

May 19, 2023

CCNC-SJ STATEMENT ON THE PROPOSED FOREIGN INFLUENCE TRANSPARENCY REGISTRY

Foreign Influence Transparency Registry

The Chinese Canadian National Council for Social Justice (CCNC-SJ) was consulted about a proposed federal Foreign Influence Transparency Registry. As noted in the Government’s Public Consultation Paper, the Registry seeks to “enhance foreign influence transparency and address malign foreign influence” and it “could impose strict disclosure requirements for individuals and entities acting on behalf of foreign principals for influence purposes.”

Effective Responses to Foreign Interference – Core Principles

CCNC-SJ shares the same concerns that all Canadians have about foreign government interference in our nation – whether it’s from China, Russia, or any other country. We must respond effectively to protect our democracy, our national security and our values. Our support for a registry is conditional to the extent that such a registry must follow certain principles that are consistent with our democracy and values. This would include the following:

- a. Be non-partisan and accountable, by committing to independent civilian oversight and community engagement in the registry’s setup and operation.
- b. Be respectful of human rights and inclusivity, by not reinforcing the perpetual foreigner stereotype or suspicions of dual loyalties, and by reducing unconscious bias and the harm caused by associations between foreign nations and Canadians of related racial or ethnic backgrounds (for example, do not equate “China” with “Chinese”).
- c. Be knowledgeable about the communities – for example, by not treating the very diverse Chinese Canadian communities as a monolith; Chinese Canadians include new immigrants from all parts of the world and also families who have been here for generations.
- d. Be global/universal, by not targeting the legislation or registration scheme to specific governments or groups.

The Bigger Context of Protecting Democracy – Our Shared Values

The increased anti-Asian racism and the current political climate between Canada and China have both made the launch of the registry more sensitive. It is therefore imperative that our responses to foreign interference be communicated clearly and consistently by our leaders and senior officials. We cannot afford confusion or mixed messages, which will be used against our shared interests in democracy, inclusion, and anti-racism. The presentation of the registry as a tool to fight foreign interference should always be framed as part of the fight to protect our democracy and national security. The bigger picture for protecting our democracy includes actions that promote our shared values and the benefits of inclusive civic engagement. These actions include fighting for human rights and equity and fighting against discrimination and white supremacy.

Specific Comments about the Registry Consultation Paper

- a. Clearly emphasize that there should be no confusion in terminology between a foreign nation and the related persons or communities – i.e., do not confuse “China” or the “Chinese government” with “Chinese”.
- b. The definition of “foreign principal” is much too broad and ambiguous, since it refers to a person or group “with links to a foreign government”. Consider if that term is even needed, because “foreign principal” will be too easily confused with the very different and ominous term “foreign agent”.
- c. The use of the term “malign influence” as a subset of “foreign interference” is confusing, especially when the word “influence” is also used to refer to a legitimate activity that is done with transparency and openness. It will be clearer to use “influence” only to refer to acceptable activities and “interference” to refer to unacceptable activities (namely, activities that are hidden, deceptive or involving threats, coercion, or bribes).
- d. The brief sentence about upholding the Charter is inadequate as one of the Guiding Principles. The government’s communications about efforts to fight foreign interference should be framed as part of a broader approach to protect our democracy and shared values. This should include commitments to ensure training, communications, organizational culture and leadership that will protect against increasing racism and racial profiling and be sensitive to the harm caused by the perpetual foreigner stereotype and the association between foreign nations and Canadians of related racial or ethnic backgrounds.

See also Statement of CCNC-SJ on Foreign Interference in Canada
<https://ccncsj.ca/ccnc-sj-statement-on-foreign-interference-in-canada/>