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**Thursday, December 9, 2004**

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**Chair**

**The Honourable David Kilgour**

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Thursday, December 9, 2004

•(0915)

[Translation]

**The Chair (Hon. David Kilgour (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, Lib.)):** Colleagues... Do you want to introduce Mr. Broadbent to your witnesses, Ms. Bourgeois?

[English]

Before we start, I'd like to put on the record that this is the UN International Anti-Corruption Day, and Transparency International Canada and the Canadian Council for International Business have marked the first anniversary of the UN Convention against Corruption. To date, 106 countries have signed on to the treaty; 16 countries, including Canada, must still proceed with ratification before the convention comes into effect.

[Translation]

The convention is the culmination of three years of negotiations and work and

[English]

high international standards of public sector and corporate integrity, transparency, and accountability.

Colleagues, I think you all know that Canada has been very active in a number of other anti-corruption initiatives, such as the OECD Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions and the Inter-American Convention Against Corruption.

I'll leave it there, but since it's the anniversary, I hope you don't mind that I took a moment to mention it.

We are most honoured today to have a distinguished group of witnesses. Could I ask, ladies, and Mr. Neve, if you would raise your hand when I call your name, so we'll be a little more familiar with who's who?

[Translation]

We have, from Amnesty International, Mélanie Bizet, Campaign Coordinator, Canadian Francophone Chapter.

[English]

Alex Neve, Secretary General, English speaking, is not at the table. Is there no place for you at the table?

**Mr. Alex Neve (Secretary General, English Speaking, Amnesty International (Canada)):** There's no place for a man at the table.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Cheryl Hotchkiss, a human rights campaigner, is also from Amnesty International.

We'll also hear from Lucie Lortie, a community relations officer with CUSO-Québec; Gisèle Bourret, from the Fédération des femmes du Québec; and Rita Acosta, from the Regroupement québécois des centres d'aide et de lutte contre les agressions à caractère sexuel. Marie-France Labrecque, a member of the Comité québécois de solidarité avec les femmes de Ciudad Juárez and the Commission québécoise de solidarité avec les femmes de Ciudad Juárez, will testify as an individual. Marie-Hélène Côté is also a member of the Comité québécois de solidarité avec les femmes de Ciudad Juárez and the Commission québécoise de solidarité avec les femmes de Ciudad Juárez.

I hope I've forgotten no one.

The order states that Mélanie Bizet will start. Is that all right with you? Is Mélanie ready to begin? You'll have five minutes each, and the questions will follow.

Go ahead.

**Hon. Ed Broadbent (Ottawa Centre, NDP):** Mr. Chairman, with your permission, I'd like to make an observation. It was you who pointed out that all the witnesses today are women. From my recent experience, the majority of human rights activists are women. That's a very interesting development.

At the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, where I was for the past few years, I noticed a sharp increase in the percentage of women. I believe they form the majority.

•(0920)

**The Chair:** I have to give the floor to Ms. Bourgeois because it was she who insisted that you be here today.

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Broadbent, your comment is quite accurate. It's mainly women who are fighting to have human rights, even fundamental rights, recognized. However, our young men are making a great deal of progress in this area.

Mr. Chairman, I'd sincerely like to thank you for enabling us to examine this issue, which is extremely important for the subcommittee because, as a result of NAFTA, we have very close ties with Mexico and the Inter-American Commission. Lastly, next year, we'll have the third part of the World March of Women. Women are fighting to put an end to violence and to improve the quality of life of their families. We know that men also benefit from this to a high degree.

In my view, this subcommittee will have to adopt very clear positions this morning in order to ask the Canadian government to take a stand on the values that will be conveyed by the World March of Women and to implement the principles that Canada defends in the world. God knows it defends them! My Liberal colleague and I have just returned from Kenya, where Canada showed that it wanted peace and that it wanted to defend human rights.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for affording us this opportunity.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. First, I believe that Amnesty International has prepared a motion. Perhaps we could discuss it.

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** Amnesty International has prepared a motion, Mr. Chairman, and I believe it was done in cooperation with the women who have come here to make a presentation on Ciudad Juárez. I'd like us to discuss it.

**The Chair:** All right. We'll move on directly to Mélanie Bizet.

**Ms. Mélanie Bizet (Campaign Coordinator, Canadian Francophone Chapter, Amnesty International (Canada)):** Lucie Lortie will start.

**The Chair:** As you wish. The choice is yours.

**Ms. Lucie Lortie (Community Relations Officer, CUSO Québec):** Good morning. First I'd like to thank the subcommittee for agreeing to receive us here this morning. We are really quite honoured. Thank you for allowing us to come and discuss the situation of the women in Juárez in particular and, more recently, in Chihuahua, two cities in the state of Chihuahua, in Mexico.

My name is Lucie Lortie. I work for CUSO, an international cooperation organization. I'm also a member of the Comité québécois de solidarité avec les femmes de Ciudad Juárez.

CUSO is the biggest Canadian organization sending co-operant workers to other parts of the world, and the issue of human rights for women of the South is central to our programming. CUSO's many projects over the years in cooperation with women's groups in Mexico, and its active involvement in organizing the World March of Women in the countries of Latin America, have encouraged firm ties between women's groups in Mexico and Quebec.

North/South CUSO co-operant Miriam Martinez Mendez arrived in Quebec in the fall of 2002, as a delegate to the women's committee of the Continental Social Alliance. Her work with the secretariat of the World March of Women made a considerable contribution to the search for economic alternatives for women in a context of globalization. She also helped raise Quebecers' awareness of the impact of globalization on Mexican women.

For three months, all across Quebec, Ms. Mendez gave a series of talks on the violence and perpetrator impunity being endured by the women of Ciudad Juárez. She also promoted the campaign "*Ni una*

*muerta mas!*" ("Not one more death!"), which was launched internationally by Mexican human rights groups, women's groups and associations of the mothers of the victims of Ciudad Juárez. In Quebec, a number of women's groups and unions supported the campaign.

I'm going to discuss the question of femicide in Juárez. First let me give you some background in order to highlight certain factors fuelling the violence and impunity in that Mexican city. I would note that some of the information here is taken from the report submitted by the Commission québécoise de solidarité avec les femmes de Ciudad Juárez in April 2004.

Since 1993, the cities of Chihuahua and especially Juárez, both in the state of Chihuahua in Mexico, have been the sites of acute and unprecedented violence against women, to such an extent that we now speak of "femicide". Amnesty International carried out an investigation there and a report made public in August 2003 stated that some 370 women had been murdered. At least 137 of that number had been abused sexually before being killed and 70 could not be identified. In addition to the 370, more than 400 young women are still missing. Other bodies have been found since August 2003. A majority of the victims were pretty and 15 to 25 years of age. They were slim and had long hair. All came from poor families and many of them were not originally from Ciudad Juárez. Most of the bodies that have been found bear the marks of the extreme violence that was inflicted on them: rape, bites on the breasts, signs of strangulation, stab wounds and fractured skulls. Often the faces have been smashed in and sometimes the bodies have been burned. It is often residents of the city who find bodies abandoned in ditches, vacant lots or in the middle of the desert.

We're referring mainly to the Amnesty International report because we feel that the investigations conducted by that organization are rigorously done. Some of the hypotheses suggested are that those responsible might be drug traffickers, members of organized crime, people who live in the United States. There are also rumours that the persons responsible are being protected. Some say they engage in satanism, illegal trade in pornographic films and charges of trafficking in human organs are also in the air. However, investigations have not yet confirmed any one of these hypotheses.

In Ciudad Juárez, a number of factors appear to be feeding the violence against women and the impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators. Juárez is a border city of 1.3 million residents, situated in a desert region in the state of Chihuahua on the border with the United States.

● (0925)

Since the signing of NAFTA, Ciudad Juárez has become the biggest industrial free zone in all of Mexico.

In 2003, there were 269 *maquiladoras*—these are assembly plants—employing 197,000 workers. According to official statistics, women hold about 50 percent of the available jobs, and their average age is between 20 and 22. A number of these women come from the country's interior states to look for work. They and their families swell the spreading shantytowns outside the centre of the city, where a quarter of the population lives in extreme poverty without basic services.

Although the cost of living is high in Juárez, wages in the *maquiladoras* average only US\$4 a day for 10 hours' work in miserable conditions that do not meet either national or international labour standards. The anarchic expansion of the city has occurred without any real expansion of infrastructures or services.

The *maquiladoras* draw on this pool of impoverished residents for the manpower they need, but contribute nothing to the city's development despite all the benefits they enjoy. Extensive work needs to be done and significant financial resources would need to be invested, in particular to improve infrastructures and pave and light roads.

Even the system of transportation intended for workers in the *maquiladoras* is not as safe as the owners claim. Among the many victims whose bodies have been found, a number were employed in these assembly plants. It is not uncommon for young women to disappear in the early morning hours or at night, when they come off a shift, and even in full daylight without anyone realizing it.

It should also be noted that there has been a drug cartel active in the city since 1993—the most powerful one in Mexico. There are also hundreds of street gangs whose members often deal in drugs. Settlements of accounts are frequent and corruption is endemic.

Lastly, male domination runs through the whole social structure. Violence against women occurs both in the home and in the work place. Every year many rape complaints are filed. Sexual harassment on the assembly line and threats of firing made by supervisors and bosses to women who turn down their advances are everyday phenomena.

Poverty increases the vulnerability of these young women. The national statistics for 1998 classify Ciudad Juárez as the most violent city in all of Mexico.

In closing, I would say that all of the many investigations carried out in Juárez by international organizations and NGOs active in the defence of human rights point to irregularities in investigation procedures, which are often skimmed or botched by the Mexican police. People who are alleged to be guilty are imprisoned without adequate evidence and then tortured to obtain "confessions". This is a situation that encourages perpetrator impunity and the perpetuation of violence against defenceless women. Thank you.

● (0930)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, madam. Who would like to speak?

Ms. Côté.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Côté (Member of the Committee, Commission québécoise de solidarité avec les femmes de Juárez, As Individual):** Good morning. I represent the Comité québécois de solidarité avec les femmes de Ciudad Juárez. So I'm going to speak a bit about the committee and the action it has taken with regard to this situation.

It was the mothers of the victims, their families and individuals in civil society who reacted first to the situation Lucie Lortie has just described to us. They started...

**The Chair:** We're looking for the text.

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** My colleague apparently has no text.

**The Chair:** Don't worry; that often happens.

Does everyone have a copy? All right.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Côté:** That's the report, I believe.

**Ms. Gisèle Bourret (Advisor, Fédération des femmes du Québec):** I believe you have an excerpt from the report.

**The Chair:** Do you have other copies of your presentation? It seems that it's on page 13. Does everybody have a copy of it now?

[English]

**Hon. Paddy Torsney (Burlington, Lib.):** Is this in their main report?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Hon. Ed Broadbent:** The subheading is "border town, industrial free zone".

[Translation]

**The Chair:** The clerk says that it's on page 13 in the French and page 10 in the English. Is everyone happy?

Go ahead, Ms. Côté.

● (0935)

[English]

**Hon. Paddy Torsney:** It starts with the situation of violence toward women.

**The Chair:** Yes.

[Translation]

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Côté:** Thank you.

So I was saying that it was the mothers of the victims, their families and individuals in civil society who first reacted to the situation Lucie Lortie just described to us. They began to survey the victims. They conducted searches and relentlessly denounced the femicide, the negligence of the authorities, their contempt for them, the prevailing immunity. The femicide in Ciudad Juárez also had to be denounced outside Mexico for Mexican authorities to stop this regarding it and take their responsibilities seriously.

In 1998, five years after the murders, the Mexican Human Rights Commission conducted a first investigation into the murders of 81 women in Ciudad Juárez. It concluded, among other things, that authorities at several different levels were guilty of negligence. The government is only just now beginning to observe the recommendations it made.

Since 1998, three Special Rapporteurs from the UN Commission on Human Rights, the Special Rapporteurs on the Rights of Women of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the Executive Director of UNIFEM and the Secretary General of Amnesty International have conducted investigations, issued recommendations and drafted reports, not to mention the solidarity delegations from various countries that have travelled to Juárez to observe the situation and show their solidarity.

The associations of victims' families and civil society groups have unanimously stated that the internationalization of the drama in Juárez has helped to ensure their safety and to prod Mexican authorities into action.

International solidarity is playing an important role in this case, and the eyes of the international community must not be diverted from Juárez as long as the femicide and perpetrator impunity continue.

The Comité québécois de solidarité avec les femmes de Ciudad Juárez was founded two years ago by women involved in international solidarity, the women's movement and the union and university communities.

We were indignant when we learned about the femicide in the state of Chihuahua and the impunity enjoyed by its perpetrators. We couldn't not stand by and do nothing, and we wanted to take action. Relying on the suggestions of Mexican groups and the mothers of the victims, we made it our objective to make the Quebec public aware of the situation, to organize a Commission québécoise de solidarité avec les femmes de Ciudad Juárez, to put pressure on the Canadian and Mexican governments and to express solidarity with the mothers, the victims' relatives and Mexican civil society groups.

From its first year of existence, the Comité québécois de solidarité avec les femmes de Ciudad Juárez made a name for itself by organizing various awareness activities, such as conferences, information booths, a vigil in front of a Mexican consulate in Montreal and screenings of the film *Juárez: ville d'impunité*. Committee members also gave media interviews and wrote articles. Then, while the Commission québécoise de solidarité was being organized, the committee received support from a number of individuals and community, union and religious organizations, and from the women's movement and international solidarity movement. It also began forming ties with Mexican groups.

The Commission québécoise de solidarité avec les femmes de Ciudad Juárez visited Juárez and Mexico from February 5 to 15, 2004. The Commission consisted of Rita Acosta, from the Mouvement contre le viol et l'inceste and the Regroupement québécois des CALACS; Diane Bourgeois, who at the time was the Bloc québécois critic on the status of women; Gisèle Bourret, from the Fédération des femmes du Québec; Claudette Carbonneau, President of the Confédération des syndicats nationaux; and myself, Marie-Hélène Côté, at the time from the Comité chrétien pour les droits humains en Amérique latine; Martine Forand, producer and director of the film, *Juárez: ville d'impunité*; and Marie-France Labrecque, professor of anthropology and researcher at Laval University.

Throughout our stay in Mexico, the Commission members met with representatives of organizations fighting against perpetrator impunity and violence against women and working in the defence of human rights and workers' rights.

● (0940)

The members also gathered testimony from the victims' mothers and family members as well as people denouncing the lack of safety and the development model of the City of Juárez. They were also received by representatives of certain municipal and federal

authorities. They held two press conferences, one in Juárez and the other in Mexico City, and gave interviews to the Mexican media. Some members took part in the V-Day march and activities in Ciudad Juárez on February 14.

Upon returning from Mexico, the Commission drafted a report, which you have before you, in which it summed up its meetings and findings and set out courses of action. The report was translated into English and Spanish, and it has been distributed in Quebec and Mexico.

Nearly one year after the Commission's visit to Mexico, its proposed courses of action have been followed and the members of the Commission and committee are continuing their awareness work and political pressure. Today's meeting was one of the proposed political pressure activities. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for affording us this time. We also went to meet with the Mexican consul and vice-consul in Montreal, on two occasions, to express our concerns and ask them what the Mexican government was doing to put a stop to the femicide and impunity.

We have circulated petitions and letters to President Vicente Fox and other Mexican authorities, and we sent a letter, together with the Commission's report, to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. We also organized a major awareness activity in early September of this year. We invited Patricia Cervantes, the mother of a victim from Chihuahua, an activist in the organization Justicia Para Nuestras Hijas, to conduct a tour in Quebec, in Montreal and Quebec City. The tour began with a solidarity event attended by a number of local artists, where Patricia Cervantes gave a moving testimonial. The event attracted 400 persons, who left informed and moved. Next on the tour, Patricia Cervantes met several hundreds of persons from various backgrounds, all of whom expressed their indignation at the situation and their empathy for the mothers of the victims.

Lastly, again this week, on the occasion of December 6, we organized information booths and gathered signatures for a letter to President Fox. We are determined to remain vigilant and active in our solidarity with Mexican women until the femicide stops and its perpetrators are identified, tried and punished.

Consequently, we are asking that Prime Minister Paul Martin, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Pierre Pettigrew, the Minister of International Cooperation, Aileen Carroll, the Minister of International Trade, Jim Peterson, and all other representatives of the Government of Canada address the issue of femicide in the state of Chihuahua, the human rights violations and perpetrator impunity in their discussions and meetings with Mexican government representatives, and in particular that they inquire into the status of the situation regarding the murders and disappearances and the investigation currently under way, and see what kind of cooperation could be developed in that area. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. Thank you for reading your recommendation. Do you want to read the other recommendation, Ms. Côté? You have two.

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Côté:** No thank you. Someone else will read it.

**The Chair:** I now give Ms. Labrecque the floor. This time, we've found all the documents. Everything's fine. You may begin, madam.

**Ms. Marie France Labrecque (Member of the Committee, Commission québécoise de solidarité avec les femmes de Juárez, As Individual):** Good. I'll start with the second paragraph, for those who have the text. I've already been introduced. I'm speaking as an individual, but also as a member of the Commission québécoise de solidarité avec les femmes de Juárez.

● (0945)

What I have to say concerns the measures that the Mexican government has taken to end the impunity for murderers of women that has applied in the cities of Juárez and Chihuahua since the problem was brought to the attention of international human rights organizations. On the basis of my experience and on the analyses made by NGOs and other observers, I shall attempt to highlight the inadequacy or insufficiency of these measures.

Overall, what the national and international organizations have asked the Mexican government to do can be summarized under four headings: first, investigate the crimes committed against women and disappearances of women and find the guilty parties; second, impose penalties on those responsible for such crimes while ensuring that their rights are protected; third, provide compensation and support for the victims and their families; fourth, prevent violence against women.

It should be noted that when our Commission visited Juárez and Mexico City in February 2004, no government representative denied that murders and disappearances had occurred in Juárez. However, they all tried to minimize the extent of this phenomenon in order to hide the fact that in Mexico we are witnessing the collapse of the rule of law, at least in the field of justice, and it is this problem that allows this impunity to exist to continue. All the government representatives asserted that the murders and disappearances had ceased, although the representatives of the National Human Rights Commission in Mexico, the members of NGOs and information in the media state the exact opposite.

The comments of the government representatives, especially those involved in the judicial system, were to the effect that safety had been greatly improved and that the murders and disappearances were being resolved. It is probably noteworthy that to date only one person has been convicted in connection with ten or so of the murders among the 400 of which we are talking here. However, they feel that most of the murders have been solved. It needs to be realized in the context that we are considering that a solved murder means that the case has moved to the preliminary investigation stage without any trial having been held or conviction entered. Furthermore, the National Human Rights Commission of Mexico has expressed justified suspicions that people have made admission in connection with the murders after being subjected to torture.

In our meetings, the government representatives greatly stressed the fact that a Special Commissioner for the Prevention and Eradication of Violence Against Women, Guadalupe Morfin Otero, was appointed in October 2003 and given the task of monitoring and co-ordinating the actions taken in order to cast light on the disappearances and killings of women in Ciudad Juárez. Emphasis was also placed on the appointment in January 2004, by the Attorney General of the Republic, of Maria Luisa Urbina as a Special Counsel to investigate the crimes in question. Earlier, in July 2003, the federal

government had issued a Program of action for co-operation by the federal government in preventing and eradicating violence against women in Ciudad Juárez, known as the 40-Point Program. This program includes three types of action: first, actions connected with the administration of justice; second, actions for social improvement; third, actions to promote human rights for women in Ciudad Juárez.

It cannot therefore be said that the Mexican government is not doing anything about the situation. We should note at once, however, that the City of Chihuahua is not included in the 40-Point Program, even though we know that murders similar to those committed in Juárez have also been perpetrated there. Also, by the very admission of Commissioner Morfin, when we met with her, the financial and human resources available are generally inadequate in light of the job to be done. She also repeated this fact in her first administrative report published in June 2004. All that she can do is to listen to and take note of the complaints of the families and the NGOs. Her only authority is moral in nature.

The Special Counsel, Maria Luisa Urbina, for her part, merely has a mandate to investigate cases under federal jurisdiction. In Mexico, each State has sovereign jurisdiction under the Constitution.

● (0950)

There are three administrative levels and it is clear that this complicates the administration of justice accordingly. Of course, national sovereignty makes it impossible for the FI to become fully involved. As well, the divisions between the two traditional parties, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and the National Action Party (PAN) and the fact that they have held power in the State and municipality in turn mean that each blames the other for the crimes rather than working together to solve them.

Despite everything, the Special Counsel has been able to determine that a hundred or so officials at all levels of the administration of justice have been negligent, especially in the State of Chihuahua. The Special Commissioner even stated in her report that the impunity was only able to continue as a result of the complicity of these officials, both civil and military.

Some observers have raised the spectre of organized crime to suggest the existence of a State within the State that wishes to make clear by committing these crimes that it can control the lawful State. To date, however, none of the suspected officials has been convicted and the punitive measures announced will apparently only be applied against officials at the lowest level in the chain of authority.

The federal government has also made a commitment to put an end to torture to obtain confessions concerning crimes. However, it appears that these practices have not been abolished any more than those designed to discredit the families of the victims who demand justice and compensation.

Finally, the government has also agreed that a DNA bank should be created as well as a national list of women who have disappeared. It seems that the DNA bank is now being established but it has not been of much use to date or has served to make the situation even more confused.

Our Commission has obtained the direct testimony of one Patricia Cervantes of the City of Chihuahua, who toured Quebec in October 2004 and whose daughter was murdered in 2003. The Police returned the body to her family after the victim has been identified by this process. Because it had doubts, the family sought another DNA analysis, this time in the United States, and it was determined that the head did not belong to the rest of the body. In conjunction with local NGOs, we might ask what purpose is served by creating a DNA bank if the people running it have agendas other than justice.

As for the national list of women who have disappeared, the criteria for defining disappearance are left to the local authorities and they do not always take the cries of alarm from families seriously and can wait up to 72 hours before investigating them. Often, blame is assigned to the victims while no effort is made to find those who are guilty.

All these factors, which testify to a lack of public will, mean that crimes against women continue to be committed in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua and elsewhere. On November 25, the International Day to End Violence Against Women, the remains of another woman were found in Ciudad Juárez. In short, there has been no real progress. The same observation was made by Carlos Castresana, the Anti-Corruption Investigator from Spain and a member of the United Nations Mission in Ciudad Juárez, in November 2003, when he was the first to file a denunciation against Pinochet for human rights violations. One year after he visited Ciudad Juárez, namely, in November 2004, he said in his personal capacity that there was little hope that the crimes would soon be solved because there is in Mexico a systematic denial of justice for victims, their families and society as a whole. Castresana even raised the possibility that the International Criminal Court might examine the murders of women in Juárez. We are talking here about crimes against humanity.

A number of observers have demanded a reform of the court system in Mexico to ensure that the public prosecutor and the office of the national Attorney General have more power and can deal with those cases in which the victim is killed because of her gender or because of misogynistic social practices or individual or group discrimination.

In conclusion, in a situation like that to which I have just referred, it is important to maintain international solidarity in order to make this tragedy more visible and ensure that it is not played down and to ensure that women are not placed at greater risk and become more vulnerable.

As an economic partner of Mexico, Canada must continue to stress the importance of international human rights law; it must also ensure that the government of Mexico does everything possible to ensure the rule of law and that it meets its commitments under the international agreements that it has signed and ratified.

• (0955)

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Labrecque. What you've told us is very important.

I'll now give the floor to Mélanie Bizet, who's going to present her document to us.

**Ms. Mélanie Bizet:** My name is Mélanie Bizet and I represent the Canadian Francophone chapter of Amnesty International. I'm the campaign coordinator.

For almost 11 years now, Ciudad Juárez has been the setting for a brutal cycle of abductions and murders of young women. Amnesty International (AI) has played an active role in mobilizing international public opinion to condemn these crimes and fight against the apparent impunity of the people committing them. In 2003, AI published a report entitled *Intolerable Killings: Ten years of abductions and murders in Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua*. All kinds of activities have been organized all over the world, including Canada, to put pressure on the Mexican government. One particular focus for that pressure has been AI's global campaign called *Stop violence against women*, which is currently under way.

In French-speaking Canada, we have done important awareness-raising work, in particular via the Comité québécois de solidarité avec les femmes de Ciudad Juárez, and we have also vigorously lobbied Mexico's federal government. We've sent letters and responded to urgent actions. We've gathered signatures for petitions within our network, through our members and our Web sites.

In response to this national and international pressure, the Mexican government has finally undertaken to implement a series of measures designed to prevent acts of violence against women in Ciudad Juárez and bring their perpetrators to justice—as we've just seen—, but Amnesty International is still concerned about several essential points.

First of all, Amnesty deplores the fact that the cases in the City of Chihuahua have not been fully integrated into the federal government's measures. Second, Amnesty deplores the lack of any judicial investigation of the abuse, including torture, that is resulting in flagrant miscarriages of justice and judicial impunity for perpetrators. No investigation has been carried out into the multiple and repeated allegations of torture made by systems detained and interrogated by the state police. As a result, the police investigations lose their credibility, the judicial system is discredited, and the fundamental rights of both suspects and victims' families are violated.

Amnesty International recommends an independent judicial review as soon as there is any evidence that the fundamental right to a fair trial has been violated. Any official found responsible for such a violation of human rights, including torture, should be charged.

Amnesty also deplores the failure to include gender-specific action in each of the prevention investigation measures designed to combat violence against women. Concern continues about the inability of the courts and the authorities responsible for investigations, particularly at the state level, to deal with the assassination of women and girls not as individual criminals acts but rather as a phenomenon rooted in a culture of systemic violence against women. The authorities persist in ignoring gender inequality issues, and do not take into account either social environment or the exact nature of the violence suffered by the victims; as a result the measures taken by the state are of very limited usefulness.

Amnesty International recommends that a reform of federal and state legislation be undertaken in order to integrate into the legal framework the principles of the Inter-American Convention for the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women, the Convention of Belém do Pará.

Lastly, Amnesty deplores the inability to put an end to campaigns of defamation and harassment against victims' families and the organizations acting on their behalf. Over and over again, state officials have sought to discredit victims' defence organizations, by describing them as immoral, as vultures who prey on the distress of the mothers and families of victims, and as crooks. By seeking to destroy solidarity among women and to set the groups against one another, the state authorities seem to be pursuing a strategy that has very frequently over the past ten years distracted public attention from the authorities' inability to solve the cases and guarantee the safety of the women of Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua.

In Amnesty International's opinion, official orders should be issued and applied at the federal and state levels to prevent officials from making unfounded statements like these. Lastly, a great many victims' families and representatives of women's defence organizations have been the targets of attempted intimidation and harassment of threats. These attempts should be the subject of investigation, and the people responsible for them should be charged.

In conclusion, despite the Mexican government's intervention in Ciudad Juárez, Amnesty considers that the recommendations by national and international organizations have not yet been effectively implemented. Thorough and efficient investigations must be carried out into all cases.

• (1000)

Action must be urgently taken to guarantee the fundamental right of women to live their lives without having to fear violence and discrimination.

**The Chair:** Brevity is also very important.

Ms. Hotchkiss, please. I believe we have all the documents.

[English]

You're going to speak in English?

**Ms. Cheryl Hotchkiss (Women Human Rights Campaigner, Amnesty International (Canada)):** Yes, I am.

**The Chair:** The document says "Mexico". It's a one-page document.

**Ms. Cheryl Hotchkiss:** I'd just like to draw your attention to an aspect that's already been highlighted by others.

Since the mid-1970s, Mexico has welcomed the installation of maquiladoras—assembly plants for export products—on the border with the United States, particularly in the city of Ciudad Juárez in the state of Chihuahua. A large number of transnational companies moved in to take advantage of the favourable conditions, which include cheap labour, very low or non-existent taxes, political patronage, and a minimum level of regulation. The maquiladora industry grew dramatically when the North American Free Trade Agreement between Mexico and its northern neighbours came into force in 1994.

In the last 11 years, more than 370 women have been murdered, of which at least 137 were sexually assaulted prior to death in the cities of Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua. The authorities currently recognize that the fate and whereabouts of around 70 women remain a mystery. According to many Mexican NGOs, the number of women who are missing is more than 400. Furthermore, 75 bodies have still not been identified. Some of them may be those of women who have been reported missing, but this has been impossible to confirm because there is insufficient conclusive evidence by which to identify them.

The authorities have failed to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate, and punish these abuses and have neglected to put in place effective public policies in the areas of justice, public security, health, and education to end this pattern of discrimination and violence.

Many of the women included in Amnesty International's report were economic migrants from other parts of Mexico living in marginalized communities. They were employed by the maquiladoras. The chance of earning a comparatively higher wage than elsewhere in Mexico has made the maquiladora industry a strong magnet for many people from other parts of the country who are stricken by poverty as a result of the economic crisis or industrial restructuring, and who go there to work or as a first step to try to enter the United States.

According to the official figures for the year 2000, 43% of the inhabitants of Ciudad Juárez arrived as migrants attracted by better working prospects. They created their own space in the city in disadvantaged areas where poverty, deteriorating housing and urban services, criminality, and environmental pollution feed off one another. Bearing in mind that the victims of violence against women largely come from the most vulnerable groups, the marginalization of this section of the population is a serious obstacle to the rights of women in Ciudad Juárez.

While the Government of Mexico welcomed the installation of maquiladoras, it must take responsibility for ensuring that Mexican citizens can live safe and healthy lives in these export processing zones. It must implement international human rights standards to stop the pattern of disappearances, murder, and violence against women in Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua.

I also just want to highlight that we have brought a copy of a document in both French and English, a memorandum to the Mexican government about reforms to the constitution and the criminal justice system that would get more to the heart of some of the systemic problems that are causing problems in Chihuahua and Ciudad Juárez.

• (1005)

**The Chair:** Can you give us a copy of it?

**Ms. Cheryl Hotchkiss:** I gave the clerk copies.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, and thank you also for being so brief.

[Translation]

We'll now hear from Ms. Bourret, from the Fédération des femmes du Québec.

**Ms. Gisèle Bourret:** Good morning. I'll briefly introduce the Fédération des femmes du Québec. Then I'll discuss its involvement in the fight against femicide, but also, more comprehensively, its involvement in the globalization issue. Lastly, I'll conclude with some proposals.

Formed in 1966, the Fédération des femmes du Québec will soon mark its 40th anniversary. Since its inception, it has, like other Quebec and Canadian women's organizations, been calling for a national study on the status of women in Canada. In response to that request, the Pearson government in February 1967 established a royal commission, the Bird Commission.

Today, the Fédération has about 650 individual members and 150 national, regional and local groups. If we count the women included in its member groups, the FFQ potentially reaches more than 300,000 women in Quebec.

In 1995, the FFQ organized a march against poverty, the Bread and Roses March. Over 800 women joined the 10-day march to Quebec City, where they presented a list of 10 demands for the elimination of poverty. The FFQ was also behind the 2000 World March of Women to combat poverty and violence against women. More than 5,000 groups in 163 countries and territories took part in various ways, calling for the elimination of poverty and the equitable distribution of wealth, the elimination of violence against women and respect for their physical and psychological integrity. This is the first demonstration on such an international scale.

The FFQ's involvement in the World March of Women helped it develop closer ties with women's groups across Canada and the rest of the Americas. In the wake of the World March of Women, the FFQ learned of the murders and disappearances of women in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico.

How has the FFQ been involved in the fight against femicide? Incidentally, since we often hear this term used, I want to emphasize that, the word femicide means the systematic murder of women.

First, The FFQ and a number of its member groups circulated an international petition entitled "Not one more", calling for an end to femicide and violence against women in Ciudad Juárez. The petition was signed by a very large number of people in Quebec.

The FFQ also appointed a representative to the task force formed two years ago and delegated her to take part in the Commission de solidarité québécoise about which Marie-Hélène Côté recently told you.

The FFQ's board of directors and annual general meeting have received regular reports on this question of the fight against femicide and impunity. At its last general meeting, the FFQ provided in its action plan that it would continue the awareness campaign on femicide and its political pressure to end this situation of violence.

For over three years, the FFQ has had a committee on women and globalization whose mandate is to document the effects that economic liberalization and free trade agreements have had on women's living and working conditions. Research has been conducted on this issue, and various ties have been forged with other women's groups in the Americas, including Mexico.

A public education or training subcommittee was also formed, and since 2001, dozens of training sessions have been given throughout Quebec concerning the impact that economic globalization has on women. At each session, the Ciudad Juárez femicide and its socio-economic context were discussed at length. The exploitation of women workers in Mexican free zones, particularly in Ciudad Juárez's assembly plants, is intolerable.

●(1010)

Large corporations, some of them Canadian, are violating international labour standards with total impunity in those *maquiladoras*, whose output is intended exclusively for export. The corporations are taking advantage of the infrastructure of the city where they are situated, but are not returning the favour by taking an active part in the general socio-economic development of the city or region. To us, free zones are the ultimate expression of free trade, which is uncomfortable with any constraint or obstacle that involves respect for workers' rights.

The FFQ, together with the Association québécoise des organismes de coopération internationale and in partnership with the community service unit of the Université du Québec à Montréal, developed a course on the inter-American human rights system. The course was presented in March 2002 by Ms. Lucie Lamarche, a professor of law at the UQAM and an expert in human rights. In May 2002, the FFQ was invited to testify before the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights during its deliberations on whether Canada should ratify the American Convention on Human Rights.

In addition, a member of the women and globalization committee represents the FFQ on the Réseau québécois sur l'intégration continentale. As a result, we played an active role in last September's Tri-national Colloquium entitled "NAFTA After Ten Years: Social Impact and Future Perspectives". A committee of representatives from various countries will follow up on the specific issue of women's living and working conditions, as well as women's rights.

In view of our research and activities in the areas of economic liberalization, free trade agreements and their effects on women and, more generally, women's rights, we are qualified to submit the following recommendations to the Subcommittee on Human Rights, which begin with the word "whereas" to explain and legitimize the proposal.

Here's the first proposal.

Whereas “[a]t the international level, the Government of Canada works through bilateral channels and at various multilateral fora to develop standards and actions that effectively advance the rights and well-being of women, including the elimination of all forms of violence”—this is an extract from a document on the Department of Foreign Affairs Web site—we recommend that the Canadian government propose to the Mexican government the formation of a public advisory committee on the femicide in Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua City, such committee to be made up of parliamentarians from the various parties in both countries as well as representatives of the civil society groups in Canada and Mexico that are striving to enforce respect for women's and human rights and to combat violence against women and the impunity of perpetrators.

**The Chair:** Ms. Bizet, you've now been talking for 10 minutes, and we have the text of your statement. Would it be possible for you to read the recommendation only?

• (1015)

**Ms. Gisèle Bourret:** All right. Second, we recommend that the Canadian government follow up on the deliberations of the Standing Senate committee on Human Rights on ratification by Canada of the American Convention on Human Rights and consult with women's groups all across Canada with a view to drafting as soon as possible an interpretative declaration or reservation, if necessary, that would safeguard the rights of Canadian and Quebec women under Article 4.1 of the Convention.

Third, that the Canadian government take the initiative of setting up a task force especially mandated to improve the mechanisms in the NAFTA side agreement on labour—the NAALC—with a view to making it truly effective at defending the rights of workers.

The FFQ also restates the last proposal on the list of recommendations: that Canada ratify the Inter-American Convention for the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women, the Convention of Bélem do Pará, which entered into effect in 1994.

I encourage you to read the recitals, which are important in understanding the spirit of the proposal.

**The Chair:** Absolutely. Thank you, Madame.

I'll now give the floor to Ms. Acosta. Unfortunately, we only received your statement yesterday and only have the French version. However, the interpreters will help us understand it.

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** Pardon me, Mr. Chairman. Could I get my colleagues' consent for the document to be submitted in French only? The interpreters can translate it to English.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Ms. Acosta.

**Ms. Rita Acosta (Regroupement québécois des centres d'aide et de lutte contre les agressions à caractère sexuel):** Thank you very much. I represent the Regroupement québécois des CALACS. My name is Rita Acosta.

The Regroupement québécois des centres d'aide et de lutte contre les agressions à caractère sexuel has been fighting sexual violence

for 25 years. The organization's 26-member centres work relentlessly to provide adequate support to victims, women and young girls. The CALACS' expertise was put to use when the Regroupement joined the Commission that travelled to Juárez last February. Since the Commission's return, we have decided that our objective is to make Quebec society aware of the situation in Ciudad Juárez through the media, various community groups and the various government authorities.

The large number of victims, the persistent nature of the murders over the past decade, the severity of the crimes and the complex nature of the investigations have tested the already deficient and corrupt Mexican justice system.

Women are entitled to non-discrimination, the right to live without violence, the right to life, the right of equality, the right to protection from all forms of exploitation and violence. In the Ciudad Juárez case, those rights, which are recognized by various international treaties, have been violated. Those rights are provided for in a number of international conventions such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the American Convention on Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women, also called the Convention of Bélem do Pará.

We also want to mention that the UN Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women has considered gender-based violence as a form of discrimination that seriously undermines women's ability to enjoy their rights and freedoms on an equal basis with men.

In addition, there is the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, under which every state party to the agreement ensures that all acts of torture are recognized as violations of criminal law.

The member countries of the international conventions must take the necessary measures to eliminate discrimination against women, whether it is practised by individuals, organizations or businesses. In the case before us, here are two examples of international convention violations in Mexico.

As a federation, we want to note that the Mexican government, through its federal department of justice and attorney general, has discriminated against the victims and their families by failing to search for the young women who have disappeared on the pretext that they went away with their lovers.

In addition, the Chihuahua institute for women, which was created by the Mexican government, acted in a discriminatory manner by classifying the crimes committed as crimes of passion. By defining the offences as crimes of passion, it trivializes the sexual violence suffered by the victims and prevents the seriousness of the violence committed against the women from being recognized. Women's right to life is flouted by every unsolved murder, by the disappearance of hundreds of women, but the fact that, in addition to Juárez and Chihuahua, other cities in the state of Mexico have cases of femicide.

The situation of the women of Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua concerns us and resounds with us with a rare degree of intensity. The CALACS are struggling to eradicate sexual violence and their aim is to reduce the number of crimes in Quebec, in Canada and among our First Nations sisters, and we have determined that our mandate is to denounce those crimes and to raise awareness and pressure on our governments to demand that justice be done. We also demand that the murders stop, that the real criminals be brought to justice, that the trivialization of these crimes cease and that a stop be put to the impunity of the perpetrators.

In light of these facts, here are our recommendations.

As a result of the concept of due diligence included in a number of conventions adopted by the international community in the past 10 years to combat violence against women, we recommend that the Government of Canada, which is internationally recognized as a peaceful state which has a right and obligation of diligence, break the silence and monitor what is happening in Mexico.

● (1020)

Amnesty International cites cases of torture in its reports. In addition, the Mexican National Human Rights Commission confirmed in its last 2004 report cases of torture inflicted on persons allegedly responsible for the murders committed in Ciudad Juárez. Despite this information, no investigation has been conducted by the Government of Mexico.

We ask that the Canadian government exercise its right of due diligence in order to act on the complaints filed by the various Mexican civil society groups regarding the cases of torture and mistreatment of those allegedly guilty and their families.

We also ask that agents of the Canadian government begin negotiations with Mexican agents to proceed with a binational investigation in order to do justice to the murdered women and their families.

We ask that all of the relations that Canada maintains with Mexico entail a requirement to respect human rights, particularly the rights of women.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madame.

I believe that completes the testimony. We will now move on to questions. There are unfortunately only 40 minutes remaining. In addition, we'll try to adopt some resolutions.

We'll start with our colleague, Peter Goldring, who will speak on behalf of the official opposition.

[English]

**Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I wish to thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for being here today. I certainly want to say that I find abhorrent these high levels of violence against women in the area you're reporting on.

Having travelled maybe 15 times to various parts of Mexico, I too have found that it's not necessarily always a safe society. I have been cautioned myself by tour operators not to go to certain areas because

there could be a hazard to my own health. So looking at it comparatively, it is not the same kind of society as Canada.

In this particular area you're commenting on, you have the numbers of women who have been murdered over 10 years, but what is the comparable number of men who have been murdered there? This would give us a little bit of idea of how safe or dangerous that society is. How many murders of men were there over the same 10-year period of time?

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Who will answer that question, to the extent it's possible to do so?

Ms. Acosta.

**Ms. Rita Acosta:** I'll try to answer it. In fact we don't have any exact figures on men. The number of men murdered is definitely relatively high, perhaps twice as high.

As far as we're concerned, we focus on the problems specific to women, rape, for example. When you talk about murders of men, you're talking about a whole situation: drug trafficking—and so settlements of accounts—and murders by street gangs, for example. But for women, you're talking about sexual violence...

[English]

**Mr. Peter Goldring:** I hope it's okay to interrupt you here, because we have limited time for questioning. I'd like to explore that a little further, that if there are no statistics for murders of men in the region, I think they would still be germane to the topic to have an overall understanding of the violence in this society in the period.

But I noted here in one of the papers—

**The Chair:** This doesn't come out of your time, Mr. Goldring.

We have a statement here that the rate of homicides for women compared to that of men in Ciudad Juarez is significantly higher than for similarly situated cities of national average.

**Mr. Peter Goldring:** What does that mean?

● (1025)

**The Chair:** Well, I think we've been hearing about that for the last hour.

**Mr. Peter Goldring:** Well, I know it's significantly higher, but it would give us a better perspective if we knew what the murder rates are.

I'm seeing numbers here that obviously show they're investigated for women, because if you're able to determine whether the women were sexually assaulted or not, these numbers must be coming from police reports. So there is some documentation on what the statistics are, which would give us a better overall idea.

**The Chair:** Mr. Neve.

**Mr. Alex Neve:** I'm just noting one reference to this in Amnesty International's report, where we highlighted that since 1993, the number of murders in general has grown considerably in Ciudad Juarez, including men and women, making it one of the cities with the highest rates of violence in Mexico, and that from 1993 onwards, the number of female murders has gone up by 400%, whereas the number of male murders has only gone up by 300%. Nationwide, for every 10 men murdered, one woman was murdered 10 years ago, but 10 years later, for every six men murdered, one woman is murdered.

So there's clear concern that the rate at which women are at risk of violence and are being murdered is increasing much more rapidly than the violence and murders that men are facing.

**Mr. Peter Goldring:** Thank you. That additional information helps me.

There is also a comment in here—

**Hon. Ed Broadbent:** If my colleague would permit, I'll ask a related question; it shouldn't come out of your time.

Do you have statistics available that show the murder rate for the women in the districts we heard about compared to the murder rate for women elsewhere in the country?

**The Chair:** Plus the sexual aspect of it as well—if you have it. You probably don't.

**Mr. Peter Goldring:** Could I ask more specifically, then? I was leading to that.

It would be interesting to see what the comparative murder rates are for another border city, Tijuana. Historically it has possibly been a little more developed for international manufacturing, but they do have the same type of new manufacturing, and if you had comparable rates there for men and women, it would be of interest.

I note here in one of the papers that it had mentioned—

**The Chair:** One moment. Do you have an answer—probably not—to that, Mr. Neve?

**Mr. Alex Neve:** I don't have the statistics at my fingertips.

**Mr. Peter Goldring:** Another comment here was that they were between the ages of 15 and 25, were slim, and had long hair. That rather suggests these women were involved in the sex trade. Maybe you could say yes or no, or have you determined what business or what area they were involved in? Why would we make the comment of being slim, having long hair, and being between 15 and 25 unless that was indicating they were involved in the sex trade?

**The Chair:** Who wishes to answer this question?

**Mr. Alex Neve:** With all due respect, that's almost an outrageous suggestion, that simply because you're between the ages of 15 and 25, are slim, and have long hair, you would be involved in the sex trade.

**Mr. Peter Goldring:** But it was an unusual comment to make.

**Mr. Alex Neve:** The reason it is highlighted is that there are very clear concerns that there's a strong sexual component to the violence women have been experiencing. It's not because they're involved in the sex trade, but they are being targeted for sexual reasons.

**Mr. Peter Goldring:** I would like to go on to say that in Edmonton—and I'm abhorred by this as well—there is a high

propensity for women to be involved in the sex trade, and the numbers are out of all proportion to other numbers. It's a very serious problem in Edmonton.

It was raised by Rita Acosta that your organization too is looking into the high number of women suffering from death and abuse who are involved in that in some of the major cities of Canada. In other words, by the comments that are on here...and I suppose the answer is yes or no as to whether they are or are not or if you do know whether they are related to crime or related to drugs. The fact that they're moving to the area doesn't necessarily mean—

**The Chair:** Madam Acosta has the floor.

**Ms. Rita Acosta:** My answer to that, because it touches me very personally, is that I have daughters, and if they are assaulted in the street, that doesn't mean they're prostitutes. The fact is that here in Canada or in Quebec most of the women we receive in our centres are women like me and like everybody else here in the room. They are not prostitutes.

In Juarez...my friend Marie-Hélène Côté is going to answer all the hypotheses they have.

There is a sex trade, it's true, but the majority of women in Juarez are not prostitutes.

[*Translation*]

It's preferable that you answer the question.

● (1030)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Madame Côté.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Marie-Hélène Côté:** Thank you.

We're talking about certain physical characteristics of these women because it's a fact that the bodies that were found belonged to women who were considered beautiful. There are a number of hypotheses circulating about the places where they went and the reasons why they were killed, but let me tell you that, if rape was involved, you can consider that the rapists preferred to rape women they considered pretty. That would also apply in the case of pornographic films. That doesn't confirm that they came from a prostitution background or organized crime.

There are a number of hypotheses circulating, including organ trafficking and, as was said earlier, satanism. There's also some question of group orgies involving drug traffickers, police officers and other administrative authorities in Juárez. None of the organizations that have conducted investigations is able to say which hypothesis is consistent with the actual facts because impunity reigns and we still don't know what happened.

However, it's really reductionist to say that these women were involved in the sex trade. That moreover is what the Mexican government tried to have people believe so that they would adopt a discriminatory attitude toward the victims and think that, after all, they were only prostitutes who ultimately only got what they deserved. We shouldn't go back to that kind of attitude.

[English]

**Mr. Peter Goldring:** No. I'm simply trying to explore this and to understand, first of all, what the norm is for the crime and murder rate, male and female, to give balance to the data on violence in the region. The comment here that they were young and beautiful women and another comment referring to it as an assassination lead me to want to explore this and find out whether it is an assassination, whether they are crimes of sex, violence, and murder, or whether they are crimes of the sex trade. We know the sex trade would function in areas such as this. We don't know the reason they have been killed.

**The Chair:** Your time is up, Mr. Goldring.

We'll let you answer, please, whoever wants to answer that.

[Translation]

**Ms. Lucie Lortie:** Here we obviously can't say that women disappeared since we still only have bodies that have been found. I'd like to point out on this subject that the bodies have been identified and that we now know they belonged to women who were, among other things, workers in the *maquiladoras*, receptionists and students. In one case, there was even a Dutch tourist.

These women carried on entirely normal, everyday activities. Usually kidnappings are committed without anyone knowing how. Suddenly, these women disappear. In some cases, as already mentioned, it was after a shift at one of the *maquiladoras*. In other cases, the circumstances were different. Whatever the case may be, we know that these women weren't prostitutes. The investigation findings are categorical on that point.

[English]

**The Chair:** Dr. Pistor has found some information that might be useful to the committee. Before we go to Madam Bourgeois, can you give it to us?

**Mr. Marc Pistor (Committee Researcher):** The source is the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights—I can give you the chapter reference later—and it gives exactly the data Mr. Goldring was looking for. One analysis concluded that the rate for men in Ciudad Juarez was 47.1 murders per 100,000 and 7.9 for women. Tijuana, for example, is also located on the northern border, is characterized by a strong maquiladora presence, and had roughly the same population for the same period; the rate was 34.9 for men and 2.4 for women. The rate for Mexico as a whole for that period was 28.2 for men and 3.1 for women.

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

Madam Bourgeois.

[Translation]

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, I'd like to thank my colleagues with whom I went to Ciudad Juárez for being here this morning. I believe that the feminicide they've told us about today is an extremely important problem.

In view of the impunity with which it is committed, its tacit acceptance by Mexican authorities and the international community, and the fact that women count for little in Latin America, I'm not surprised at the figures our researcher has just given us, that is to say

that approximately 35 men out of 100,000 are killed in Tijuana, as opposed to 2.4 women per 100,000.

I've been to those cities, and I can tell you that a woman there is valued less than a cow, less than an animal. No statistics are kept on the morality of women in those countries. We have one woman, Ms. Acosta, who is from Latin America and who is very much aware of what goes on there.

I'll also remind you, colleagues, that we've received a very good document, quite voluminous, which is the report of the Commission québécoise de solidarité avec les femmes de Ciudad Juárez. It provides facts in the second entitled "About Feminicide in Ciudad Juárez". It explains why most of the victims are between 15 and 25 years of age. It's related to drug trafficking, to snuff movies, to the pornography that's made there.

I believe we have a responsibility as Canadians, as Quebeckers. As responsible parliamentarians, we do business, we trade with Mexico under NAFTA. We have a responsibility toward the people, the human beings who work in Canadian businesses that have taken up residence there. I've seen them. Johnson & Johnson is there, as well as other Canadian businesses, whose names escape me, but that I've seen and photographed. So we can't let what's going on there continue.

I know that the women from the Commission québécoise de solidarité avec les femmes de Ciudad Juárez have done an excellent job. I know perfectly well that they work for Amnesty International, which for years has been criticizing what's going on in Ciudad Juárez. What's going on there is now known.

This morning, the case has been presented to us, and it's time to take action. I also know that Mexican women have high expectations of Canada's reaction. I also know that there was a march last year, the V-Day march, which was referred to. A lot of Quebec and Canadian women, particularly from Alberta and British Columbia, went there and let it be known that Canada would not allow the situation to continue.

I'm going to talk to my colleague from the NDP and my colleagues from the Liberal Party, but I would ask you, colleagues, and Mr. Chairman, to consider and adopt the recommendations that have been made to us by our guests. I find these recommendations entirely acceptable. They put a little pressure on the Government of Canada, obviously, but they very clearly denounce the situation in Mexico.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

• (1035)

**The Chair:** Thank you, madam. Unfortunately, we only have 20 minutes left.

**Hon. Ed Broadbent:** I have a few recommendations from the various groups.

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** Do you have them in English? I have them in French.

We have them in English as well.

•(1040)

**The Chair:** Ms. Bourgeois, do you want to read the recommendations?

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** I'll read the recommendations, but I won't read the parts that begin with the word "whereas": We call upon Prime Minister Martin, Foreign Affairs Minister Pierre Pettigrew, International Cooperation Minister Aileen Carroll, International Trade Minister James Scott Peterson and all of the representatives of the Canadian government to raise the question of femicide in the State of Chihuahua, the violations of human rights there and the impunity of perpetrators, in their discussions and meetings with representatives of the Mexican government. In particular, we call upon them to make themselves fully informed about the situation (assassinations and disappearances) and current investigation practices and procedures, and determine what type of collaboration could be developed in this regard.

**The Chair:** May we consider that motion now? I know we're encroaching on the rights of the other members to ask questions, but I'm at your service.

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** Mr. Chairman, I don't want to remove anyone's right to speak. However, if everyone agrees, it can be done quite quickly.

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Bains, Mr. Broadbent, and Ms. Torsney.

**Mr. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.):** I'll be fairly brief...

Mr. Chair, is this in terms of questioning or in terms of this recommendation?

**The Chair:** You're entitled to questions, of course, and we're going to run out of time in about 18 minutes, so as long as—

**Hon. Ed Broadbent:** I'm sorry, but I don't have the precise recommendation. There are seven pieces of documentation here, and I don't know which one it is. I have one with a set of recommendations that wouldn't cohere with what's just been said.

**A voice:** It's a one-pager.

**The Chair:** Mr. Goldring has cited the requirement for notice. Up until now, at every one of our meetings, we've managed to do it with unanimous consent. We haven't had to use the 24 hours' notice rule. But the absolute requirement is that everybody has to be in agreement.

Is everybody in agreement with the recommendation that has just been made by Madam Bourgeois?

**Hon. Ed Broadbent:** We just got it, Mr. Chairman. I got it two seconds ago. Even for an MP, it normally requires more time than that.

**The Chair:** Perhaps you would like time to reflect on it, then, while Mr. Bains asks his questions.

Madam Bourgeois.

[Translation]

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** Mr. Chairman, may I point out to you that, at our last two meetings, members presented the motions on the spot and we always graciously agreed to consider them?

This morning, we're introducing recommendations. I would appreciate it if my colleagues would consider the fact that these women should not have come here for nothing. I would like us to consider these, please.

[English]

**The Chair:** Madam Torsney.

**Hon. Paddy Torsney:** First of all, just to be clear, are we considering the first recommendation or are we considering all the other ones? Only the first? Okay.

I would like to say that I would support this, but I...and I do acknowledge that this committee, in my absence, has been adopting a certain practice that I'm extremely uncomfortable with. I don't think it's fair, whether a 24-hour rule is being used or not, that people are actually handed a motion at the meeting. I understand that everyone has agreed to this—I haven't been here, and it's my fault I haven't been—but on this I really do caution members.

I don't think this is the time to deal with it, but we need to get this system in a better order, to be fairer to everybody.

**The Chair:** Ms. Torsney, on December 16 we will be having a discussion of future work plans.

**Hon. Paddy Torsney:** Perfect.

**The Chair:** We're dealing right now with the clock, and with whether we can agree unanimously with the only recommendation that's been made, by Ms. Bourgeois in the name of the witnesses.

**Mr. Navdeep Bains:** Can I make one small comment? I do agree with the concerns that my colleague has indicated, but as I read the motion, it seems to be fairly harmless. It doesn't seem to have any contentious issues. Directionally, it speaks well.

So I would support the motion, the first motion.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Can we agree to this motion? Do you want to agree to it unanimously?

[English]

It should be stressed to our witnesses that all of what you've said will be sent—if necessary, I'll send it—to the members of our government and to the members of the Mexican government, perhaps through the Mexican ambassador. Nothing you've said this morning will be wasted. This report is part of our record.

Is that right, Mr. Clerk? This will be part of the *procès-verbal*? Very good.

Mr. Broadbent.

**Hon. Ed Broadbent:** Mr. Chairman, I have a special request to ask of my colleagues.

As my colleagues will know, the New Democratic Party does not have many representatives to cover many committees. I have a committee meeting at 11 o'clock that's about as far away from here as it could possibly be. I'm now going to issue a special appeal, maybe to my Liberal colleagues, to let me have my comments now, although the normal practice, of course, would be to go to the Liberal side.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Hon. Ed Broadbent:** I appreciate that.

I want to begin by adding my great appreciation to the women, now joined by one man, Alex, for the exceptionally fine presentations. Each in some way was brief and full of very pertinent information.

I want to use my time as judiciously as I can here. I'm pleased we adopted this motion, and I would like to get your quick response to the following proposition.

Given our special relationship with Mexico, given the fact that much of the violence that has occurred against women has been in the maquiladora regions, and given the fact that in the same regions there has been a rather systematic violation of workers' rights in general, whether the workers were men or women, do you think it would be advisable if we could form, at the parliamentary level, a working group of members of Parliament, from both Mexico and Canada, who were interested in human rights, specifically the human rights of women and workers, given the well-documented situation and serious concerns in particularly the maquiladora regions?

Do you think it would be useful if we proceeded to try to get such a committee working on an ongoing basis?

• (1045)

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Ms. Bourret, over to you.

**Ms. Gisèle Bourret:** The Fédération des femmes du Québec has previously introduced a similar motion. It's on the table. It provides for the formation of a public advisory committee of parliamentarians from Mexico and Canada, representatives of civil society groups, and so on. Its purpose is to monitor the feminicide issue. It doesn't necessarily concern workers' rights. There's also a motion on the NAFTA side agreement on labour, the NAALC. We could improve that motion. It's interesting because the NAALC includes mechanisms for reviewing complaints on the labour situation or conditions in a Canadian partner country. Perhaps we could forward something based on those two motions. I share your concern.

[English]

**Hon. Ed Broadbent:** Thank you. Perhaps I'll just leave that and move on to my two other questions.

No one made reference to there having been established a UN special rapporteur on violence against women. Has there been any effort to get a special rapporteur on violence against women from the UN to investigate the situations we've heard about this morning?

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Ms. Bourret, over to you.

**Ms. Gisèle Bourret:** The rapporteure produced a report. She went there.

[English]

**Hon. Ed Broadbent:** Oh, there was a rapporteur, a UN rapporteur?

[Translation]

**Ms. Gisèle Bourret:** Yes, but not anymore. There was one until last year, I believe.

Incidentally, I think we should consider the work of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. I've been told that, in its

last report, which dates back to 2003, it had not followed up on the previous report, which concerned the disappearance and murder of women in Ciudad Juárez. It would be important and interesting to question the Commission on that point. We sent a letter and the report to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and informed it that we would like to be informed of the follow-up to those reports. It all seems somewhat vague for the moment.

[English]

**Hon. Ed Broadbent:** Okay. We could pursue that. I would like to get their most recent document—whatever they have done on this.

On the last question I have, you recommend that Canada ratify the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights convention, calling attention to the existence of one clause. Would you kindly spell out your concern about that particular clause? I think I know what it is, but it might be useful for members to know.

• (1050)

[Translation]

**The Chair:** Ms. Bourret, go ahead.

**Ms. Gisèle Bourret:** We're not recommending that Canada sign the convention; we're recommending that it follow up on the work of the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights on ratification. We're aware of the problems that arose with regard to Article 4.1, which states that life, in general, begins "from the moment of conception". For women's groups in Canada and Quebec, that called into question the judgments of the Supreme Court. There has always been a desire not to prevent ratification, but for the convention to be ratified with a reserve or interpretive clause concerning that article. It would state how the matter stands for Canada so that it doesn't diminish the rights of Canadian and Quebec women following the Supreme Court judgments.

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Broadbent, I know you have to leave, but on December 16—and I know you can't be here—we will spend the first hour dealing with Zimbabwe. I think that's known to everybody. It's done partly at the request of Amnesty International and a group of our colleagues in the House and the Senate. The second hour will be spent on our work plan for the coming year.

Ms. Torsney.

**Hon. Paddy Torsney:** I just want flag that there is some rumour that the House may not be sitting on the 16th, and I'm not sure how that would impact on the work we're doing.

**The Chair:** Thank you for pointing that out.

Mr. Neve, please keep that in mind. We'll let you know.

Secondly—Mr. Broadbent, I know you have to leave—you all have a sheet of documents headed "motions".

**Hon. Paddy Torsney:** On the budget?

**The Chair:** No, it's on the question of the motions we've passed. It's to send them to the full committee.

If somebody would be kind enough to move motions 1, 2, and 3, we can get the process—

**Hon. Ed Broadbent:** I so move.

(Motion agreed to [See *Minutes of Proceedings*])

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

Then you're on your way? Thank you for coming.

**Hon. Ed Broadbent:** Just to get clarification, you don't object to Canada ratifying the convention, as long as there's a technical possibility we can call attention...exemption—I forget what the legal terminology is—of that particular clause. Then we could ratify the rest.

You're not objecting to that. Okay.

**The Chair:** Mr. Bains has been waiting patiently.

**Mr. Navdeep Bains:** Thank you, colleagues.

I'll be brief, in light of the time. I just have a couple of questions.

I want to begin by thanking all the panel members for coming here today and sharing their remarks. I was actually very impressed by the depth of knowledge and, more importantly, some of the alarming statistics that were mentioned.

My question is—I want to ask the chairperson as well. I'm kind of surprised we didn't get somebody from the government to state the government's position on this issue as well, just to bring a little bit more balance to the presentation. It's not meant to, in any shape or form, marginalize the work you've done, but just to provide a bit more balance. That's just a suggestion going forward.

Have there been any good news story items? Has anything improved in the last 11 years due to international pressures or diplomatic pressures? Is there anything that works well to help alleviate some of these concerns that have been raised today?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Marie France Labrecque:** I tried to show in my presentation that, under pressure from national and international human rights organizations, the Mexican government had moved and taken measures such as appointing a commissioner and a special counsel. It can't be said that it's done nothing. It's done something, and that's thanks to the activism of the civil organizations, their families and the NGOs.

However, I tried to show that, in spite of the efforts and a certain degree of good will on the part of the federal government in particular, much remains to be done. The barriers are due to overlapping powers and the partisanship that comes into play against the measures taken by the federal government. I don't know whether that answers your question, but I tried to show that things were in fact being done.

• (1055)

[*English*]

**Mr. Navdeep Bains:** It does.

Very quickly, I have two points. Did we mention this during Vincente Fox's visit here? Did we indicate our concerns or our position? Maybe you can address that, or maybe not, but I want to go

on the record as asking that question. Was there any presentation made when the delegation from Mexico was here?

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Ms. Labrecque and Mr. Neve, you may answer.

[*English*]

**Mr. Alex Neve:** I can speak for Amnesty International, but I can't speak for the Prime Minister. In advance of President Fox's arrival in Canada, we made a submission to the Prime Minister on a number of critical Mexican human rights issues that we urged he make central to his dialogue with the President while he was here. This was the first and foremost issue that we highlighted. Certainly, at the time of the visit, we didn't see any public indication that the issue had been raised. We've not yet heard back—I expect we will—from the Prime Minister's office in response to our letter as to whether anything was raised, at least quietly.

**The Chair:** We have a representative here from the parliamentary affairs bureau of Foreign Affairs.

Sylvie Blais, would you like to say something on this?

No.

**Mr. Navdeep Bains:** I'll be very quick with my last question. I do apologize. I didn't mean to take any of your time.

On the statistics we were talking about before in terms of deaths and so forth, did they come from government officials or police officials in Mexico? If that's the case, based on the fact that they themselves commit these crimes, I'm inclined to believe that these statistics are a bit skewed, and the situation could be far worse.

Do you share the same concerns? I have a feeling that these statistics don't reflect the true impact of what's taking place in Mexico.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Ms. Bourret, go ahead.

**Ms. Gisèle Bourret:** I'm simply going to talk about the statistics on disappearances. When we went to Mexico, as we told you, we met a lot of groups. We were told that, when a young girl disappeared, it wasn't reported to the police because that wouldn't achieve anything. People very often looked for the girl themselves and got organized in an attempt to find her. So you obviously can't rely on official figures on disappearances. I assume that the murders may also be underestimated quite significantly.

[*English*]

**Mr. Navdeep Bains:** I just want to highlight that I believe the statistics are definitely understated. That's something that should be noted.

**The Chair:** Mr. Neve.

**Mr. Alex Neve:** Just to add on the statistical point, we've highlighted in our report that since 1997, the national institute for statistics in Mexico—which I think is the equivalent of Stats Canada—has actually failed to indicate the gender of murder victims in the statistics they have reported. Your concern as to whether the information is reliable in the first place is a valid one, but then we have the secondary concern that the information isn't consistently being made public. That makes it very difficult to carry out the kinds of comparisons that have been at question in the hearings today. It makes it very difficult to carry that out.

**The Chair:** Unfortunately, our other colleagues are giving us the bum's rush. They want us out of this room for their committee meeting.

Again, on behalf of all of us, I'd like to thank you

[*Translation*]

ten thousand times for coming here today.

Ms. Bourgeois, you'll have the final word.

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** First, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman for allowing this meeting with these people.

However, I misunderstood something a moment ago. Did someone say that there were documents for which the motions had not been received 24 hours in advance? I believe that Mr. Etoke, our clerk, has done an excellent job in this regard. I believe that all the motions were received, and I think it's too bad that we were unable to take a position on the Commission's recommendations.

If it's true that everyone received the documents beforehand, could we come back to the Commission's recommendations at a future meeting, since they're extremely important? You, who have the experience, Mr. Chairman, tell us whether it's possible to come back to the recommendations and to put our foot down on this subject.

•(1100)

**The Chair:** The problem is quite simple. You normally have to give 24 hours' notice when you want to introduce a motion. We've received the recommendations, but we haven't... If everyone here agrees, we can allow you to introduce them now. Are all members prepared to accept that?

**Hon. Paddy Torsney:** There's a difference between sending a motion and presenting a motion. In fact, we have to determine how we're going to work in future because we'll often be receiving witnesses here who will be informing us of emergency situations.

**The Chair:** Colleagues, are you willing to accept the recommendations this morning?

**L'hon. Paddy Torsney:** I think we have to discuss them further.

**The Chair:** All right, Ms. Torsney.

[*English*]

**Mr. Navdeep Bains:** May I make one small request? We've accepted the first recommendation and we'll stick to that. In the subsequent meeting, I'll be more than glad to review the other motion as well with my colleagues and discuss it. So we can follow up.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** After the holidays? Yes?

**The Chair:** Yes, perhaps on the 16th or in February.

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** After the holidays? I'll come back to this.

**The Chair:** All right. We're counting on you.

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** Yes, Mr. Chairman, don't worry.

**L'hon. Paddy Torsney:** So, can we present the motions?

**The Chair:** We can present them. All right.

**Ms. Diane Bourgeois:** Excellent. Thank you very much, everyone.

**The Chair:** The meeting is adjourned.







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