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## **Standing Committee on the Status of Women**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Thursday, December 2, 2004**

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**Chair**

**Ms. Anita Neville**

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## Standing Committee on the Status of Women

Thursday, December 2, 2004

• (1120)

[English]

**The Chair (Ms. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.)):** Good morning, everybody. We're a little late getting started, so I would like to get right down to our discussions this morning.

Let me begin by welcoming those of you who have come to meet with the committee. As you're undoubtedly aware, this is a new committee established in this Parliament. It's the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, and as part of our process of defining our own agenda, we are meeting with women's groups from across the country, some in general meetings and some in topic-specific meetings. We're delighted to have the opportunity this morning to meet with you, to hear from you, and perhaps to ask you some questions and to make some comments.

Beverly Jacobs, would you like to begin?

**Ms. Beverly Jacobs (President, Native Women's Association of Canada):** I think we are—

**Mrs. Sheila Genaille (President, Métis National Council of Women Inc.):** Isn't there an agenda, Madam Chair?

**The Chair:** There is an agenda. I'm sorry, I'm going out of order. Sheila, you begin—and you're sitting in order too.

**Mrs. Sheila Genaille:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen of the committee. My name is Sheila Genaille, and I'm president of the Métis National Council of Women.

[Translation]

Good day, ladies and gentleman. My name is Sheila Genaille and I'm the President of the Métis National Council of Women. Since my mother tongue is English, I will address the committee in that language.

[English]

I do have a summary that I have left with the clerk for translation and distribution. I will not read it verbatim but just pick out certain parts.

Since we are starting late, Madam Chair, I hope we would add those minutes on at the end, because I think it's very important to hear the aboriginal women's voices. I think it's important for everybody in this committee to hear what we have to say and hopefully act on what we are asking.

Both the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and Status of Women Canada have recognized that Indian, Inuit, and Métis

women are among the most disadvantaged women in Canada and that the specific forms of disadvantage experienced by Métis, Inuit, and Indian women are as unique and diverse as their cultures.

The non-recognition of the Métis National Council of Women by successive federal governments has prevented aboriginal women who are Métis from being able to develop autonomously. In other words, despite the fact that Métis women have a very unique origin and needs, they are forced to approach other aboriginal non-governmental organizations as clients and not as equal participants in the long-term tradition of aboriginal self-governance that was recommended by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.

First I will address the historical disadvantage of Métis women. Within the amendment of the Constitution Act of 1982 and section 35, recognizing and affirming the existing rights of aboriginal people—Indian, Inuit, and Métis—the issues of jurisdiction and government structure for Métis are still unresolved.

Teresa Nahanee, who is a first nations lawyer from British Columbia, spoke to a Métis women's workshop this spring and said:

At its most basic, self-government means control of people, land and resources. Identifying the Métis citizens is an important first step. It is a battle that has been fought by Métis, Inuit and Indian—the right to identify themselves. Conversely, the women of these nations are the ones who have suffered the most by allowing Canada to define who they are.

She further said:

One author summed up the struggle for self-determination by Indigenous peoples as being both a struggle against oppression, and an assertion that the group has a "right to have rights". That is also what the female Aboriginal struggle is all about—it is about their "right to have rights".

Political and economic participation are important, and Métis women have been denied this participation. The Métis National Council of Women believes values such as inclusion, equality, fairness, and acceptance are important factors in establishing and working toward collective and community objectives. The federal government must develop practices based on accommodation and mutual respect that allow the Métis National Council of Women to retain their identity without being marginalized and excluded for being different.

The Métis National Council of Women was incorporated in 1992 to ensure that Métis-specific needs of Métis women were not completely obscured by the growing focus on male-dominated aboriginal organizations as the recipients of federal funding for aboriginal-specific funding and programs. We are the only national, autonomous, equality-seeking Métis women's organization in this country, and our sole mandate is to represent the interests of all Métis women in Canada.

The Métis National Council of Women believes the federal government must support this national process in areas such as policy advice and technical support; capacity development of institutions and individuals; advocacy, communications, and public information; promoting and brokering dialogue; and knowledge networking and sharing of good practices.

• (1125)

The Métis National Council of Women represents the interests of committed, knowledgeable, and effective constituents and member organizations. Fundamental to a strong organization is continued capacity building, social inclusion, and gender equality that will ensure Métis women's participation in the development and implementation of federal government policies.

There are cumulative effects of exclusion and discrimination on Métis women. Unfortunately, as the long-term processes of moving toward greater community control over federal funds and programs has unfolded, the persistent exclusion of the Métis National Council of Women from stable core funding and participation in the growing number and variety of aboriginal funding programs has had the effect of pushing Métis women further back than they were in the early nineties, relative to women in mainstream Canada. I'll give you a short example.

The exclusion of the Métis National Council of Women from funding formulas developed by Human Resources Development Canada for aboriginal peoples provided a poignant illustration of the cumulative effects of exclusion and discrimination.

I could go on, but I'll let you read this document when you get it.

Exclusion from the pathways and post-pathways programs has over time compounded the disadvantaged status of Métis women in numerous ways. I'll give you a few examples.

Métis women and their communities have been prevented from exercising local community control over program design, delivery, and administration and the allocation of federal funding in the wake of HRDC's withdrawal from this level of program delivery. Métis women are denied access to federal child care funding reserved for Indian and Inuit groups. They have been excluded from meaningful participation in the largest federal project supporting the transition of aboriginal self-governance.

I want to quote the royal commission of 1996—almost a decade ago. This is what they said:

The fact that this area of discrimination has been permitted to compound itself over the last decade is rendered even more reprehensible because it is well recognized that access to job training and capacity-building resources is probably the single most important factor in enabling Aboriginal peoples to make the transition to self-governance.

It is clear that the high-level federal government bureaucrats have participated in recycling negative attitudes about Métis women leaders, and in particular the Métis National Council of Women, as a way to justify their continued exclusion of the Métis National Council of Women from formal devolution and funding agreements, from negotiations and contracts, and from all the processes by which the federal government is supporting the movement toward aboriginal self-government.

We're asking this committee to really study this document and to make the necessary changes to stop this exclusion and marginalization.

The Métis National Council of Women points out, for example, that the Status of Women Canada programs—and I quote—are to “support activities aimed at removing such barriers, helping women to enter decision-making levels in all spheres of Canadian society”. In fact, the senior bureaucrats in that department do the opposite. I will give you an example.

In the initiative to address violence against women, Status of Women Canada bureaucrats identified and invited certain aboriginal women's organizations representing Indian and Inuit women and not Métis women. My colleagues at this table from the various organizations alerted me to this. They supported our request to be included in this process, but as of today we are still being excluded from the process to address violence against women.

We have some recommended changes.

Continually denying Métis women and their national autonomous organization funds and participation in policy development precludes the Métis National Council of Women from participating in critical capacity-building processes and policy development and implementation on an equal basis.

• (1130)

The aboriginal peoples of Canada had social systems, values, and a common philosophy of human rights long before European settlers arrived. The exclusion of aboriginal women from their homes and their lives on the fringes of society should awaken the consciousness of all of you around the table to their social exclusion, and the federal government should be aware of the factors that perpetuate it and address these barriers.

It is also important to consider the policy implications of the diversity within the aboriginal communities, particularly when aboriginal peoples are asked by government policy-makers to speak with one voice. We would not ask any one of you sitting around the table here from the various parties sitting in the House of Commons to speak with one voice. You would be—

• (1135)

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. Could you conclude, please?

Thank you.

**Mrs. Sheila Genaille:** Okay. I just have some recommendations to make.

It is necessary—and these are minimum changes—that the federal government provide equal access, opportunity, and inclusion for the Métis National Council of Women; and that the Métis National Council of Women, Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Association, and the Native Women's Association of Canada all be guaranteed stable and long-term funding. The government should include the three national women's voices on the basis of full equality.

The Government of Canada must make changes to the systemic exclusion within the federal bureaucracy. The Government of Canada must immediately remove the barriers and discrimination faced by organizations such as ours. The Government of Canada should take immediate steps to make the Status of Women Canada its own ministry.

I will close with this final thought. The promise of the future must be tempered with the legacy of the past. In the case of Métis women, the legacy is a long and continued history of exclusion, marginalization, and racism.

The Government of Canada must respect the autonomy of the Métis National Council of Women, and with respect and political will there will be change and freedom for Métis women from social injustice, exclusion, gender inequality, and racism.

I thank you.

**The Chair:** When the clerk called she suggested a five-minute presentation. I've been fairly generous with the times, but it cuts back on the amount of time we have for interaction.

If possible, you can highlight your concerns or your recommendations. I understand the importance of background, but if we have a written brief, I expect that most of us will be following through and doing our homework.

Beverly, welcome, and congratulations to you.

**Ms. Beverly Jacobs:** Thank you.

*Ske:noh Swagwegoh, Nyigyasoh Gohwehgyusay.* I bring greetings of peace and wellness to all of you as well as providing my name in my language, Gohweguysay, which literally means "she's visiting".

I've come here to visit you, to bring to your attention the issues that are impacting aboriginal women in Canada, and to provide solutions to address these issues.

We are celebrating our 30th anniversary this year as an organization, and we have been consistent in our role to advocate for aboriginal women in this country. We understand the role of Status of Women Canada is to promote gender equality and the full and equal participation of women in the economic, social, cultural, and political life of this country. We also understand that its mandate is to coordinate policy with respect to the status of women and administer related programs.

In Canada's report to the UN's International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights that covered the timeframe until 1999, Canada reported that there were various programs that were administered for aboriginal women. We continue to need these projects because the issues haven't been forgotten, and we are still continuing to deal with these issues.

There are many issues aboriginal women are facing that we as an autonomous national women's organization address on a daily basis. I receive telephone calls asking for support because many of our women feel so alone in their fight for justice, with human rights violations in their own communities. Some of our women are not able to bring forward issues. They don't have a voice because they are silenced in their own communities. It is therefore my job to ensure that these issues are presented to you to ensure that our

women are no longer marginalized and that they feel safe in their own homes and communities.

The following are issues we as an organization have to address. First, violence against aboriginal women has to end now. NWAC has been addressing this issue specifically through its Sisters in Spirit campaign and the AWAVE coalition, as well as supporting three Mi'kmaq women in the project they're working on, Aboriginal Women on the Move. They'll be biking across the country in the year 2006 to address this issue and bring awareness of the violence against aboriginal women.

With my involvement as the lead researcher and consultant in Amnesty International's report *Stolen Sisters*, I was also able to meet and visit with families and talk to them regarding the loss of a family member—their mother, their auntie, their grandmother—who has been missing or who has been murdered. I know first-hand the impact of violence, and I how it has impacted all of those families and their friends. This violence continues on a daily basis.

We are waiting—patiently, mind you—to hear from Canada as to whether it will be funding our Sisters in Spirit proposal. We have received much public support, both aboriginal and non-aboriginal, but we need to hear something soon. As noted in the *Stolen Sisters* report, all levels of government in Canada should work urgently and closely with indigenous people's organizations and indigenous women in particular to institute plans of action to stop violence against indigenous women. This is an urgent matter, as our women's rights are being violated every day.

NWAC has been very involved to ensure that culturally relevant gender-based analysis is integrated into various developments occurring internationally, such as the Working Group on a Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the Organization of American States, Beijing+10, and the Indigenous Peoples Summit of the Americas.

We as an organization, of course, require the necessary funding to have our experts and technical assistants attend these meetings. In Canada's report to the UN's International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Canada reported that that the aboriginalwomen's program also provided funding to the NWAC to pursue the issue of aboriginal women living on reserves who did not enjoy the same right as women living off reserves to an equal share of matrimonial property at the time of marriage breakdown. Despite this funding being provided at that time, this issue still exists.

● (1140)

First nations women and their children living on-reserve still have no recourse to the same laws any other woman has off-reserve; this still needs to be rectified. We will, again, need to gather stories from our aboriginal women in our communities to identify the specific impacts they are dealing with.

There are many strong aboriginal women in our communities, as well as many aboriginal female youth, who want to make a change in today's society. We need to strongly encourage this youth and assist in providing leadership for them. We will require funding to develop mentorship programs to initiate these positive relationships between our aboriginal female role models and our aboriginal youth.

There are so many issues we would like to get into detail about, but as we know, we have time constraints. It would be impossible to deal with all of those issues, so we are dealing with the following: health care issues that specifically address aboriginal women, maternal health care and midwifery issues, and specific health issues affecting aboriginal women such as breast and cervical cancer; education; child and family services; poverty; and the impact of residential school.

Many of our aboriginal women are responding to the current ADR process. However, we do not have the resources to provide support to these women. There are justice and corrections issues such as overrepresentation of aboriginal women in the justice system and a negative relationship of aboriginal communities with the justice system, especially the police. This was referred to in Amnesty International's report.

We're still dealing with racism and systemic discrimination, dealing with stereotypes and the negative portrayal of aboriginal women in the media specifically.

We are also dealing with continued discrimination in the Indian Act and also continued discrimination within Bill C-31, which was supposed to deal with the sexual discrimination in the Indian Act.

We're also dealing with employment and training issues, namely the lack of funding for AHRDA programs and the lack of gender analysis of the models that are being currently developed.

Those are some of the issues, and here are some of the solutions we would like to address.

As I have just begun my position as president of the Native Women's Association of Canada, there is a definite need to set up a meeting with the Minister responsible for the Status of Women to discuss these issues in more depth.

There must be a recognition of and respect for the Native Women's Association of Canada as a national aboriginal organization. We have been in existence for 30 years. We must be invited to all relevant meetings and be advised of them in appropriate time to prepare for these meetings.

We also have a need for meaningful consultation between the Native Women's Association and other aboriginal women's organizations to understand the issues affecting all aboriginal women. Of course, when I'm referring to aboriginal women, it's first nations, Métis, and Inuit women.

Policies and programs affecting aboriginal women must be implemented immediately. Amnesty International's recommendation to end marginalization of indigenous women in Canada is that all levels of government should adopt such measures that are necessary to ensure that indigenous women are consulted in the formulation and implementation of any policy that could affect their welfare and status.

Aboriginal women are still missing and are dying every day as a result of violence and poverty.

Status of Women Canada must ensure that qualified aboriginal women research aboriginal women's issues, increase advocacy within cabinet to support aboriginal women's initiatives, and advocate that Canada ratify the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women.

As it is the Status of Women's mandate, we require equitable funding such as core funding for the Native Women's Association and our affiliates in the provinces. It is no longer acceptable that we work with very limited resources while doing the same work as all of the other national aboriginal organizations, which do have the high levels of funding to do this work.

• (1145)

We demand that we be funded at a level that is equal to our male counterparts. It would be ideal if multi-year funding agreements could be implemented so that less of our time is spent on writing reports and evaluations for our funders.

We look forward to a continuing dialogue with the ministers and this committee. We are prepared to, of course, answer any questions from the committee members on any issue raised in this submission.

Thank you for listening.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for being here today.

Jennifer, I think you're making the presentation on behalf of your organization.

**Ms. Jennifer Dickson (Executive Director, Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Association):** Good morning. Thank you, Madam Chair, for the invitation to participate in your important work, and congratulations to the Government of Canada for striking such a relevant and timely standing committee. It's very nice to see an actual male human being at it too.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Russ Powers (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, Lib.):** Today's your day.

**Ms. Jennifer Dickson:** For those of you who may wonder what Pauktuutit is, please let me explain.

In the early eighties, Inuit women from across the north gathered to consider how to address their deplorable social conditions, a growing set of harsh realities and appalling health challenges that few others were interested in even discussing. Knowing instinctively that they'd have to become their own agents of change, in 1984 they succeeded in incorporating Pauktuutit, a non-profit organization with a charitable trust to represent all Canadian Inuit women, to tackle on a national level what were then known as women's issues.

Led by a small staff located in Ottawa and directed by a highly motivated board of directors, 13 Inuit women comprised of a youth representative, a non-northern representative, and women elected from regions that take in all 52 communities across the north, Pauktuutit is committed to bringing about political and social improvements, to foster awareness of the needs of Inuit women, and to encourage their community, regional, and national participation in relation to social, cultural, and economic development in Canada.

Gender equity, many forms of abuse, protection of cultural and traditional knowledge, unique northern environmental sensitivities, and economic self-sufficiency are among our priority issues. On the health side, long-term advocacy and program work has made progress on substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, hep C, diabetes, tobacco cessation, suicide prevention, and respite for caregivers, to mention just a few of our active concerns.

Since women hold in our hands our most vulnerable citizens and our hope for tomorrow, Pauktuutit has always emphasized the well-being of children in all our work. SIDS—that's sudden infant death syndrome—traditional midwifery, maternal and infant care and prenatal programs, children in care, teen pregnancy, youth suicide, fetal alcohol syndrome, and sexual child abuse are among our child-related programs.

That's our Pauktuutit in a thimble. With these few minutes to speak, let me provide a little context for some of the many alarming circumstances that face Inuit women.

The majority of Inuit in Canada live in 52 remote Arctic communities extending thousands of kilometres from the Alaskan border in the west to the eastern shores of Labrador. This vast cultural and geographic heritage will very soon be in the hands of our precious youth. Between 1996 and 2001, Canadian Inuit experienced a population growth of 12%. This is relevant because it's four times that of the non-aboriginal population, which means Inuit now have an average age of 20 years, compared to regular Canadians who have an average of 38 years.

Any constructive discussion on the needs of Inuit women must start when they are children and must include a focus on the needs of mostly very young, inexperienced single mothers. I'm talking about girls who are 14 years old, very young.

Historically, very young mothers bearing children were a normal and acceptable practice in Inuit culture. A young mother would have had a husband and a number of close relatives in a small camp to assist and guide her. Gender roles were defined and formal schooling wasn't in the picture.

Today, most of these young women do not have the assistance of a partner, and their extended families are either elsewhere or stressed by their own inadequate and often destructive social and economic conditions—conditions that place Inuit at the extremes of all of Statistics Canada's indicators. Inuit have the highest rates of unemployment, the lowest incomes, the highest cost of living, the worst housing conditions, the highest rates of communicable disease, and the shortest life expectancy of all Canadians by far.

We know that as to number, quality, and effectiveness, services to Inuit women and related supports to their children do not yet even approach services provided to Canadians as a whole. Evidence of the

negative effects of this inequity is all around us, and the situation is growing more complex and urgent in several interrelated areas, of which I'll list a few.

You may be familiar with the sectoral sessions that are now taking place and that everybody is participating in across the country. I guess the one downside of that excellent work—and there are two or three upsides—is really obvious, and it is that it's again creating silos. That is almost debilitating. We were in housing a couple of weeks ago, and when you raise the impact of housing on abuse, employment, or the environment, for example, people say, "No, that's another session. We're talking about housing today." So it's very difficult.

- (1150)

**Housing.** There is an ongoing and severely under-addressed crisis in social housing for Inuit, causing growing numbers of Inuit women to continue to be severely disadvantaged in ways that impact them throughout their lives.

**Early childhood programs.** Pauktuutit committed to initiatives that provide Inuit day care and aboriginal head start programs. While these are successful in some communities, access is spotty and many children have yet to benefit. More subsidized day care spaces would help very young mothers continue with their education. This, in turn, would be a first-rate investment in the future of our communities, and our society and country, as the evidence is clear that educating young mothers increases healthy baby outcomes. There's a direct correlation between educating young mothers and the health of their children.

**Abuse.** Pauktuutit has been addressing family violence issues since its inception in 1984. Our success in partnering with governments to make prevention in this area a priority and to provide services to victims is increasing, but programs remain, for the most part, marginal. There are very few safe shelters helping to protect women and children scattered across Inuit regions; however, the root causes of violence remain largely unaddressed, mainly because resources to address them continue to be appallingly inadequate.

Most Inuit women witness violence in their homes; too many are victims of violence themselves. Everyone in this room is aware of the negative impact that violence has on children's physical and emotional well-being, their ability to learn, and their potential to grow into healthy, stable, and productive adults. Significant financial investment in community-based programs and the human resources to carry them out is essential to help these women and children heal and to protect all from future abuse.

City women. The needs of Inuit women in urban areas is of growing concern. More than one in ten Inuit now live in the south. Canada's Inuit urban population is expanding rapidly, for a variety of reasons, which include greater access to education for children and young adults, employment opportunities, and access to comprehensive medical care. But, sadly, many Inuit women move south to escape family violence and abuse. There are services run by Inuit, for Inuit, in Ottawa, including much needed children and family services. While these Ottawa services are useful and increasing, other urban centres are at earlier stages of organizing and most are without such culturally relevant programs, which means homelessness in the Inuit is growing exponentially.

Another far-reaching priority area of concern for Pauktuutit is fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. This is just one of our programs that I've chosen to brief you on a little bit today. This is now affecting three generations of Inuit, and it is approaching epidemic levels. As we promote FASD awareness and prevention, the need for services for those affected by FASD becomes ever more urgent. Currently, in most cases, these problems can't even be diagnosed due to the absence of professional help. Without diagnosis, there is inadequate data to justify to governments the urgent need for services. If these citizens are to reach their potential, adequate program delivery and training of caregivers remain major issues to be resolved.

It would be difficult to overstate the effect on Inuit women of cultural change they have experienced; in less than 50 years they went from an isolated, family centred economy, based on subsistence hunting and seasonal relocation, through fractured family structures and children taken far away and educated in a foreign language and culture, to population migration from small communities to regional centres and an economy of wage-earning employment and life in permanent housing. On all these matters—housing, social services, health issues, parenting, and especially the impact on the Inuit of unparalleled social change—it is disheartening that the Inuit are, as mentioned above, at the extremes of Statistics Canada's indicators.

Let me underscore a point about connectivity that we all now know. We can no longer try to look at improving health without looking at housing, nor can we look at education without including cultural sensitivity, or at economic development without considering environmental protection. Inuit women are heads of families and leaders of communities, mothers, girls, grandmothers and great-grandmothers, teachers, caregivers, and health providers. Inuit women have ancient wisdom, traditional knowledge, and practical expertise to share. They truly are the agents of change in Canada's north.

If Pauktuutit is to participate in opportunities for beneficial legislative public policy and program interventions, we must get Inuit women higher on the radar of policy-makers, funders, and advocates.

• (1155)

We must raise awareness within Canada and across the world about these little known and no longer acceptable social and economic conditions in the north. *Nakurmiik*. Thank you.

I brought along a package of letters that we've sent in the last three weeks—three letters that we've sent to the Prime Minister on the urgency of some of the issues facing Inuit women. I have provided

them to your interpreters and also to your clerk, so perhaps you could have a look at them. The most recent one went out from our president, Mary Palliser, just this week. So far we've gotten no response at all.

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

In regard to the letters, I don't know whether you've given them to us in both languages, but if not we'll get them translated.

**Ms. Jennifer Dickson:** English and Inuktitut is our requirement.

**The Chair:** That's not the language we work in here. So we will get them translated and distribute them to the members.

I know that some of us have received them, but we will get them out to all members.

Let me welcome you, Ellen Gabriel. Thank you for coming. Go ahead.

**Ms. Ellen Gabriel (President, Quebec Native Women Inc.):**  
[*Witness speaks in native language*]

Thank you for inviting me here today.

[*Translation*]

Thank you all for inviting me. I am very pleased to be here.

[*English*]

My Mohawk name is Katsi'tsakwas, and I'm Turtle Clan from the Kanien'kehá:ka, people of the Flint. I'm from the community of Kanesatake.

I am newly elected as president of the Quebec Native Women's Association. It is a non-profit organization founded in 1974 by Mary Two-Axe Early, a Mohawk woman, along with many other aboriginal women whose goal it was to work on the reinstatement of aboriginal women who had lost their Indian status through marrying a non-native.

The women worked tirelessly to achieve their goal, and in 1985 the Indian Act was amended by Bill C-31 to reinstate the status of women who had lost their rights. However, with it came the categorization of the children of these women, who gained only partial status. This categorization of the children, I feel, is comparable to the way purebred animals are categorized in going by the purity of bloodline. It is an insult to our people and an insult to all human beings.

Under Bill C-31, many women have been denied access to their land and homes on the reserves where they grew up by band councils who have been given the task in recent years by the Department of Indian Affairs of deciding who is a member and who has a right to live in the community. And yet INAC still maintains jurisdiction in this area. So there really is a big conflict going on within our communities, a situation created by INAC. For example, in some meetings with band councillors, some women have been told they have to either divorce their husbands to be able to live on their reserves, or they have to kill their husbands, as one band councillor jokingly said. This is the kind of insult that we have been given and the kind of attitude that we, as a colonized and oppressed people, have come to in this day and age.

We have the issue of matrimonial property, which I think many women here understand, where aboriginal women face the possibility of losing their land, their home, or their property during divorce because the matrimonial property law under the Department of Indian Affairs favours the male. No other Canadian women are given this kind of status. No other women in this world, I think, have been subjected to the kind of sexism and racism that aboriginal women have had to face in post-colonial times.

There is also the issue of child paternity, which becomes contested. If it's not acknowledged, I can refer to the child protection act under the United Nations, the Convention on the Rights of the Child:

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practise his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language.

Again, we go back to what colonialism and oppression has done to aboriginal people. We talk about the violence in our communities. We have much to do in the areas of educating our own people and in educating the government and the public.

Quebec Native Women services many, many women who are not provided these services by their band councils, and yet we do not have funding comparable to the AFNQL or the Assembly of First Nations, or any other regional groups. We have submitted many reports on issues such as matrimonial property and the conflict with Bill C-31, and we have worked tirelessly to advocate the rights, safety, and well-being of aboriginal women and their children.

• (1200)

In a speech by the justice minister of Canada, Irwin Cotler, he claimed that his daughter told him that when it comes to human rights, you must always think of the children. Yet this year in the community where I come from, the safety and well-being of the children on Kanesatake were not considered when there was no policing. There was no safety for the children living within that community. So it seems that justice is truly blind in many aspects. It's not just blind to race, creed, and colour; it's blind in many other ways that should not be applicable.

On domestic violence, I believe those of you here have a tripartite report that Quebec Native Women did in regard to policing on the reserves. It is a report that we believe is very fair and equitable and will try to help resolve some of the issues such that aboriginal

women, at least in the province of Quebec, and it should be applied elsewhere, can be helped through policing services. We at this moment have the attitude from policing agencies like the RCMP and the Sûreté du Québec and the justice minister of Quebec that the aboriginal police forces are not really police. This was said to me in a meeting with Sûreté du Québec officers. So we really need to address the issue of the attitude of policing authorities, but provide better training and resources for the police officers.

If we look in the province of Quebec alone, or any other province, aboriginal women's shelters are underfunded. They lack the resources necessary to provide long-term and adequate care to their clients. We not only need to provide more adequate funding but to create more aboriginal women's shelters in the meantime, while we're trying to deal with the issue of violence within our communities.

On the status that aboriginal children or people have to face, I've also been asked to discuss, in the case of longhouse children, the Iroquois Confederacy, which provides its own birth certificates. In the Iroquois Confederacy, there are Mohawk, Seneca, Cayuga, Oneida, Onondaga, and Tuscarora. These children go under their parents' status and they lose all those rights when they're 18, in spite of the fact that both parents are status Indians. It's an issue that has been going on for many, many years, and it's an issue that needs to be addressed.

I would like to reiterate as well Beverly Jacobs' statement concerning the Sisters in Spirit campaign and the report of Amnesty International that said aboriginal women are five times more likely to experience a form of violence against them than any other group of women in this country.

We'd like to support the Native Women's Association of Canada's request to create a database and research to address the issues of violence against aboriginal women. We need to take appropriate action against the attitude of some of the authorities who fail to deal with this problem in an appropriate manner. Although there are exceptions to this rule, on the whole, aboriginal women have not been treated fairly. They have not been protected and they have not been respected.

In Canada today, aboriginal women continue to play key roles in the caregiving professions within our communities, such as education, counsellors, social workers, and health workers, and yet we are purposely excluded from having any decision-making powers within the community. As Beverly has also stated, aboriginal women's groups are not funded like our male-dominated groups, such as the Assembly of First Nations.

There is also a misconception that we only advocate on behalf of aboriginal women, but this is not entirely true. We advocate on behalf of the women and their children, which also includes males.

A lot of the issues we're talking about, we can put band-aid solutions to. We do tend to get funding, which is very much appreciated, which sometimes does not last in the long term. As Beverly has stated, we need to provide core funding so that programs that continue are not stopped because they have a timeline. The issue is very important today and it is critical that violence and health issues, particularly mental health issues in our communities, are researched, are addressed by our own people, and that we be given some kind of control over our destiny.

• (1205)

I don't know how you say it in English, but we have tried many times in diplomacy with the Canadian government, with the public, to try to educate people on who we are as a people. We do not want to lose our language, our culture, our identity in a world that is very consumeristic. It's something we have to contend with, with the children. We have to talk about not only our rights as human beings but our rights to our land, which our identity is strongly tied to.

I hope that one of the things that comes out of the recommendations, if there will be any from this standing committee, is education. The way history is taught in schools across Canada has changed. The perspective of aboriginal people and the true history of what happened in Canada, or in the Americas for that matter, needs to be reported and taught to Canadian children across this country. What is happening now, if you look at media reports, if you look at the way university students naively ask questions about aboriginal people... they don't know anything about us.

It also spurs on racist attacks, because people believe we are the most privileged group in this country because supposedly we have free education; supposedly we have everything free. There needs to be a lot of cultural sensitivity, and there needs to be more dialogue with not only aboriginal women's groups but aboriginal people in general.

Thank you very much.

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

Let me explain to the presenters how we work as a standing committee. A rotation was established at our first meeting setting the order in which members of the committee may ask questions or make comments to presenters or witnesses before us. They are timed. We have seven minutes for the first round and five minutes for the second round, and the timing includes the question and the answer. In order that we get in as much as possible, I'm asking my colleagues to keep their questions directed, and I ask those of you who are here presenting to keep your answers directed to the question. That way we can hear from more people and have more of an exchange.

Who will go first from the Conservatives?

Ms. Grewal, go ahead.

• (1210)

**Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank the panel for taking their time to come here. Certainly, your presentations were very useful and helpful to us.

I have a couple of questions. Aboriginal women share certain commonalities but also diversity of circumstances linked to their status as native women, Métis or Inuit women. As the committee continues its work, how should it incorporate the distinct needs and issues of aboriginal women in future studies? Two of you—I think it was Beverly and Ellen—mentioned in your presentations that Bill C-31, in 1985, amended the Indian Act and restored the government, defined Indian status of first nations women who had previously been denied those rights when they married non-status men. Are there outstanding issues related to Bill C-31 that this committee could examine? What are they?

My third question. There are a disproportionate number of aboriginal single-parent families. Moreover, almost one-half of urban aboriginal children live with a lone parent, usually a woman. This figure represents a rate three times higher than the Canadian norm. What factors contribute to the high number of female-led single-parent families in aboriginal communities? What supports are made available to single mothers? Are existing measures sufficient?

**The Chair:** You have a number of questions in that. Who would like to respond? Go ahead.

**Mrs. Sheila Genaille:** I'll respond to the first, and I think I can make it short. As to how you should incorporate all groups, I'll let my colleagues answer that.

I think one of the first things that would help aboriginal women is to have us here as individual groups. We all have the same problems, but how Quebec native women and how the Inuit women address them are very different. I think the number one step is to have us here as individual groups, so you're focusing on one and getting a similar background.

I think the biggest thing is to educate. Subsection 35.2 of the Constitution, 1982, says: "In this Act, 'aboriginal peoples of Canada' includes the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada." By lumping us all together in restricted timeframes, you're going to get bits and pieces. I will keep that as answer number one.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Ms. Beverly Jacobs:** May I try to answer number two?

**The Chair:** Please.

**Ms. Beverly Jacobs:** Do I have seven minutes?

**The Chair:** No, you don't. I apologize. This is the structure of Parliament. I'm hopeful that we'll have other opportunities to continue the dialogue in a less formal setting, but this is a first step. We're a committee feeling our way.

I'm not intruding on your time—I'll add on time—and I'm trying to be flexible with it as well.

**Ms. Beverly Jacobs:** The Bill C-31 outstanding issues would take hours to go through, all of the detail of the impact of Bill C-31, because we're talking about 20 years. In 2005, it will be 20 years since Bill C-31 was enacted.

Specifically, there's still sexual discrimination that occurs as a result of Bill C-31. I'll give you an example. Let's say a brother and a sister both marry non-status people. The husband's wife comes under subsection 6(1)...both of them under Bill C-31, because they both had status prior to 1985. Their children have 6(1) status. Basically, Bill C-31 has created these levels of status. So when the sister married a non-status man, she lost her status. But when she regained her status she regained her status under paragraph 6(1)(c)—there is (a), (b), (c), (d) and (e) under 6(1). So their children have 6(2) status. If a 6(2) marries a non-status, their children have no status. The brother's children maintain the 6(1) status, unless of course the children marry a 6(2) or marry a non-status.

It changes, but basically that's where the level of discrimination still exists. And there's also the second generation cut-off rule that is affecting those women and their children and grandchildren. That's one issue.

The other one is also regarding unstated paternity. As a result, when women register their children they have to obtain consent from the fathers. So if they're in an abusive relationship or had a child because of rape, they have to go and ask the fathers to sign in order for their children to be registered, to determine whether they're 6(1) or 6(2). And it's automatic. If they do not state anything, that the father is or is not status, it's automatically assumed that they're non-status, so their children become 6(2).

I could go on and on, but those are two main issues.

●(1215)

**Ms. Jennifer Dickson:** I can take a shot at three if you like, except for statistics.

You were asking about single-parent families in the south, and mostly single-parent families headed by women. For the Inuit, this is a great big problem.

As I mentioned, at least one in ten Inuit now live in the south. There's only one support centre that I know of. It's called TI and it's in Ottawa. For the Inuit communities elsewhere across Canada, they're not all in urban centres. There is very little support, although thanks to the Aboriginal Friendship Centre's generosity, Inuit are welcome, but they often don't feel comfortable in somebody else's centre.

As Sheila mentioned, it's a real challenge for all aboriginals to be lumped into one group; let's get all the aboriginals in and then we can put a check in that box and get on with our real work. In the case of the Inuit and first nations, it's like combining the Japanese and the Chinese and saying, let's look after those Asians; let's get them in the room. It's not that there's any problem between us. We collaborate on many files. But it's very strange.

●(1220)

**The Chair:** I'm sorry to interrupt you, but there's a technical problem with the console here. We'll have to suspend for a minute because it's affecting the translation.

●

(Pause)

●

**The Chair:** We're ready to go again.

I'm sorry I interrupted you mid-sentence, Jennifer.

**Ms. Jennifer Dickson:** I departed from the question for a second, but I wanted to answer it.

Again, I can only really speak for the Inuit women, but the single Inuit women with children in the south, and particularly the urban regions, are a huge problem. That's partly because many of them are already casualties. The reason they're here is that they couldn't otherwise get out of an abusive situation at home.

I could talk about the abusive situations in the north, the reasons people are trapped in them, and the whole circle of violence, again for much more than seven minutes. Let's just assume, though, that we've gotten to the south and we're now down here in a really precarious position, with no money, probably no English—maybe very little—certainly nothing of what people might call an academic education, and two, three, four, five, or six children. You're trying to figure out what to do and how to get them into schools and how to get some help.

As I mentioned, there is this little stop-gap place in Ottawa called TI that has a little bit of federal funding that helps on a short-term basis with efforts to find housing and efforts to find social services. It's a serious and growing problem, though, because what immediately happens is substance abuse. Some of the kids, often teenagers, are vulnerable to every kind of abuse you can imagine on the streets, for reasons of race, unfortunately, and also for reasons of cultural insensitivity. Inuit are often by definition very generous, open-hearted people, and they can sometimes be taken advantage of in ways that more sophisticated people might not be. But the women in particular are in a desperate situation in the south.

We have one woman director on our board, but it doesn't begin to cover....

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Madam Brunelle.

[Translation]

**Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ):** It's a pleasure to meet you.

I was deeply troubled by Amnesty International's recent report. It gave me an opportunity, as a newly elected MP, to ask my first question in the House and to request from the Minister a status report on the situation.

Like you, I'm proud of my language and my heritage. That's why I'm speaking French today and why I speak French whenever I can.

Getting back to my first question in the House, I was very troubled by Amnesty International's report on aboriginal women, violence and the high number of violent deaths. I asked the Minister what the government intended to do to address the situation. I was told that the government was planning to take corrective action. When I later broached the subject once again, I was again told that some corrective action would be taken. I haven't heard anything further about this. I'm curious as to whether you've heard about any efforts being made to correct this problem?

I've observed that many native women don't trust the police very much. Why is that? What can we do to help you? How can problems be resolved if they are not brought to light? I've noticed that when a woman dies in a violent manner, the police don't say whether or not the victim was a native woman. Statistics are difficult to come by. Would you care to comment on that?

I have another quick question for you. You mentioned that your language and heritage was important to you. Why are they so very important to you?

•(1225)

[English]

**The Chair:** Who would like to begin?

Go ahead.

**Ms. Beverly Jacobs:** Can I answer the first two?

On the Amnesty International report, as I mentioned, I was quite involved in the whole report. Thank you for asking the minister about what Canada is going to do.

So far what has happened is NWAC has submitted a proposal to the Privy Council Office for the \$10 million for the campaign. We have not heard anything. We hear rumblings underneath that they have an interdepartmental committee that's going through the proposal and deciding on what they're going to do. But we haven't heard anything other than that.

We would like to hear soon; otherwise I will again be going public with the media to find out what is happening.

**Ms. Beth Phinney (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.):** Madam Chair, for clarification, is the \$10 million for the Sisters in Spirit proposal?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Ms. Beth Phinney:** Okay. I didn't know if that was the same proposal.

**Ms. Beverly Jacobs:** With respect to aboriginal women not trusting police, there's an underlying systemic issue. When I was meeting with families of the missing and murdered women, many of those families felt that. There was one specific mother who called the police to report that her daughter was missing, and when they came to her home they interrogated her. They didn't really pay attention to what she was trying to tell them in explaining to the police that her daughter was missing and had been missing for two days. She was only 16.

She described the police coming to her home at 2 o'clock in the morning. She had five other children. She had called during the day,

but they decided to come at 2 o'clock in the morning. That is only one example of the trust level.

You hear that from one aboriginal woman, and it's magnified 100 times in the communities, because of the trust level and the relationship with them. There may also be abusive relationships with the police. The police may control issues within the community.

Also, as you know, there's been the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples with regard to the criminal justice system. The criminal justice system has failed aboriginal people. There have been task force reports in every province. Every commission has talked about the justice system, and almost every one of those reports has talked about the police and their responsibilities in providing protection to the aboriginal community. It's not happening.

To add to that, in my travels I also travelled to the downtown east side in Vancouver. I met with some of the front-line women and talked about the terrible relationship they have with the police in that community, the distrust they have because they're also being violated by the police.

•(1230)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Madam Gabriel, could you give a brief answer to the second part of Madam Brunelle's question?

[Translation]

**Miss Ellen Gabriel:** My language is important because it's tied to who I am. The history of our people is closely connected with our language. Our language reflects our ancestors thoughts, beliefs and knowledge. It is our link to our past and our ancestors. In my opinion, our language needs to be protected just as much as yours. Considerable efforts must be made to safeguard our language.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mrs. Sheila Genaille:** Madam Chair, I'd like to respond as well.

**The Chair:** Very briefly, please.

**Mrs. Sheila Genaille:** One of the questions you asked was why the aboriginal people don't trust authority. One of the things you have to look at, from the Métis community's perspective as well as that of the other aboriginal peoples, I would suggest, is the generational cycle of abuse within the communities. According to Stats Canada in 1992, Métis women are the most impoverished in this country. At that time the majority of them were at \$10,000 or less per year.

You also must take a look at the global impact it has on all of our children. They have the Internet. They have television. With the violence cycles in their homes a lot of them head to the streets.

I live in Edmonton. We have many problems with gangs. There are organizations that are struggling. There's an organization that has been working to keep aboriginal kids in school. A lot of kids come into the city from the reserves, and they're throwaways. A lot of our kids are throwaways.

So number one is the poverty of the population, addressing it and having the women become involved and included so they can make the necessary changes.

That was very brief.

Thank you.

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

Ms. Kadis.

**Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.):** Ms. Jacobs, you seem to characterize or portray the government as, I guess, an enabler. There was some statement or reference, obviously, that you feel that Indian Affairs has encouraged male-favoured approaches or responses to the problems.

You seem to agree with me; you're nodding your head. If so, why do you feel that? Give us some examples, if you can, and why you feel that is occurring.

**Ms. Beverly Jacobs:** I think, for one thing, we are trying to develop positive relationships with the AFN and trying to create women's analysis. We don't want to create any divisions. These issues facing aboriginal women are still happening despite the leadership that exists. The fact is that the Indian Act governing first nations communities is patriarchal, and I would describe it as one of the most racist pieces of legislation. You don't see any other legislation for any other race of people. Also, there is the fact that a majority of the leadership are men. I don't want to generalize that all of them are violent, but there are some. We hear that from the women in those communities, who have no support or no mechanism in their communities to feel safe in their own communities.

That's the difference when it comes to our approach and how the AFN approaches those issues.

• (1235)

**Mrs. Susan Kadis:** If I can also ask, do you feel that the Status of Women—another part of the government, obviously—has helped the situation, and if so, how? If not, why?

**Ms. Beverly Jacobs:** Has helped what situation?

**Mrs. Susan Kadis:** Well, there are programs. It doesn't sound like a lot of them are in play within your community. Are you not having any...?

**Ms. Beverly Jacobs:** I don't see anything from the Status of Women coming directly to the communities.

**Mrs. Susan Kadis:** I think someone else implied they may have some experience.

**Ms. Ellen Gabriel:** We do have some programs that may have come from the Status of Women regarding violence. It has been very beneficial to the Quebec Native Women's Association anyway, and to some of the work we're starting. It's very much a new relationship, but I think it's very much a necessity in networking with other organizations within the government that deal specifically with women's issues or networking with other women's groups.

**Ms. Beverly Jacobs:** I have to mention the AWAVE coalition, a partnership between Pauktuutit, the Native Women's Association of

Canada, the Aboriginal Nurses of Canada, the Quebec Native Women's Association, and the Métis.

**A voice:** Actually, the Métis are not there yet.

**Ms. Beverly Jacobs:** We're trying to work on that.

But that coalition is funded by the Status of Women.

**Ms. Jennifer Dickson:** Madam Chair, let me just make a quick point. This is important. This is the new status of women committee, and it is such a great concept and idea. However, from the Inuit women's perspective.... Yes, on occasion we have received small bits of funding for specific time-related programs. Even this new AWAVE thing, which is a great big effort—it's the first time ever that some serious national organizations have worked together to try to make something happen—was Status of Women's initiative. They said, "Why don't you guys get together and collaborate on a much bigger, five-year program?" AWAVE means Aboriginal Women Against Violence Everywhere. It is a neat concept, and we have to give them credit.

On the policy side, however, when you go down your list in the blue pages and come to Status of Women Canada and say "That's who I'm going to phone"—to be an advocate on some matter we're dealing with that's really important, not just applying for funding for specific little programs—and "They can be our champions on whatever our latest issue is", you phone them and say it's great to talk to your program analyst and your this person and that person, but now we have an issue.

There's our little exchange, for example, with the Prime Minister. It's a total no-brainer. We are asking for two specific things that are tiny, not time-relevant and not big deals. Yet when we were trying to ask whether Status of Women would be our champion on this or help us push it or in any way get involved, they more or less said no, we don't even want to hear what the specific issues are. That's between you and we don't know who, so maybe you should go ahead and write the Prime Minister.

If you think of Status of Women Canada as some place for women in Canada to take their status issues to, it ain't the place to go. I don't know where you go instead, but it doesn't work.

• (1240)

**Mrs. Sheila Genaille:** I would also like to make a comment on that point about AWAVE.

That was one of the issues I mentioned in my presentation. While Jennifer is all excited about it, the Métis women are disgusted and insulted by it, because the Status of Women bureaucrats decided who would come there. Mary's predecessor, Veronica Dewar, from Pauktuutit, and Roberta's predecessor, Terri Brown, alerted me to it. They had asked at the table, "Where are the Métis women?"

The discrimination of Status of Women Canada against the Métis National Council of Women is ongoing. That happened earlier this year. Six months later we are still asking to be included.

As I say, while you have a great enthusiasm, Jennifer, the definition of violence also includes oppression, and the oppressiveness of these bureaucrats and their high-handedness in suggesting they know who should be there for Métis women is appalling and insulting. I hope this committee takes a hard look at it, because we are not the token half-breeds of the 19th century. We have rights.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Jean Crowder.

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** I have a couple of points. First of all, although our committee is called the status of women committee, we are not affiliated with Heritage Canada's department, Status of Women. We are much broader, looking at the whole government. I just wanted to let you know that piece.

I have a couple of comments and then an overview question. I think the whole situation around missing women in the Vancouver east side is indicative of the extent of racism and discrimination in Canada. It wasn't until the numbers were so large that police forces and other levels of government could not overlook it any longer. I think that is a statement around what happens for women in Canada.

I have also raised the Amnesty report with the minister. I made a statement in the House, and when we did the estimates in the House I specifically asked her about the Amnesty International report and why core funding had been cut to aboriginal women's organizations. The response I got back was there was \$1 million earmarked over four years to deal with violence in aboriginal communities. I reminded the minister that that worked out to \$250,000 a year, which is an insignificant amount when we're talking about women from coast to coast to coast.

At this stage, we have enough reports; we know what the issues are. My question to you is, how can you help us get this to the top of the agenda across government departments? One of the things you've talked about is gender-based and cultural analysis, but I wondered if there were other things you could tell us to help guide us, because many of us I think are very frustrated with the fact that the information is there. Let's get on with it.

**Ms. Beverly Jacobs:** I'll try to answer that. I know this is something I always say: that aboriginal people have been researched to death. And literally, when it comes to the missing and murdered women, that's something that needs to be addressed.

I think all that needs to happen is to collect all the documents, the research, everything that has been collected all over in the past years—I don't even know how many years we could go back—but when it comes to specific violence issues and statistical issues, that's where the gap is concerning aboriginal women: there are no statistics. There are no specific statistics to explain or to determine even the numbers of aboriginal women who are missing or murdered, which is the reason for the campaign.

And also, concerning the gaps in service that exist, the research has already been done. What it means to me is that there has to be action; there has to be implementation of the work that's already been done. That's my recommendation.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Sheila.

**Mrs. Sheila Genaille:** I think the most comprehensive document for the Métis population is the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, and we're coming up ten years since that. If you take a look at the Government of Canada's *Gathering Strength* announcement, aboriginal women—and I shouldn't say aboriginal as a whole, because the Métis women haven't received any of the political inclusion or funding, for that matter.... The inclusion and the funding formulas and funding there for women have to be part of it, because in our world, the first issue is survival for women. Over 50% of the population, whether we're Métis, Indian, or Inuit, are single parents under 25 years. If they can't be included and have their issues addressed, it's going to continue and continue.

How do we get the agenda? It's through political will. Successive governments have not had political will, and that's what it takes—political will to address aboriginal women. Without that, we will be gathering dust on shelves in reports.

● (1245)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Gabriel.

**Ms. Ellen Gabriel:** I think it's rather important for us to look at the history of colonialism and the impact it's had. We're looking at small pockets of it. We do research, and as Beverly has said, we should be implementing the recommendations from all these reports that have come out instead of sitting them on shelves.

Let me say something else. Groups of women who have talked about violence and all these different issues have talked about a return to traditional values, traditional culture, the saving of the language, and encouraging artistic forms of expression in storytelling or art so that the youth can have something for the future. But as well, they have talked about having more comprehensive proposals that don't have time constraints on them, encouragement within the communities to have a more equitable voice for all people—youth, women, men, elders—and to really look at what has happened in the past so that we can move on to the future.

We have to correct the mistakes of the past, and this generation is carrying the burden of multi-generational abuse and oppression. How can we have the time to heal within our communities if we are constantly being told “This is the timeline you have; these are what we're going to give you”, and that's it; there's no negotiation.

It's something to listen to our voices and who we are that I think is needed.

**The Chair:** Jennifer.

**Ms. Jennifer Dickson:** Your specific question was how we can help you to get more clout among your colleagues. As we all know, the only thing that works is accountability. One thing would be if this committee were half men or were all senior cabinet ministers whose heads were going to roll if this committee didn't succeed. I'm dreaming in Technicolor, but failing that, there are the things they are looking at. For example, I heard the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development tell somebody the other day that they were focusing really hard on women's issues now and that the aboriginal women were all happy. So now you're armed, at least. You can go away and say, "Excuse me, we met them". That's one thing, anyway, because we're not all happy.

Another thing this committee could do would be to at least tell them to answer their mail, because we haven't even received a response saying, "We got your letter, we're looking into it, we'll get back to you", or a "Go away, we're not interested" letter. We haven't even gotten the basic bread-and-butter letter, which is important, because when you hold an AGM, you want to report to your board that something has happened.

There was one thought I had. They're all talking about revisiting the funding formulae for particular policy and program initiatives, and there's a big discussion about whether it should be by population. Of course, the Inuit strongly advocate that it not be by population, because then we're painted out of the picture. Furthermore, the needs are so much greater up north that you can't do anything at all with \$25,000 against abuse, or even \$250,000 or whatever it is. So we're hoping that things like relative need get into the formulae.

Wouldn't it be neat if you also had gender in some of these formulae? I can't speak for AFN, but I know it's true—and I certainly can speak for ITK. They've been saying for thirty years that these are women's issues and don't need to be attended to by them. They care more about power and control over territory and area; let's all sign this agreement and that agreement. We say fine, but meanwhile can we look after the babies, and can we find the women who are lost? Every single week, another woman gets killed. If we could do something that painted gender into those formulae, then maybe, by definition, some of them—

• (1250)

**The Chair:** I'm going to have to interrupt, I'm sorry.

I'm arbitrarily making a decision to go just to those members who haven't asked a question. I'm going to ask you to ask a question, and we'll have to conclude after that because members have other commitments they have to move on to.

I do want to say to you, though, Jennifer Dickson, that you shouldn't underestimate the ability of this group around the table. We may not be senior cabinet ministers, but don't underestimate us.

From the Conservatives, we'll hear from Ms. Guergis.

**Ms. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll start, and then Lynne has a quick question.

Thank you very much for being here. I'll talk as fast as I can. I appreciate you all coming. I know it's a great distance for some of you to be here.

In my previous experience, I did seven and a half years volunteering in a rape crisis centre. That's going back almost a decade now, and some of the questions we had on the table then and some of the things we were trying to do then included reaching out to aboriginal women on the violence issues and such things as that, in order to show them that there's a hotline and other simple things like that, to show them that if they're suffering abuse in the household, they can go to the shelters. I'm really saddened to hear that nothing really seems to have changed at all in the last decade. Quite frankly, it's making me very angry. I just wanted to share that with you.

Can you answer this for me? Do aboriginal women have the same resources that white women do? Do they have a hotline if they've been sexually assaulted, so that they can call someone who will be there for them? No?

What about shelters? Do they have the option of going to a shelter to get away from an abusive relationship?

**Ms. Jennifer Dickson:** It depends on where they are. There are a few in the north, but they're afraid to go to them because the communities are small and the stigma—

**Ms. Helena Guergis:** And everybody knows what's going on. I understand that. I've put that on record.

Really quickly, talking more about the matrimonial property rights, the Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights recommended that appropriate funding be given to the aboriginal women's associations. Has anything changed in this area of property rights since the Senate committee tabled its interim report? Was any progress made whatsoever?

**A voice:** None. We haven't heard a word.

**Ms. Jennifer Dickson:** None.

**A voice:** When was that?

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, CPC):** I think it would be very interesting to have your definition of what you would like to see under property rights.

**Ms. Helena Guergis:** Submit it to the committee.

**Ms. Ellen Gabriel:** Quebec Native Women issued a report this spring on matrimonial property. We can send it to you.

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich:** I want to ask a quick question as well.

Because we have had some self-government agreements already done, there has been Nisga'a, and there has been...I forget what the other one is. However, Tlicho now is being debated. I haven't asked the minister specifically about this, but I saw a lack of reference to women in the agreement.

I'm interested in what you think of that. Do you think there will be some discrimination perhaps in those agreements?

You did mention funding. You feel that funding for women isn't really addressed. I would suggest that you get yourselves on the finance committee's agenda, because I think you probably have some very good contributions there.

I also want to mention something I'd like to know about reserves and schools, because we all know the federal government does in fact fund those. But many times all they are is just infrastructure, and there are a lot of social problems that come out of that.

In regard to that, I wonder how we can solve some of the jurisdiction problems. Do you have a lot of jurisdictional problems because you're dealing directly with the federal government and wish you could work with the provincial?

Those are some really quick questions.

**The Chair:** There are a lot of questions there.

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich:** But I wouldn't mind if they were just submitted to me in writing.

**The Chair:** I think it's important that Ms. Yelich—

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich:** I think you all have something to expand on, on any one of those, and I know we don't have the time.

**Ms. Helena Guergis:** And I'd like my information for sure.

**Mrs. Lynne Yelich:** I think if you just want to send—

**The Chair:** If you want to submit some written responses, send them to the clerk, Ms. Bonnie Charron, and then we shall distribute them to members.

I apologize for the time constraint. Perhaps someone wants to take one of Ms. Yelich's questions and give a quick response, but it has to be a fairly tight response.

**Ms. Jennifer Dickson:** I was just going to say that we were invited to the finance committee for the first time ever and it was a very positive experience. They asked brilliant questions and seemed intrigued, and surprised, and as horrified as you are. I think you might talk to your colleagues.

I also wanted to clarify something, Madam Chair. When I suggested that a committee like this be half male, I didn't mean instead of half of you because they're so much stronger. Quite the contrary. I was suggesting they be dragged in kicking and screaming and not allowed to escape it. That's where I was coming from.

• (1255)

**The Chair:** Ms. Phinney.

**Ms. Beth Phinney:** When did you go to the finance committee? We can get the notes.

**Ms. Jennifer Dickson:** I think it's exactly a month ago today.

**Ms. Beth Phinney:** I have a quick question. Again, you can send in your answer.

We've all been talking here, and in different committees, about the gender-based analysis, and there's only one ministry that's doing it now. We're trying to convince all the others to do it, or the Status of Women is trying to convince them to do it. If this ever got through to all the government departments and they were doing gender-based analysis before they wrote their bills, do you think it would have any impact on your communities at all?

**Ms. Jennifer Dickson:** Yes.

**Ms. Beth Phinney:** How?

**Ms. Beverly Jacobs:** I actually wanted to be specific about a culturally based gender analysis, which I think is different from—

**Ms. Beth Phinney:** That's what I want to hear.

**Ms. Beverly Jacobs:** —mainstream gender-based analysis. We are actually trying to put it together at the NWAC offices as to what that really means, because it is different when it comes to—

**Ms. Beth Phinney:** Could you let us know then what you mean?

**Ms. Beverly Jacobs:** Yes.

**Ms. Beth Phinney:** If you're saying you want it to be culturally based, that's not what we're looking for now.

**Mrs. Sheila Genaille:** This is an agenda as well. It includes the gender aspect.

**Ms. Beth Phinney:** What has already been looked at by the Status of Women, etc., and what we're asking departments to do is not culturally based. It's just male-female.

**Mrs. Sheila Genaille:** Then it should be culturally based.

**Ms. Beverly Jacobs:** All that you see is male-female, but we see it from the intersectional—

**Ms. Beth Phinney:** That's what I wanted to know. Perhaps you can send comments on that.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ):** I won't bother restating the importance of our heritage, given that we live in North America where English prevails. My question to you is as follows: is education the key to helping your communities find their way out of this dilemma? For instance, do you think people could be encouraged to pursue an education in such fields as law and engineering?

[*English*]

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

**Mrs. Sheila Genaille:** Yes, by all means.

Education is powerful. I think when you look at urban aboriginal people, regardless of what group they come from, there's a lot of poverty, so there have to be programs in place.

I'll give you an example of a group in Edmonton called the Aboriginal Youth and Family Well-Being Education Society. They target kids at age 15 to 20 in inner-city schools in Edmonton to keep these kids in school, and they work with parents, guardians, and the schools themselves. There has to be funding for groups like that, for women to keep the children in school.

The success rate of what happens.... These children have a place to go eat at lunchtime, for example. They get food from various sources in the city.

But there has to be funding. There was funding federally a number of years ago, but they changed the age group in that area from 15 to 21 to 22, and they still called it youth. But what we found in Edmonton is that they're on the fence at 15. They're going to fall off and go somewhere else, or stay in.

That's short and sweet. I'll answer more in writing.

**Ms. France Bonsant:** Okay.

**Ms. Beverly Jacobs:** With respect to education, the way I have to approach it is that we have two different means of education. One comes from our traditional education and learning from our ancestors—the ceremonies, the language that has to be respected. That's where I come from, along with Ellen.

The language is important. We do have immersion education programs that have to incorporate our language, but in following those we still have to follow the Ministry of Education guidelines; we still have to fit our education within that system. It is good because that's part of the strength of our children and our youth—their identity and knowing who they are. If they don't have that.... I believe that's why they don't make it through the system.

• (1300)

**Ms. Jennifer Dickson:** In the north, as we know, education is at a crisis level. There's a good piece, and that is that everybody gets taught in Inuktitut until grade 3. And by the way, my president is a grade 3 teacher, so she gets those children and starts to teach them English. But the education up there is almost universally culturally irrelevant, so it's just hard to ask children to sit still and do something that for them doesn't connect with their real life at all.

It has to be thought of completely independently of anybody else.

**Ms. Ellen Gabriel:** In Quebec, while there have been some immersion schools, we still have to follow the provincial and federal ministries of education. But in some communities, say the Mohawk communities, what we have to compete with is the fast money with cigarettes. The youth are thinking, "Why should I go to school when I can make a lot of money very quickly at the age of 18?"

The issue really is how we can compete, how we can encourage them to continue in post-secondary education, while at the same time encouraging the language and the culture. It's a really big job, and in the Mohawk communities, at least, it's been going on for almost 30 years, I think.

**The Chair:** Let me thank all of you for coming. I think this has been...how can I put it? I don't want to measure it with other presentations we've had, but it's certainly been very provocative, and it has given us a lot of work to do and a lot to respond to.

I do apologize for the time crunch. You can see by my colleagues that we are all on a tight schedule and everybody is booked into two-hour slots, so people are moving on to their next commitment. But I do want to thank you. I expect we'll be back to you either as a committee or as individuals to follow up, and I would urge you, if you have further comments or information, to contact us. You can contact me or—probably the preferred way—the clerk, who will then distribute any materials you have. But if you want to have a conversation, please feel free.

We hope to make a difference in this committee, recognizing the differences in your communities, but for your communities.

Thank you again for coming. I think some of you have travelled a long distance to be here on short notice, and we particularly thank you.

We look forward to seeing you again.

The meeting is adjourned.

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