along with officials from the Immigration and Refugee Board to appear for one additional hour on the Supplementary Estimates (A), as well as the subject matter of Main Estimates for the fiscal year 2024-25, before June 21, 2024.

The Chair: Thank you.

I have Mr. Ali, Mr. El-Khoury and Ms. Dzerowicz.

Go ahead, Mr. Ali.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you, Chair.

I agree with everything, but I just want to give an option to the minister, if it's not possible for him until June 21, to give an alternate date when he would be appearing before the committee, as Ms. Kwan has suggested.

I think if we can add that into it, it would give him leverage so he's aligned with our—

The Chair: I can entertain it only if there is an amendment to the motion. You've got to say that the motion is amended. Otherwise, I will call this a discussion.

I cannot propose it myself. If one of the honourable members asks to amend, just like Mr. Chiang earlier requested of Mr. Redekopp, the amended motion should be on the floor. Only then can I go to the amendment.

Mr. Ali, you still have the floor. I will go to Mr. El-Khoury afterwards.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Can we suspend for one minute so we can talk? If it's a friendly amendment, we could work together on this.

A voice: It's not friendly.

The Chair: I will suspend for a few minutes.

• (1835)

(Pause)

• (1850)

The Chair: We are back to business.

I have a speaking list.

Mr. Ali, you have the floor, and then Madam Dzerowicz, Mr. El-Khoury and Mr. Kmiec. I have four on the speaking list.

Oh, Mr. El-Khoury is off, so the person I have is Mr. Ali.

Mr. Ali, go ahead. The floor is for you.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you, Chair.

I suggested that I move a friendly amendment. At the end of the motion, add, "or an alternative date that the minister is available."

The Chair: Mr. Redekopp, do you accept the friendly amendment?

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Yes, I do, but with one condition that we finish the Liberal, Bloc and NDP round as planned. I'm done with my time.

The Chair: Sure.

All those in favour of the amendment?

(Amendment agreed to)

(Motion as amended agreed to)

The Chair: We are going to Mr. Redekopp. No? We are going to Mr. Ali. No?

Look at how generous both the Conservative and Liberal friends are for Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, we are skipping the Conservatives and the Liberals, and we are going to give you and Madam Kwan the last round before we adjourn the meeting.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have a quick two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's like Christmas came early.

Ms. Chen, you told us that Canada has called for the repeal of the Hong Kong national security law and is calling for the release of all political prisoners charged or imprisoned under that law.

As we know, Jimmy Lai is a political prisoner. Am I to understand that Canada is calling for the release of all these political prisoners, including Mr. Lai?

• (1855)

[*English*]

Ms. Jennie Chen: Yes, Mr. Chair, I would agree with that statement.

The Chair: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I'm glad to hear that answer.

Thank you, Ms. Chen.

I'll yield the floor over to whoever wants to take it.

[*English*]

The Chair: I took the time, without the consent from Mr. Chiang. Mr. Chiang, can I give two and a half minutes to Madam Kwan, and then come back to you? I know I am going out of order, but hopefully you will entertain my request as the chair.

I see consent. Okay, thank you.

Madam Kwan, you have two and a half minutes before I go to Mr. Chiang, because I just went off the track.

Madam Kwan.

Ms. Jennie Kwan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I just want to be sure, and the question is for GAC.

Of course, yesterday was the 35th anniversary of the Tiananmen massacre, and 30 years ago the national security law and the protests came about. Many people will say that what's happening right now in Hong Kong is basically Tiananmen massacre 2.0.

Just this past week we had a situation where what's called the "Hong Kong 47" are under arrest and charged with being in violation of the national security law and also article 23.

My question for GAC is this. What is the minister doing in relation to that? Is she actually calling for the release of these political prisoners and for the Hong Kong authorities to stop prosecuting these individuals?

The Chair: Madam Chen.

Ms. Jennie Chen: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The last few days have seen some very important developments on the China human rights scene. As some of you may have noted, Global Affairs Canada released a statement on May 30 regarding the outcomes of the trial of what we call the "Hong Kong 47", again expressing our grave concerns about the application of the national security law for what we believe are legitimate expressions of political views in Hong Kong.

Yesterday Global Affairs Canada also released a statement on the occasion of the 35th anniversary of Tiananmen Square. We think it's very important that Canadians and the world do not forget what happened 35 years ago in Beijing.

I would say that our minister is very focused on the relationship with China at this moment, including human rights.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'm sorry. I was asking very specific question.

Is the minister calling for the release of these political prisoners and for the Hong Kong authorities—the Chinese government—to stop prosecuting political prisoners? It's a yes-or-no question.

The Chair: If you can, be brief in your answer.

Ms. Jennie Chen: As mentioned in the universal periodic review statement by Canada in January, we called for Hong Kong to discontinue all cases against individuals charged with exercising their human rights and freedoms.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chiang, I'm sorry. I just saw the hand from Mr. Ali. I thought Mr. Ali was giving me the go-ahead to go to the other parties. You have my apologies.

Mr. Chiang, you have the floor.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all the witnesses for being here today.

In July 2023, I had the honour of making an announcement on behalf of IRCC about the removal of the educational requirement under Canadian work experience streams A and B of the Hong Kong permanent residency pathway. This change meant that we could welcome more Hong Kongers who need our support to Canada, while simultaneously helping Canadian businesses fill labour gaps with workers who already have work experience here.

Can you explain to the committee how the government has been using a flexible approach to adapt its program to support the needs of Hong Kongers here in Canada?

• (1900)

Mr. James McNamee: Thank you.

That was one example of when we looked at a public policy and amended it to make it more effective in the circumstances of the day.

Other examples are the May 27 amendments and new public policies that allow persons who have work permits to extend them,

and that allow persons who are in the process of getting permanent residence access to a longer stay in Canada of up to three years. These were made in response to the realities of our day-to-day that we need to adapt our policies. We're very willing to do that, and we'll continue to do so if necessary in the context of Hong Kong.

The Chair: Honourable member, do you still have a question?

Mr. Paul Chiang: I'm good.

The Chair: The member is good, and the watch says it's right on 7 o'clock.

On behalf of the committee members, I want to thank all of the officials for being with us. I wish you the very best.

I also want to thank everyone—the support staff, the interpreters and, of course, the clerk and the analysts—for staying until 7 o'clock.

The meeting is adjourned.

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