

*Content warning: violence, police brutality, colonialism, genocide*

Thank you for taking the time to listen to this testimony. You might be wondering why I sent in a statement, instead of personally coming in to talk. Believe me, I would love to make my case in person — after all, this issue is extremely concerning to me — but regrettably, I would fear for my safety if I did so.

Of course, this should not be the case. I should not feel afraid to speak to the SRA; I should not feel afraid to exist on this campus.

However, as an ethnic Chinese student at Mac, this is the reality that I experience as a result of two main factors. Firstly, in February, the McMaster CSSA openly declared their contact with the Chinese consulate and their intention to police what people say or do on campus by reporting those who stray from the official viewpoint of the Chinese Communist Party. Secondly, in the face of such brazen intimidation, the MSU and SRA have responded to student pleas for action with little more than deafening silence.

The CSSA's actions are deeply wrong and problematic on numerous levels, and the MSU's silence and inaction so far is a disgrace. If you still do not understand why this is incredibly distressing to students like me, let me break it down.

Firstly, I cannot emphasize how extraordinarily terrifying it is to know that an organization — in its capacity as an MSU-ratified club — reported activity on campus to the Chinese government.

For those of you who don't know, Mainland China is under a totalitarian dictatorship where the ruling Communist Party regularly commits crimes against humanity and has historically used whatever means possible to stifle dissent and silence critics. This includes the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre, the purging of traditional communists who opposed China's shift to capitalism, and rampant, high-tech surveillance and censorship.

Human Rights Watch and international media have also reported on numerous cases where activists and critics within China have been arrested, while those overseas have been abducted or had family in China detained — all just for criticizing the government.

If you are privileged enough to not know what it feels like to live under an authoritarian regime — one where saying something critical of the ruling party is often enough to land you and your family in prison — then please, I implore you, please listen to those who do.

Literally, right now, there are over a million Muslims locked up in concentration camps in Xinjiang, for the high crime of trying to practice their faith and culture. Meanwhile, protests in the semi-autonomous former British colony of Hong Kong are entering their fourth month as Hongkongers furiously oppose China's heavy-handed police violence, resist Beijing's attempt to recolonize their city, and demand democracy instead.

You may be wondering — why is this relevant to what's happening at McMaster? It would certainly be convenient to say that genocide and police brutality happening off campus is not worthy of our concern.

However, this becomes relevant because of how the CSSA attempted to expand the Chinese Communist Party's surveillance and oppression to our campus. By reporting a Uyghur refugee to a genocidal regime — and thus endangering any family that she may have in China — the CSSA sends a chilling message to students on campus: toe the Party line, or you will also be reported, and thus suffer the consequences.

That is why I do not feel safe speaking to the SRA. If I was reported to the Chinese government, like Rukiye Turdush was, then that could mean the imprisonment of my family in China, where prisons are rife with torture and forced confessions. Therefore, for the safety of me and my family, I must now watch what I say, think twice before attending political events, and hesitate before actions as basic as speaking to the SRA. This is a terrifying state of affairs — and an appallingly effective way for the CSSA to use their threat of surveillance to silence critics of the Chinese government.

The CSSA's public missive is not an acceptable use of their right to freedom of expression if it is actively suppressing other students' right to do the same. Their actions represent a brazen attempt to silence, rather than engage with, their detractors. In fact, the McMaster Muslim Students' Association and McMaster Muslims for Peace and Justice have described this incident as, "a form of intimidation, and an attempt to silence those wishing to freely express opposition to Chinese human rights abuses and to raise awareness. As students, we feel it is our right to be able to speak without intimidation or bullying at our university about human rights abuses anywhere in the world."

I fully agree with this, given how I have felt silenced as a result of the CSSA's threats. As an ethnic Chinese student, I feel uniquely obligated to emphasize that not all Chinese students support China's genocide, and that many of us want to support Uyghur Muslims. However, given the CSSA's threats, I cannot do this without fearing for my safety. This is painful, both because I am prevented from exercising my right to freedom of expression, and also because it means the CSSA was successful in its goal of silencing voices in support of Uyghur Muslims.

This also makes the MSU's continued silence — for seven months so far — a complete and utter travesty.

We must remember that this issue is not about a singular incident at the MSA/MMPJ event. This is a much deeper issue, where an MSU club is advancing the political agenda of a hostile foreign government, including by surveilling and policing marginalized students on campus. An MSU-ratified club not only openly defended the genocide in China, but they also reported a refugee of said genocide to the genocidal regime from which she fled. Then the club had the audacity to publicly declare that they did this. And after all of that, the MSU has signalled, through its inaction, that this behaviour is perfectly acceptable.

Does nobody on the SRA realize how extraordinarily problematic this is? And does nobody in the MSU realize how silence merely encourages and enables the continued oppression of the victims of genocide and authoritarianism, many of which are students here at Mac?

If a club openly defended putting Indigenous people in concentration camps, or decided to report Indigenous activists to the police for merely hosting a speech, the outrage would be palpable.

So why is it acceptable for a club to openly defend incarcerating Muslims in concentration camps? Why is it acceptable for a club to actively aid in this genocide by reporting refugee activity on campus to the

authoritarian regime that's perpetrating the genocide? Why is it acceptable for a club to utilize its status to recruit students into subscribing to the hateful and extremist ideologies that help enable the Chinese government's genocide?

These questions are rhetorical, so don't give me that bullshit about needing more information, or being unfamiliar with genocide and colonialism in Asia, or not knowing what refugees have been trying to tell you for months.

It's been a stunning seven months — yes, seven months — since McMaster landed in international headlines over this incident, and multiple impacted parties have since been calling for action. Seven months should have been more than enough time to educate yourself.

Therefore, any further delays or flimsy excuses about needing “more information” or banal policy semantics are, at best, a half-assed attempt to gaslight the Muslim and Chinese students who bring forward concerns — and are, at worst, a baffling and dangerous attempt to protect a problematic club that has openly assisted a genocidal foreign government in surveilling refugees on campus.

We know from the Dominion Society that the SRA is indeed capable of acting. The SRA should therefore stop dragging its feet over the CSSA and start taking action to address concerns, including by immediately revoking club status for the CSSA. The SRA needs to stop condoning this harmful behaviour and start protecting marginalized students whose safety is being threatened.

And if you are worried about support for international students, then please stop posturing and actually act on your concerns by doing things to help them — such as advocating for resources better tailored to them, or providing interpreters at key MSU services like SHEC and WGEN. It would be hypocritical to act concerned if all that you're prepared to do is offload your responsibilities onto a problematic club that actively polices marginalized students and indoctrinates them with extremist and intolerant ideologies.

Finally, I also want to respond to a rumor that somebody on the SRA has characterized scrutiny of the CSSA as “racist.” This is a dangerous generalization and I kindly ask whoever you are to stop. The CSSA may claim to speak on behalf of all Chinese students, but that is their way of erasing minority Chinese voices like mine. In reality, there are many different Chinese students — those from the People's Republic of China, those from the Republic of China (Taiwan), those from Hong Kong, those who are second generation, etc. — and we all have different political opinions. This may surprise you, but many Chinese students actually oppose genocide, and oppose the Communist Party and its affiliates. Therefore it is dangerous to blindly accept the CSSA's ethnonationalist rhetoric as truth; it is dangerous to look at the colour of our skin and assume that we all think the same way. We face actual problems with racism on campus, and any casual conflating of criticism of the CSSA with criticism of Chinese people is not helpful.

If anybody on the SRA is indeed concerned about racism, then please spare a thought for the million Uyghurs who are locked up in concentration camps. Spare a thought for the Muslim minorities who fled China — only to discover that, here in Canada, they continue to be hunted and surveilled by a genocidal regime that remains determined to harass them no matter where they go. Spare a thought for the Chinese students who think this is wrong, but cannot speak without fearing retribution.

And when you do, please remember that genocide is a process. The Holocaust did not start with gas chambers; it started with hate speech. Likewise, the concentration camps in China started with the normalization of Islamophobia and the indifference of bystanders.

That's why it's so incredibly important for us to speak out against genocide. That's why we must listen to refugees, such as the speaker hosted by the MSA and MMPJ. That's why we must be unwavering — rather than selective — in our support of oppressed peoples everywhere.

And that's why it's disappointing to see the MSU remain so callously indifferent. If the student union tasked with protecting us is cowed into silence by a club that invokes the Chinese government, then how do you think Muslim and Chinese students feel when we are targeted on campus? Therefore, once again, I implore members of the SRA: Please, listen to voices like mine. And please take these concerns seriously. Please educate yourself. Please step into our shoes, if only for a moment. Please take a stand and stand up for us. And, most critically and most urgently: Please, do something.