



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

FEWO • NUMBER 008 • 1st SESSION • 38th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, November 30, 2004

—
Chair

Ms. Anita Neville

All parliamentary publications are available on the
"Parliamentary Internet Parlementaire" at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

Tuesday, November 30, 2004

• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.)): I wonder if we can begin.

Let me welcome everybody here this morning. I'm delighted to see that you found your way to this committee room, because some of us took a while finding our way here. I'm pleased that you are all able to be here this morning.

We're going to begin our first panel. Following this panel, we have a second group of presenters here as well.

We're asking, if possible, and I underline "if possible", to keep your remarks as close to five minutes as possible. I say that hesitatingly, because I know you've gone to a lot of effort to prepare your presentation here. If you can keep your remarks as tight as possible, it gives us a little bit more time for questions and answers. Right now, we have 50 minutes scheduled for this panel, and then we'll follow up with the second panel afterwards.

I'm going to go from left to right and ask Joyce Hancock to begin her presentation. Welcome. It's nice to see you here.

Ms. Joyce Hancock (President, Newfoundland and Labrador Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women): Thank you.

I wanted to start by saying that although it says by way of introduction that we are an advisory council on the status of women, I don't think it really says from what perspective I speak or why I come here.

I do need to say that I've spent three decades working on issues of social justice, from rape crisis centres to women's centres, on the ground in western Newfoundland. I've been the regional rep with NAC. And since 1996, the government, in its wisdom or naiveté, appointed me the president of the advisory council on the status of women in Newfoundland and Labrador. I've also co-chaired the national coalition of advisory councils for a couple of years.

For people who think an advisory council is simply a mouthpiece for government, I need to say that in Newfoundland and Labrador we do things differently. For instance, I'm a full-time president; I work every day to challenge the decisions that provincial governments make that impact on women and families and communities. On any given day, we may be marching with women in our province or we may be sitting at the table with politicians and cabinet ministers to bring forward an analysis on some of the issues.

Another unique feature of the advisory council I work for is its strong connection to grassroots women's organizations. We're very well connected with our women's centres, our shelters, family resource centres, transition houses, and coalitions against violence. I always say that these women and women's equality-seeking organizations in our province are the organizations this advisory council takes its direction from in Newfoundland and Labrador. Women in Newfoundland and Labrador are consummate strategists.

We are a province rich in people and natural resources, but I would be remiss in this opportunity today not to say out loud that one of the reasons for our inequality and inequities and exclusion as women is the inequality and exclusion our province suffers because of the federal government—things like the Atlantic accord, the equalization formula, and, for people who watched, the recent pay equity decision allowing the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to discriminate against health care workers because of the fiscal reality of my province. When we argue this to my province, we are told that the situation our province is in can change dramatically if our situation vis-à-vis the federal government changed. I couldn't be here without saying that.

In reading the transcripts and information from last week, I can't help but say I concur with some of what women were saying there, especially the women from NAWL and the feminist alliance. These are the points we've been talking about for a long time.

I can't say strongly enough how the shift by Status of Women Canada to talking about gender equality is hurting us. We're talking about women's equality; we need to name it. When we say gender equality, it feels like 20 years ago when we were trying to say soft words, like domestic violence and spousal assault. Somehow we believed that if we talked like that our detractors would be on-board and we'd have women and men joining anti-violence coalitions and men supporting equality. It doesn't happen like that. There's nothing about this women's movement or working for women's equality that wants to harm men. If words like "gender equality" and "gender mainstreaming" worked, we'd not have to worry about government departments, as they wouldn't resist doing a gender-inclusive analysis. The shift in talking about women's equality to saying gender equality didn't come at the request of grassroots women's equality-seeking organizations.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, like women all over this country, we fought when Status of Women Canada began making the work done at our women's centres into projects. Pennies for projects, we called it. I have to say that as good as the research and reports that come out of Status of Women Canada are to us on the ground, there are only three of us at my advisory council for a whole province and we're hard-pressed to be able to use any of it.

In the mid-nineties, when Status of Women Canada did regional consultations, women's groups did not tell them that the model they are using today is an appropriate model.

We need a sustained presence of equality-seeking women's organizations in communities and regions if we are to move forward on equality. We need respect for the experience and analysis of grassroots women and organizations, and we need resourcing for the work we do.

In late September, Newfoundland and Labrador women, joined by national women's organizations, misbehaved when the federal, provincial, and territorial ministers held their meeting in St. John's. Led by two women wearing their persons medals, we brought forward a document—which I know you've seen, and we hope to be able to provide it to you when we get it translated into French—with five demands for women's equality in Canada. We could have given it to them politely or sent it by mail, but we were making a point, saying, “You are making decisions and priorities based on political and bureaucratic knowledge.” Some of the provincial governments no longer even have arm's-length advisory councils, and others have rendered them ineffective. They have no vehicles that connect them to grassroots women and women's organizations.

As chair of a coalition of eight provincial and territorial advisory councils, it took us four years to have a meeting with the federal status of women ministers. They said something about jurisdictional issues. Jurisdictional issues don't matter to women.

No one disputes that issues like child poverty or violence against aboriginals are not important priorities, but when these become separate campaigns without the sustained presence of women's organizations on the ground, they don't work.

Thank you.

•(1110)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Lise Martin, would you like to go next?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lise Martin (Executive Director, Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women): It is a pleasure to be back here a second time to share our ideas with you. Today, I am specifically representing the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, CRIAW.

Our goal at CRIAW is to create links between research, action and social change. More concretely, we produce brochures on many subjects such as poverty, violence against women, immigrant and refugee women, and on peace and security. I believe you received our most recent issue just last week.

These brochures attempt to present this information in clear and simple language to a broad public. It is not enough to present the facts to women. Women's equality and a feminist vision of the economy, of politics, of justice, of health, etc., must become an integral part of mainstream discussions, including that of members.

Over the next four years, CRIAW has chosen to concentrate its efforts in the area of economic and social justice, more specifically: how to overcome poverty and the exclusion of women.

Our work is based on an integrated feminist analysis. Integrated feminist analysis takes into account the different impact that policies and practices can have on various categories of women because of their race, their social class, their disability, their sexual orientation, their immigrant or refugee status or their age.

In Canada, we have chosen to put the emphasis on child poverty, which is a much more tangible goal for people in general and for the decision-makers. What concerns us, however, is the fact that this program intended to reduce child poverty does not take into account a certain number of facts, and because of that, the proposed policy changes will not be able to meet the needs of the poorest mothers, who must care for the poorest children as well. We know that those most worried about child poverty are the mothers, who are equally poor. When the debate on poverty is centred on children, we have a tendency to forget about women. This is why we believe that the time has come to recognize female poverty as real problem, and that this should translate into some political will.

[*English*]

The reduction of female poverty is central to CRIAW's vision and central to Canada achieving substantive equality. Why are more women poor? There are simple, obvious structural reasons for women's lower incomes—the presence of children, the preponderance of part-time employment in low-paying jobs, cuts to social assistance, of course, cuts to unemployment insurance, and inadequate pensions.

Poverty is not random, and it is not solely a matter of availability of jobs or levels of social assistance. Certain groups in Canada are more vulnerable to disproportionate poverty than others.

Again, why are they poor? It is important that we stand back and attempt to answer these questions, as this will inform policy that will work for everybody.

Poverty, and women's continuing economic inequality at every level, is not simply a matter of the availability of jobs. A look at statistics reveals that women, particularly lone-parent mothers, senior women living alone, aboriginal people, people with disabilities, racialized people, recent immigrants, and people living in rural and northern and remote areas, are more likely to live below Statistics Canada's low-income cut-off than other people in Canada. Within each group, the women of the group have lower average incomes than men.

In April 2000, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives produced a report card on women and poverty. In this report, Monica Townson indicated that women's inequality had to be addressed if headway was to be made against women's poverty. At the time she wrote that, neither seemed to be anywhere on the public policy agenda.

With the exception of the creation of this parliamentary committee, the situation has not greatly changed. In fact, one could argue that it has worsened, to the point that the UN committee on the elimination of discrimination against women, CEDAW, indicated in January 2003 that Canada was not meeting its obligations to women under international human rights law. The committee noted that government cuts to social programs are deepening women's social and economic vulnerability, as these cuts have eliminated women's good jobs, have increased their burden of unpaid work, and have made women less able to leave abusive situations. Finally, the UN committee recommended that the federal government re-establish standards to ensure that commitments to women's equality are met across the country.

CRIAW has just completed consultations on women's economic security in St. John's, Moncton, Montreal, North Bay, and Vancouver. It is clear from the many women who attended that their lives have taken a turn downwards in the last ten years and that their voices are being ignored in the policy debates.

Policy recommendations on poverty alleviation often tend to centre on job creation, education, or training. However, one of the problems for women is too much work, not too little work. Women often bear the responsibility for caring for children, seniors, or people with severe disabilities. Even if a paid job were available, without subsidized child care or adequate numbers of hours of home care, many women would not be able to take paid work, or more paid work.

The other problem with assuming that the best social policy is a job is that most low-income women and men are already engaged in paid work. Women and youth make up 80% of minimum wage workers. Canada is now a low-wage employer, with an increasing number of jobs that do not pay workers enough to live on. Canada is second only to the U.S. among advanced industrialized countries in incidents of low pay.

In 2002, 25.3% of Canadian workers were low-paid, meaning they earned less than two-thirds of the median hourly wage. By contrast, only 5% of workers in Scandinavia are in low-wage jobs. The rise of non-standard and precarious employment has led to greater income insecurity and vulnerability to poverty, especially for women, who make up significant numbers of those employed in these jobs. We therefore need to create employment that will provide for a standard of living above the poverty line. A good starting point would be to provide decent wages to child care workers.

My recommendation to the committee would be to integrate the information it receives and to advocate for the institutional mechanisms presented to you by the Coalition for Women's Equality. On an individual level, I would urge you, as members of Parliament in various parties, to engage in all policy-related issues and debates, and to make the point that policies are not gender-neutral, that they do impact the Canadian population, which is far from being

homogeneous, in a multitude of ways that far too often have negative impacts on the most vulnerable.

Thank you.

• (1115)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Barbara Crow.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Barbara Crow (Associate Professor and Past President, Canadian Women's Studies Association): Thank you for having invited me to appear here today.

[*English*]

I am currently an active past-president of the Canadian Women's Studies Association. We represent undergraduate and graduate students in women's studies, women's studies faculty, and those interested in women's studies.

Our association started in 1982, and like many women's organizations in Canada, it has experienced both moments of real strength and engagement and times when we've literally had to pull somebody's arm to say, "Will you please be the president of our organization this year to sustain this?"

For the last four years, there have been ten of us who have been working very hard to change the organization. During this group's discussion period, I'll talk about some of the things we've done.

What I'd like to speak to you about on behalf of our association are two items, and then I'd like to put forward a challenge and ways in which I think the federal government and women's organizations can have better working relations. I'm going to provide a concrete example in which the women's studies association has been active with this.

The first one, many of you have heard, has been an issue around the chronic underfunding of women's organizations, and most particularly the shift in the last decade to project-based funding and the tremendous effect this has had on the women's organizations and women's movement in Canada.

An issue that I would like to raise as somebody who is in contact with young women has been the disengagement of youth from the federal government or from seeing the government as the site of social change or an agency to work with, such that young women are organizing outside of it. For example, I'm sure we'll see many today at the protest. They don't see the federal government in the way I did as I grew up; I can now say, twenty years later, that there was a very different kind of serious engagement with the federal government around women's issues. That has changed. It has been compartmentalized, and I think it is a real issue that young women do not see agency or citizenship around engaging with the federal government for social change. So that's the first item.

The second item is the rhetoric of equality and even the rhetoric of equity. It is very difficult to organize for social change against a rhetoric that says women have achieved equality and when Canada is held up as a model around the world. Indeed, there has been much that we have to be proud of, that we have done, in the kinds of changes we have made. For example, violence against women is an issue most people in Canada know about, and that's thanks to the women's movement.

The challenge, though, is the rhetoric of equality. When we engage with making social change, we always have put forward to us, "But look at the advancements we've made. Look at all the women doctors. Look at all the women lawyers." This is an extremely privileged group of women. I represent a group of women. Only 23% of Canadian women have university or college degrees. The point I want to make about that is that often we focus on the individual and the opportunities, not on the conditions and the systemic and systematic practices that continue, the gendered and racialized practices in Canadian society in which we have not achieved full equity yet.

My challenge is to give you a project called the gender and work database. It is currently a Canadian university research alliance that has brought together Statistics Canada, the women's studies association, under the chair of Leah Vosko—she's a chair in feminist political economy—and the union movement. We have worked very hard to bring together data that help us to understand the changing nature of the paid and unpaid workplace in Canada. We've done this by creating a database that's accessible—it's really easy for us to get access to the kind of content we need—as well as by working with institutions that allow us, as feminist scholars, to say that these are the kinds of questions we need and the data we need to be able to show the ways in which the changes in the paid and unpaid workplaces affect Canadian women and men.

Thank you.

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you.

Sungee John, it's your turn.

Ms. Sungee John (Interim President, National Action Committee on the Status of Women): Thank you.

Good morning. My name is Sungee John, and I'm currently the interim president of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, NAC.

NAC welcomes this opportunity to make its presentation to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. Also present with me at this hearing are Kripa Sekhar and Anne Kettenbeil, both vice-presidents on the NAC executive.

As Canada's largest feminist organization, NAC has been fighting for women's equality for over 30 years. Committed to equality and social justice for all women, its focus is mainly on advocating for changes that will improve the status of women, such as those in child care, violence against women, poverty, and minority rights. In addition to supporting national, regional, and local issues, NAC participates in conferences and actions to promote international solidarity between women and advocates for women's equality rights globally.

Historically, NAC's strength was threefold: as an advocate for the equal and active involvement of grassroots women in all aspects of Canadian society and policy through democratic fora such as the annual NAC lobby on Parliament Hill; providing leadership and a voice for feminist advancement in public policy; and as an umbrella organization whose momentum and *raison d'être* is sustained by the energy and commitment of our member groups on the front lines of the Canadian women's movement in communities large and small.

We also point out that NAC is a member of the Coalition for Women's Equality, who appeared before the committee on November 18. As such we fully support that presentation and do not intend to repeat the information shared at that time. We will, however, focus our presentation today on an issue that was touched upon then, that of the role of Status of Women Canada and the funding of equality-seeking independent women's movements through the women's program.

Since the federal government implemented dramatic changes to the funding criteria for women's organizations in the late 1990s, the status of Canadian women has never been the same. These changes resulted in the elimination of program or, as we know it, core funding to women's organizations and established instead project funding that placed an emphasis on quantitative outcomes rather than advancing the women's equality agenda and improving the quality of women's lives. Ask any equality-seeking women's group and they can name several women's organizations that have folded as a direct result of the changes to the funding criteria.

Equality-seeking women's groups have known for a while that the current system of funding and support for women is not working. What is a fact for many women's groups is that Status of Women Canada has increased the state of women's inequality. The current system of funding women's organizations is not working. The elimination of core funding has had a devastating impact for many women and women's groups. The result is a system where the bureaucracy has an inordinate amount of control over the needs of women in Canada at the point of entry; that is, through the application and proposal process of the women's program. It has done so by establishing funding criteria so restrictive and with such a limited funding pool that many women's groups are struggling to even meet the proposal targets.

The post-1998 funding proposal was promoted as more democratic than the previous format under core funding. Instead it has served to create barriers for women's groups, with its inconsistent demands and unrealistic expectations. NAC has spoken with many grassroots women's groups who have expressed frustration with the present protocols and who despair of ever meeting the approval of their funding officers within the women's program. As a case in point, NAC members' groups have been in discussion with Status of Women Canada to organize a pan-Canadian lesbian conference. After four years of interaction between Status of Women Canada and the volunteer committee established to coordinate the conference, the pan-Canadian lesbian conference is still waiting for funding approval. One of the key obstacles has been an evaluation process that is not universally understood by either the applicants or the funders themselves.

For a department that was created to "address the issues of concern to women", it has followed a path of exclusivity. The women's program has been increasingly research-driven in its funding process and as a result more removed from the needs facing front-line women's organizations. Moreover, the funders fail to acknowledge the amount of unpaid work that is put into proposal writing, work that is unsupported and entirely taken for granted. It begs the following questions. What is the role of Status of Women Canada within government? Is Status of Women Canada in existence to serve up information to government departments? Is Status of Women Canada in existence to provide for the logistical and research needs of government or the actual needs-driven work of women across Canada?

• (1125)

What must be a certainty is that Status of Women Canada should not usurp the role of the independent, organized women's movement, which includes policy-making and charting a true equality-seeking women's agenda.

NAC is greatly encouraged by the establishment of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. However, as the role of the standing committee becomes better defined, women's organizations will need assurances that only new funds will be directed toward its work, that it will not be taking money away from the current women's program funding, meagre as it is.

We strongly recommend that the committee include a balance of views that will seek equal input from both staff and volunteers of women's organizations, such as boards of directors.

Furthermore, the committee also needs to establish a more equitable system for convening hearings. While we appreciate being given the chance to bring our issues to your attention, the current process has placed many other women's groups at a disadvantage, through a combination of short notice and the lack of availability of women to quickly put together a presentation that will convey all their hopes and concerns. In addition, meeting the upfront costs of travel and accommodation to appear at hearings in Ottawa can be prohibitive for many groups, both mainstream and marginalized.

In closing, NAC recommends that it is imperative for this committee to review the process through which only a small percentage of women's organizations receive any funding from the women's program. To that end, we urge that this committee ensure that women can participate within the Canadian democratic process by reinstating core funding and expanding it to include equality-seeking organizations that represent grassroots women as a key departmental policy of Status of Women Canada.

NAC also recommends that the women's program budget be increased to a level that would permit core funding to be extended to all equality-seeking grassroots women's organizations—for example, the equivalent of \$2 per woman and girl-child in Canada, or \$30 million.

Finally, the role of Status of Women Canada should be the administration of funding to equality-seeking women's organizations through a process that is user-friendly; that is, using plain language and applying consistent practices and criteria.

The National Action Committee on the Status of Women looks forward to working with the Standing Committee on the Status of Women to further the advancement and equality rights of Canadian women.

Thank you.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Our practice here is to have seven-minute rounds of questions. We have a laid-out process for members of the different parties to do it.

I'm going to ask my colleagues to please confine it to the seven minutes. I'm going to cut you off, so that we can hear from everybody, because we have a second panel coming forward.

I also wanted to let everybody know there is a light lunch available in the corner. Please help yourselves when you're ready.

Who is taking the lead for the Conservatives? Nina?

Ms. Grewal.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to thank the panel for their presentation.

My question today is this. While women in Canada have made lots of progress on all fronts over the past decade, there are many areas where women continue to face inequalities with men. What are the main obstacles today to equality between men and women?

Women in Canada have a diversity of experiences and needs. Could you identify certain issues that, while they may not be priority areas for women generally, may be important to certain groups of women?

What role should the federal government play in working toward equality between men and women?

The Chair: Who would like to begin?

Ms. Lise Martin: I think there are a lot of questions in there. One is about the difference between women and men, as well as the difference between different groups of women, if I understand correctly. Is that right?

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): It's in terms of seeking equality.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Yes, equality.

Ms. Lise Martin: Oh yes, it's the equality agenda. All women don't—

Ms. Sungee John: Certainly, with the equality agenda, there are varying levels of how organizations work internally, and also how they're perceived publicly and how their relationships are with government.

For equality-seeking women's organizations, the work is certainly a work of eliminating systemic inequalities out there, and systemic discrimination, and applying several lenses—looking at definitely a feminist analysis, a race analysis, a class analysis—and applying those lenses to every aspect of policy-making and organizing.

Ms. Joyce Hancock: I would like to take the last part. I've spent more than three decades now as a part of the organized women's movement in one capacity or the other. I keep wondering, when priorities are decided, how do you even know what the issues are if there are not mechanisms on the ground whereby equality-seeking grassroots women's organizations get to identify, prioritize, and have resourcing to move those issues on a continuous basis—you know, informing their own provincial ministers, the federal minister?

But also, if you're going to do sustained work, if you take a priority and research it, if no equality-seeking organization exists in communities and in regions in our provinces, territories, within our country, then how does that work even have an impact if we have no place for it to go any more?

The projects are fine, but when the project is over, where does that work go? It disappears for many of us.

• (1135)

Ms. Lise Martin: I think on the very general level we've given examples in the past in terms of the differential impact, such as the changes to the employment insurance program, which have definitely had a greater negative impact on women than men.

There are so many examples. In terms of the sandwich generation, data came out in that area as well a few months ago. And even last week new Stats Canada data was released that demonstrated how Muslim women were disadvantaged in terms of employment. They had very high degrees of education, but in terms of employment it wasn't panning out.

I think the examples are definitely there. It's a question often of political will and of wanting to integrate this information and knowledge, and to recognize, as I said, that policies do not impact people in the same ways—in rural areas, in urban areas.

Also, I think an issue that has often really disadvantaged women and other minority groups is that policies are looked at in silos. There isn't a holistic approach. All this federal-provincial discussion always comes in to the mix, which is often an easy out as well in terms of really building solutions for women's equality.

Ms. Barbara Crow: I think we have numerous women's organizations and extensive Canadian scholarship speaking to the challenges faced by women and the various ways in which sex gender and sexual orientation get operationalized and work in a systemic and systematic way.

The point I was trying to make about the rhetoric of equality and equity and the way it operates is that equality often still gets defined in relation to, basically, white men's equality, what white men have. We've made it when we are doctors, engineers, or members of Parliament. But largely the definition of equality has evolved around a notion within the public sphere, not around the kinds of things that happen in the private sphere.

We haven't seen the same shift or attention to the private sphere. We haven't seen very significant changes in men's practices or relations to the family, and that's one of my concerns about the rhetoric of equality. It's really ubiquitous, and it's amorphous, to be able to understand and measure how this operates, so that when we say it's not just about being a doctor, it's about a whole way of quality of life and of social justice.

Status of Women can play a significant role in putting forward a definition of equality that attends to this range, to social justice, and to putting forward a definition that brings into consideration all of the various identities and politics that we occupy in that definition of equality and the work you do.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Brunelle.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Good morning, ladies. Thank you for having come. I greatly appreciate your courage in continuing to work for improvements in the status of women.

Ms. Martin, I read your documents, which I found particularly interesting and which could indeed be read by most people. In connection with that, I am wondering if you have any means of distributing them. What happens once the word is out?

I have a question for all of you. You were saying that the situation of women has gotten worse. Changes in attitudes are required. We can see that the more we move forward, the more we lose ground. Do you think this is connected to the false sense of security that a lot of women have?

We have more women who are university graduates, who have more access to education, but we note that salaries are lower. Therefore, first of all, I was wondering how we might manage to bring about a change in attitudes?

Secondly, I was wondering how we might fight against women's false sense of security. As for men, they tell us there is no problem, that everything has been settled as far as the status of women is concerned.

• (1140)

Ms. Lise Martin: I will answer the first part, which deals specifically with our brochures. Then I will give the floor to the others.

In fact, insofar as it is possible, we distribute our brochures, and they are free. We feel this is very important because our goal is indeed to give our leaflets the broadest possible exposure. I can tell you that they are used in different settings for very different reasons and in very varied contexts. I know, for example, that the Calgary Police used the one on violence against women to make their officers more aware. They are often used in an educational context as well.

I think that this may be a funding problem. In fact, the result of project-based funding means that when a project is finished, we must quickly move on to the next one. It makes distribution very difficult.

I will take the one we did on peace and security that was published last month as an example. I heard several different things on the radio. The Quebec Liberal Women's Caucus was discussing the issue of security, of various projects, of missiles, etc. So I told myself that I had to send this information to all of the women members of Parliament, because I know that subject is in the news and that you will be discussing it. But I don't have enough time; I have not done it yet. I told myself that you, at least, would have it.

We received a lot of very positive feedback on it, and I think that this information is often hidden. It is one of the problems related to our project-based funding methods, as we now have various deadlines.

[English]

Ms. Joyce Hancock: I would like to respond to these in terms of that whole false sense of security. I do think this is real and I think it's been around a long time. It takes very strong, brave, feminist men to counter that. Unless you're impacted sometime by poverty, the most you do is put some food in a food bank. Unless you're impacted by violence, the most you do is say, here's some money for a transition house.

I think it really is about saying that we would expect people who work to improve the status of women to name it as it is. We haven't arrived. We need to be clear in that.

I was challenged by a minister in my own province a short while ago. In her own caucus—and it's no different from Canadian society—the thinking is that women have arrived, and why are you still going on about it. Well, I think that's when the situation calls for leadership. That's what leadership is about, naming it. And finally, if we have a parliamentary committee, it's about showing that leadership and not being afraid to counter those myths, because they are myths.

Ms. Barbara Crow: I had written down leadership. I think there's a real opportunity for Status of Women Canada. I think there are enormous resources in Canada, groups who have been working for a long time and researchers who have been doing this, to move forward an agenda that foregrounds the concerns of women. I think

we're at a moment when we do need leadership coming from the federal government around social change on women's issues.

Ms. Sungee John: I concur with everything that's been stated. If there is a false sense of security, it's due to the fact that there's been a lack of funding to women's organizations. There's been a silence almost. Women's organizations have been restricted by project funding from doing the advocacy they need to do to educate the public so people are constantly reminded that the numbers show that women have not achieved equality. The numbers show that men are still predominantly in power roles.

Look at Parliament. Just over 20% of the people in Parliament are women. That's an obvious statement of where women still are in this society.

Again, if equality-seeking women's groups were funded—I emphasize equality-seeking groups—even to the levels and the criteria they were before 1998, you would see more consistent output of education, of the advocacy, so the whole Canadian public would be more understanding of the realities facing Canadian women.

• (1145)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Powers, your turn.

Mr. Russ Powers (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, Lib.): I'm not relegated to asking the administrative questions, but I do. We just want to get an idea of the size of the groups you represent. Needless to say, we're having deputations from everyone, so it gives us a perspective.

Could you advise us of your membership, the number of groups you have, and what your annual budget is?

Ms. Barbara Crow: Oh, I'd love to do it. I can tell you the Canadian Women's Studies Association is currently enjoying a membership of over 250 members. We've worked very hard to increase our membership.

However, there are over 5,000 undergraduate and graduate students in women's studies in Canada. I would also suggest that if you look at those women's studies programs, they're very much like the paid labour force in that we have many part-time faculty teaching and subsidizing the women's studies programs, very few with a structure.

Our budget is minimal. Right now we have a budget of \$8,000. Our organization has been able to do well largely because I'm at one of the biggest universities with one of the largest women's studies programs in Canada. I've been able to mobilize the resources of that university to provide us with graduate students.

One of the other challenges for women's organizations has been the introduction of digital communications. This has increased our responsibility and the set of knowledge skills that are required to communicate in an increasingly global place.

That's our organization. It's mostly volunteer. Everybody on our board is a volunteer. We do it on very little money.

Ms. Joyce Hancock: I work for the Newfoundland and Labrador Advisory Council on the Status of Women. We have a provincial budget of just under \$300,000. It's been like that since 1996, when I came there.

But as I said in my introduction—I guess it was because I had come from a grassroots women's centre—my quest in the last eight or nine years has been to connect those women's centres and shelters and transition houses to an organization that possibly has the ear of governments.

We spread ourselves really thin and work like banshees all the time just trying to ensure that there is a voice for those issues. We even developed criteria, and have had them accepted, that all of the women who make up the board of the advisory council must be drawn from feminist, equality-seeking grassroots women's organizations. They have to be attached to those in order to even get appointed to the board I work with.

Mr. Russ Powers: I'm Irish. I know all about banshees. What are your membership numbers?

Ms. Joyce Hancock: We are government-appointed. There are eight women's centres in our province. There are five women's transition houses, shelters. There are some coalitions. As I said, we're a bunch of women's organizations that strongly connect and mobilize very quickly on issues. That's one of the strengths of our women's movement in the province.

Ms. Lise Martin: We are, by and large, an organization based on individual membership. We have approximately 600 individual members. We have 10 what we call educational institutional members, which are universities. We also have a number of women's groups; we have a \$15 membership fee for women's groups. Obviously, we feel it's important that information be shared as widely as possible.

Our annual budget obviously fluctuates. I believe this year it's approximately \$350,000. We have three staff people and a volunteer board of 15, which generally meets twice a year. We also organize, with those funds...as I mentioned, we had local consultations on women's economic security, and we will be doing this at the national level as well.

Ms. Sungee John: It's been no secret that NAC has been severely affected by the funding cuts. At our strongest, we had 700 member groups. NAC only accepts memberships from groups; we don't have individual memberships. We're currently in the process of membership renewals. We are getting memberships from women. Another impact of the funding cuts has been that our member groups themselves have lost funding and have folded. That has reduced our numbers, but more and more women have expressed the need to reorganize, and we are now getting more submissions and requests for memberships. We are in the process of restaffing our office, so we'll have better numbers later in the year.

• (1150)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Kadis, you have two minutes on this round.

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): Thank you all for coming and for your forthrightness today. What would you attribute the change in that funding formula to? There was a reference to making

it more democratic, I think someone said. Why do you think it did change? Was there any rationale for that?

Ms. Joyce Hancock: I think it was just a change in terms of the whole way the federal government was doing business with our provinces and organizations. You could see it within other departments, but it has been really a terrible thing. When I left Stephenville in western Newfoundland to take this position, there were no food banks. Now our women's centres are doing the work of government. So at one time there were these strong groups that spent time insisting we be on an education board or on a mental health board, and now we spend our time providing services that governments used to provide to deal with poverty and violence. I think in many ways it was a deliberate attempt to align it like every other part of that federal bureaucracy—that's my own thinking.

Mrs. Susan Kadis: I know we have very little time, and I want you to respond on the issue of how the department has responded to your level of frustration. Obviously, they've heard from a lot of groups for a while now, with the same message.

Ms. Lise Martin: As recently as three weeks ago we had a discussion on the issues, and we feel we are not getting straightforward answers on these issues. I mentioned in my presentation on the 18th that the option to go to results-based management, on the part of the women's program, was a choice. It is true that it is a trend, and a lot of governments are doing their funding through results-based management models. However, it was a choice, and as I indicated, there are other areas, like CIDA, the Canadian International Development Agency, that still give some form of core funding. Sometimes in other departments it may not be called core funding; they've changed the name a bit. But I do know that part of our strategic planning process was to talk to other more mainstream policy research institutes like ours, and we met with the Canadian Council for Social Development, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, the Caledon Institute, and the North-South Institute. Those are all institutes you may recognize that are strong, and an organization like CRIAW should really have that same strength. The mechanisms they're privileged to have are very different from the ones we have. Part of it is, as I've said, too, that Status of Women is very small within the whole mechanism, and I think it's that political will to be able to say we're putting women's equality on the agenda and we're resourcing it.

Ms. Joyce Hancock: Maybe it was simply an attempt to try to survive, the way government was starting to line up that department. So even though it was becoming less and less connected to grassroots organizations, it was surviving within a bureaucracy that had become less and less connected anyway.

The Chair: We're going to have to complete this round.

You have 20 seconds, Sungee.

Ms. Sungee John: There's one point we want to make about the democratic process. As a result of the core funding to project funding, it's taken women's time away from the work of servicing their clients and constituency groups. Every year they have to write a new project; if a project's successful, it cannot be repeated. That's the nature of project funding. With core funding, if something is successful, it can be sustained. With project funding, it's non-sustainable. It takes the work of women every year, a lot of volunteer time, to write proposals, and also to support those proposals. It's an immense amount of work that is not factored into any budgets and any funding in the government structure.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Crowder.

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

Thanks again for your presentations. I have a question for each of you, and I'm going to quickly fire them off and then sit back.

Ms. Hancock, one of the recommendations that's come out of Newfoundland and Labrador is a recommendation to restore an arm's-length independent Canadian advisory council on the status of women. I'd like you to specifically comment on that.

Ms. Martin, one of the things we know is that we have a cascading effect in place. We have low wages for women, which means low EI, which is going to eventually result in low pensions. I think we're just seeing the tip of the iceberg. I wonder if you could comment on if there's been any work done about the projections we might be facing over the next 10 to 15 years with women.

Ms. Crow, you specifically talked about leadership—and I'm sorry I'm talking so fast, but we only have seven minutes—and I wanted to dispel any notion that just because you're elected as a member of Parliament and you're a woman, you actually have achieved any equality. I could set you straight on a few things on that. You specifically commented on leadership, and I wonder if you could comment more specifically on what you think needs to be done around that.

Ms. John, I want you to actually comment on gender-based analysis, my favourite topic. We have a mechanism; there's actually quite a good guide that's called *Gender-based Analysis: A Guide for Policy-Making*, which has some very good questions and comments. I wonder if you could comment specifically on gender-based analysis and government policy.

• (1155)

Ms. Joyce Hancock: Restoring an arm's-length Canadian advisory council, I think in some ways, because I come from an arm's-length, independent advisory council that decides for itself what it is we need to advise, and advocate, and lobby our provincial government on.... That's one of the losses. When we talk about the losses that have happened with women since the royal commission, this is one of the things that has come and gone. Everything has its problems, and some women would argue that it wasn't really arm's-length and independent, but those were mechanisms we felt we had on the ground that we don't feel we have any more, that strong voice that came and was connected.

I know we always felt in Newfoundland and Labrador that we had a connection with the advisory council, and I think once that was axed, it sent a signal to the other provinces that you can do likewise. That's why our advisory councils have become ineffective, or, as I would say, they are sometimes often seen by women in the grassroots as the mouthpieces of government.

Ms. Lise Martin: Definitely you're right, there is that cascading effect. I don't think there are projections that are out for the next ten years, and I would just point to the importance of the CST because a lot of this stuff comes under the Canada social transfer. One of the things we would like to advocate for is a strong discussion on the CST and to bring that discussion to the level of the CHT.

Ms. Barbara Crow: My family is from Duncan, B.C.

One of the things I did when I was preparing for today was I revisited the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, which went back over 40 years, and in the plan for action in chapter 10, it sets out what the Status of Women Canada should be doing. Honestly, 40 years later, I think the recommendations are still relevant for what should be done: be directly responsible to Parliament; that Status of Women Canada have the power to investigate and administer human rights legislation; include within the organization.... Anyway, there's a whole series here that I think we should all revisit; we should revisit what we did so admirably 40 years ago, and that has been the sustenance, whether we agree or disagree with the royal commission, in shaping the contemporary women's movement in Canada.

In terms of leadership, Status of Women Canada is the only official body that has women in its name. Isn't that the case?

A voice: Yes.

Ms. Barbara Crow: So I think we have something there to work with and move forward on in terms of leadership. I think it would be interesting for you to tell us what you need in order for the Status of Women to be a stronger organization within the government, what kind of support you need from us. I think we're incredibly well resourced. Many of us know how to mobilize. You won't believe the things we do with our \$10,000 in our organization.

We have the knowledge and the resources, and I think it's about bringing those together to move forward around women's issues in Canada, to move it past the level of rhetoric to real equality-seeking justice and social justice.

Ms. Sungee John: As a signatory to the *Platform for Action* at the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing, Canada is committed to applying gender-based analysis in all its various governmental departments. Some departments do have gender-based analysis units. I'm not sure if all of them do, but some do have units that do some analysis. A lot of that work is removed from the actual grassroots front-line work that women do. In many ways, it's very exclusive; it's very elitist. A lot of the work, to borrow a term Lise used, is done in silos; they're all working in silos and they're not connecting with women at the grassroots.

So they may have good academic analysis, but there's no practical application of the analysis. Oftentimes, there is analysis, but that's not implemented by the government departments themselves. Needless to say, Status of Women has used the excuse of gender-based analysis to drive its proposals to a more research-driven as opposed to a needs-driven agenda for women's groups.

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That brings us to the end. We're actually over the schedule.

I want to thank you all very much for coming today. I certainly learned something from each of your proposals.

I expect you may well be hearing back from individual members of the committee, or you may be hearing from the committee as a whole. This is part of our learning and charting the course for the committee. I really do want to thank you.

Ms. Barbara Crow: I think this is important to goodwill.

The Chair: We're going to suspend for five minutes to allow another panel to come forward.

I would advise members that there is a light lunch at the back of the room.

• _____ (Pause) _____

•

• (1205)

The Chair: Colleagues, we'll begin again, please.

Let me welcome those of you who are here for the second panel. Who would like to go first?

Andrée.

• (1210)

Ms. Andrée Côté (Director of Legislation and Law Reform, National Association of Women and the Law): Bonjour. Merci.

I'll be doing my presentation in French, but I will gladly take questions in English after the presentation.

[*Translation*]

The association is one of the oldest women's groups in Canada. It was established in 1974; so we are celebrating our 30th anniversary this year. Our mandate is to promote the equality of women through education and legislative reform. Our work really involves informing and exerting pressure, chiefly on the federal government. We also do a great deal of work to inform women's groups about developments in federal policy, including those relating to women.

Our role is to promote the right to equality of all women, including immigrants, aboriginal women, women of colour and lesbians. In the course of our work, we always try to study and propose reforms that will have a beneficial impact on promoting the equality of women from various communities.

Throughout our existence, we have done a great deal of work that I will not talk about today, but I will mention that the NAWL has been very active as regards the criminal law, and all the changes made to the Criminal Code in the area of rape, sexual assault and

domestic violence. For example, the immunity that formerly existed in the Criminal Code for men who rape their spouse has been eliminated. In 1999, we prepared an important brief on the defence of provocation, which unfortunately still exists in our Criminal Code and is too often used to excuse patriarchal violence and the murder of women by their husbands.

We have done a great deal of work in the area of immigration law. I have brought you a copy of our brief on Bill C-11. This is a project that we will be continuing in the years ahead.

We have done a lot of work on family law matters. I will come back to this in a few moments.

Each year, we make a presentation on the budget. We are one of the groups that has been very active in recommending the implementation of gender budgeting, because it is very clear that without a budget policy that takes women's needs into account, we will not get very far.

We have also been very active in defending the right of women to abortion.

Today, I'm going to talk about the priorities of the National Association of Women and the Law in 2004-2005. They are: pay equity, improving maternity and parental benefits; improving the Canadian Human Rights Act; reforming family law, to better protect women's right to equality; and access to legal aid in family law.

I have brought in five copies of our newsletter, *Jurisfemme*, which I distributed with Ms. Charron. I thought five was the number required. We could perhaps send you some other copies. You will notice the newsletters contain articles on all the subjects I will be mentioning today, so they are a source of further information.

I would like to remind you that in 2000, the National Association of Women and the Law, in cooperation with 24 national organizations, established the Canadian Committee on the March of Women, as part of the World March of Women in the year 2000 to protest women's poverty and violence against women. In this context, we developed a series of very detailed demands, complete with 68 recommendations to the federal government. These demands were really seen as a minimum for dealing properly with poverty and violence against women.

I also brought you five copies in English and five in French of the Advocacy Guide of the World March of Women. If you need more, Ms. Charron could perhaps make some more copies. These documents contain a whole series of recommendations on protecting women's social and economic rights, improving the status of women in the paid workplace, defending the rights of immigrant women, particularly those of domestic workers, and defending the rights of aboriginal women and lesbians.

•(1215)

In addition the National Association of Women and the Law is also part of the Feminist Alliance for International Action, FAFIA. As a result, we have been very active in drafting the alternative report of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. We fully support the demands of the FAFIA and other women's groups that your committee should study the recommendations of the UN committee. Of the 24 recommendations, I believe the UN committee report contains 24 recommendations, some of which reflect our current concerns, in particular pay equity.

As you may know, pay equity is the right to equal pay for work of equal value, that is comparable work requiring a comparable effort and similar qualifications and responsibilities. Unfortunately, although the principle of pay equity has been established in the Canadian Human Rights Act since 1977, very little progress has been made. As a matter of fact, Minister Frulla emphasize this point in her presentation to this committee. On average, women are still earning 72 cents for every dollar earned by men. That is true for women working full-time. That means that very many women are still earning less than that, because they work part-time, have a job with no security or work on contract.

So women are still stuck in female-employment ghettos, where the value of work done by women is undervalued. This results in discriminatory situations. The current procedure for establishing pay equity in Canada—namely section 11 of the Canadian Human Rights Act—is really inadequate. We think that one of the urgent issues for women in Canada is to improve procedures for protecting and promoting pay equity.

In the year 2000, pay equity was one of the priority demands of the World March of Women. In 2001, the Minister of Justice, at the time, Anne McLellan, together with her colleague, Ms. Bradshaw, the Minister of Labour, set up a task force on pay equity which reported its recommendations in May 2004.

We are very pleased with the work done by this task force, and we think it is very important that its recommendations be implemented. We must not wait until this report becomes yet another one collecting dust on a shelf. The recommendations of the task force on pay equity must be implemented.

I could come back to this in detail, but, generally speaking, it recommends an independent act on pay equity and the extension of pay equity protection not only to women, but also to other groups that have suffered discrimination and are protected by the federal employment equity legislation, particularly aboriginal people, the handicapped and racial minorities. This is one of the problems identified in the report.

[English]

The Chair: Could I ask you to wind up, please?

Ms. Andrée Côté: Okay.

[Translation]

There is another major issue: the inadequacy of the protection provided by maternity and parental benefits.

As you may know, currently only 35 to 40% of women are entitled to these types of leave. Even when eligible, a woman would

only receive 55% of her salary, which means that the majority of working women do not have the means to take maternity leave or do so under conditions of great poverty.

This is why we believe it is important to look into the issue, especially in light of the fact that a decision of the court of appeal of Quebec will bring the issue before the Supreme Court. The court ruled that the current maternity benefits scheme under the Employment Insurance Act is unconstitutional, that it isn't under federal jurisdiction. This will lead to a very serious crisis for women in Canada, causing them to lose ground. We are trying to see how we could defend Quebec's right to maternity leave benefits while maintaining, outside of Quebec, national standards so as to allow all women to benefit from maternity leave.

There are major problems with respect to family law: the lack of acknowledgement of issues of domestic violence in the context of child custody; the fact that, increasingly, there is a formal vision of equality which amounts to shared custody, leading to deteriorating circumstances for women who end up with much more work and insufficient financial resources. It is a serious problem.

There is another serious problem. The development in Ontario and Quebec of practices involving the use of religious codes, notably Shari'ah, to settle family law issues through arbitration or mediation.

Finally, legal aid is an urgent issue for women throughout Canada. We undertook consultations on family law last year. Everywhere, in all cities and provinces, women told us that they didn't have access to legal representation and legal aid.

So there are many burning questions. I could go on, but I will stop here.

I thank you, Madam Chair, for granting me this time. It would be a pleasure for me to answer your questions.

•(1220)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Lori Harreman, would you like to speak?

Ms. Lori Harreman (Board Member, Women's Legal Education and Action Fund): Good morning. My name is Lori Harreman, and I'm representing LEAF here today. I'm a member of their national board of directors and I chair their national education committee.

We thank you for your invitation to appear before you. As you know, LEAF is a national, federally incorporated, non-profit organization founded in April 1985 to secure equal rights for Canadian women as guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

To this end, LEAF engages in equality rights litigation, research, and public education. Commencing with LEAF's work in the Supreme Court of Canada case of *Andrews in British Columbia* in 1989, LEAF has made significant contributions to the development of equality rights, jurisprudence, and the meaning of substantive equality in Canada. Women from around the world look upon LEAF as a leader in equality law.

LEAF develops and advocates equality rights arguments in the context where sex inequality is compounded by other prohibited groups of discrimination, such as race, class, aboriginal status, sexual orientation, and/or a disability. LEAF has intervened in over 150 equality-rights-related decisions in the areas of sexual violence, pay and equity, social and economic rights, spousal and child support, reproductive freedom, and access to justice, to name a few.

The dual purpose of section 15 of the charter is to prevent discrimination and to promote equality. It's a purpose repeatedly endorsed by the Supreme Court of Canada. Beginning with the case of *Andrews and the Law Society of British Columbia*, that court has consistently rejected an abstract and formalistic approach to equality rights in favour of a contextual and substantive approach. The court has repeated its commitment to this interpretation of section 15 in its most recent equality rights decisions.

At the heart of the substantive equality approach is the recognition that differentiation by itself is not a violation of equality rights. A violation of equality rights is established by differentiations that substantively discriminate. These are grounds-based differentiations that reflect, perpetuate, reinforce, exacerbate, or fail to remedy historical patterns of oppression of particular groups and individual members of these groups.

The prohibited grounds of discrimination are those enumerated in section 15, grounds analogous to the enumerated grounds, and interlocking grounds—for example, gender disability discrimination, racialized gender discrimination, and gendered age discrimination.

Preventing discrimination and promoting equality requires the transformation of established norms of social, political, economic, and legal systems. It places positive obligations on governments to respond to the equality needs of women and other oppressed groups.

Governments cannot justify equality of rights violations by broad and abstract appeals to the public good or the general fiscal welfare. To do so suggests that equality rights are luxuries that are separate from the democratic good instead of rights that substantively define and enhance the public good.

The guarantees in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms are, to quote the charter, “subject only to such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society”.

Recently in its decision in *NAPE and Newfoundland*, the Supreme Court recognized that in assessing what constitutes a free and democratic society, the values that inform a free and democratic society must be taken into account. It is LEAF's position that a substantive interpretation of democracy incorporates a recognition of values and principles such as equality, inclusion, social justice, and participation, and is not a mere majority rules approach.

Equality must inform the meaning of freedom within the charter and is itself one of the fundamental values of a democratic society. Substantive democracy would thus reflect norms that value and promote diversity, inclusion, and belonging.

● (1225)

In support of such an approach, the Supreme Court has recently reaffirmed its longstanding commitment to the idea that while it is the responsibility of governments to govern, governments are obligated to govern in accordance with the rights and freedoms guaranteed in the charter. Government action or inaction that violates a charter right or freedom must therefore be measured against the principles and values of substantive democracy to determine whether or not government action or inaction is constitutional.

It is LEAF's position that in order to fulfill its commitments under section 15 of the charter, the federal government is obligated to provide for both substantive equality and substantive democracy, as just described. There are many ways in which the federal government can provide leadership with respect to the achievement of these goals. In fact, it is LEAF's position that the federal government is obligated to provide that leadership.

With respect to providing for substantive equality, the federal government needs to ensure that its obligations to protect and to promote equality rights as provided for in the charter and in the international human rights instruments to which Canada is a signatory are fulfilled. Last year the CEDAW committee expressed its concerns relating to the Canadian government's failure to achieve these goals and the government's failure to put into practice the equality principles to which it has expressed a commitment.

In particular, the government needs to address the socio-economic disadvantage experienced by women in Canada, a form of discrimination that compounds the oppression experienced by women in other areas of their lives. For example, poverty leaves women vulnerable to violence, including spousal violence, and poverty has direct negative impacts on women's health.

Areas in which the government can demonstrate leadership that would assist in the reduction of women's poverty include revisions to the employment insurance act relating to the reformulation of the number of hours needed to qualify for maternity and parental benefits, and the implementation of the recent recommendations of the pay equity task force, including but not limited to the introduction of new pay equity legislation.

The current law just doesn't work. Women working full-time still earn, on average, 72¢ for every dollar a man earns. Women of colour, aboriginal women, and women with a disability face even greater levels of discrimination in the labour market, reflected in lower pay and inferior working conditions. The current pay equity process is too long, too costly, and extremely frustrating. It relies on complaints by individuals about unequal pay, which take years to resolve. The situation is so serious that the CEDAW committee has called on the Canadian government to take action and accelerate the implementation of equal pay for work of equal value.

Another specific that would promote substantive equality would be for Status of Women Canada to provide women's equality-seeking groups with core funding to conduct their work. The policy of providing only project-based funding has decimated women's equality-seeking groups across Canada. Without core funding that allows equality-seeking groups to do their core work, these groups cannot be effective in assisting the government in achieving its equality-related goals.

While the assistance provided by way of project-based funding is appreciated, groups need core funding in order to be sustainable. Just as the health care system needs to provide core services to assure a basic level of health for Canadians citizens, Status of Women Canada needs to provide core funding for the basic well-being of women's equality-seeking groups. Without core funding to purchase, for example, reliable computer systems, these organizations cannot effectively do the project-based work that Status of Women Canada currently prefers to fund.

• (1230)

The Chair: I'd ask you to begin to wind up, please.

Ms. Lori Harreman: In terms of specifics relating to substantive democracy, LEAF submits that there is a very real need for the federal government to consult with women's groups about equality rights issues. The value and legitimacy of the consultation process has been recognized by the Supreme Court of Canada in a variety of contexts. The dialogue on equality rights must be more than a two-way dialogue between the government and the courts. The conversation needs to include the stakeholders who have the experience and expertise dealing with the issues. In order for such consultation to be meaningful, women's equality-seeking groups need the financial support and the time to consult with our own constituencies to ensure that our contributions are representative and comprehensive.

LEAF would like to assist Status of Women Canada in achieving its goals, and it looks forward to working with you in the future towards that end.

The Chair: Thank you very much,

Dr. Bose.

Dr. Anu Bose (Executive Director, National Office, National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada): Thank you, Ms. Neville.

You must be getting very tired of seeing me, but I'm the Jill of all trades at NOIVMWC.

What is the National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada? It is a non-profit, non-partisan, and non-sectarian organization. The purpose of NOIVMWC is to ensure equality for immigrant and visible minority women within a bilingual Canada.

I think immigrant women came into view in the Bird commission report, in which we were given seven paragraphs. What is more important to remember is that the points she raised are still valid today, in 2004.

NOIVMWC was founded in 1986, five years after the federal government initiated the first national conference on immigrant

women. It was founded in Winnipeg in the worst snowstorm in Winnipeg's history—now that's saying something.

In 1985, after a few of the recommendations had been acted upon, persistent community pressure caused the then Minister of Multiculturalism to call a national consultation. The consultation identified 25 areas that needed remedying: *inter alia*, language skills, training, employment equity, health and social services, immigration policies, and core funding. Alas, the concerns remain very much the same.

If you were to ask NOIVMWC what are its concerns, NOIVMWC would reply that they are legion: second-class status at entry; second-class status as a "citizeness" to the end; the impoverishment of new immigrants, meaning anyone from zero to five years in this country; the lack of movement in employment equity, especially in government; the lack of protection for racial and sexual harassment in whistle-blower legislation; the glass ceiling—how many visible minority women and immigrant women do we see in GIC appointments; lack of culturally appropriate and well-funded services and settlement services, especially in agencies that deal with domestic violence; and, as you have heard time and time again, lack of core funding, which leads to poorly funded, insecure, precarious employment in the voluntary sector.

Who are NOIVMWC's constituency? NOIVMWC channels many different constituencies: new immigrants, Canadian-born citizenesses of origins other than the founding groups or aboriginals, different races and ethnicities, and faiths and no faiths. So we try to speak for a very heterogeneous population.

We are at once in coalition with equality-seeking, expressly feminist groups, as in the Coalition for Women's Equality, and we are there like a Greek chorus in the Canadian opportunities partnership, saying, "And the visible minority and immigrant women, please".

So what are our present activities? They are centred mainly around advocacy, advocating for immigrant and visible minority women in committees like yours, and also capacity-building for advocacy, where NOIVMWC, with funds from CIDA, is rolling out a training of trainers program where immigrant and visible minority women will analyse the precarious nature of immigrant women's livelihoods and build up advocacy skills to influence government policy. We will keep you posted on that as it rolls out in the coming year.

We've also been very active on the national security agenda. We appeared on the Hill three years ago to voice our grave reservations about Bill C-36. I was in the minister's lock-up on the national security policy, and yesterday I was at a round table on ethnic and faith groups with Minister Cotler.

Our main concern today is to speak to you about the impoverishment of immigrant and visible minority women, especially those in the zero to five brackets. We commissioned a study advocating for livelihoods for immigrant women. What is it that is keeping immigrant women from realizing their potential? After all, immigrants, men and women, have traditionally been the key to Canada's prosperity. They were part of Canada's brain gain.

• (1235)

Yet, in 2004 immigrant women face tremendous inequality, not just in the initial adjustment period but also year after year throughout their lives. They have become part of Canada's brain waste.

In my last presentation with the Coalition for Women's Equality I cited facts and figures. I just want to make one more observation on that. There is a yawning gap between the earnings of Canadian-born women, who make an average of \$50,000, while immigrant women make, on average, \$34,700.

In 1980, 15% of the full-year, full-time employed immigrant women held university degrees. In 2000 it has risen to 38%. The brain waste is due to the lack of fit between selection criteria for immigrants and the reality on the ground. This is due to the lack of recognition for the credentials of immigrant professional men and women, earned either in their countries of origin or in third countries, plus the constant refrain, "lack of Canadian experience".

The process is long and cumbersome. We realize that government policy on accreditation is in the minefield known as federal-provincial jurisdiction. But we would like you to know that today there is very little data on immigrant women professionals. There are also very few mentoring and accreditation programs specifically geared to women professionals. You're relying on your committee to put a gender and a racial-ethnic lens on the question of credentials, on immigration, on settlement, and on poverty. This would go a long way to laying to rest the myth that immigrant women are subservient, helpless, poorly educated, and a drain on the Canadian taxpayer.

Immigrants are an urban phenomenon, and the dangerous trend is towards the creation of an urban underclass of visible minority immigrants in the larger cities. I think many of you know it from your own constituencies. In Toronto, immigrants are more likely than non-immigrants to live in the neighbourhoods with high rates of poverty. Poverty acts as a barrier to social and economic integration of new immigrants and their children. Living in poverty has adverse effects on a whole range of life experiences, leading to conflicts within families, lack of self-esteem, and a sense of despair among future prospects. Settlement agencies are poorly resourced and overstretched and are unable to tackle the multifaceted nature of immigrant poverty.

Standing Committee on the Status of Women, we request you to apply a gender lens to the federal cities' agenda as well, and to look for the earmarking of money. In short, we are asking you to inject the concerns of immigrant and visible minority women into those portfolios that concern our constituency most.

We also want you to look at the social inclusion agenda. Many federal government policy papers now speak of social inclusion, but

no social inclusion agenda in Canada can be separated from Canada's official policy of multiculturalism. Henry and Tator, writing in the year 2000, say there is a tension here between two competing value systems: the reality of pervasive discrimination and racism and democratic liberalism. A social inclusion framework suggested by Saloojee, writing in the year 2004, says we must incorporate an anti-racist perspective and recognize the limits to multiculturalism and the realities of systemic discrimination in Canada today.

There is little debate right now in English Canada on citizenship values and the impact of newcomer settlement, as there has been in Quebec. However, the whole social inclusion debate singularly lacks an agenda perspective and an immigrant and a visible minority women's perspective.

We trust that you, this committee, will remedy the situation.

Thank you very much.

• (1240)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I apologize to each of you for hurrying you on, but our time is defined.

I'm going to suggest that we do five-minute rounds rather than seven, but they'll be generous five-minute rounds, if necessary.

I'll begin with Mrs. Yelich.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to our guests this afternoon.

We are going to be addressing and having a motion on the floor about the rape date drug, so I'd be interested in anything you could add to that. You don't have to answer that; if you have any information you could forward it. The date rape drug that's used as a weapon is definitely a problem, for women, of course, more than men. Any information you would have on that I would appreciate.

Also, I want to talk a little about the sharia law. I would like you to tell me how we should address that. I understand it's in the jurisdiction of the Province of Ontario right now, and when it comes to the federal level, just how would you approach that, the sharia law?

I would also like to hear about your priorities. You talk about the disabled, and age, racial, aboriginal, visible minority, and immigrant issues. I know that all of them are very important issues. If we were to prioritize them, how could we so we can do the best we can for women in all of those particular areas?

And I would like you to give me an example of any legislation programs or policies that could have benefited from a gender-based analysis. You don't have to go into any length. I just wonder whether we have some successful legislation, or do you see where there is some that could have benefited? I would be interested in any comments.

Thank you.

The Chair: I would just like to intervene to ask that you make your comments crisp and to the point, if you can, please.

Go ahead.

Ms. Andrée Côté: On the Rohypnol, the date rape drug, I think it's important to remember that the majority of sexual assaults are committed by people who know their victims—by fathers, by husbands, by boyfriends, by acquaintances, by work colleagues. I think that is an important focus of intervention. I would suggest if you want to have more detail that you invite Lee Lakeman, with the Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centres. She would surely be able to provide a lot of information for this committee.

In terms of programs and policies that could benefit from a gender-based analysis, clearly the budget process is in desperate need of having a gender-based analysis focus, because we have these huge amounts of money that are simply being handed over right now to international financial institutions as repayment on the debt, whereas we have a serious equality deficit in this country. We should really focus on making sure that the surplus we have...I would say at least 50% should be handed over to women and to programs that would benefit women. That's certainly an area.

We know that the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act has a provision mandating a gender-based analysis of the impact of its legislation. To my knowledge, that has not yet been done. So we're looking forward to seeing that; however, we are somewhat disappointed that we're not being consulted in the evaluation of this impact.

Finally, in terms of sharia law and how it should be addressed, NAWL is in the process of consulting and discussing this with our sister organizations, and in particular with the National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women, as well as with the Canadian Council of Muslim Women. We are in the process of doing more research and thinking about this. It's a hard issue, but certainly we need to look at it through a gender lens and to ensure that whatever measure we do promote to respect culture and multiculturalism, women's human rights will be protected in this process. I think that's our focus. We have serious concerns with the privatization and the introduction of religion in law. Mixing up religion with law, whether it be sharia or any other religion, is very worrisome.

Perhaps my colleagues want to say more about that.

• (1245)

The Chair: Does anyone else wish to comment on this?

Ms. Lori Harreman: I can say that LEAF has also been looking at the issue of sharia law. A subcommittee of our national legal committee was struck to look at the various aspects of the sharia law question.

We have given our submissions to Marian Boyd, who will be the Ontario AG's representative addressing this within the province of Ontario. Many of the people on the subcommittee are also involved with NAWL and with other women's organizations, so there is overlap and continuity of message here. But I would echo Andrée's concerns that we not focus on sharia law as the only religious context in which some of the concerns we might raise would arise, and that we not let our post-9/11 concerns and fears inform how we look at issues like the sharia law question.

I'd also like to suggest that in terms of policies that would benefit from a gender-based analysis, you've heard mentioned by both Andrée and myself the concerns around maternity and parental leave benefits. We would urge you to look at the maternity benefits scheme as a dignity-conferring benefit—in other words, as one designed to eliminate proactively discrimination faced by child-bearing women within the workplace. In doing so, ensure that the benefit is based on an understanding of women's reality of work and that a male working reality does not inform the eligibility requirements and the ways in which the benefit is actually conferred on the beneficiary.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: As a solution, you would have a different eligibility or skill.

Ms. Lori Harreman: Eligibility is critical, but—

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: What would you ideally—

Ms. Lori Harreman:—there are many aspects that would need to be looked at. It's part of a package. When you start with low salaries, those salaries inform the low benefits. Those low salaries also translate into low pensions.

It's a continuum. Maternity benefits and eligibility for those is an important piece of the puzzle, but you can't forget the other parts of that puzzle, which include effective pay equity legislation and ensuring equal pay for equal work.

• (1250)

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm going to go to Madame Bonsant.

[*Translation*]

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): Thank you.

Do you think maternity leave should be withdrawn from the current plan? Should it be separate? Should we, as certain companies do, offer monetary compensation to cover half or part of the costs? This exists in some collective agreements.

My second question has to do with immigrant women. I have a hard time accepting the fact that Canada or Quebec do not recognize talents or foreign credentials. What can we do to help women who have diplomas, who are very competent? Should there be legislation, or something else, to that effect?

I think Ms. Bose would have a good answer to this question.

[*English*]

The Chair: Dr. Bose.

[*Translation*]

Dr. Anu Bose: Unfortunately, Ms. Bonsant, I don't have an answer. I will ask Ms. Neville, given the fact that she is a member of the governing party, whether she could suggest a solution.

[English]

The Chair: I don't have any easy answers, quite clearly. I know Dr. Fry is working with the provinces right now and that some of the professional associations are beginning to make some accommodation in their licensing requirements. It is an effort, as I understand it, on behalf of or on the part of the federal government, the provincial governments involved, and most certainly the licensing organizations, which have to move beyond a guild mentality. I know Dr. Fry is working on this file, but I haven't been updated by her recently.

Dr. Anu Bose: Ms. Fry is the parliamentary secretary?

The Chair: Yes.

Dr. Anu Bose: She needs resources, because this thing, unfortunately, needs to be backed up with considerable cash. The regulatory bodies are practising a kind of supply management, a kind of gatekeeping function. If they are to be brought to heel—and I think that's a very unfortunate expression on my part—I think it will require more than just political persuasion. It will require something much more stringent.

We have already recommended to the previous standing committee on immigration that they look seriously at the Australian model, which I am quite willing to send to you, if you wish to look at it.

The Chair: I'd be pleased to have it, thank you.

Go ahead.

[Translation]

Ms. Andrée Côté: As far as maternity leave is concerned, we are currently exploring different ways of improving the system. I believe that feminists in the rest of Canada want a national maternity leave program. Should we improve the employment insurance program? That is one option. The Canada Labour Congress has put forward some general recommendations, for example.

Should we adopt stand-alone legislation on maternal and parental leave based on the Quebec model? That is another option. However, we should perhaps await the Supreme Court decision in order to see whether this is an area of federal or provincial jurisdiction.

Either way, we want national standards outside of Quebec and we want to recognize Quebec's right to have its own program. We strongly urge the federal government to negotiate and give the necessary funds to the Quebec government.

In any case, we will have to explore the possibilities of a universal program that could benefit women who are not part of the salaried workforce, because currently, there are too many women who have no protection. If they do not have a salary or if they were salaried but now have a second child, they are no longer eligible for employment insurance. Therefore, we are studying that issue.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Crowder.

•(1255)

Ms. Jean Crowder: First of all, a number of us have had to leave. It signals no lack of interest but rather commitments at 1 o'clock. With the security on the Hill, it's been a challenge for us today.

The Chair: Yes, it's very difficult today.

Ms. Jean Crowder: I have just two quick questions, although one is more of a comment.

A number of you have talked about the silo mentality in government. I think immigration is a really good example of how on the one hand we encourage immigrants to come to Canada, and on the other hand we don't deal with it in a coordinated way. If you had some specific recommendations on how we might do that differently, that would be great.

Second, a number of people have talked about ways in which women's organizations across the country could work with this committee. If you had some specific suggestions or recommendations around this, that would be terrific.

Ms. Andrée Côté: On the immigration question, certainly two of the issues that we at NAWL are very concerned about are the situation of domestic workers and the appalling conditions in which women are forced to work, in particular the live-in requirement that a woman must stay with her employer. Study after study has demonstrated that it places women in situations of vulnerability. So eliminating or radically transforming this program is imperative.

The other issue is the spousal sponsorship issue. Just this weekend I read a big article in the *National Post*—one of the papers I usually don't read, but I was in a hotel and I had it in my hand—on how Ontario is going to start cracking down on those who sponsored a family relative who then went on welfare. They're going to start suing people to recoup the welfare.

That is an extraordinary form of discrimination against immigrant families. Nobody else in this country has to pay a price to live with their family members. I think it's a scandalous situation, and I'm very concerned about provinces starting to use this strategy as a way of getting money back from some of our poorest citizens in the country. The sponsorship commitment is alive even though the sponsored person has become an immigrant. That is just a shocking second-status situation in Canada.

The Chair: Dr. Bose.

Dr. Anu Bose: Thank you, Ms. Neville.

Immigrant women come into this country sometimes as second-class citizens. Sponsorship can be a very demeaning situation for women, especially in cases of marriage breakdown and where there is violence. A woman is never sure whether she should report the bloke who's being physically violent with her, and risk his deportation and her impoverishment, or whether she should just turn him in and suffer the consequences. Plus there is the whole question of ostracism, which is very prevalent, and the loss of face. These things are not very well understood by the Border Services Agency or by government in particular.

I would say that immigration needs to have not only a gender lens but a racial-ethnic lens put on it, and this committee is very well placed to do it, because you have both.

The Chair: Ms. Harreman.

Ms. Lori Harreman: To address your second question, I think what we'd like to see you do is to ensure that we can substantively participate in your decision-making processes. As we've attempted to lay out for you here today, part of our ability to participate depends on the existence of core funding for our work.

At LEAF we deal with litigation. Charter litigation is becoming increasingly expensive. There are resources where the equality rights litigation affects or involves federal legislation. However, cases like NAPE and like Auton, some of the most important recent section 15 decisions, are coming out of provincial settings, where there is no funding available for those kinds of cases.

The funding also affects other organizations' ability to use the law to effectively enforce their own equality rights, mandates, and strategies. They need to be able to work with us. We need to be able to work with them. Increasingly, that is done through the use of

Internet and information technologies. There has to be funding available to ensure connectivity amongst women's organizations and between government, especially with this move toward e-government, and women's organizations.

● (1300)

The Chair: Thank you.

I want to thank the three of you very much for coming. I'm sorry if it seems rushed today, but today is an unusual day on the Hill. As you can see, many of our colleagues have had to make their way to other events.

Thank you very much. You've brought forward a number of very thoughtful and good suggestions. We may well follow up with you individually or as a committee.

Thank you. The meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

**Also available on the Parliamentary Internet Parlementaire at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le réseau électronique « Parliamentary Internet Parlementaire » à l'adresse suivante :
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.