



The Alliance of  
Genocide Victim  
Communities

## **Transnational Repression in Genocide Affected and Atrocity Affected Communities in Canada**

### **Executive Summary**

The Alliance of Genocide Victim Communities (AGVC) submits that transnational repression in Canada constitutes a direct threat to the safety, dignity, democratic participation, and wellbeing of genocide affected and atrocity affected communities. When individuals alter their speech or participation due to fear of foreign retaliation, the integrity of Canada's democratic space is compromised.

AGVC's cross community structure reveals consistent patterns across diverse geopolitical contexts, demonstrating that transnational repression in Canada operates systemically.

Communities report surveillance, intimidation, harassment of family members abroad, disinformation campaigns, reputational attacks, and sustained pressure to self censor. These tactics function in coordinated ways and draw on pre existing trauma, unresolved injustice, and ongoing vulnerability tied to relatives living under repressive regimes.

The result is compounded harm. Survivors withdraw from public life, civic participation declines, trust in institutions erodes, and the effects of atrocity extend into diaspora communities in Canada.

Canada has recognized the national security dimensions of transnational repression. Current responses remain fragmented and insufficiently aligned with the lived realities of affected communities.

AGVC recommends a coordinated, trauma informed, and community engaged response that treats transnational repression as both a national security issue and a matter of community protection.

### **About AGVC**

The Alliance of Genocide Victim Communities (AGVC) is a Canadian coalition of communities affected by genocide and mass atrocity. AGVC works to advance justice, recognition, prevention, and public education through cross community collaboration.

Its membership includes individuals and organizations representing a range of atrocity contexts, including Hazara, Rohingya, Rwandan, Tamil, Tigrayan, Tibetan, Uyghur, and Yazidi communities. This collective structure allows AGVC to identify recurring patterns of harm that may not be visible when communities are considered in isolation.

AGVC regularly engages with policymakers, law enforcement, and civil society to strengthen responses to human rights violations and to support the wellbeing and participation of affected communities in Canada.docx

## **Core Submission**

Transnational repression in Canada is systemic, not incidental.

While methods vary across state actors, the effects are strikingly consistent across genocide affected and atrocity affected communities. These include:

- suppression of speech and advocacy
- intimidation and monitoring of community activities
- harassment and targeting of individuals and organizations
- coercion through threats to family members abroad
- coordinated disinformation and reputational attacks
- erosion of trust in institutions, including law enforcement

These harms extend beyond individual incidents and are experienced within Canada's borders, shaping how individuals speak, gather, and participate in public life.

For many, participation in protests, commemorations, or advocacy carries perceived risk. Individuals may withdraw from public discourse, avoid engagement with officials, or decline to report incidents. This results in a chilling effect that weakens democratic participation in Canada.

Transnational repression engages multiple areas of Canadian law, including criminal harassment, intimidation, foreign interference, and violations of Charter protected freedoms such as expression, association, and participation in democratic life. Canada also has obligations under international human rights law to ensure that individuals within its territory are protected from coercion and retaliation by foreign actors.

### **Transnational repression in Canada:**

- distorts public discourse
- interferes with civic participation
- creates unequal access to democratic rights
- introduces foreign state power into Canadian public life

When individuals in Canada alter their speech, participation, or advocacy due to fear of foreign retaliation, the integrity of Canada's democratic space is compromised.

Evidence shared through federal consultation processes underscores the lived reality of these dynamics. Individuals have described living in a state of ongoing fear despite residing in Canada, with some reporting that they continue to experience surveillance, intimidation, and pressure linked to foreign state actors. These accounts highlight that transnational repression is

not abstract, but actively shapes how individuals experience safety, belonging, and participation within Canadian society.

Across multiple communities, individuals describe altering or withdrawing from public life due to fear of retaliation. This includes avoiding protests, limiting speech, severing communication with family members abroad, concealing identity, and experiencing sustained psychological distress. These patterns reflect the extension of foreign state influence into Canadian life, reshaping participation, safety, and belonging.

## **Patterns Observed Across Communities**

AGVC's cross community work reveals several recurring patterns of transnational repression:

### **1. Silencing Through Fear**

Individuals and community leaders frequently self censor due to fear of retaliation. This includes:

- avoiding public advocacy
- limiting online expression
- declining media engagement
- withdrawing from organizing efforts

Fear is often tied to credible concerns for relatives living under repressive regimes. In one case, Uyghur community member stepped back from advocacy after receiving warnings from family members abroad that their activities in Canada were being monitored and could place relatives at risk.<sup>1</sup> Similar patterns have been observed across communities. Tibetan Canadians have reported avoiding public protests and community events due to fears that their identities may be recorded and used to target family members abroad,<sup>2</sup> while Tamil advocates have described refraining from public engagement due to the risk of being labeled as extremists or terrorists, with consequences for travel, employment, and safety.<sup>3</sup> Individuals moderate or withdraw from public engagement in response to credible threats extending beyond Canada's borders.

This pattern reflects a consistent constraint on participation across multiple communities in Canada

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<sup>1</sup> Foreign Interference Commission, Public Consultation Process: Small Group Meeting Summary (Uyghur Community – Meeting 2), prepared by Uyghur Rights Advocacy Project, 2024, Participant 3.

<sup>2</sup> Foreign Interference Commission, Public Consultation Process: Small Group Meeting Summary (Tibetan Canadian Community), 2024, Participant 2.

<sup>3</sup> Foreign Interference Commission, Public Consultation Process: Small Group Meeting Summary (Tamil Canadian Community), 2024, Participant 1.

## 2. Surveillance and Harassment

Community events, protests, and commemorations are monitored and, in some cases, disrupted. Individuals report:

- online harassment and coordinated targeting
- anonymous threats or intimidation
- unauthorized recording or monitoring of gatherings
- reputational attacks aimed at discrediting advocates

An individual in the Uyghur community has described living under the assumption that their communications and personal devices are subject to monitoring, reporting a constant sense of surveillance despite residing in Canada.<sup>4</sup> Comparable experiences have been reported in other communities. Tigrayan Canadians have described avoiding the use of their real names or public visibility due to concerns that online activity is monitored and may result in retaliation against family members,<sup>5</sup> while Tamil advocates have reported being subjected to international scrutiny, interrogation, and monitoring linked to foreign government designation.<sup>6</sup>

Persistent surveillance creates an environment of heightened vigilance and insecurity. These experiences indicate that surveillance is not perceived as occasional, but as persistent and normalized.

## 3. Coercion Through Family Vulnerability

A defining feature of transnational repression in genocide affected communities is the targeting of family members abroad.

Threats, pressure, or retaliation directed at relatives create powerful coercive conditions. Uyghur community members have reported that threats against family members abroad, including detention, imprisonment, and disappearance, are used to compel silence or cooperation, reinforcing the reach of repression beyond national borders. This is among the most effective mechanisms of coercion.<sup>7</sup> This pattern is consistently reflected across multiple communities. Tigrayan Canadians have reported that family members were directly threatened, detained, or forced to flee after advocacy activities in Canada,<sup>8</sup> while

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<sup>4</sup> Foreign Interference Commission, Public Consultation Process: Small Group Meeting Summary (Uyghur Community – Meeting 1), prepared by Uyghur Rights Advocacy Project, 2024, Executive Summary.

<sup>5</sup> Foreign Interference Commission, Public Consultation Process: Small Group Meeting Summary (Tigrayan Canadian Community – Meeting 1), 2024, Participant 4.

<sup>6</sup> Foreign Interference Commission, Public Consultation Process: Small Group Meeting Summary (Tamil Canadian Community), 2024, Participant 1.

<sup>7</sup> Foreign Interference Commission, Public Consultation Process: Small Group Meeting Summary (Uyghur Community – Meeting 1), prepared by Uyghur Rights Advocacy Project, 2024, Executive Summary.

<sup>8</sup> Foreign Interference Commission, Public Consultation Process: Small Group Meeting Summary (Tigrayan Canadian Community – Meeting 1), 2024, Participant 3.

Tibetan Canadians have described being required to limit their expression or engagement as a condition for protecting relatives from imprisonment or retaliation.<sup>9</sup>

This mechanism extends the reach of foreign states into the private lives of individuals in Canada

#### **4. Disinformation as a Tool of Repression**

Disinformation campaigns play a central role in transnational repression. These may:

- misrepresent victims and perpetrators
- delegitimize advocacy efforts
- create confusion among policymakers and the public
- justify harassment or dismissal of community concerns

Disinformation distorts narratives, isolates communities, and undermines the conditions for credible institutional response. Across communities, disinformation has been used to reshape public perception and undermine advocacy. Tigrayan participants described coordinated efforts to label activists as terrorists and disseminate propaganda in Canadian policy spaces,<sup>10</sup> while Tamil advocates reported organized campaigns to falsely associate individuals with terrorism in order to damage reputations and suppress political participation.<sup>11</sup>

These campaigns shape not only narratives, but the conditions under which communities are believed or dismissed.

#### **5. Institutional Hesitation and Underreporting**

The true scale of transnational repression in Canada is likely significantly underreported. A combination of fear, limited awareness, and low confidence in institutional responses creates a persistent gap between lived experience and documented cases. As a result, current policy responses risk being shaped by incomplete data.

Underreporting is further compounded by the fact that many individuals do not recognize their experiences as transnational repression. Limited understanding of legal rights, uncertainty in identifying qualifying incidents, and lack of clarity on where or how to report contribute to this invisibility.

Community members may refrain from reporting due to:

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<sup>9</sup> Foreign Interference Commission, Public Consultation Process: Small Group Meeting Summary (Tibetan Canadian Community), 2024, Participant 1.

<sup>10</sup> Foreign Interference Commission, Public Consultation Process: Small Group Meeting Summary (Tigrayan Canadian Community – Meeting 1), 2024, Participant 1.

<sup>11</sup> Foreign Interference Commission, Public Consultation Process: Small Group Meeting Summary (Tamil Canadian Community), 2024, Participant 3.

- limited awareness of reporting mechanisms
- uncertainty about whether their experiences meet reporting thresholds
- fear of escalation or retaliation, particularly involving family members abroad
- concern that authorities may lack the contextual understanding required to respond effectively

For example, a Uyghur community member who reported repeated threats to police was informed that authorities lacked the capacity to investigate and was advised to consider relocating.<sup>12</sup> Similar experiences have been reported in other communities. Tigrayan Canadians have described reporting threats to law enforcement without receiving follow-up, contributing to a loss of confidence in institutional protection,<sup>13</sup> while others have indicated that responses from authorities minimized the seriousness of online threats or dismissed them as non-credible.<sup>14</sup> Experiences such as this reinforce perceptions that available protections may be limited or ineffective, further discouraging reporting.

These factors obscure the scale and severity of the issue and limit effective policy response.

Transnational repression in Canada is sustained, adaptive, and embedded in the lived realities of affected communities, contributing to a widening gap between lived experience and institutional protection.

### **Why Genocide Affected Communities Require Distinct Consideration**

Genocide affected and atrocity affected communities face distinct and heightened vulnerability to transnational repression.

In genocide affected and atrocity affected communities, these tactics intersect with:

- collective trauma and intergenerational grief
- unresolved justice and accountability processes
- ongoing threats to relatives abroad
- historical experiences of state violence and impunity

Acts of intimidation carry layered psychological and communal consequences. They reopen trauma, reinforce fear, and weaken trust in institutions. In this context, transnational repression reactivates existing harm, amplifying its psychological and communal impact.

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<sup>12</sup> Foreign Interference Commission, Public Consultation Process: Small Group Meeting Summary (Uyghur Community – Meeting 1), prepared by Uyghur Rights Advocacy Project, 2024, Participant 3.

<sup>13</sup> Foreign Interference Commission, Public Consultation Process: Small Group Meeting Summary (Tigrayan/Ethiopian Canadian Community), 2024, Participant 1.

<sup>14</sup> Foreign Interference Commission, Public Consultation Process: Small Group Meeting Summary (Tigrayan/Ethiopian Canadian Community), 2024, Participant 2.

AGVC community members have described the psychological impact of these experiences as profound, noting that the realization that repression extends into Canada is itself deeply destabilizing for affected communities.<sup>15</sup>

This dynamic is reflected across communities. Participants have described severing communication with family members, withdrawing from public life,<sup>16</sup> or experiencing profound psychological distress upon realizing that repression extends into Canada, reinforcing the sense that there is no safe distance from the conditions they fled.<sup>17</sup> A response that does not account for this context risks being ineffective.

## **Recommendations**

These recommendations are grounded in consistent patterns identified across communities through federal consultation processes. AGVC respectfully submits the following recommendations:

### **1. Establish a Dedicated Federal Reporting and Response Mechanism**

Establish a centralized, publicly accessible federal reporting mechanism for transnational repression, with a clear mandate, defined inter-agency coordination, and publicly reported aggregate data on incidents.

### **2. Implement Trauma Informed Engagement Protocols**

Develop and implement standardized trauma informed protocols for law enforcement and public institutions engaging with affected communities.

Training should include:

- understanding of genocide and mass atrocity impacts
- awareness of coercion through family vulnerability
- sensitivity to barriers to reporting

### **3. Recognize Transnational Repression as a Dual Priority**

Treat transnational repression as both:

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<sup>15</sup> Foreign Interference Commission, Public Consultation Process: Small Group Meeting Summary (Uyghur Community – Meeting 1), prepared by Uyghur Rights Advocacy Project, 2024, Participant 3.

<sup>16</sup> Foreign Interference Commission, Public Consultation Process: Small Group Meeting Summary (Tibetan Canadian Community), 2024, Participant 1.

<sup>17</sup> Foreign Interference Commission, Public Consultation Process: Small Group Meeting Summary (Tigrayan Canadian Community – Meeting 2), 2024, Participant 3.

- a national security issue
- a community safety and wellbeing issue

Responses should address both high level threats and everyday forms of intimidation and harassment.

#### **4. Address Disinformation as a Component of Repression**

Develop a federal framework to identify and respond to disinformation targeting diaspora communities, including:

- monitoring and analysis
- public clarification where appropriate
- collaboration with civil society and community organizations

#### **5. Establish Ongoing Structured Consultation with Affected Communities**

Establish formal, ongoing consultation mechanisms with diaspora and genocide affected communities to:

- inform policy development
- identify emerging trends
- evaluate effectiveness of responses

#### **6. Strengthen Accountability Measures**

Where appropriate, utilize:

- targeted sanctions
- visa restrictions
- export controls related to surveillance technologies

These measures should be informed by documented patterns of transnational repression.

#### **7. Develop a National Strategy on Transnational Repression**

Develop and publish a coordinated federal strategy on transnational repression with defined roles, timelines, and accountability mechanisms that integrates national security, law enforcement, human rights, and community safety responses.

### **Conclusion**

Transnational repression represents a growing challenge that extends beyond foreign interference into the everyday lives of Canadians.

For genocide affected and atrocity affected communities, its impact is profound. It silences voices, fragments communities, and undermines trust in the very institutions meant to provide protection.

For many, the experience of repression did not end when they left their country of origin. It followed them. Canada has the opportunity and responsibility to ensure that it does not continue here and to lead with a response that is principled, coordinated, and grounded in the lived realities of those most affected. As reflected in community testimony, individuals continue to experience fear, surveillance, and coercion within Canada, leading some to withdraw from public life and disengage from democratic processes.

Current approaches risk underestimating the scale, coordination, and impact of transnational repression in Canada.

As reflected in testimony, some community members describe feeling unsafe and vulnerable in Canada despite their status and residence, underscoring the persistence of foreign state influence within Canadian life and the urgency of an effective response.<sup>18</sup>

Across communities, this manifests in sustained fear, surveillance, and coercion that shape behaviour,<sup>19</sup> leading individuals to withdraw from public life, limit expression, and disengage from democratic participation.<sup>20</sup>

AGVC stands ready to support this effort through continued engagement, research, and community collaboration.

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<sup>18</sup> Foreign Interference Commission, Public Consultation Process: Small Group Meeting Summary (Uyghur Community – Meeting 2), prepared by Uyghur Rights Advocacy Project, 2024, Participant 1.

<sup>19</sup> Foreign Interference Commission, Public Consultation Process: Small Group Meeting Summary (Tigrayan Canadian Community – Meeting 2), 2024, Participant 2.

<sup>20</sup> Foreign Interference Commission, Public Consultation Process: Small Group Meeting Summary (Tamil Canadian Community), 2024, Participant 3.

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