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**EVIDENCE**

**Thursday, November 25, 2004**

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**Chair**

**Ms. Anita Neville**

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## Standing Committee on the Status of Women

Thursday, November 25, 2004

•(1115)

[English]

**The Chair (Ms. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.)):**

Good morning, everybody, and welcome. I apologize for the delay in getting started this morning, but we have yet to find a permanent room for this committee and the committee before us was quite slow in moving out. My understanding is there's going to be another interruption as the parliamentary restaurant wheels through this way again in a couple of minutes with coffee and some light sandwiches.

**Mr. Russ Powers (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, Lib.):** We won't mind at all, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** You won't mind, Russ. It will be for us. It is coming right now, on cue, and there is a light lunch provided as well today, if anybody wants to take advantage of it.

Let me welcome everybody today. We have representatives of four organizations. Our original expectation was that we would do this in two panels, and we expected to have three or four people here for each group, but some groups were unable to do it within the short time span we provided. So with your concurrence, and the concurrence of the committee, we're proposing to hear from everybody together and then move into questions and answers.

What we have suggested to those who are coming before the committee is that if possible you confine your remarks to about five minutes, and it's not a rigid chair, as you will find out. But if you confine your remarks to about five minutes, it gives us more time to expand on what you say and it allows members opportunities to question in a fuller way.

Who wants to go first? Catharine, would you like to begin?

**Ms. Catharine Laidlaw-Sly (President, National Council of Women of Canada):** All right, Madam Chair. I cheerfully volunteer.

Before I start and the clock starts in, I must apologize that the national council prepared this so quickly. In fact, the national council prepared it this morning starting at 4 a.m., because I was on the road and the information didn't catch up with me until I got home.

**The Chair:** We appreciate you being here. My apologies. I should have introduced you as saying you're here with the National Council of Women in Winnipeg, and we're happy to have you here. Thank you.

**Ms. Catharine Laidlaw-Sly:** Thank you very much, and thank you for the opportunity to appear today. I will identify some of the issues of concern to members of the National Council of Women, Canada's oldest umbrella group for women. In fact, we're running up on our 112th annual general meeting next spring.

Our mandate, or our mission statement, is to empower all women to work together towards improving quality of life for women, families, and society, through a forum for member organizations and individuals. Since women are still not equal in our society, this is the reason the establishment of this standing committee was long seen by our members as necessary. We wish to commend the members of the House of Commons for establishing this committee, and may I take this opportunity, Madam Chair, to thank you and commend you and all the members of this committee who have agreed to serve and do this work. Thank you very much on behalf of our membership.

Today we believe that women still face real inequality in society in spite of many initiatives undertaken to improve their status in many ways. I'm just going to skip down now and say that we want to talk about two fundamental areas of action and interaction that could be undertaken, we believe, by this committee.

One of the underlying causes of inequality seems to be that women still do not count, to use Marilyn Waring's phrase. The members of this committee will recall that in 1995, at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, there was an agreement, which Canada supported without reservation, to publish the auxiliary accounts annually, which would be showing then the value to the gross domestic product of the uncounted and unpaid work done mostly by women. We know from the work done by Statistics Canada that it is still mostly done by women, though not exclusively.

This still has not happened. We do not have these annual reports, and sadly, in business, especially men in businesses of all sorts, are seen as the vital spark plugs for the engine of the national economy, even though it is known and acknowledged that it is women entrepreneurs who have a better track record of success in starting and succeeding in developing new enterprises, which are also recognized as real engines of growth in our communities. However, women doing the unseen and uncounted work in our society are the invisible lubrication of that engine, and their importance and value receives only lip service acknowledgement, frankly, we believe. Proof of this bias is seen in the time allocated to business interests appearing before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance when compared to those organizations, a good many of whom are for women and in which all the workers are women, representing the voluntary sector working to enhance Canada's social infrastructure.

We hope this committee will take up this issue, and I have a recommendation here that they would assemble the information presently available through the figures obtained by Statistics Canada and the values established by the federal department, Status of Women Canada, and publish these as a preliminary step to having the Department of Finance include these figures in its yearly reports. We believe this would go a long way to clarifying what the value of home caregiving, for example, of all kinds really is, and it would also cut out all sorts of incremental mini-measures currently being offered for some sorts of unpaid work without the benefit of a comprehensive understanding of the real value in and to our society.

Moving on, national council members are also concerned that women's elected representation at the national level seems stalled in the range of 20%-plus. This is a far cry from equal representation for the group, and it's certainly a disappointment when you consider that we started looking for equal representation over 100 years ago. It also reflects badly on our own effectiveness in achieving this.

The national council has called for electoral reform, recommending that a royal commission be established, with 50% of the commissioners drawn from women's stakeholder organizations, to examine all the possible ways in which more equal and fair representation, both of public opinion and of male and female candidates, could be achieved, presenting their conclusions to the public and the government for decision.

•(1120)

We would urge that this parliamentary standing committee start this process, if it's possible at all, by holding hearings designed to assist Canadian women in learning all the possible reforms and the possible advantages and disadvantages of each electoral system, in preparation for a public plebiscite on reforms designed to achieve equal representation for women.

I don't want to overstay my welcome or take up too much time, but I'm going to draw your attention to the fact that our other ongoing concerns are calls for action on measures designed to maintain or strengthen Canada's social infrastructure, the development and implementation of measures designed to enhance economic equality for women throughout their lives, and the ongoing stability, continuity, and predictability of funding that

enables non-profit and voluntary organizations to fulfil the missions for which they were created.

Concerning the first category, Canada's social infrastructure, I would simply ask, in the interests of saving time, that you be prepared, if you are interested in any particular issues dealing with health, child care, early childhood education, women's economic security, education and long-term learning opportunities, homelessness, and also those working for the elimination of all forms of violence against women, to please consult our website, because all of our policy is listed there from 1967 on. You go to [www.mcwc.ca](http://www.mcwc.ca); then if you put in "violence against women" or "income security", up will come a list of the policies, and you can find them. I think that will save a lot of time.

However, there is one special group of women, victims of violence, to whom I wish to draw your attention most urgently. The National Council of Women of Canada is supporting the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies in their work to improve the situation and treatment of relatively few women. It's probably fewer than 500 women, all federally sentenced women. They include a disproportionate percentage of aboriginal women, as you know, which indicates racial bias in Canadian society.

While there's no longer the shameful situation of Kingston penitentiary, we still see that these women are not benefiting from implementation of the recommendations made over a decade ago for their treatment. The last United Nations CEDAW review specifically recommended that their treatment should be improved.

The Elizabeth Fry Society, supported by other women's equality-seeking organizations, has appeared before the Canadian Human Rights Commission. Recommendations were forthcoming, but it is the regretted conviction of all those who were present at the consultation that the recommendations to change the classification and treatment of these women, most of whom have suffered from a lifetime of all sorts of violence, will not be implemented. There is little political advantage, and it will not seem to be worthwhile to act on behalf of these women. Yet all of us who have worked to overcome violence against women and female children know that the sorts of abuse federally sentenced women have suffered differ only in degree from the abuse many of us have seen or even experienced personally or in our own families. This is an area where this committee, by its interest and inquiries, we believe, could effect a real improvement. I urgently ask you to work on this issue, because it's a tiny group, but they're so desperate.

I'll close by just mentioning that a second area of concern earlier mentioned is the stability and viability of women's non-profit and volunteer organizations. The withdrawal of core funding in favour of project funding has not worked to improve the quality of work done by organizations, particularly those that are not allowed to have a tax number because they do not deliver services. In fact, it even cripples attempts to produce documents in both official languages. That's my excuse, but it's actually valid. We just do not have the staff. We cannot afford to hire them. We do it all with after-tax dollars.

Project funding does not implement the recommendations in the Beijing *Platform for Action* for institutional arrangements for national governments. I refer to chapter V, section A of the Beijing *Platform for Action*. Further, project funding does not respect the intent of the recommendations for national governments as set out in the Beijing *Platform for Action* in chapter VI dealing with financial arrangements. I would recommend—and I looked at and read what was set out in—articles 346 to 350 inclusive.

• (1125)

The National Council of Women of Canada would recommend that this committee assimilate these recommendations in its mandate in a way to help advance the status of women and of women's organizations.

I'm going to close. I wish the committee well in its work. We will be sending you copies of all our briefs and reports on a regular basis. We regret not having this available in both languages.

Thank you. I hope I haven't taken too long.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Norah McMurtry, would you like to go ahead, please? You are with the Women's Inter-church Council of Canada. Welcome.

**Ms. Norah McMurtry (Program Coordinator, Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada):** Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today and to introduce you to the Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada and some of its concerns.

The Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada is an independent ecumenical, feminist organization of Canadian Christian women engaged in work around ecumenism, women's spiritual growth, social justice, and women's issues. It is an organization that has faith in the power of women to transform the world and that shares a hopeful vision of equality for all peoples. It respects diversity and fosters connections between church and society.

The council began in 1918, when women representing the women's missionary societies of four denominations met to discuss how they could unite prayer and action and have a stronger voice in national questions. Today, WICC—which is our acronym—is the Canadian coordinator of the World Day of Prayer, a day celebrated by women in 170 countries around the world and in over 2,000 communities across Canada. On the first day of March each year, Christian women of all denominations come together to pray and take action in solidarity with women in a particular country. WICC is also the Canadian coordinator of the Fellowship of the Least Coin, a global prayer movement for peace and reconciliation.

The council members are either elected or appointed from each of 11 denominational church partners, as well as from the community.

We work closely with national staff and women's organizations in our member churches, encouraging collaborative efforts whenever possible. Our work priorities focus on violence against women, poverty and economic justice, racism, and women doing theology. We have organized a number of national gatherings and have produced numerous resources, as well as a quarterly magazine called *Making Waves*. We prepare an annual liturgy for use on December 6, Canada's national day of remembrance and action on violence against women, and it's available on our website each year.

WICC works both within the church setting and in the secular arena and seeks to be part of coalitions of equality-seeking women's organizations. It was a member of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women for a number of years and more recently joined with 25 other national women's organizations to form the Canadian Women's March Committee. That forum of diverse groups allowed us to engage in a challenging process of discussion and debate. We celebrate this diversity and the opportunity to struggle together to find common ground on issues related to poverty and violence.

Together we identified a set of 13 priority actions for the Government of Canada aimed at eliminating poverty and eradicating violence against women. It's known as the "feminist dozen". Many women of faith participated in this remarkable project of national and international solidarity by organizing local educational events, vigils, and marches, and by participating in the national lobby and march on Parliament Hill.

I recommend that you refer to those 13 demands as you prioritize your work as the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. To date, not one of the issues named has been addressed by the federal government. They address basic needs related to health care, social housing, a national child care program, old age security increases for older women, reform of laws related to immigrants and women refugees, a guaranteed living income for everyone, pay equity, and inclusion of women with disabilities and other marginalized groups in the economic, social, and political life in Canada.

A key issue in eradicating violence against women is the restoring of adequate funding for front-line, independent feminist groups that are committed to ending violence against women, groups such as women's centres, rape crisis centres, and women's shelters.

•(1130)

The experience of working as part of this coalition has been invaluable. We've been able to pool our expertise and our resources, share our analysis, and strategize together. It has been a place of creativity and energy, but it is at risk because of lack of funding and staffing. Most of our women's organizations are short of funds and have limited ability to participate in such a coalition. I think that's borne out by the difficulty the standing committee has had in contacting a number of the organizations on your list.

I urge you as a committee to set a high priority on finding adequate financial resources for national non-profit women's organizations, both for their particular pieces of work and for the opportunity to meet together on a regular basis.

The need is especially acute for aboriginal women and their organizations. The Sisters in Spirit campaign, which focuses on missing and murdered aboriginal women, was spearheaded by the Native Women's Association of Canada, and is being promoted by WICC and a number of national church groups. It is a vital campaign and is being propelled on a shoestring. Women of faith are active in the Sisters in Spirit campaign, because we see it as an opportunity to build bridges across race and economic lines and to respond in solidarity with concrete actions.

The report released by Amnesty International this month, *Stolen Sisters*, speaks of the epidemic of violence against aboriginal women and children. It points to the social and economic marginalization of aboriginal women and the history of government policies that have torn apart families and communities.

These conditions, along with racism, have pushed a disproportionate number of aboriginal women into dangerous situations that include extreme poverty, homelessness, and prostitution. Their lives remain at risk in part because of a failure of Canadian governments to implement critical measures that have been called for repeatedly by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and by United Nations human rights bodies.

I urge your committee to make it a high priority in your work to listen to aboriginal women across this country and to follow up on the recommendations of the Amnesty International report and the royal commission report.

As women of faith, we believe we are called to be in solidarity with those who are marginalized by our social and economic policies and to work to change structures of injustice. I call on you, as members of this new Standing Committee on the Status of Women, to use your power, your knowledge, and your compassion to work for justice and equality for all women in Canada, especially those who are the most marginalized.

Thank you.

•(1135)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Danielle.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Danielle Hébert (General Coordinator, Fédération des femmes du Québec):** Good morning. My name is Danielle Hébert

and I represent the Fédération des femmes du Québec. I would like to thank the Standing Committee on the Status of Women for receiving us today. This is a committee that we also consider as a step forward for Canadian and Quebec women.

In view of the short period of time in which we had to work, I was unfortunately unable to prepare a written brief, particularly since we're very busy with preparations for commemorative events for the École Polytechnique massacre. December 6 will be the fifteenth anniversary of that tragic event. Our teams are on site in the Montreal metro gathering signatures for a joint petition with Amnesty International requesting that the Quebec government organize a policy and a broad awareness and education campaign on violence against women. My colleagues are all working on that.

In this preamble, I will introduce the Fédération des femmes du Québec. Our action plan this year will outline our demands and the methods we intend to use to implement them, particularly in the current context of globalization.

The Fédération des femmes du Québec will be celebrating its fortieth anniversary in 2006. It is an unreservedly feminist organization for the defence of women's rights against all forms of discrimination and for equality between men and women. In recent years, our struggles have taken on a particular, international dimension. As you know, we organized the World March of Women in 2000. So our struggles have long had an international component. For those who don't know, the Federation represents associations, but also individual women. We currently have some 150 member associations and more than 500 women members. This year, we completed a two-year orientation effort in which we updated our mission and our statement of principle. We have a very original political platform. I could send you those documents, which haven't been translated. However we might perhaps be able to get a grant to have them translated. In any case, we could send those documents to the committee.

This orientation effort has also enabled the Federation to identify its main work axes for the coming years: the fight against poverty, the struggle against violence against women—when we say violence, we mean much more than marital violence; we mean all violence suffered by women—the fight against discrimination, particularly racism and homophobia, and the struggle against the harmful effects of globalization on women's living conditions and work. So these are our four main axes. As you will see, our work is based on those axes.

In view of the Federation's mission, since we're a pressure group, we take stands on all current events that may have an effect on women. And there are many such events at this time.

One of our main concerns, on which we're working concretely, is to maintain and increase government subsidies in Quebec and Canada. They are essential to the survival of an independent women's movement. Quebec women have spoken at Quebec and federal meetings. We feel we currently have major problems, particularly with the Women's Program. Perhaps we can come back to that in the discussions.

One of the priorities in our work this year is to analyze, on the basis of our feminist objectives and views, all the reforms and bills the present Quebec government is preparing. There have been an enormous number since Mr. Charest's government was elected. Examples include the specific issues we're working on and in which we're making demands.

●(1140)

Currently, a welfare reform has been announced in a new bill. So we're working on that issue. A reform of the Quebec Pension Plan has been announced, and we think there's an enormous risk that women will be impoverished. They're already poor at retirement, and what's being announced could well impoverish them even further.

As for work-life balance, the minister responsible is to announce a policy. In our view, a policy on work-life balance is a very broad policy and not just a series of measures. That policy must reach into all areas where it can change things, whether it be the Labour Standards Act, conditions in businesses or anything else.

A bill is to be announced to amend voting procedures. Together with another Quebec organization, we're fighting so that, as part of this reform of voting procedures, there'll be mechanisms promoting greater representation of women.

We're now in the middle of a debate in Quebec—and we'd make the same demand at the federal level—to maintain our Quebec government organizations and institutions for women's equality, the Conseil du statut de la femme and the Secrétariat à la condition féminine. Like all other Quebec feminist organizations, we're going to demand that they be preserved and even that their ability to act be increased by opening a new department with a senior minister, which is something we had lost in Quebec.

The situation is even worse in Canada, and we have the same expectations on this issue because we're deeply convinced that these institutions are still extremely necessary to the extent that women still experience inequalities. I won't go back over the status of the situation that everyone describes. If women are still experiencing inequalities, we still need institutions in our governments that are capable of defending them.

I told you we had four major work axes. Another axis concerns violence. We've begun a study on violence against certain groups of women in particular, Arab and Muslim women. Since September 11, we have reason to believe that there has been an increase in violence against them. So we've begun a study on the question. As I said earlier, we are working for a government awareness and education campaign on the violence question.

As for the discrimination axis, I'd say that the position of the Fédération des femmes du Québec has evolved on the issue in recent years. We wanted to take an increasing interest in it and to work in a concrete way on it and also to ensure that groups of women from

Quebec's cultural communities join the Fédération des femmes du Québec. We think it's important the women's movement open up to the women from the cultural communities, and we've taken various steps to do that. Among other things, we're currently conducting a broad-based search to define actual mechanisms to provide more room for these women in the women's movement, but also in public institutions and society in general.

Lastly, as regards the globalization axis, a few years ago, we began a study which is continuing on the impact of globalization on women's living conditions and work. It's a piece of research that we also want to publish in English this year and distribute across Canada. We're now starting a series of training sessions on the issue.

I've explained all this to illustrate the work we're doing at the Fédération des femmes du Québec and the demands that follow from it. In the discussion, we can discuss these issues in greater depth, if you wish.

Thank you.

●(1145)

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Diane Watts from REAL Women, welcome.

**Ms. Diane Watts (Researcher, REAL Women of Canada):** Thank you very much.

REAL Women of Canada is a non-partisan, non-denominational organization of independent women. We come from all walks of life and occupations and from all social and economic backgrounds. Some members work full-time outside the home, some work mainly in the home, and some remain at home to care full-time for their families. We represent a broad spectrum of Canadian women.

We were federally incorporated in 1983. We are an NGO in special consultation to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. We have attended countless UN conferences. We made a presentation recently to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva. We've attended the UN World Summit for Children, the UN Commission on Human Rights, the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, and the UN Conference on Population and Development in Cairo.

We have been involved in the planning of, and participated in, the World Congress of Families in Mexico City, Geneva, and Prague. On November 19 we took part in the World Day for the Prevention of Child Abuse, supported by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, in support of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

REAL Women has been involved in ten court interventions in the Supreme Court of Canada concerning the rights of families in Canada. We are concerned about many issues that affect women in Canada. We have positions on marriage, day care, tax reform, pensions, and unequal funding of women's groups.

The family is the most important foundational unit of society, we believe. Research has shown that the family setting is the safest environment for women and children. We note a Statistics Canada report, November 1993, which found that women living in common-law relationships are four times more likely to experience violence from their partners than are legally married women.

The family provides the most stable environment for children. Children can reach their true potential more easily within a stable family environment. On that, we depend on the studies of Statistics Canada, including the national longitudinal survey of children and youth. According to the latest census, 70.5% of families consist of married couples with or without children under 25. Poverty levels are lowest in the family setting. Again, it's a Statistics Canada study, from 1996, that tells us this.

We promote equality for all women. One of our objectives is to support policies for women that provide equal opportunity in education, employment, and retirement. We believe the social and economic problems and solutions for women today should be resolved by taking into account the impact on the family and society as a whole. Our view is that the family, which is now undergoing serious strain, is the most important unit in Canadian society.

Our objectives are: to reaffirm the family as society's most important unit, since the nurturing of its members is best accomplished in the family setting; to promote the equality, advancement, and well-being of women, recognizing them as interdependent members of society, whether in the family, workplace, or community; to promote, secure, and defend legislation that upholds Judeo-Christian understanding of marriage and family life; to support government and social policies that make homemaking possible for women who out of necessity would otherwise have to take employment outside the home; and to support the right to life of all innocent individuals, from conception to natural death.

REAL Women of Canada believes women should have career choices that include the financial option to remain at home if they choose. At the present time, many women do subordinate their own careers, desires, and material needs for their families by choosing to remain at home as full-time homemakers. Many do so at great financial sacrifice, struggling to live on a limited single income. We encourage tax laws that make that option possible for women.

At the very least, government policies should remain neutral on the issue of career choice for women. Public policy should treat women in the home and the workplace equally. We recommend a homemaker's tax credit. We believe taxes should be reduced for single-income families, who currently pay much higher tax rates than two-income families because the latter are allowed to file separate returns. We also support various options for women in the workplace so they can work in adjustments for their families.

●(1150)

We support a child care system in Canada that would provide equally for women in the home and women in the paid workforce. The needs of children, as well as those of parents, need to be taken into consideration. Parents should be able to choose the kind of child care they want, according to the family's values and the needs of the child. This can be done by way of direct payments to the family, which would provide the flexibility of keeping its child support moneys for a parent to stay at home; to spend on day care, whether government- or community-operated; or for private care, such as a nanny or relative, or a combination of the above.

We believe government funding through Status of Women discriminates against family oriented groups like REAL Women of Canada that do not adhere to a strict feminist ideology. Before women can have equality with men, we must first have equality amongst ourselves, and this means a tolerance and respect for the differing views of other women. This also means recognition not only of the dignity of the individual, but also of the fact that women have always required more than just one voice to speak for our concerns. REAL Women speaks for women who support traditional family values. Society may change, but society's need for a strong, stable family remains the same. As Canada moves toward the new century, we believe REAL Women of Canada is in the vanguard of change for a fairer, more compassionate, caring, family oriented society.

We would like to thank the committee for inviting us to share our views with you.

**The Chair:** Again, thank you very much for coming on short notice.

We have a speaking order that we follow, and I'll ask the Conservatives to begin.

**Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to thank the witnesses for coming and appearing before us.

This committee has invited organizations such as yours to identify key issues of concern to women. What would you identify as the top three issues of concern to women in Canada today? What role could this committee play in addressing these issues? Women in Canada have made progress on a number of fronts over the past decade. However, there are many areas where women continue to face inequalities with men. What are the main obstacles today to equality between men and women?

**The Chair:** I should let the witnesses know how we operate here. We have seven-minute rounds and we have a speaking order. The answers and the questions are all part of the first round, which is seven minutes. Subsequent rounds are five minutes. I'm a fairly generous chair, but I do have to keep an eye on the clock so that everyone has a chance.

**Ms. Catharine Laidlaw-Sly:** Actually, when we drew up our paper, we wrote our issues out in order of importance because we felt fundamental things had to be addressed first. We did succumb to the temptation to have a hierarchy of issues. We were talking, first of all, about equality and the fact that there are many inequalities. We were talking about the fact that one of the reasons women are still seen as unequal—and I mean they are not valued in society—is the fact that their value to Canada as a contributing section of the population is not fully appreciated because the auxiliary accounts are not being published.

If you're going to give a monetary value to everything and value it in terms of the GDP, then it's only fair and just that the work that is done but unpaid and uncounted should have a value assigned to it, and that should be shown in the annual reports. Otherwise, the people doing that work are seen and very often talked about—sometimes in pejorative terms—as freeloaders, which they emphatically are not. Speaking personally, as a woman who raised six children, I certainly was not a freeloader. I know I wasn't. I didn't have time to freeload, but no woman does. No person doing any kind of home care does, whether it's looking after the disabled or whatever.

So we felt this was one of the key issues that would make a big difference, if everyone in our society could see what really is happening and how much is really being done. That was our first point.

• (1155)

**The Chair:** I'm going to ask Ms. McMurtry to identify hers, because I'm watching the clock.

**Ms. Norah McMurtry:** Our organization has named violence against women, poverty, and racism. Of course, those are very big topics. The thirteen demands that I referred to are all areas that affect women's economic status and conditions of violence.

I would say that addressing the violence experienced by aboriginal women is a really high priority. I think it's shameful in this country. And of course that opens lots of other doors around addressing racism, economic stability, and so on.

I think I would name those, but it's hard to pick three.

**The Chair:** Ms. Hébert.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Danielle Hébert:** I don't know whether I'd name three or more. There are still a lot of inequalities with regard to women. I don't think that, amongst ourselves, we need to recall the figures and statistics that are even presented by the Government of Canada.

I think that one of the main points is the recognition of women's work. When I say recognition of women's work, I'm not merely referring to recognition of paid work, but also recognition of women's work in the home, the work of volunteer women and so on. I believe that when we manage one day to talk about full

employment, taking into account the various aspects of the lives of women, and men too, we'll have made enormous strides in our society.

Now there are things that we can do to achieve greater recognition of women's work, such as pay equity. There's an ongoing debate in Canada on this question. Will we have a different act from what we currently have in the Charter, and so on? I believe pay equity is essential for the recognition of women's work in the labour market.

Another way to recognize women's work would be to improve maternity leave. When you have children, your take-home pay is low. It's hard for lowly paid women to be on maternity leave because the subsidies aren't big enough. We've had quite a fight on this in Quebec, but it isn't over yet because the agreements have not been reached. But we think it's fundamentally important to improve this leave, that that's the key.

Moreover, one of the main reasons for the inequality between men and women in the labour market is the fact that women have children, that they leave their work and so on. So if maternity leave were improved, I think that would already be a very good step. It's not the end of the world; it's not that costly. I've already done some calculations on it...

My time is up?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Watts.

**Ms. Diane Watts:** In recognizing the key issues, we believe the family should be taken into consideration when public policy is made or legislation is passed.

There was an interesting statement made by Dr. James White, a professor of family studies at the University of British Columbia. He said, "Our legislators have made marriage a target for taxation and they've taken away incentives to marry and have children." I think we need to take a closer look at the taxation system, how it treats the family as a unit and how it puts pressure on the family and pressure on women especially.

There was a study done in 2002 on the views of Canadians on the family. They put marriage and family very high in their priorities, in the 79% to 80% range. In terms of a child care system, which is being spoken of these days, one of our important concerns is that it be flexible. This same study said:

- 71% agreed that "the best child-care is a parent who does not work and stays home to raise the children." That is, Canadians believe that parental child-care is the best child-care.

- 76% of the respondents stated that they would prefer to have a parent stay home with the children if finances and other circumstances made it possible.

Also, women with children in day care have stated that if they had the financial choice, they would stay at home with their children, especially their young children, and sometimes teenagers when they need extra help.

We're not anti-day care; we are in favour of good day care. But since the government is looking at forming a child care system, we believe one of the crucial points should be that it be flexible, include all women, and not discriminate against those who make particular choices at particular times in their lives.

• (1200)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Madame Brunelle, then Madame Bonsant.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ):** Good afternoon. My question is for Ms. Hébert.

As a Quebecker, I'm very proud of the Fédération des femmes du Québec. Don't give up; keep on going. You're doing an excellent job.

You told us you had problems with the Women's Program. I'd like you to tell us a little more about that. I'd also like to know whether you're taking any action on the poor representation of women in politics. We can try all we can to address that: as women and elected representatives, we realize we have little success. Have you planned any action at the Fédération des femmes?

**Mrs. Danielle Hébert:** With respect to the Women's Program, apart from the delays in analyzing issues, which are extremely long this year, particularly because of the election, I believe, there's a problem with the way criteria are being tightened up and also a problem due to the fact that it will increasingly be a matter of project funding.

I think this is a problem, particularly for organizations such as the Fédération des femmes du Québec, which, as you can understand, can't work on one or two projects. We work on what's going on in society as a whole, and that would thus greatly restrict our actions, since we're a pressure group. Project funding is still causing us a lot of problems. Moreover, we're still waiting for this funding, and the Women's Program is one of our main backers. It's very important for us.

I also wanted to point out that 20 percent of the Federation's budget consists of donations, which is a lot. So we're not funded solely by governments. We've done our work well in this regard. However, it seems to me that the funding of organizations is fundamentally important in a democratic society such as ours. Unfortunately, we've regressed in this regard in recent years. There should be a genuine debate on this issue.

As to your second question, Ms. Brunelle, with the collectif Féminisme et démocratie, which is focusing on the voting reform issue—and that issue arises at both levels of government—we're considering mechanisms to ensure that women are better represented in politics. Unfortunately, I don't have a final answer to give you because we're in the midst of a debate on the subject. Do we want coercive mechanisms or incentive mechanisms? These organizations haven't yet made the decision. I would say that the mechanisms we're currently studying are generally similar to those provided for in

affirmative action programs or what's called employment equity at the federal level.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

You have more time.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Paule Brunelle:** With the Conseil du statut de la femme and the Secrétariat de la condition féminine, and perhaps the minister—we've already seen that—do you talk about being able to maintain these functions? With regard to the Conseil du statut de la femme, I've observed that there appears to be less staff and that the regions have been merged.

How are you going to address this issue?

• (1205)

**Mrs. Danielle Hébert:** The Conseil du statut de la femme itself has produced an imposing 175-page opinion on what it proposes what would be the new way of working in Quebec at the Conseil. We've got nothing against their way of working, on the contrary, because they admit in that opinion that there are still inequalities between men and women and that, in order to address those issues, a so-called specific approach should be maintained recognizing that discrimination exists.

Where it's much vaguer is with respect to the mechanisms it wants to maintain within the government in order to do that work. In Quebec a few months ago, there were rumours that the Secrétariat de la condition féminine would be merged with the Conseil du statut de la femme. We and all the Quebec groups disagree with that because those two organizations have extremely different functions. One is a council; the other provides a way into each of the departments. The Secrétariat à la condition féminine makes it possible to go into each of the departments to enforce a certain number of policies. So we think these two mechanisms are important.

The way we work in Quebec, and we've acquired this over a number of years now, is through a vast coalition. We bring groups together and we try to define common positions. It's those positions that we'll defend before the parliamentary committee that starts on January 25.

**Ms. Paule Brunelle:** At the federal level, is there any impact or anything to do to provide support or assistance?

**Mrs. Danielle Hébert:** At the time, the Fédération des femmes du Québec had been a member of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, but it withdrew some years ago. However, we're starting to return to the federal scene, particularly with the Coalition pour l'égalité des femmes, and so on, because we think it's very important to be there. On that subject, yes, discussions have been started on these issues, and, like the Coalition, we hope these mechanisms and institutions will also reappear in Canada.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Ms. Phinney.

**Ms. Beth Phinney (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I have the same question for the four of you: Why have none of you run in an election? I ran not because somebody came after me and asked me, not because somebody said, "I'll support you", or, "I'll fundraise for you", or, "I'll look after all your personal problems", or whatever it is. I ran probably for a negative reason: because I didn't like the male who was running for the party. I didn't want that person to be my MP, so, alone, I put my name in, ran, and won.

I'm just wondering why each of the four of you hasn't run yourself. You're certainly qualified. Why don't you just get the women you're working for to support you, and run? I'd like each one of you to answer that.

**The Chair:** Who wants to go first?

**Ms. Catharine Laidlaw-Sly:** I certainly don't support ageism, but I might have a bit of a problem because I really am now a great-grandmother. Presently, I'm not quite sure I really want to give up that much time, because I have three generations of family.

I can honestly say that in my husband's work, when we were married for some forty years...I was actively discouraged from going. In the interests of family solidarity and so on, I did do what so many women of my generation did: subdued and put my ambitions and interests on hold. When I was free later to take those things up, in point of fact my financial rug was pulled out from under my feet by my now former husband and it has never quite recovered.

I just want to leave it at that.

**Ms. Beth Phinney:** Have you had the desire to?

**Ms. Catharine Laidlaw-Sly:** Yes, very much so.

**Ms. Beth Phinney:** Well, do it then. I was over 50 when I went in, and I've been in fifteen years now—and I'm giving my age away.

**Ms. Catharine Laidlaw-Sly:** Well, you know, 73-plus....

**Ms. Beth Phinney:** Well, you never know. You'd probably work harder than the men would.

**Ms. Norah McMurtry:** To tell you the truth, it never occurred to me.

**Ms. Beth Phinney:** You have to do it. We wonder why more women don't run.

**Ms. Norah McMurtry:** I think the reality of women's lives is such.... I was a single parent of my kids from when they were 3 to 10, and I've almost gotten them through their teens now.

• (1210)

**Ms. Beth Phinney:** Now is the time to run.

**Ms. Norah McMurtry:** Going back into the workplace and raising kids is a big job, and the thought of doing politics on top of that—

**Ms. Beth Phinney:** Do it after your kids are gone.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Danielle Hébert:** That's a good question; I congratulate you. I feel I'm also doing politics where I am. I think it's important that there are people who are involved at various levels in our society, because what you do and what we're doing requires an enormous amount of involvement.

Having said that, I'd like to give you an idea of the problems that result in there being fewer women in politics. I think there are

objective reasons why there are fewer women in politics, and that's what we would like to address. There are all kinds of barriers. They've just named a real one: the fact that women take care of children for a large part of their lives, as a result of which they're less available.

Women are still much closer to local and regional power structures than they are to provincial or national power structures, precisely for family reasons and so on. So there are objective barriers that we should try to eliminate if we want women... Not to mention that, when you enter a world that, culturally and in the past, has been a man's world, I think we'll probably all agree here that there is... I've been involved in mixed organizations myself in the past. Let's say that the corridors at times are not the same for men as for women.

So there are a certain number of problems. I think we have to be able to eliminate some of them if we want women too be more involved.

[*English*]

**Ms. Diane Watts:** I attended a Status of Women panel a few years ago, and it was stated by a politician, very high up in government, that women don't want to run for office because it's too hard on their marriage, on their families. I was quite surprised to hear that from a woman who'd been in politics for a long time. I think this endorses the study I quoted earlier, which stated that Canadians really value the family, the care of children, and their marriages.

In terms of personally running, I would love to run for office. I think it would be very interesting to be involved politically. But I think I would really have to put aside my relationship with my family and my children, and other private interests that are important to me. I've never been able to put those things aside for politics.

I think that probably applies to a lot of Canadian women.

**Ms. Beth Phinney:** But I think we should look at the men who are there. We say, well, women can't do it because of this and this and this: we're not qualified, we don't know how to fundraise, and so on. We should sit down and take a look at each one of the men—I know there's a man here today, but since he has experience in the field, we'll exclude him—and just see if they're more qualified than we are.

A lot of it's an excuse: gee whiz, I couldn't do it—and nobody asked me. Nobody asked *me*. So I think we have a hurdle to get over there. I know a lot of men who are politicians who have the same feeling about their families as women would have.

You adjust your life to get around that, right?

I think we have to stop thinking that we have this big wall in front of us, that we can't do it. If you want to do it, you can do it. I don't think anybody should give up their family. If that's number one, then wait until your family is gone and they're doing their own thing.

**Ms. Catharine Laidlaw-Sly:** May I make a supplementary remark?

**The Chair:** You have another minute.

**Ms. Catharine Laidlaw-Sly:** Speaking as the full-time president of a big federated group like the National Council of Women, we see the work we're doing as, first of all, highly political, although we are non-partisan, and as just as full-time a commitment. I could not have done this work when I was much younger.

The other thing that's happening at the national council is that we have a group of young women who have been coming in and taking up membership. We are making it very clear to them that we also are there to help them learn to operate in the political spectrum in case they are looking at a political life. We're finding that most of them do have that in their heads, and we're nurturing that.

**Ms. Beth Phinney:** Good. I'm glad to hear it.

**The Chair:** Ms. Crowder.

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I first would like to thank the panel. I appreciate your taking the time to come and present to the committee.

I have a couple of comments. One is the fact that over a couple of decades we've seen numerous reports that continue to talk about the plight of women, and now, looking back over the last 30 years, many women are feeling that we're now at a place where we're actually stepping backward instead of moving forward.

A number of you talked about the marginalization of women by social and economic policies that do not address the systemic issues entrenched in our society. Part of the challenge, and you also referenced this, is the unpaid or underpaid work many women do that is not recognized as being of equal value. You also referenced the core versus project funding.

I'd like to ask you to talk about, in a couple of minutes, how we actually break the stalemate we have and move toward entrenching some sort of analysis and legislation that will actually recognize this inequality.

• (1215)

**The Chair:** I'm going to start the panel the other way this time, just out of fairness.

Ms. Watts.

**Ms. Diane Watts:** There will always be forms of inequality in society. And people value different things. Some people think it's very unequal if a woman dedicates her entire life to family and children, whereas others see that as the foundation and basis of society. The person who rocks the cradle rules the world, in a sense.

I think social science studies indicate that really the strength of the society, of any society, of any civilization, is the emotional and psychological strength of the next generation. I think we have a problem in this area in Canada. So it depends on how we look at inequality.

I mentioned previously that government funding itself of women's groups involves a measure of inequality. If you support family orientation, automatically you're not considered to be struggling for

equality. If you see that you're not unequal because you don't earn the same salary as a man, you're doing something else, you're seen as not really keen on equality. And I don't think that's fair. Certainly our organization recognizes women as equal. We also recognize the importance of the family. We have suffered inequality and discrimination in terms of funding, but if you have a particular ideology, you have no difficulty getting funding.

So we would like to see some improvement there. I think this would broaden the view of Canadians, of the government, and broaden the scope of legislation, which would touch on all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Danielle Hébert:** It seems to me that one of the major setbacks or problems we currently have is the fact that we don't want to recognize, or are reluctant to recognize, that there are still inequalities between men and women.

We recently held a conference in Montreal on the place of women or women's demands in the media. We observed newspapers over a period of time and realized that the message that equality is being achieved is getting through. Equality between men and women has apparently been achieved, whereas we're saying that's not the case. So there's now this kind of dichotomy. It's moreover on the basis of this, at least in Quebec, that the government is asking whether we still need these institutions, the Conseil du statut de la femme and others.

At the same time, we clearly admit that there have been major advances for women. We also have to say that. If we didn't say it, I'd get the impression we've been completely powerless during all that time, which wasn't the case. I believe we've made major gains, but there are still things to be done.

Furthermore, we saw in the media that it's been observed that, when this happens elsewhere, in other countries, it's recognized that there are problems, that women can fight. That's the case in Afghanistan, for example. However, when it happens here at home, there are no more inequalities.

It seems to me that the first thing we should reaffirm—and that's why I'm so happy this committee has been established—is that there are still inequalities and, contrary perhaps to what has prevailed in the past, there are increasing inequalities among women. Some have succeeded in life—so much the better for them—but a very large number are falling further into poverty. All these issues should be addressed.

I entirely agree that we have to consider new ways, we have to be imaginative, and we must also consider new realities in our approach. But I think that admitting that there are still inequalities is the key.

• (1220)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Ms. McMurtry.

**Ms. Norah McMurtry:** How do we entrench an analysis that makes a difference? That is a big question. I think it has something to do with the participation of people in decisions that affect their lives. I think people feel fairly alienated from the whole political system. They feel that decisions are going to be made that are not going to help them, so they isolate and don't engage.

I think there need to be processes for consultation and engagement at the community level that allow people to speak about the realities in their lives and to recognize that they share common realities with others. There's no guarantee that it's going to bring about the change, but I think there is some key there around democratic participation and engagement at a local level. I think people know what's good for them and what isn't good for them, and by sharing stories, experiences, and strategies, things can shift.

My son has just written an article for his high school writing class about his participation in the Quebec summit, so the expression of "This is what democracy looks like" has been echoing in my head. That was a situation where people of all ages came together because they really cared passionately about what was happening.

**The Chair:** Ms. Laidlaw-Sly, it's your turn.

**Ms. Catharine Laidlaw-Sly:** Thank you.

In answer to your question on how we can break through, I think three things are necessary. One of the very basic ones is to break the stereotypical idea that women do not contribute to the same extent and that their contribution does not have the same value and validity for society's welfare as men's, by and large. These are old habits of thought, and although we are nibbling away at them and are effecting some changes, I think that across the board the work women do, which is not seen or not paid and not reported and does not have an assigned value of some kind, even if arbitrary, disappears from all sense of worth. So right there you've categorized women as worth less in society.

The second thing we need to do is to use sound, gender-based analysis, using good sex-disaggregated statistics, and analyze the effect of legislation on both men and women, and do it on a sound basis. We also need to make sure that tax measures, for example, are fair to all women, or that if they are meant to help caregivers, for example—and I cite the drop-out, drop-in provisions for caregiving where imminent death is suspected. Well, they are just absolute nonsense, speaking as one who nursed a daughter through terminal cancer. People don't die in neat little six-week packages. Nobody can predict that. Certainly, if you're doing long-term caregiving, you are not qualified. In any event, this measure is tied to the employment insurance system, and those women are the women with the best resources. In other words, the whole situation was well-meaning but wasn't analyzed, and it didn't really take into account women's real lives. So I think that's the second point.

Then the third is the very important point that Ms. Phinney spoke about too, that we simply need to have more women in public life to validate what we are.

I think with all three together we'll get somewhere. I think the fact that we have this committee is a step in the right direction.

Thank you.

• (1225)

**The Chair:** Ms. Yelich.

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC):** I have so much to say and you have so many interesting opinions and lots of food for thought. I have way too much and have to narrow it down.

I am interested in the auxiliary reports that were spoken of. Do they exist? Do they actually exist and have just not been published, on the statistics of women's contributions as far as volunteer hours are concerned? Is that what I understand, or were they never done?

**Ms. Catharine Laidlaw-Sly:** I have never seen them done here in Canada.

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich:** Okay. But that was an order from—

**Ms. Catharine Laidlaw-Sly:** It was an agreement that was signed onto at the Beijing *Platform for Action*. I do know that Status of Women Canada has done a lot of work and does have equivalent values for work that is currently unpaid and not counted.

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich:** It certainly is a very good place to start.

A tax number for women was an interesting thought. I don't remember who brought that up. I would like the idea of a tax number for women expanded on.

Norah, were you speaking to that? I can't remember if it was you or if it was Diane who spoke to that.

But I do want to mention, and you might be interested to know, being that you are in ecumenism, that just recently I understand the Catholic Church and another church, I believe, may not be able to use charitable status for certain deductions. I haven't looked into the bill. It has been mentioned in the House, and I do remember them saying that the United Church would be able to, but that the Catholic—and I don't remember if there were perhaps Anglican or other ones.... I had read they may take the charitable status away. It is a concern.

Some of our MPs have been written to about that. That's perhaps something you can check into and make sure we are made aware of that, if it is indeed happening.

We'll try the tax number for women first.

**The Chair:** Who wants to respond to that?

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich:** On the tax number for women, it was mentioned that they should be able to have a tax.... It was you? Okay.

**Ms. Catharine Laidlaw-Sly:** Yes, it was me. I simply mentioned that if you're doing advocacy work but you're not a service deliverer, then you do not qualify for a tax number.

The national council does not have a policy saying we should have a tax number, but we are pointing out that when we are doing the sort of work that members of the national council, the provincial councils, and the local councils do, we mostly have to fund that work with after-tax dollars. To the extent that we are asked to come to consultations and so on and are trying to bring in our best and most expert person to speak to an issue, if we have to do this out of our money or the person herself has to fund it, you immediately cut out all women who have very few financial resources. We feel this is another disadvantage in bringing forward the worth, the contribution, and the voice of women who are trying to work for the family, work for family values, work for children's welfare, and also to ameliorate the situation of those women who are discriminated against in our society.

I won't take more time, but I could give you a personal example.

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich:** Yes, that's fine.

I'm interested in how we would do...I think caregiving is a very important issue, and there are two things I would think are very important that you mention today. One is the recognition of the work performed by women; therefore, we're into the caregiving area of definition.

How can we define "caregiver" at the federal level so that we acknowledge it at the federal level? The provincial level is certainly the one that has to deal with delivering, that can understand how best to deliver the services when we talk about caregiving, so let's talk about the federal level of defining "caregiver".

You brought up a very good point about how the unemployment certainly does not address that very valid point. However, you have to look at it from the entrepreneur's perspective. Many of them are women who own businesses, and they'll tell you they cannot afford to lose people for six weeks and still pay wages.

So we have to work out something that really works well, and that's why this is a very good issue.

Do you want to start, Diane?

• (1230)

**Ms. Diane Watts:** Unfortunately, the tax system fails to recognize very important work like the care of a sick relative, the care of young children. One of our recommendations is to increase tax exemptions for dependent family members. That would mean children. If a family member, and very often it's the woman, cares for the person who is ill—the health care system cannot do everything, and they're now demanding more and more that families do their part—and that person is fully employed, there's a lot of pressure. Who takes care of the elderly? Who takes care of the young children? Our tax system does not recognize that work, but we recognize it.

Also, there's the choice of separate spousal tax returns. There's some choice. If you earn the same amount of money with one salary rather than two salaries, there's a very great difference. The person who supplies their family with one salary pays much more in taxes than if there were two people earning the same salary. For example, if one earner earns \$60,000, they pay greater tax than if the two people, two parents, a mother and father, each earned \$30,000. But in the case where there's a handicapped child or an elderly parent who needs care, one person, the man or the woman, may not be able

to work full-time. They may be obliged to care full-time for young children, the elderly, or the sick person.

A type of separate spousal tax return would take that into consideration, because very often there's a differentiation of roles in the family. One person will work full-time, but the other person helps that person work full-time. When I had children who were working, I was doing a lot so that they could work by not working full-time myself.

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich:** That's the caregiver all right, but what if you're a senior and you want—

**The Chair:** Can you wind it up, please?

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich:** What if you're a senior or a disabled person who wants to stay in your home and choose a caregiver? How could we handle that? This is where it becomes difficult in defining a caregiver. Who gets the advantage there at the federal level? Should the recipient or the caregiver have some sort of latitude from the federal government, whether as a tax deduction or...? I don't know how else we could do it at the federal level, because we certainly can't make sure those services are delivered.

Do you have any comment? I have to wrap it up.

**Ms. Catharine Laidlaw-Sly:** Yes. The National Council of Women is looking at the whole question of a minimum adequate income. We feel that if you married the facts about the value of caregiving and the fact that a person has foregone the chance to be in the paid workforce, and evened it up, very much in the same way as the guaranteed income supplement—this is one of the ideas we are looking at. But this is very difficult work, and we've only begun to get into it.

I just want to add that two weeks ago at the pre-budget consultation it was very interesting. There were seven groups at the table and we were all looking at social infrastructure. The idea of a guaranteed adequate income kept coming up again and again, particularly where economic hardship is suffered due to the opportunity to earn income being foregone in order to give unpaid, uncounted care.

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich:** When you come up with some hard numbers, please forward them to this committee. I think they'd be of real value and we could do lots with them.

**Ms. Diane Watts:** There's just one point I'd like to make in this area. Just like a universal day care system, many Canadians would like to support themselves, and they really do not want too much government intrusion.

On the concept of being paid by the government, most Canadians don't want to take that direction, just like measuring every value of unpaid work and volunteer work is distasteful to many Canadians because it involves a lot of government intrusion and is very costly.

• (1235)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We have 30 seconds. Do you want to respond, Ms. Hébert.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Danielle Hébert:** We're considering compensation measures for parents who take care of older children, sick children and so on.

I know that the federal government isn't responsible for providing services, but I'd like to add to what my colleagues have just said that we absolutely have to monitor developments in our public services. Nothing will ever replace high-quality public services.

In Quebec, when we introduced \$5 day care, there was a striking increase in the number of parents wanting to use those services. Parents' desire to use free public day care services was very clear.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Powers.

**Mr. Russ Powers:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll be quick.

**The Chair:** You have time.

**Mr. Russ Powers:** Ms. Kadis is going to share my time.

I have one question in four parts. That's one way to do it.

To each of you, how many members do you have in your organization? How many groups do you have within your organization, and what is your annual operating budget? Do you actually share information amongst yourselves and amongst groups? I'm sure after today you will. Go from there.

**The Chair:** Who wants to go first?

Let's start in the middle this time with Ms. Hébert.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Danielle Hébert:** In terms of members, the Fédération des femmes du Québec currently has approximately 150 associations and more than 500 individual members. You can join the Federation as a group or as a woman, personally. The budget of the Fédération des femmes du Québec is approximately \$500,000 or \$530,000 a year. Although we need additional staff, we have six full-time workers.

The Fédération des femmes du Québec, in Quebec itself, is one of a large number of coalitions, which makes it possible to work jointly on a number of issues. As I said earlier, we are pleased to do this. We're returning to the federal arena through various coalitions.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Laidlaw-Sly.

**Ms. Catharine Laidlaw-Sly:** We have five provincial councils of women, with a sixth in preparation right now, 18 local councils, and some 27 member organizations. Do we share information with other groups?

**Mr. Russ Powers:** What's your membership, please?

**Ms. Catharine Laidlaw-Sly:** Oh, yes. We believe it's somewhere between 600,000 and 650,000, but I'm sure you will understand the difficulty of having an accurate census. I belong to four organizations that are members.

**Mr. Russ Powers:** That's understandable.

**Ms. Catharine Laidlaw-Sly:** The other thing is, yes, we do share information. We also have special representatives to groups and we are entering into working partnerships with other groups—for example, the Canadian Federation of University Women. Its bylaws do not permit it to join at the national level, but we are in active cooperation with the federation all the time.

**The Chair:** Next, Ms. McMurtry.

**Ms. Norah McMurtry:** It's a little difficult. Our networks are more informal, I would say, but I can give you a few numbers.

The decision-making council is about 25 to 30 people. We have around 2,000 people who have signed up as members of our network and receive our *Making Waves* publication. There are 2,000 groups across Canada that put on the World Day of Prayer service once a year, and we distribute about 250,000 booklets in French, English, and some other languages.

Our budget is about \$450,000 and we give out grants of close to \$100,000. I use everybody's information in our publication. It's one of the reasons I value the coalition of national groups. As an organization, we rely on the expertise of specific groups in different areas. I can't emphasize this enough, because we don't have the wherewithal to do the research and so on ourselves.

• (1240)

**The Chair:** Ms. Watts.

**Ms. Diane Watts:** We have representation across Canada in every province. We have local chapters. We have over 100 affiliate groups. Our membership is approximately 55,000. We are supported by donations and membership fees, and I'm not sure what our annual budget is. It's not very great. It's not as great as the budgets these ladies have told us about. We have no government support. We have received project funding in the past, but very little, so we're really self-supporting.

We are engaged on a regular basis in coalition with other pro-family, family oriented organizations at court interventions promoting particular views and defending the family when pieces of legislation go through Parliament that we feel will be harmful to the family. Most of the work done in our organization is done by volunteers. We do some contract work but very little. We share a lot of information in many ways.

We also share information internationally. There are many family oriented, pro-family groups and pro-life groups across the country and throughout the world. We are helped by the information they give us, and they appreciate the information we pass on to them.

**Mr. Russ Powers:** Madam Chair, I have a quick request.

Number one is, the comments here are all taken care of and provided to us afterward, but if indeed you have material you'd like to share with us after the fact, then I respectfully request that you direct it to the clerk of committee to share with us.

Further, a request I would make of Minister Frulla's department is if indeed there's material, whatever material there is available, either in written form or web access, I would like it shared with this committee to see what we are making available to the public. There may very well be some interesting issues here. There may be some areas we need to fill in.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Kadis, we'll come back to you.

Madam Bonsant.

[Translation]

**Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ):** Thank you. I'm going to ask Ms. Hébert my question, since she touched on the subject, but the other women can still answer.

You mentioned violence against certain groups, Arab and Muslim groups among others. How can we help them? A lot of religious battles—over excision, for example—are the issue among these people. What can we as women do to help them?

**Mrs. Danielle Hébert:** In fact, we're starting a study on this question. It's really hard to contact groups that enable us to meet women who are victims of violence. In most communities, these matters are obviously kept completely secret. Merely gaining access to women who can attest to these things is a major step.

With this study, we want to define mechanisms for helping these people more, within either the public system or women's groups. We've discovered that there is a shelter in Quebec specifically for Arab women. So we're going to work more with them and define action mechanisms. We haven't yet established them, since it's really by meeting these women and working with them that we'll be able to do so.

**Ms. France Bonsant:** Thank you.

**Ms. Catharine Laidlaw-Sly:** Pardon me, Madam, but may I speak in English? I can't form any of my ideas in French on the subject.

• (1245)

**Ms. France Bonsant:** Say it in English.

[English]

**Ms. Catharine Laidlaw-Sly:** The Canadian Council of Muslim Women is one of our members. Last year we allied with them and supported them in their concern about the very aggressive attempt to entrench the use of one particular version of sharia law as it applied to family law in practice and in use in the province of Ontario.

We were also told by our Muslim members that they were afraid that this was being undertaken and looked at seriously by two other provincial governments, in particular British Columbia. We supported them, we took action, we spoke to governments, we sent out our policy as soon as we had it, and we asked our members to get to their MPPs, MLAs, MNAs,

[Translation]

regardless of religion.

[English]

and to speak about the issue to make sure it went no further. We have been actively working with the province of Ontario. In fact, I just spoke to the minister responsible for the status of women at the semi-annual meeting of the provincial council. I raised the topic again, asking what the Government of Ontario was going to do about the problem it had, having allowed the Arbitration Act to be used in some divorce cases.

That's what we're trying to do to help our Muslim sisters.

[Translation]

**Ms. France Bonsant:** Thank you very much.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Crowder, you have a few minutes.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Great. Thank you.

We talked earlier about public service funding and core funding versus project funding. I wonder if you could comment.

We've had the minister and some of the department officials in and they've specifically stated that they don't fund delivery of services. In part we rely on provincial governments to take on delivery of services, and we know—for example, in British Columbia—that it hasn't been happening. For example, money transferred to British Columbia for early childhood initiatives has actually eroded the delivery of child care.

I wonder if you could specifically comment on the role for Status of Women in delivery of services for women in poverty, women in violence, and other initiatives like that. Do you think there is a role for Status of Women to actually contract with non-government organizations to deliver those services?

**Ms. Catharine Laidlaw-Sly:** May I take a flying leap at this one?

**The Chair:** Sure, go ahead.

**Ms. Catharine Laidlaw-Sly:** I think there is a role. Again, I think this would be a case of having presentations on a yearly basis perhaps, very much like pre-budget. This would be sort of an evaluation of what is happening, what progress is being made in addressing these systemic problems, and the fact that interpretations of how moneys should be used and who needs to benefit differ from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. These presentations could be used as a way of concentrating legislators' minds both on what the real problems are and on how active groups—or groups that represent many different active sub-actors, shall we say.... For example, we have at the local level shelters for battered women. All sorts of services like that are part of our network. We get reports and we could certainly follow up issues in a year, if asked to do so.

In the last two years, for example, we've been working on homelessness. We're particularly concerned about the invisible homelessness of a lot of women. The true dimensions of the problem are not even apparent to us. We had great trouble finding out what the numbers really are.

I think it would take the form of annual progress reports, with the committee on the status of women functioning in a way of presenting an ongoing report card. Maybe I'm not working in the right frame of mind, but that would seem to be a useful role.

**The Chair:** Are there any other comments on this?

Ms. Watts.

**Ms. Diane Watts:** I have a comment on poverty. In 1996, Statistics Canada gave us some interesting information that the incidence of low income among families with children was as follows: husband-and-wife families, 11.8%; lone-parent female, 60.8%; lone-parent male, 31.3%

So it would appear that the family formation has a great influence on poverty. Children of lone-parent families headed by women in 1996 were more than five times as likely to be in a low-income situation, with everything that involves in terms of health and psychological poverty as well when the levels of poverty are so low.

Being a family oriented organization that wants to promote family, we recommend that this aspect be at least considered by Status of Women and by all government departments. We have always recommended that the government promote marriage as a personal and social good. This can be done in many ways, by supporting marriage in the curricula in schools, tax-exempt marriage counselling, etc.

There's a definite link there that doesn't at all seem to be looked at, yet we seem to be at cross-purposes between departments. One department gives us a very important clue to the association of poverty with family formation, but other departments don't seem to consider it when they form legislation. We believe that's very important as well.

It's the same with violence against women. Statistics Canada has told us that the chance of violence against women is four times greater in non-marital, non-committed relationships. What is the government doing to address this and to further support family formation? Again, the taxation system seems to neglect that important foundational institution.

• (1250)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Kadis.

**Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.):** Thank you.

It's probably a good opportunity for my question. Again, I know we have to be very brief and get to our other committee business as well.

First, I want to thank you all for your forthrightness today. I believe it has been very useful and helpful to the committee. We need to have an accurate picture reflecting what's really happening out there across Canada, and I think you've supplied that to a great extent.

It seems to me, sitting here at the last few meetings, that we may have plateaued in some of these areas. In other words, we've made substantive progress through the years—we're acknowledging that—with everybody's involvement at all levels, but at this point we may have hit a wall on some of them. That's my overall impression.

I'd just like to ask you if that is your perception. If so, why, in brief terms? In other words, what are the obstacles? Where do you think we need to go now in terms of breaking away from the position we're in now and actually having progress for women across Canada?

**The Chair:** Ms. McMurtry, do you want to have a go at that?

**Ms. Norah McMurtry:** One thing I'm aware of is that we've plateaued. What I hear the national groups saying—the 25 groups that sat around the Canadian Women's March Committee—was that funding is a huge piece of that. Groups are not able to fulfil their mandates because they don't have the staff. They're working very short-staffed. One of the groups that was to be here today was the Disabled Women's Network, but I gather they're suffering quite a bit from a lack of funding.

I know the groups that provide services around violence against women are being cut back more and more. I was doing research for a resource for churches that we just did on violence against women, and there has been very little new material since the middle of the nineties in terms of statistical analysis and all of that. I think that's when the funding started to be cut back.

I think the need is there and the knowledge to address the need is there, but groups don't have the financial resources.

**The Chair:** Ms. Hébert.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Danielle Hébert:** I entirely agree with Ms. McMurtry that funding is currently a major barrier to continuing the groups' work. In Quebec, we have an organization that funds the operation of groups, the Secrétariat à l'action communautaire. Unfortunately, the funding level is so low that it's not enough to finance the infrastructure. The fact that the groups' infrastructures or management are not funded raises enormous problems: we can't develop projects if we don't have staff. So you see the vicious circle in which we constantly find ourselves. In fact, we're still looking for funding; that's part of the groups' everyday lives.

Having said that, I would like to mention one of the major discoveries of recent years. We've discovered that discrimination against women and other groups in society is not only direct, but also systemic. We're talking here about discrimination introduced into the systems as a result of which a person or an employer in particular is not responsible for it. This factor enables us to gain a much clearer understanding of the discrimination phenomenon. This has given rise to thinking about affirmative action programs, differential gender-based analysis and so on.

In short, if we want to fight discrimination right now, we have to consider the real barriers facing women. To do that, the analyses conducted must be a little more sophisticated than those done in the past; we also have to find ways to do them. If it's well done, of course, I think differential analysis can be a very promising tool. You also have to take into account the different places that women occupy amongst themselves in society. They aren't all at the same level.

Simple demands for equality with women are no longer enough today. Instead we have to try to understand what the real problem experienced by women is. If we've reached a plateau, we'll no doubt have to take slightly more sophisticated measures to continue our work.

•(1255)

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

You have 30 seconds. I'm sorry.

**Ms. Catharine Laidlaw-Sly:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

In response to your question, in some respects, yes, we seem to have plateaued, for example, on female representation. But in other areas we believe we are actually experiencing a backlash, and that in point of fact a lot of the advances made over the last 30 years are very fragile, and under the exigencies of economic cutbacks and so on, their well-being for the long term is in doubt.

One of the reasons that a lot of young women are suddenly coming forward and wanting mentoring and wanting to learn how to work on the issues is because they suddenly see that their future does not look as financially and fiscally secure as they would wish. They believe that collectively they are going to have a very hard time of it, and that's what they're coming forward about.

**The Chair:** Ms. Watts, again, 30 seconds if you can.

**Ms. Diane Watts:** We have been functioning very well and growing annually since our formation in 1983, and we have had no real funding from any Status of Women source. We asked for funding and we were denied it because we weren't seen to be an equality-seeking group. Yet equality is in our name—Realistic Equal Active for Life—and we believe in equality. We believe in the strength of women. We believe in the strength of families as well. So in that regard we don't fit into the usual format.

One of the main obstacles we find to the standard women's movement, which we believe ideologically was inadequate to begin with, is in seeing men and women as confrontational rather than complementary. We've always tried to see men and women as complementary. We've always tried to see marriage and the family and the homemaker as intersupportive, one of another. So we don't concentrate on the antagonism between the two. We believe this is an obstacle to advancement for women and for families and for men and for Canada.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I'm sorry to say we're at the end. I want to thank you all for coming out today and participating.

I'm conscious of the clock. I don't know whether anybody else is due in this room after we're finished, and we started 15 minutes late. I apologize if I was rushing you, but I do want to thank you very much for coming out and sharing your comments with us today.

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich:** Madam Chair, I would like to make a comment that today, November 25, marks the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. So congratulations for being here with us.

**Voices:** Hear, hear!

**The Chair:** I wanted to note that as well.

To other members of the committee, is there any business you want to raise today?

•(1300)

**Mrs. Susan Kadis:** If I could, just very briefly, Madam Chair, a lot of references have been made to various material and documents—Beijing+10, I believe it is, etc.

We don't need every document, obviously, because that would be huge, but we need some of these key documents or reports. Otherwise, we're kind of flying without directions.

**The Chair:** We'll arrange for everything to be sent to you if it hasn't been already.

**Mrs. Susan Kadis:** Thank you.

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich:** Maybe this would be a good time to bring it up. At the very first meeting we had we talked about the documents not coming in both languages. I realize the reason for not accepting them if they come in only one language. But today, it could have been such an asset to have the documents to go back with us while everything is fresh in our minds. I think it's something we should rethink. If the documents are here....

I think Danielle had hers. We don't have it in English, but I would allow it to go to the French members. I think we should rethink the issue of when the documents arrive in one language to at least pass them out to us, and then the others can get them when they're translated. I think it's very important.

You must have a good reason why you couldn't get them translated in time. Unfortunately, we can't accept them because they're not in both languages. I think we've done a disservice to you, and I think we should apologize to you, as guests who have taken a lot of time, money, and effort to get here.

I don't have them and I may not get them for awhile. By then, I won't have forgotten you, but I certainly will have forgotten some of the points I really wanted....

I know it's in Hansard, but it's nothing like some of the presentations. There's a lot of good stuff in this one, the one that has been turned out. I really think it's very good.

I just want to make that point, and I'd like to know, as witnesses, if they would have enjoyed that.

**The Chair:** Ms. Crowder.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** I wanted to comment on that as well.

My understanding is that part of the challenge is that the notices went out to organizations with very little time for them to get their documents to us in advance. We will provide the translation service. That's part of the challenge in terms of the timing on this.

We have an official languages policy, and I think it's very difficult for us to hand out unilingual information at a committee.

**The Chair:** Well, one hopes now that we have the lists made up.... We have our budget, which was approved just last Thursday. That didn't allow us to move forward with inviting groups until we knew we had the resources to do so.

So I'm hopeful we can get around your concerns, Ms. Yelich, by having formal presentations in ahead of time.

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich:** It may not just be my concern; it could also be the witnesses' concerns.

**The Chair:** I think the decision was made by the committee. We'll give it a little more time before we come back to this.

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** I know your concerns.

Again, thank you very much.

We're adjourned.

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