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—
Chair

The Honourable Judy Sgro

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•(1105)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.)): I call our meeting to order. This is meeting number 12 of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

I'm pleased to welcome all of you back and I look forward to having a successful session as we move forward on very important work that we all want to see accomplished here.

Our lead researcher has been Julie Cool for quite some time. Julie is now taking a change and moving on to some other challenges. She has been a wonderful resource for us in the few months that we've been here, but clearly from what I understand from the previous chairs she's been a wonderful resource to them as well.

Julie, thank you so much for advancing the issues of equality of women and Canadian issues for all of us.

Marlisa Tiedemann is going to be taking the lead and Lyne Casavant is going to be adding support. They will replace Julie after today's meeting.

Thank you, and welcome to the others.

Just to remind the committee quickly, while we get ourselves organized, we have retabled recommendations contained in the reports in our last Parliament with regard to funding for women's organizations, gender-based analysis report, parental benefits for self-employed workers, and report on pay equity. We completed the study and reported to the House on matrimonial real property rights. We did accomplish a fair amount in our last session. I hope we will be as successful in getting some reports into the House in this session.

You should have in front of you, just to confirm that everybody has the same thing, the agenda, a proposed work plan for consideration, and by internal mail you should have received a copy of the government response to reports 1 through 5 that we had tabled. You should all have received that already.

I have asked the clerk to try to ensure that we get all of the reports as quickly as possible to our offices, electronically if possible.

Does everybody have everything in front of them that they need? The work plan is what we will be working from. Everybody should have that in front of you. There's a preliminary work plan for discussion purposes. This is the issue that we will work forward to.

I might add that until the House leaders table all of the committee membership, we're going forward as today with who we are. There

may be changes next week and we will have to have an election again for chair and vice-chairs, once that's been tabled in the House. Hopefully they'll do that today. We can take care of that business on Tuesday morning. I didn't want to miss time waiting and miss an opportunity for a meeting by not going forward. So what we're doing today in mapping our plan will have to be reaffirmed next week, once we've gone through the election process again.

In total we have 20 meetings between now and the Christmas break. We've set aside four meetings for government responses and for main estimates, which leaves us 16 meetings.

If we're going to try to get a report on whichever area we're going to move on, whether it's the economic issues or others, we need to allow ourselves two or three meetings in order to draft some instructions to be able to table something in the House before Christmas. If we continue to work in these sessions and try to get a report into the House at the completion of the session, I think we'd be advancing the issues that we're all working on in a much more effective way.

Two studies would make it very difficult for us, so what you have before you are the two suggestions for the two different studies.

We have been requesting Minister Oda to come before the committee from when we started. We have a tentative date this morning from the minister of October 5, that she would be before us to discuss the reports from the House and possibly the main estimates.

I'm asking for two dates from the minister because I think it's going to take more than the one meeting to cover off all of those issues, as well as to find out what her desires and directions are for the status of women committee.

We've requested that Minister Finley, Minister Prentice, and Minister Toews appear in response to the reports that the government has tabled.

We still have the five reports that we had tabled in the House and that were responded to on September 18. We have a follow-up report on pay equity, which is due from the government on October 5. A report from the government on matrimonial real property rights is due October 19, and main estimates are due to be reported back to the House by November 10. We're going to be working within those dates as we move forward.

We are lining that up, just to put into perspective what's before you.

Ms. Davidson.

•(1110)

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Yes, Madam Chair. I just wonder if I might interject at this time.

I am wondering if we can request that Minister Blackburn appear. I believe he is the one dealing with the pay equity issue.

The Chair: Yes, he's dealing with it jointly with Minister Toews. They have both been requested to come. We don't have a date for the meeting yet.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Oh, okay. I didn't see his name, or I didn't hear it.

The Chair: Yes, I didn't say it out loud, but Minister Blackburn as well.

Hon. Belinda Stronach (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Madam Chair, you said that you had requested two dates from the minister. I think it's important that the minister come before this committee—it has been eight months now—before we review the estimates on November 10, so we have an opportunity to hear what her vision is. We know that at estimates it becomes less about vision and more about numbers. I think we specifically need to hear her vision as it relates to the committee and then the funding criteria for the program for women, which many women's groups across this country are extremely concerned about at the moment.

The Chair: Yes, very much so.

I was pleased to see that the minister had given October 5 and October 26 as two possible dates. We are trying to confirm both of them so that we would have sufficient time to talk about the vision, plus the reports, plus main estimates. We're hopeful that the minister will be able to be with us on those particular dates that she's given us this morning.

Ms. Mourani.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Why would the Minister appear in October? I don't understand the delay. What do we have on our agenda for next week? I don't have my calendar with me. What are we doing next week? Isn't that scheduled to be our first meeting?

[*English*]

You forgot you have francophones here.

The Chair: No, I didn't. I thought I would have picked it all up, but I didn't grasp it all, so, please, if you don't mind....

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Earlier, you said that Ms. Oda would be appearing before the committee in October. That's the plan. However, what are we doing next week? Won't that be our first meeting? Shouldn't we be hearing from her next week, for example, on Tuesday? Things are likely to heat up.

Wait a minute, Tuesday the 26th is the deadline for renewal of the Women's Program.

[*English*]

The Chair: I think the minister is aware of some of the pressures on the funding issues. We have asked her for some time to come, and she has not been able to get here. She is now planning to come October 5. The request was that she come as urgently as possible, given these issues.

If you like, we could put in another request that as a result of the committee's request today that she come next Tuesday. Again, it's a scheduling issue, but if it's the will of the committee, we will make another urgent request to the minister today that because of the funding issue that she appear next Tuesday. We will adjust our schedule if she can manage to do that.

Is that agreeable to everyone?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Mrs. Smith

•(1115)

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): I talked to the minister, and she wants to get here just as fast as she can. October 5 was the earliest she could be here. I will talk to her one more time, personally, as well, because of the funding issues, and see if it's possible at all for her to get here earlier. She's very excited about coming, and I know she will be here as quickly as she can.

The Chair: Normally, for all of us who have been ministers, once you are appointed a minister, your very first responsibility is to get to your committee so that we can share an idea of where the minister wants to go and in what direction as well. So it has been difficult for us because she hasn't been able to make it. So if you could....

I have spoken to her as well. Given these funding concerns, if she could possibly come next Tuesday, I think it would be very helpful to all of us.

Mrs. Joy Smith: Yes, indeed I will do that. She has many committees that she has appeared before. I guess everyone wants her first, and she's trying to get to all of them as quickly as possible.

The Chair: So we will put that request in to the minister. Thank you.

Ms. Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): On a point of clarification, Madam Chair, maybe I misunderstood, but I think you said the pay equity report was going to be in in October.

The Chair: There's report number six.

Hon. Maria Minna: We have the other one already.

The Chair: There is one that we have received. This is another report that we had also tabled in the House, which we are awaiting a response to. There was a smaller one on pay equity.

Hon. Maria Minna: I just wanted to understand, because I knew we already had this one, which we need to discuss as well. Thanks.

The Chair: Okay.

So the suggestion is that we would move on to the discussion on our work plan, that we would be moving forward on it. What we did put before you were several proposals for study. One is option one, which we had been talking about, the economic security of senior women, and a list of possible witnesses. The second option on the economic security issues would be to focus on federal programs and whether there are shortcomings in the current federal programs.

Again, given the fact that we probably have about 14 meetings in total between now and our Christmas break, if we want to be as diligent as possible, let's try to narrow in on what we want to accomplish between now and then.

There are two possibilities put before you as far as the economic security of senior women is concerned. One would be to focus on the larger picture, including income tax splitting and a variety of other issues that have been raised and that we've seen in our previous one; or to focus on the federal programs, whether our federal programs specifically are meeting the needs of women in Canada today. Those are two options on the economic security file. Perhaps we could narrow down which of those we think would be of most interest to the women of Canada, that we might have much success on. So we could look at those first.

Ms. Mathysen.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think option one looks quite significant in terms of covering a broad range of areas. But as broad as it is, there are things that I do believe are missing. I would like to see housing added to that list, because we organize our lives and everything in terms of families in terms of our housing. I'd like to see immigrant women and the situations they face added.

I was quite interested in the barriers to work in terms of child care. But in addition to that, there are barriers once you're in the workplace, and I think there are some things we could look at in that regard. For example, 68% of women are still in what are regarded as traditional female roles. I'd like to hear from groups such as Women in Leadership; from some businesswomen; from women who are in non-traditional roles—for example, women who are scientists, etc. I hear there's a group of construction workers who have some interesting job experience. I'd also like to add pay equity to that list, because clearly there's another report coming back in October 5.

I must tell you, Madam Chair, I am less than happy with the response that we received back from the minister. In addition to speaking to her about that, I'd like to hear from groups such as Bell Canada, CEP, CLC, and the Public Service Alliance in regard to their experiences around pay equity.

So I think this first option is very good, but it does need to be added to. We need to do a really thorough job and come up with a first-rate report that we can present to the House of Commons and really advance the cause of women.

•(1120)

The Chair: We have tried to include as many of the possible witnesses whose names were submitted by committee members as possible. I wanted to make sure that we have a wide range of

discussion and opportunity here as well, considering how many meetings we have.

I have Ms. Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I agree that the women's income security issue should be properly studied by this group, and that we should come up with some real recommendations. When we look at all of the issues—trafficking, prostitution, or other things—at the core of them is women's economic instability. That's why they're ending up in some of the areas that they are. I think there are some core issues, and I looked at these with respect to women's economic security this summer. A lot of this has to do with what they call time poverty. A lot of people here know what that means: women are looking after children and elderly parents; they are in and out of the labour force, and by the time they're seniors they end up with a much lower pension. I understand that the average Canada pension for women is about \$500, and of course it's much higher for men, and so on. I won't go into all of that. We'll get into those discussions when we get to them. I am pleased we are doing that, and I would like us to have a strong report by the end.

I want to refer to the list of witnesses. I must say I understand and appreciate that it's difficult to fit everyone in, but I can not see how we can possibly discuss women's economic instability or problems without talking to immigrant and visible minority women. I had put in some recommendations and had a list of organizations and groups, but I don't see them represented here. NOIVMW and OCASI are two major organizations. OCASI is an umbrella organization in Ontario for immigrant settlement programs. It's very well known. Of course, NOIVMW is a national women's organization.

In addition to that, I'd like to see a bit more. There's a long list for seniors, but I don't see enough on women like Maxwell and others with respect to younger women dealing with the issues early on before they become poor seniors. I don't see enough of a list there to address those barriers. That's where I would put NOIVMW. I can't remember all the ones I put in, and I'm not suggesting I have to have all of them, but I really think we're quite thin on the ground for information on younger women who are planning their lives, the barriers they face, and the implications on public policy that they have.

The Chair: One of the things we noticed when we had our last session was that we would get some interesting witnesses, but there was not enough time to get all the questions, answers, and information back. I think it's important when we're looking at these lists that we really identify who is the very best to give us the most accurate reflection of the issues we can get. We are trying to list them, but we don't always know which ones are the best. If there are suggestions as to ones that are better than others or ones that we not have so that we can include some others, those would be quite helpful.

Ms. Smith, go ahead, please.

Mrs. Joy Smith: I appreciate what Ms. Mathysen and others have said. I really believe that immigrant women are key. We need to have a voice from immigrant women and immigrant workers because they have special challenges. That leads into the human trafficking issue as well.

I'm wondering what the timelines are. I understand we're going to be doing this section first and then human trafficking second. What are the timelines? Could you clarify that?

• (1125)

The Chair: I put them both in front of us because they were both issues that the committee indicated they wanted to deal with. The difficulty is we only have so many weeks to be able to do this. If we try to do both, I think it's too much. They're both so important that I don't believe we'll be able to accomplish both within the committee standard. We could take our 16 weeks, focus on economic security, and then plan to focus on human trafficking in February. In the meantime we could start doing the planning for the second session on human trafficking. We probably could get some top-notch stuff done by separating them and focussing our efforts, I would suggest.

Mrs. Joy Smith: I can see that. Both of these are so important. I have special interest in the human trafficking, the immigrant women, and the housing issue as well. Immigrant women and housing issues are extremely important as well.

The Chair: Exactly.

If we want to try to get a report in by Christmas, if we were to focus on the economic security issues between now and then—a good job on it and table a report—and then do the human trafficking with that same kind of intention, I think we would probably be more successful.

I have Ms. Mourani next.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Unless I'm mistaken, Madam Chair, we examined the Canada Pension Plan, Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement during the last session. At the time, we focused on the economic status of women.

I'd like our first item of business to be the trafficking in persons and here's why. Admittedly, considerable progress has been made, but much remains to be done. We know that the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights has created a subcommittee on solicitation. Subcommittee members have been meeting and are scheduled to table their report very shortly, in December as a matter of fact.

Given that that Standing Committee on the Status of Women is not taking part in this debate, I believe it's important for us to examine the issue of trafficking in persons. I have yet to see a specific report on the link between the decriminalization or legalization of prostitution and trafficking in persons.

A clear distinction is made between trafficking in persons and prostitution. I may not have read everything out there, but I would be more than happy to look at other documents that delve more closely into this subject. However, in conjunction with the theme "Introduction to the Issue and Legislative Framework", I'd like to take advantage of the presence of an RCMP representative to have

someone explain to me if, as a criminologist, I'm right to believe that a connection exists between the legalization of prostitution and trafficking in persons. I may be wrong, but if that's the case, I'd like to know it for a fact.

I also think it's important to understand the various forms of trafficking. Is a more subtle form of trafficking taking place here in Canada, a less visible kind than the open trafficking in certain developing countries? Are there other issues of concern to women that need to be addressed? Certain immigration programs have occasionally been used to exploit women. It's important to understand what we're dealing with. Personally, I don't know much about this problem and I want to be clearer about it to form an opinion. That's why it's critically important that we have this debate and meet with all of these very interesting people who can give us some insight into these matters and help us draft our report. In my view, it's important to start out by examining the trafficking problem, which is as important a subject as economic security. We touched on this during the last session. Could we examine trafficking? We were supposed to discuss it during the last session, but didn't get around to it. We promised to revisit the issue later. I hope later doesn't mean ten years down the road.

• (1130)

[*English*]

The Chair: As I outlined at the beginning, there are only 20 meetings between now and December. A minimum of four are going to have to go to officials, to estimates, to viewing the reports. That leaves you 16 meetings.

We can do a lot of talking, but at the end of the day, if you don't put a report forward, you've had a lot of discussions but you haven't put anything forward to the government asking the government to do anything. So if we want to accomplish something, and I know you do—and the issue is, I think, appreciated by all of us and of interest to all of us—it will be the committee's decision as to which way you want to go.

I just think it's impossible for us to do both, and if we want to accomplish something, we need to pick one or the other—that is my suggestion—and it will be the will of the committee.

I have Mr. Stanton and Ms. Neville, and then Ms. Smith again.

Mr. Stanton.

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's great to be back with my colleagues in this really thought-provoking committee, I must say. I've enjoyed the spring session and I find the subject matter to be of extreme interest.

I share the view that option one on the economic security issues is the route we should follow. And I appreciate that it is going to be very difficult to fit all of the subject matter into this fall session.

Before Madame Mourani made some good comments with respect to the trafficking issue, I was going to suggest on the economic side of things that while we had good presentations on the issue of child care—and that was one of our meetings, I noticed, to be enveloped into that one segment—the topics around immigrant women and housing might be better in that slot, considering we've already covered some ground in that area. I would agree, for example, that there is a strong emphasis on senior women here when in fact economic security issues cut across the spectrum. That's a suggestion, perhaps, if we're pressed for time.

On the issue of trafficking—and again this picks up on some of the themes that we really didn't get into too much in the spring around violence against women—perhaps if we can deal with only one subject matter, we should concentrate on that and try to develop a strong report. We delved into the violence issue somewhat in the spring session, but this would give us a little bit more time to get in-depth. The economic security topics could then be pushed off.

I like the work plan, but I get the point that it's going to be difficult. We know that we have ended up with meeting cancellations. Given the breadth of witnesses and the ability to get witnesses scheduled, I know it can be difficult. On the other hand, if we don't have enough, that doesn't preclude the possibility of bringing in witnesses on economic security issues as well. In other words, we'd still be advancing that topic through the fall session when we can, but we'd put our objective and set our sights on a strong report on that one topic, on human trafficking.

The Chair: Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): I'm not quite sure I followed your argument, Mr. Stanton,—

• (1135)

Mr. Bruce Stanton: It wouldn't be the first time.

Hon. Anita Neville: —where you were going with it.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

I looked at the work plan and I thought it was a good one. I would like to very much proceed on the whole question of economic security for senior women.

We talk about the issue of human trafficking, and when we talk about a study on that, I'm not quite sure what it's encompassing, whether it's encompassing the international trafficking of women, whether it's encompassing the trafficking of women from a certain region of the world, or whether we're looking at it on a worldwide basis, because it is a far-reaching topic, as we all know.

Maria Minna made the comment that women traffic because they're poor and they enter into sexual activity for dollars because they're poor and have no other resources.

I always come back to somebody who was in my office about a year and a half ago who was involved in a status of women organization in Vancouver, and it has stayed with me because she said when she now looks out her window she sees 70-year-old women on the street. And why are 70-year-old women on the street? It is because they have no other way of gaining income, either through public programs or through their own inability to enter the workforce; we don't know what their histories are.

When I looked at this plan I was struck by the absence of aboriginal women in the plan, but I also think back to that visit we had in my office, and I think of the women who are on the street in the city of Winnipeg, women who are struggling to have educational opportunities, to find opportunities for economic security for themselves, for their children, for their families. It strikes me that the underpinnings of all of it is economic security so that women, whatever country they live in—and my focus right now is on Canada—don't have to go on the street.

I would strongly urge the committee to look at the whole issue of economic security and let's make some strong recommendations.

I notice that Ms. Mathysen has put forward a potential motion for a subcommittee on human trafficking. I realize that it's extra work for the researchers and it creates double duty for some members of the committee who would choose to go on the committee, but let's deal with that on a parallel bar.

Define the parameters of it. Are we going worldwide or are we looking at Winnipeg or Canada? Are we looking at parameters that are manageable, but always recognizing that the only reason or the primary reason that women are in prostitution or that women traffic is because they have no alternative for any kind of economic security for themselves and/or their families?

The Chair: Ms. Smith.

Mrs. Joy Smith: Thank you.

I was very interested in what Ms. Mourani had to say. I believe she is correct.

Listening to the comments around the table, I can see from Ms. Neville and from others at the table that we need to do much more study on human trafficking so people understand what it's all about.

We are a global community, so people, as we know, are trafficked from abroad into Canada. It becomes a Canadian issue. I think this is an issue that people know little about and I think it merits full attention on our full committee, not in a subcommittee. There are two RCMP officers in charge of the human trafficking here in Ottawa. They have put together a new video for the training of RCMP officers and I think we need to get them in to explain what human trafficking is about.

I know we have many of these other issues that are so important as well and we should not let them go, because the economic issues for all women are extremely important. But I do think we should start first with human trafficking, because I do think there is a lack of knowledge about what's going on in Canada. We need to get the people in to really have the status of women committee standing up for the rights and the respect of women and children.

Most trafficking is done with very young girls, and I think we have a responsibility, as the status of women committee, to do that. So to start with human trafficking I think is very appropriate.

The Chair: Ms. Mathysen.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to basically reiterate and support what we heard from Ms. Minna and Ms. Neville.

I think it comes back to rights and respect for women. Those are very clearly lacking when we have societal attitudes that allow women to be economically disadvantaged. It's very important, I think, that we begin the discussion around economic security. I know we're all very concerned about the issue of trafficking—this committee has indicated that—and because we're concerned, I think we need to give it a proper amount of time. It will require a great many witnesses, a great deal of testimony, and extensive consideration. It may also require travel. I know that a previous committee, a justice committee, did a great deal of work, and it involved witness protection. It involved extraordinary measures in order to allow full testimony to be heard.

To me, 16 meetings doesn't seem to be adequate time for that kind of work. Certainly when you include our concerns about economic security, we simply don't have that kind of time. I'd like to do a really good job with one, and I can't see us doing a good job if we attempt to do too much.

So I would say let's begin with economic security, which is the basis of that respect for the rights of women.

• (1140)

The Chair: Ms. Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to come back to the discussion a little bit. I was listening to Mr. Stanton earlier about the importance of finishing one good piece. The difficulty I'm having with the discussion, though, is that, as Ms. Smith has also mentioned, there are the rights of children and protecting the rights of children.... There's no question that there are more affected children. I was dealing with many when I was involved as minister for CIDA, and I've seen it around the world. There are exotic dancers who come into Canada and they end up doing other things besides dancing—we know that—but why do they come? They're desperate for money. Why is there trafficking of children in Africa?

First of all, are we talking about just Canada or are we talking about the world? Whether it's in Canada or outside of Canada, it's money that buys the children, it's money that buys the young girls. It's money. If there were security in the homes of those little girls, and maybe boys and other females, they wouldn't be able to buy them.

Dire poverty and people who live on the edge is what's causing and is what's affecting the situation. Women are the poorest people in Canada, we know that. Whether they're aboriginal women or they're immigrant women or they're other women in different parts of the country, they are the poorest people of our country. To some degree, the system is set up to keep them there.

Why are they still making only 70 cents of the dollar that men make, even when they have university degrees, the same as their fellow men? Why is it that the EI system, our system, still excludes most women, and they can't qualify? We were supposed to review that, and we still haven't done it. It's a piece that needs to be looked at. Why is it that pensions...? The very life that women lead keeps them in poverty because they are not able to participate.

I met a woman, a senior woman, who just a week ago came to my office because she and her husband were not quite separated, he just

left and went off with a younger woman a year before. Unfortunately for her, he died, and the law says that the last person he lived with, common law, gets to inherit his CPP—after 32 years of raising his children. Can we get serious here about women?

This is a diversion. If we don't deal with the core issue of women, which is economic, we cannot save them from the traffickers—we cannot. How can we take elderly women out of poverty and deal with that? Can we not deal with the core issues here, which address women's instability and their lives and their poverty, their dire poverty? Because that's at the core of why they're trafficked, of why they get into prostitution, or why they end up wherever.

There's another great example here. I hope that my colleague, Ms. Mathysen, will not be offended, but I'm going to use one of her colleagues, the most recent NDP member of the legislature in Ontario, who was a street child, a street kid, as an example. She eventually bailed herself out of that, eventually got an education, and now is a legislator. Was she lucky? Maybe there was some help along the way—and Ms. Mathysen might know her story better than I do—but it's one very glaring example of somebody who survived and managed to get out. Why can we not help the others to get out instead of studying trafficking? Get at the core of what causes the poverty. Why is the system holding them back? Let's deal with it. That is where it's at and that's where I think....

I get passionate because I've been dealing with women's issues now for 35 years. The issue on the table is the same every time, year after year. I'm going to retire, and I'll be old and dead long before we deal with the core issue of why women are trafficked, why women are in prostitution, why women are poor. Let's deal with it. At least let's give it a try and have a report before the end of the session. Let's say this is what we stand for, and we are trying.

If we deal with only trafficking, which is a small slice of the real issue—an important slice, no question at all—we will not address the real issue, and again we will be diverted to something that is really nice and sexy. It's high-profile, it will get attention and what have you, but it won't address the core problem—it won't.

• (1145)

Madam Chair, as you can see I am extremely passionate about this because I've been at it at this table for far too many years, and I've seen the same issues come and go. And at the end of the day, if we don't address the core issues we really have failed the women and the children of this country.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: Ms. Minna addressed much of which I was going to reiterate. I guess what I'm struck by is when we began this committee—and not everybody was here, but some of us were—we began a broad-based consultation with women across this country from coast to coast to coast to try to determine what their primary issues were, what were the issues that they felt needed addressing by the Parliament of Canada. It was the first time that there had been a full Standing Committee on the Status of Women to address the issues that were particular to women in this country. And overwhelmingly we heard about the issues of poverty, single parenthood, providing supports for families and children, the struggles to get into the workforce, and the struggles of violence in the street. Perhaps the issue of trafficking came up, but if it did it was certainly not memorable in its quantity and urgency. And suddenly, out of right field, we have a proposal for a study on trafficking of humans. I don't want to diminish the importance of it; it is important. But what is really important are the issues of women in this country, women who are struggling to get an education, women who are struggling to make a better life for themselves and their families, and women who are struggling in their senior years to live with some dignity and some hope and optimism.

I had one of my colleagues ask me, when we were talking about this, are you forgetting the women of the inner city, who we know are struggling to make a life for themselves, in order to deal with the international issue of trafficking of women as a priority? And I just urge colleagues to look at why we're here—the opportunities that we provide for women in this country—and to address the issues that are front and centre in the minds of most women in Canada.

I'm just astounded that at this time and place, with the opportunities we have, that we will not put first and foremost the needs and hopes that women in Canada have put in the activities of this committee.

The Chair: Ms. Stronach.

Hon. Belinda Stronach: Thank you very much.

The danger here is if we're spread too thin we will not accomplish anything. If we don't address the economic security of women, we will never break the cycle. If we don't empower women economically to make the choices that are best for them, then they won't have equality either. It's about equality as well: 70 cents of every dollar earned, as my colleague mentioned, compared to what a man earns; two-thirds of all single-parent family households are headed up by women; I believe about 68% of part-time workers are women. How can we ignore 52% of the population? We have to break the cycle. We have to accomplish something in this committee.

The other issue is also a very serious issue and should be addressed. I think the motion that Irene Mathysen put forward, in which we run a parallel process, will allow us to accomplish both. But unless we address economic security we will never have equality and we'll never break the cycle. It's as simple as that.

• (1150)

The Chair: We have Ms. Davidson and Maria Mourani.

Ms. Davidson, you haven't spoken at all yet, so I will make a suggestion after.

Ms. Davidson.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Thanks, Madam Chair.

I just want to say that I think the work plan as presented to us is very good. We have two issues here that are vitally important to all women in this country. I think the staff have done a really great job in putting this together.

I agree with the comments that have been made from the other side about housing, immigrant women, women in traditional roles, and aboriginal women, and I think there are other things we can look at as well. I also agree that I don't think we're going to be able to do both in 20 meetings.

The issue of trafficking in persons is extremely important as well. This issue isn't caused only by poverty. To say that this is the only reason for trafficking in persons shows a very huge lack of understanding of the issue.

The only time I took offence to anything this morning was when I heard trafficking in persons referred to as making a nice and sexy study. I think it's anything but. For someone to have said that, it's extremely appalling; I just cannot understand how anybody could make that comment.

The other thing I would like to say, Madam Chair, is that we've spent the first hour of this committee discussing this. We've had a good discussion. A lot of issues were brought out that needed to be brought out. My suggestion is that you ask that we decide and vote on which one we're going to do. Then we can spend the next hour determining who the witnesses will be and what the work plan will be.

The Chair: Let me make a suggestion. We've already started on the economic security issue—it is something we did start on in the spring—so if we organize our meetings well, we should be able to get through a pretty significant report.

There is a report on trafficking about to be released, I think in the next week or two, by an analyst at the library. So we will have a report on the human trafficking issue coming forward.

There are several suggestions here. We have a proposal for a subcommittee. If we were to continue on with our economic security issue, then as soon as we have this publication on prostitution, we might want to have one meeting where the researchers come in; we could define the parameters for a full-fledged study come February.

So there is that option and the option of the subcommittee, or the option of either one. We could continue the work on the economics, have one meeting to define the parameters for the human trafficking issue, which we would commence in February, or we could put the subcommittee together and start that now.

Unless there's something else to be added to the debate, I think we probably should have a vote on that issue.

I have several other speakers on the list—Ms. Mourani, Ms. Mathysen, and Ms. Smith again.

Ms. Stronach, you have a question.

Hon. Belinda Stronach: Is it possible to construct a subcommittee now? We go with the top priority, initially, of economic security; we create a parallel subcommittee for trafficking; and then, in January or February, we roll that out to become the next focus.

That way, we won't have lost all that time on the trafficking. We can combine it, and then move it up to the main committee.

• (1155)

The Chair: So the subcommittee would start working, and then, come February, fold it into the full committee. That's your suggestion?

Hon. Belinda Stronach: Yes.

The Chair: Are you making that into a motion?

Hon. Belinda Stronach: I can make that into a motion.

The Chair: Did you need clarification on that, Ms. Smith?

Mrs. Joy Smith: I believe there are things being shoved through here today. We need to slow down a minute.

There is a subcommittee on prostitution out of justice, and they're dealing with human trafficking as well, I understand.

Is the question just for clarification, Madam Chair? Are you asking what we are going to start first, the economics or the human trafficking? Is that what you're asking of the committee?

The Chair: I believe that's what I'm hearing, that some members want to do the human trafficking, not the economics.

Mrs. Joy Smith: So we're going to have a vote on that now?

The Chair: I suggest that if we can't resolve it...

Yes, Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: I'm struck by Ms. Smith's comment just now that the subcommittee on prostitution is also dealing with human trafficking.

First of all, if it is dealing with human trafficking, why are we going back and reinventing the wheel? Secondly, so that we don't start from ground zero again, why aren't we waiting for that report to come out and using that, coupled with the report that's coming from the Library of Parliament on human trafficking, as a foundation to do further work?

Mrs. Joy Smith: Can I just clarify that?

The Chair: Just for clarification.

Mrs. Joy Smith: Yes.

There is a subcommittee on prostitution.

Hon. Anita Neville: I'm aware of that.

Mrs. Joy Smith: I will double-check about the human trafficking, because it all goes together. I feel that we're dragging our feet on this right now, that as soon as we talk about human trafficking, there's some reason why we can't study it. As women, we need to be front and centre.

For the subcommittee on justice, I will double-check, but I know it's on solicitation and prostitution. I would assume—and I'm assuming only—that human trafficking is a part of it, because it all goes together.

But I think what we should be doing here is working on the human trafficking as a committee, and for the reasons I cited.

The Chair: Ms. Mourani, Ms. Mathysen, and then we have to vote on whether or not we have a study on human trafficking or the economic security of women first. We also have the motion by Ms. Mathysen for a subcommittee on human trafficking.

Ms. Mourani.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Personally, I feel it's critically important for the committee to focus on trafficking in persons. I don't have a problem — and I've repeatedly said so since the start of the last session — with having a subcommittee look into solicitation. However, as members of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, we also have a duty to take a stand on this issue. We don't know yet whether or not we endorse the Justice Committee report, but we need to do some work of our own in this area. Not only will this help us to broaden our understanding of the problem, it will help us avoid all of the clichés.

To begin with, may I point out that if all Canadian women living in poverty worked as prostitutes, then there would be a large number of prostitutes in this country, because many women in Canada and around the world are poor. Prostitution is a highly complex issue. Numerous factors come into play and we must guard against drawing any speedy conclusions. First, we need to have a firm grasp of the issue. I may know some things, but I don't know everything. I want to understand this issue so that I can speak out knowledgeably on the subject if ever the House of Commons votes on legalizing prostitution. That's very important.

What does the subcommittee hope to accomplish? We are still in the dark. We're being told to wait until it releases its report. We'll have something to review, no doubt hastily, whereas all we're really asking is to let the committee consider the issue and adopt its very own position so that down the road, we can compare reports and recommend concrete initiatives, rather than engage in still more debates.

A great deal of responsibility rests on Canada's shoulders with regard to trafficking in persons. In developing countries, people live in abject poverty and must send their children out on to the streets. The international community has an obligation to defend these people by enacting laws prohibiting trafficking here in Canada and elsewhere in the world.

Take, for example, sex tourism. What are we doing about this problem? We have a responsibility to take action to rein in sex tourism. What about immigration laws? What steps are we taking when it comes to organized gangs to counter trafficking in children? Don't think that this is only going on in Bangkok, Thailand. Trafficking in children is also happening in Canada, albeit more indirectly. When minors are sent off to various regions of the country with forged papers to dance and work as prostitutes, Canada has a responsibility to act. We're not taking about sex shows, but about a humanitarian problem. The economic security of women is very important. I don't deny that.

We have focused on a number of topics, for example, pay equity and social housing, and we must continue to do so. During the last session we agreed that we would look into trafficking in persons and various other subjects and we did not get around to the task. We claimed to have run out of time, and that's perfectly understandable. We are now starting a new session and we have a lot on our plate. I think we need to vote on which topics we want to examine.

Before we vote on the creation of a subcommittee, I want to be clear on the role that subcommittee will play. For example, will it be tabling its report in December or in January? Will everyone get an opportunity to be heard, if he or she so wishes? When will the subcommittee meet? We can't overlook the reality that we all have very busy schedules.

• (1200)

In short, I have no objections to striking a subcommittee, but we need to be realistic. It must report back in December 2006. I don't have a problem with this, provided these conditions are met. However, I'll need to see some proof.

Thank you.

[English]

Hon. Maria Minna: Madam Chair, I'd like to speak on a point of clarification, if I may. I'll be very quick.

I've had two of our colleagues now mention what I said with respect to the word sexy. I apologize for that. I was simply being facetious; I was not actually trying to say that it's a high-profile issue. That was not my intention at all.

However, what I was trying to say is, I've seen poor women in Africa—young girls, 13, 14, or 15 years old—who have no choice but to give themselves up to prostitution because they're AIDS orphans and are looking after three or four other siblings or themselves, or they've been thrown out because they're now living with an aunt who already has five or six children, and she is ill, and therefore they don't get fed.

It's economics. I'm trying to say we cannot address any of these young women's problems if we don't deal with their economic security, or financial or whatever, to keep body and soul together so they don't have to go in that direction. I've seen them; I've talked to them. It hurts badly to hear such comments, because that's not at all what I meant.

I was hoping we would actually deal with some of the core issues also on the foreign situation—not just Canadian. We could talk about foreign aid and how women and girls are affected.

But I guess we've lost that fight today, and I have to tell you that I feel very sad, because I see ahead of me another 35 years of women's poverty, and it won't address the issue of trafficking, I'm afraid.

• (1205)

The Chair: Ms. Mathysen is our last speaker. Then we'll have to have a vote and decide. We are—what is it—almost three-quarters through our meeting and we need to make a decision.

Ms. Mathysen is our final speaker on this.

Mrs. Irene Mathysen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to begin by thanking Ms. Minna for drawing attention to my new provincial colleague and the fact that she is a woman of courage who was able to change her life and emerge from the life of a street child into a United Church minister's role and finally a legislator's.

I think if anything her experience affirms the work we do on this committee and the importance of Status of Women Canada: that we can speak on behalf of Canadian women and ensure they have the opportunities to have secure and productive lives. So thank you for that.

I wanted to draw attention to my motion and speak to it briefly. My rationale is this. I understand absolutely how very important both issues are, and I saw this as a way to deal with both in an expeditious way. Again I come back to my original argument: if we were going to look at trafficking in human beings, it would take an inordinate amount of time.

We know from the experience of the previous committee that it undertook a very extensive review of the situation. They had a great deal of work on their plate, a lot of travelling, and they had to bring in witness protection. It was just very complex, and I fear that kind of complexity precludes our doing a good job if we try to do both in the main committee.

My objective was to find a compromise, but I want to reiterate that I believe absolutely that looking at economic barriers and impacts is essential. It's a starting point that I think this committee must pursue.

The Chair: The best thing for us at this point is to decide. Trying to do both of them between now and December will not do justice to either one of them; hence the reason we need to choose which one we feel is a priority for the committee and do it as such.

You have before you option number one, which is economic security of women, or option two, the trafficking in persons, as what will be the main focus of the work of this committee from now until December.

Ms. Minna, have you asked for a recorded vote on this?

Yes, she did, so I will turn it...

The decision is whether we do economic security or do human trafficking as our main focus of study between now and Christmas. It's one or the other.

Are there any other suggestions before we go to a vote on this?

Hon. Belinda Stronach: Yes. May I make a suggestion? Can we call it economic security and women's equality?

The Chair: Yes, fine.

•(1210)

Hon. Belinda Stronach: Thank you.

The Chair: I'll turn it over to the clerk to deal with a vote on it.

Ms. Stronach, you mentioned earlier—and I will need this to be put down—that the committee should focus their attention on economic security and women's equality in order to prepare a report to table in the House in December.

And the other motion—I assume moved by Ms. Smith, the vice-chair—would be that the committee focus their studies on the subject of human trafficking.

Do you want us to try to get a report for December in order to prepare a report to the House by December?

Mrs. Joy Smith: Yes.

The Chair: That's moved by Ms. Smith, and Ms. Stronach is moving the motion on economic security. So we'll go on to whichever one goes first.

I will read it out. It is moved by Ms. Stronach that the committee focus their studies on the subject of economic security and women's equality in order to prepare a report to the House by December 2006.

We'll have a recorded vote on that first.

(Motion negated: nays 7; yeas 4)

The Chair: We now have Ms. Smith's motion on the table—a recorded vote—that the committee focus their studies on the subject of human trafficking in order to prepare a report to the House by December 2006.

Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: May I have a clarification, please? Do we know what the parameters of a report on human trafficking means? Is it global, is it national, is it every part of the world? I think we have to know what we're voting on.

The Chair: Can we vote on this issue first? We can clarify that after. Let's vote on this first.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Madam Chair, we should vote first and then move on to discuss possible topics for our consideration.

[*English*]

The Chair: We will be doing that.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 7; nays 4)

The Chair: If I can turn everybody's attention to page 4, we have a list of possible witnesses on that study.

Yes, Ms. Davidson.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Madam Chair, could I just ask a question? Is it understood by everybody that the economic security of senior women and women's equality will be the next item coming after this other report is done, or do we need a motion to that effect?

The Chair: It certainly has been the intent of the committee to do that study, so that's the reason that both of them are—

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Okay. I would be glad to make it a motion if anybody is concerned.

The Chair: It's already on here. We came forward with both of those issues, with wanting to study both of them. The question for us today was which we were going to focus all of our time on, because if we try to do both of them we're not going to do justice to either one of them.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: I understand that, as long as it's clear that we are going to be doing that study.

The Chair: You have a list of possible witnesses down here. At our first meeting, if we have the officials in, it would maybe help us to narrow that down a bit as to how broadly we want to look at this in our limited amount of time and what we can accomplish. So following that first meeting, it is possible that we might be able to narrow that down.

Ms. Smith.

Mrs. Joy Smith: Might I say that if we had the officials in and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Victor Malerick, that would give the committee a strong sense of what we're facing in Canada and how this impacts on our immigrant population and our aboriginal population. That might be a good place to start. There are two RCMP officers in charge of the human trafficking stationed here in Ottawa, and Victor Malerick does live in Montreal, I believe, so he's easily accessible.

Might I also suggest the Ukrainian Congress? The Ukrainian Women's Association of the Ukrainian Congress in 2004, before the UN, put down and passed a resolution to stop human trafficking, so I would suggest that members from the Ukrainian Congress be invited.

•(1215)

The Chair: All right. We have a list. Is there anyone currently on this list who anyone objects to or does not feel will contribute anything significant over and above what someone else might be offering?

Hon. Anita Neville: Can we go back to my question of what are the parameters of this study? Are we looking at trafficking locally, are we looking at it internationally, or are we looking at it globally?

We've just heard Ms. Smith suggest the Ukrainian Women's Association. I have no problem with that, but we know that a significant amount of trafficking is from Southeast Asia. The women of those communities may want to come forward.

I've just put down a list. I'd like an opportunity to enhance this list. I don't know where this list came from, but there are some religious groups that are involved in it, and there are some community activists. I think it's important that we have a comprehensive list. I also would like to look at the economic underpinnings of trafficking, not only from a law and order perspective.

The Chair: All right. We will try to come up with some additional names.

Ms. Mourani.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Madam Chair, I hope the clerk will be giving us copies of the studies and reports that have already been completed. I'd like to have them well before we start hearing from the witnesses, to determine which areas we should delve into further at the meetings.

I'm not asking for everything in the Library of Parliament, only for those important documents that could enlighten us on the subject at hand.

[English]

The Chair: I gather we will have that report from the Library of Parliament in the next week, tomorrow.

Ms. Lyne Casavant (Committee Researcher): There will be a report, two parts, from one of my colleagues at the Library of Parliament who's been looking at this question for some time. That report is an electronic document and has hyperlinks to many other resources.

I suggest that if members have other information requirements after they have looked at it that perhaps you can come back to the analyst who'll be working with the committee and ask for more information. But that should be a good starting place, with many links to other reports and other websites to provide members an orientation with the issues.

The Chair: Ms. Mourani.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: My colleague mentioned a report to me. We're not clear whether it's a report or a paper on the disappearance of Aboriginal women near Vancouver some time ago. Does that ring a bell for you?

Ms. Lyne Casavant: The report *Stolen Sisters* was drafted by Amnesty International. I don't recall if trafficking in persons was discussed in the report, but I do know that it focussed on violence toward aboriginal women.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: No connection was established then?

Ms. Lyne Casavant: I can't say if the report established a direct link with trafficking in persons, but that possibility could be underscored to committee members.

Mrs. Maria Mourani: It would be helpful to get a copy of this report as well, if at all possible.

[English]

The Chair: Our researchers will pull together what they can.

Ms. Smith.

Mrs. Joy Smith: I also have quite a bit of information in my office. I have compiled a binder on human trafficking. So after this report is out, if any of my colleagues would like to see the information I have in my office, I would be so pleased to share it with you. I don't want to inundate with you with a lot of paper—my binder is very fat. I suggest seeing what this report looks like, but I would also be very willing to share all this other information with you.

• (1220)

The Chair: Good. Thank you.

Ms. Minna.

Hon. Maria Minna: There are a couple of other organizations I'd like to suggest, but I'm hesitant to. It was mentioned earlier that after the motion had passed we would discuss the parameters of this study, and we still haven't. Before I even start recommending organizations—of which there are many, both international and national—I would like to know what the parameters of the study are. Are we looking only within Canada, or are we looking at the international situation, which is a much broader thing?

The Chair: I'll ask Ms. Smith.

Hon. Maria Minna: It's a huge study dealing with developing countries, third-world countries, and all kinds of things. It's a law-and-order type of issue. There are some laws now in Canada where Canadians, when they're travelling abroad and engaging in any activities with prostitution, can be charged. I think it's only happened once. I'm not sure. I would have to think about how trafficking is linked to that. So there are already laws on the books in Canada with respect to Canadian citizens travelling abroad. I'd like to get a sense of what we're studying before deciding which organizations I'd like to recommend.

Mrs. Joy Smith: On the parameters I would like to see in our committee, first of all we need to gather knowledge about trafficking into North America and Canada. We will have to get information—and I have a lot of it—on immigrants to whom this has happened in different countries. It's not only Asia; there are many different countries in which this is happening. So it's defined in Canada, but it touches on the U.S. through Ambassador Miller's office there. It also touches on other countries.

What we're looking at in human trafficking is what happens here on the shores of North America, but it doesn't just happen within Canada and with Canadians. It happens when orphans from Ukraine are let out of the orphanages and the predators are there, ready to promise them all sorts of wonderful things. Then they end up being trafficked into the North American continent.

So the first parameter should be to find out about this issue and how it works. Then we need to bring people in from the religious organizations, Ambassador Miller's office, the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, and Canadian NGOs. There are a lot of people.

I recommend first of all, as I said before, we view the RCMP video, because they can give us a really good parameter on how this works.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

Ms. Neville.

Hon. Anita Neville: Perhaps we could take the RCMP video and watch it at home, so as not to take up time in committee.

The Chair: Certainly. I will have the research staff put in a request for the video—that would save us some time—and see if we can all get a copy of it as soon as possible.

Ms. Mourani.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: Of course we want to examine the issue of trafficking in persons, but not strictly from a Canadian perspective. We need to look at the international side of the problem, because both realities are closely connected. We cannot draw a line and separate the two.

Whether we like it or not, in this era of globalization, borders are very porous. Trafficking in persons extends beyond our borders and has an impact internationally. When we meet with the witnesses, we could be more specific. For example, when an RCMP representative testifies, I might be interested in a very specific issue, whereas Ms. Smith could be interested in something else. By adopting this approach, we'll end up with a richer, more interesting, report.

I don't think we should limit the debate in any way. We're dealing with a global phenomenon and we have responsibilities as international players. It's our job to take responsibility. After all, we're federal, not provincial, government members.

•(1225)

[English]

The Chair: I think the researchers have an idea of where we want to go with this and our witnesses. Is there anyone who is currently on this list that anyone objects to specifically? On the witness list you currently have before you, is there anyone you don't think is appropriate to come before us, always keeping in mind this issue of time and the number of weeks we have?

Mrs. Joy Smith: We should add to it The Future Group.

The Chair: You said The Future Group. Okay, that's fine.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: I'm not sure if Ms. Côté is available to testify. From what I was recently told, the National Association of Women and the Law no longer exists, because its funding dried up. That's a major problem. It's unlikely that this person will be able to testify, because the association no longer exists. I can't say if, like a phoenix, the association will rise from the ashes after the 26th of the month. That would be nice, but until then, we're in the dark. Therefore, we should put a question mark here.

Elsewhere, I think it's important to meet with Canadian NGOs, as well as with one or two experts on street gangs.

[English]

The Chair: The clerk will pull a budget together for this study. We will have it before us next Tuesday. We will start to plan for getting departmental witnesses here next Tuesday, but we will also

stay available in case the minister can come next Tuesday specifically on the funding issue, since it seems to be an issue of urgency. We will try both of those things.

Is there anything else we need to discuss? We've decided what we're working on. We will work on the witnesses in preparation for next week. Are there any other comments or issues we need to discuss?

Ms. Minna, you passed out a motion.

[Translation]

Mrs. Maria Mourani: On a closing note, Madam Chair, can we suggest possible witnesses? I did send you a list, but I don't see any of the names I proposed listed here.

[English]

The Chair: If anyone else has suggestions for possible witnesses, please submit them to the clerk; she will work with the researchers, and we'll do our best to accommodate the witnesses within the timeframes we have. We'll have to make our best suggestions, because we won't be able to hear from all of them in the time we have.

Ms. Minna, to your motion.

Hon. Maria Minna: Madam Chair, I brought forward this motion so that we could discuss it the next time we get together. It's primarily because we have received some reports from the government with respect to gender-based analysis, with reassurances that it's being done and so on, but I know that on the website for CIDA, for instance, all references to gender-based analysis and women's equality have now been removed, and I know there are issues at another department.

I would like to at least have the deputy ministers here to tell us exactly what they're doing to implement GBA in their respective departments. It would be a way to hold them accountable and to make sure it is in fact happening.

The Chair: We have requested a variety of ministers to come in and talk about it as well. We can deal with this specifically at our next meeting. It's here as notice and we'll deal with it at our next meeting.

Are there any other issues to discuss?

All right. Thank you all very much. We will see you on Tuesday.

The meeting is adjourned.

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