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**Chair**

**The Honourable Judy Sgro**

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## Standing Committee on the Status of Women

Thursday, November 2, 2006

• (1110)

[English]

**The Chair (Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.)):** I'm going to call to order the 21st meeting of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

I'll bring to the committee's attention that we were to deal with Ms. Smith's motion at the beginning of the meeting, but Ms. Smith has asked that we deal with it in our last 15 minutes. You have your committee calendar in front of you as well.

Mr. Stanton, you had asked a question about the finances of the committee about six weeks ago, and somehow I just never seem to be able to get this out of here. Our total budget for the committee is \$166,400. We had not spent any extra of the committee's money until we started with our witnesses. We'll keep the committee posted on how our budget is progressing as part of our work here.

We're going to move on to our witnesses. We have Ms. Crawford from the Panache Model and Talent Management agency. Welcome, Ms. Crawford.

From the Native Women's Association of Canada, Erin Wolski is replacing Beverley Jacobs.

From Help Us Help The Children, we have Irena Soltys, the coordinator. Welcome.

From the organization against the sexual exploitation of women, we have Rhéa Jean, doctorand in philosophy, University of Sherbrooke; and Diane Matte, ex-coordinator, International Secretariat. Welcome.

To all of you, welcome. We appreciate very much your taking the time to come this morning to speak to us.

I will open the floor for whoever would like to go first.

Ms. Crawford, you were here first, so if you would like to, you can begin.

**Mrs. Liz Crawford (Panache Model and Talent Management):** Thank you.

If I had known it was first come, first served, I would have been last.

**The Chair:** Be comfortable. You're with friends in this room.

**Mrs. Liz Crawford:** Thank you. Thanks to all of you for inviting me here today.

I know your agenda says that I am from Panache Model and Talent agency. Currently, I suppose, I'm still a model, although considered probably prehistoric, by my age, in the industry. I am still a model, and have modeled both in Canada and internationally as well.

I want to go on the record as saying that I am pro-modelling, not anti-modelling. I am not here today to say that this industry is a bad industry, by any means. However, I am here to talk about the problems that exist in this industry, both within Canada and in what happens when we export our models internationally.

I have not prepared anything for a handout, and I apologize. The reason is that when I was preparing to come here I started making lots of phone calls, and I was absolutely astounded, when I started to scratch the surface, by the information that came forward to me. There is so much going on that even I, who have been in the industry for 20 years, was unaware of.

I would love to prepare something for you that you could all take home, but to be truthful, there was so much information that I would have needed probably two more months. I am going to do my very best, though, to share with you my personal experiences, things I have witnessed, things I have seen, things I have been told.

I'll start with that. It's not overly formal, but I'm going to speak to you honestly and frankly.

I have been a model since I was 13 years old. I am now 33. That's 20 years in this industry, which is almost unheard of. My first international placement was in Vienna, Austria, when I was 18. It was very exciting for me, obviously. It was my first trip abroad. I was dazzled by the glamour and the excitement of being an international model, what all young girls at some point think of.

It wasn't long after I was in Vienna that I realized there was a darker side, a side that at 18 I probably didn't have the wisdom or the experience to really comprehend or deal with.

I had a roommate, a beautiful young girl, maybe 18 years old. She was from Romania. She and I lived together for about two weeks. In the first week or two, I was going on plenty of "go sees" and castings, and meeting photographers, and all was going well.

I noticed that with my roommate the response wasn't the same. I quickly learned, because of her behaviour and the things she was doing—going out late at night, and so on—that she was brought in for an entirely different reason, and that was not to work as a model, but to entertain clients for the agency. This was the first time I recognized that models were not always models and weren't always modelling, but that there are some girls—and they used to refer to them as party girls—who were being brought in for different purposes.

This girl was a beautiful girl. She came from a very impoverished background. She saw this as her opportunity to get out of Romania, to model, make money, and send some money home to her family. She had no idea what the plans were for her.

I don't know what ever became of this girl. I left Austria after two months, and she was still there. She was being passed around from client to client, that sort of thing. It was heartbreaking. Again, I was 18. I couldn't comprehend, and I didn't know how to deal with it myself.

The more travelling I did, the more I realized it wasn't just girls from Romania or the eastern bloc, or the Ukraine. There were girls from all over the world that this was happening to. There were girls from Canada; there were girls from the U.S.

I thought, how is this happening? How do you guys not know? Why isn't anybody telling you? But they didn't know, and often they were targeted, and a lot of them were easy targets, because they would be sought after for certain reasons: they were beautiful; the ones that were most vulnerable had very little family support or strong ties back home; maybe they didn't have an agency in Canada or the U.S. that was particularly involved; they probably didn't have the financial means or resources to get themselves back home.

Those girls were the girls who became—and I say girls.... I'm sure it happens to male models as well, but I didn't see it as often, and I say "girls" and not "women" because we're not talking about women; we're talking about girls. The average age of a model starting out is 14 years old, so I'm very reluctant to use the word "woman".

I'm sorry, I get emotional, because I tell this story and it really is bothersome to me.

• (1115)

So these young girls would get these placements. They felt they had no choices. They wanted out, but the only way out was to earn the money to get out. They were the perfect target.

I met a girl this summer. For some reason, I've become something of a mother hen in our industry. When girls have problems, they often phone me. They phone me to get recommendations to new agencies. They phone me for advice on all sorts of things. I met a girl from a small town—I don't want to say what province, but in Canada—and she had heard about me through a friend. She knew the work I have been doing to advocate for restrictions or guidelines for agencies. She told me she had been recently sent to Greece.

I modelled in Greece; I know how it works. The first thing they do is confiscate your passport. This is because they say that passport theft is a really big problem there. The first thing you do when you

get off the plane is give them your passport. They lock it up, and you're without a passport.

She was bought a one-way ticket to Athens. She was 18 years old. She didn't know this isn't done. If somebody said they had an international placement for me and bought me a one-way ticket, I would say, no, I don't think so. You need a return ticket. The one-way ticket isn't acceptable. She had a one-way ticket, and she did not have the financial means to get home.

So within hours of arriving in these markets, often the first phone call you receive is from a PR guy. PR guys work for nightclubs. Often, the agencies also own nightclubs and restaurants. They sometimes own magazines. They sometimes own strip clubs. They own a variety of businesses. The modeling agency is just one of them. Because they own all these businesses, it serves them well to have models working in these clubs.

She was in Athens, with no passport, no return ticket, and no money. They said she would have to work in the bar because they hadn't been able to find her any work—not that I think she was actually brought over to work. I don't think it was a coincidence. I think probably she was brought over for that purpose. She spent four weeks basically earning money to get back to Canada.

This is a story I have heard repeatedly. That is just one problem.

We have problems within our own country, which again, when I started to look into this more seriously, I was shocked what I learned. In Winnipeg, which is where I'm from, there was an agency that was recently shut down. It was in business for five years. The gentleman who owned it was a police officer. He has recently been charged with 21 counts of sexual exploitation and assault, half of which are on minors, girls who are 15 and 16 years old.

He would scout them. I have been a scout. There's nothing wrong with being a scout, but basically the qualifications for being a scout are having a pulse and a business card. If you have a heartbeat, you can be an agent or a scout. This is appalling, considering the average age of a model is 14 years old. There is no licence required. There are no standards to be met. There are no restrictions. It's easy. I could be one, Irena could be one, anybody could be one.

He was out scouting, and he developed his own agency. He had a camera. This is a very lethal combination: minors, cameras, model agents, and big promises of fame and fortune. He is now in deep water. The 21 girls who came forward are probably just half of them. I'm sure there are a lot who never wanted to tell their parents. I hear those stories all the time. I ask them why they don't talk to their parents about it. They will say their parents didn't know they wanted to be a model and they didn't want to talk to them about it. If he has victimized 21 girls, I'm sure there are 41 or 50. And he was a police officer.

The awareness of our industry is such a problem. People don't know. They are so uneducated about how it works.

This is a police officer. To open this business, he had to get permission from the chief of police and an executive committee of 14 fellow police officers. He got the okay.

I ask you, if a 40-year-old male says, "I'd like to open a modelling agency, I have no previous experience or history in the industry, I'm going to be targeting young girls, and I'm running it out of my home", would that not raise a red flag? Would you not say that something is not quite right? He was in business for five years. Now they're investigating where he distributed the pictures. Where are these girls' pictures?

• (1120)

It's a very, very grey line in fashion. With nudity and fashion, it's a grey line. What's fashion and what's pornography? He could be very convincing.

So there are many problems in the industry.

International placements are not controlled. Girls don't know. Girls are being exported and imported in and out of this country all the time. Nobody knows. Nobody knows where they're going, where they're coming from. Nobody knows. These girls haven't got a hot clue. They leave the country. They believe their agency here. They believe everything is going to be fine. They get over there—and this isn't every one of them. I've travelled internationally and I've had a few bad experiences, but I had the resources to come home. But it does happen and it happens too often.

So we have a problem. We have a problem with the import and export of models. We have a problem that a lot of them aren't even 18 years old, they are going into foreign countries, and they have no knowledge. They don't know where our Canadian embassies are. Nobody tells them anything. They give up their passports as they get off the plane. They haven't got a clue. That's one problem.

We have a problem in Canada that we have no standards for model agents or scouts, yet it is a million dollar industry. We have so many agencies across the country that are scouting and putting up modelling conventions. You hear them on the radio all the time, but there are no restrictions. Anybody could be one. Anybody in this room could open up an agency tomorrow, no problem.

If I want to volunteer in my child's classroom, however—my daughter is in junior kindergarten—I have to go for a course for the day. They check me out thoroughly. I'm handing out cupcakes and pouring apple juice, for God's sake, but I understand the need to check me out.

But I can go and target 14-, 15-, 16-year-old girls, no problem, and recruit them for modelling. Modelling is a very grey industry, where between fashion and pornography there's a very thin line.

Those are the problems we have within our own country.

I'm sorry, I don't want to take up too much time. I just want to point out to you that the popularity of Canadian models is soaring, with shows like *Project Runway* and *Canada's Next Top Model*. There are so many girls, young girls, who want to become models.

It is imperative and it is our responsibility as Canadians that we set an example, that we have standards, that we say it is unacceptable for our young girls to be exploited in any way. The modelling industry is just such an easy umbrella to hide under. It is a playground for predators.

We googled over 20 different Internet agencies, saying "How do I become a model?" and "Canadian model industry", and not one warning site came up. Not one buyer beware site came up in Canada.

The U.S. has started to take some initiatives, but not Canada. All that came up was—and how safe is this—"Submit your photo, your phone number, and your address and we'll let you know if you have the potential to model". They'll let you know by showing up at your door. This happened in Newfoundland this year. A guy set up an agency over the Internet. Kids don't know. Nobody talks to them about it. They are not educated about it. But I would venture to guess probably one in every four girls has looked into modelling.

With the popularity of Canadian models—and they are becoming quite popular internationally because of our ethnic diversity, because of our environment. We have good skin. They're very sought after.

• (1125)

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

We will hear from each of the witnesses and then we will have rounds of questioning. I can assure you there will be numerous questions.

Ms. Soltys, would you like to go next?

**Ms. Irena Soltys (Coordinator, Help Us Help The Children):** I just want to say that I'm honoured to be here today, and I'm hoping to share with you some grassroots insights I've had, as a volunteer, on a topic that's more than disturbing. It's much more than despicable.

I realize that the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women—Stop Human Trafficking as well as Help Us Help The Children are only two of the many organizations grappling with this issue. Uniting us all is a concern for this human rights tragedy. We care, and we want to truly make a difference.

You will have heard from many witnesses on the issue of human trafficking. No doubt by now you know the statistics, what the RCMP is doing, and how this has become a worldwide crisis.

Since I'm not a law enforcer, a politician, or a university professor, I'll allow myself to appeal, on a more emotional level, to your sense of what is blatantly wrong and what needs to be done about it. For those of us who occasionally benefit from a jolt of harsh reality, allow me to read a passage from Victor Malarek's book, *The Natashas: The New Global Sex Trade*. Many of you are likely familiar with this book already. I'll read you a story about Sophia, an 18-year-old Romanian who was abducted at knife point while walking home one evening on a rural road, about a kilometre away from her home.

I'm saying Romania, but this has happened recently here in Canada. We know of a girl in New Brunswick who was abducted and sexually trafficked.

Two men with knives forced me into the car. I thought they would rape me and kill me. I prayed that my life would be spared. Instead I was driven to a river crossing where they sold me to a Serbian man. He took me across the Danube river in a small boat and then to an apartment in a town in the mountains. I didn't know the name, but I soon learned I was in Serbia.

There were so many young girls in there. They were from Moldova, Romania, Ukraine, and Bulgaria. Some were crying. Others looked terrified. We were told not to speak to each other, not to tell each other our names or where we were from. All the time very mean and ugly men came in and dragged girls into the rooms. Sometimes they would rape girls in front of us. They yelled at them, ordered them to move in certain ways, to pretend excitement, to moan. It was sickening.

Those who resisted were beaten. If they did not cooperate they were locked in dark cellars with rats, with no food or water for three days. One girl refused to submit. She screamed and screamed. We all cried, and the next day the girl tried to hang herself.

Sophia's biggest fear was being broken in herself. In her words:

I dreaded that moment. In the first day I thought to myself, I will fight back. Then I saw what they did to one girl who refused. She was from Ukraine, very beautiful, very strong willed. Two of the owners tried to force her to do things, and she refused. They beat her, burned her with cigarettes all over her arms. Still she refused. The owners kept forcing her. She still refused. She kept fighting back. They hit her with their fists. They kicked her over and over. Then she went unconscious. She just lay there. They still attacked her. She didn't move. She wasn't breathing. There was no worry on the faces of the owners. They simply carried her out.

What I've read to you just now is a fact. It's absolutely not fiction. It's a small sample of the horrors that occur all over the world, and here in Canada as well. It was this book, *The Natashas*, that was the wake-up call for many of us, guilty of perhaps being ignorant or oblivious of the plight endured by hundreds of thousands of enslaved women. We are very comfortable in our own safe cocoons of existence, in our ideal lives.

I believe that ordinary people can achieve extraordinary things. That's why I volunteer. I strongly believe that governments can partner with NGOs and volunteer community groups in achieving a global impact on this issue.

Allow me now to share with you some brief highlights of what our volunteers have accomplished. Help Us Help The Children is a project of the Children of Chernobyl Canadian fund and we've been working in Ukraine for over 12 years supporting projects. We've been providing medical and education aid to orphanages in Ukraine.

• (1130)

At the tenth anniversary gala, Victor Malarek was the guest speaker. He brought to our attention how conveniently orphans fall prey to traffickers. We're talking about children after they leave the orphanages. We're talking about children who could perhaps even be sold by corrupt orphanage directors. It was at this point that we decided to form the Help Us Help the Children anti-trafficking initiative.

I'll mention some of our projects in Ukraine, because I strongly believe our experience internationally—the experience of the NGOs at this table—can in fact be implemented here in Canada. We have experience with women's groups, educational modules, etc., that can easily fit into our system here in Canada.

We've had awareness-raising events in Canada, the United States, and Ukraine. I mentioned the learning modules that we've implemented for the orphans at our summer camps and for the orphanage directors as well. We're happy to know that our

educational modules, on which we cooperated with the International Organization for Migration, will be incorporated into the Ukrainian high school system. Again, we could easily modify these programs, incorporate them into Canadian high schools, and in fact warn young girls of the dangers that could be facing them in, for example, the modelling industry.

We're also proud to speak of our trafficking awareness project, which was in fact funded by IOM and CIDA's partners in tomorrow program. It involved trafficking awareness education by a travelling team of trainers and volunteers at various orphanages in border towns in Ukraine, where it was determined that orphans may be more at risk of being trafficked. Of course, we're thankful to Her Excellency Ambassador Dann for lending her ear and support to our projects and aspirations in Ukraine, as well as here in Canada.

Now I'll talk a bit about Canada.

The spark or wake-up call reached far beyond the Ukrainian Canadian community. To that end, Stop the Trafficking Coalition was born, with membership and activities stretching from Vancouver to Montreal. To begin our work, we developed a comprehensive anti-trafficking action plan for Canada. The issue is just so large that we didn't know where to begin, so we put down all the facts and we looked at what we could tackle. It was not all that overwhelming. We picked a few issues that were important and that we could deal with, and we moved forward. They were issues dealing with legislation, enforcement, and the victims.

Along with other groups, we've met with and continue to liaison with the RCMP immigration and passport branch to discuss community involvement in ensuring a better outcome for trafficking victims. We've even organized a group of volunteer interpreters and have offered our assistance to the area police victim assist programs, should our interpreters be required.

We've made contacts with local Toronto shelters and NGOs, with the goal of increasing awareness about possible trafficking victims who may come through their doors. But the reality is that we have not found any shelters that are truly equipped to deal with all the issues surrounding trafficking victims: the social, spiritual, and security issues that need to be in place if we are to offer them proper protection.

We've organized various letter-writing campaigns. Some of you may have received letters from me. I thank those of you who replied.

We've also been part of the trafficking forum, which was organized in Ottawa in March 2004. The event was then sponsored by the ministries of Justice and Status for Women. The following day, we participated in a meeting hosted by the Interdepartmental Working Group on Trafficking. At that time, we first submitted our action plan, as well as a proposed private member's bill, copies of which could be made available today if they're desired. We feel fortunate. Part of our wish list has been addressed by Bill C-49 and the recent guidelines for trafficking victims.

We're also looking at the medical consequences faced by trafficking victims. I'm employed in a large teaching hospital in Toronto. I've met two colleagues who have worked on numerous papers on this issue. I've put them in contact with the Interdepartmental Working Group on Trafficking. They're ready to move ahead in terms of educating physicians and health care workers on the fact that they could perhaps come across trafficking victims in their practices. Of course, we're still waiting for a response on this issue.

• (1135)

We're focused on the eastern European elements of trafficking in humans, but we recognize it's a much wider social and economic problem that has echoes around the world. We recognize that it's a global crisis. We've sought to make contact with and have benefited from the knowledge of various groups.

Many of these groups you've already heard from; some are present today. Allow me to mention only two of them. There are our friends in the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, who will be speaking to you. We were privileged to have worked closely with them in 2004 in formulating new resolutions on the action against human trafficking.

I'd also like to mention The Future Group. Many of you will recall The Future Group's recent 40-page study, released in March of 2006, entitled "Falling Short of the Mark". That report is available online.

This report gave Canada a failing grade for failing to provide temporary residence to victims to recover from their ordeals and for the lack of even basic medical services for them. The study received national and international coverage, and as you know, on May 11, Citizenship and Immigration Canada announced the adoption of new measures that will help victims of human trafficking in Canada, measures that now need to be effectively implemented.

What are we asking of our Canadian government? What should the responsibilities be of all sending, transit, and receiving countries? Canada fits all those categories.

**The Chair:** If you could wrap up with that, Ms. Soltys, fairly quickly, we'll be able to get some of your points in through the questioning.

**Ms. Irena Soltys:** All right. I'll just go, then, to the wrap-up of the main points of what I feel the government should be acting on: reactivation of the Interdepartmental Working Group on Trafficking in Persons; revisiting its mandate; opening cooperation of this group with NGOs, in implementation of effective victim rehabilitation strategies; and giving it the proper funding to do so.

We must ensure that the victim services are available in all the appropriate languages and are comprehensive, and that they include medical, social, and spiritual rehabilitation, protection, and shelter.

When I say shelter, I actually mean federally funded safe houses, where victims are secure from traffickers looking for their property. We urge timely and effective implementation of the guidelines. If possible, victims know they will be safe in a safe house, they are more likely to come forward, and then we will be able to make the necessary arrests.

We encourage law enforcers to continue to actively investigate the Internet chat rooms, mail-order bride sites, modelling agencies, massage parlour and escort ads, and tabloid newspaper ads. We

know the businesses are not what they appear to be. My point is, if the men or users can find these women, so can the police. I also urge funding for the RCMP so that they can effectively carry out their mandate.

**The Chair:** Ms. Soltys, could you give us those recommendations at a later date, possibly, so that we can assure that everything is circulated to the committee? We can possibly get some additional recommendations in through the question and answer time.

I realize it's difficult. It's just that the committee only meets for two hours. The information is so valuable and important, but we have to get everybody in. Let us try to get some of your comments in at the end through the question and answer process.

We will move on to Ms. Wolski.

Ms. Wolski, try to keep your comments within about a 10-minute range, please.

**Ms. Erin Wolski (Research Coordinator, Native Women's Association of Canada):** Yes. That's no problem.

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

**Ms. Erin Wolski:** Thank you very much.

My name is Erin Wolski. I'm here on behalf of the Native Women's Association's president, Beverley Jacobs. She sends her regrets that she was unable to attend today.

I'm a member of the Chapleau Cree First Nation in northern Ontario, born and raised in Chapleau, Ontario. I'd like to thank you again for allowing us to come and speak here today.

First, I'd just like to acknowledge the Algonquin territory on which we currently sit.

I want to focus my discussion today on three main themes related to human trafficking. First, I'll make some general comments on the issue, highlighting Canada as a source country. Second, I will identify some of the research gaps and offer suggestions on how to best address these gaps. And third, I want to bring your attention to some of the potential linkages between human trafficking and aboriginal women's situation in Canada today. Finally, I'll wrap up with some specific recommendations on how we see Canada moving forward in a proactive manner to appropriately deal with this rapidly growing criminal activity.

What is human trafficking?

The issue of trafficking in human beings is of particular concern for us, as it is for all aboriginal women in Canada. Human trafficking represents a modern-day slave trade that strips human beings of basic human dignity, fuels corruption and organized crime, and jeopardizes individual and public health. It represents human rights violations that are occurring in global proportions. It's a disturbing trend that Canada, unfortunately, has taken limited action to address.

It's an extremely lucrative business, generating up to \$10 billion a year internationally. It's the world's fastest growing crime, thought to be more lucrative than drug trafficking. In fact, penalties for human trafficking in Canada are much less than those for drug trafficking. It's a low-risk, high-gain criminal activity affecting the most marginalized sectors of the human population in Canada. It's extremely unsettling to know that criminals today can buy and sell human beings with less consequence than for dealing illegal drugs.

The United Nations estimates that up to one million people are trafficked throughout the world every year. In Canada, the majority of those affected are girls and women under the age of 25. Canada is described as both a transit and a destination country. This means that people are trafficked through Canada to other countries and to Canada as migrant workers.

The question I pose today is, what is the extent of human beings being trafficked from Canada to other countries? This is a critical issue. There is a lack of knowledge about Canada as a source country.

Are Canadian women and girls themselves targeted by traffickers? This is of particular concern to us given that aboriginal women possess the highest vulnerabilities to this type of activity. If in fact Canadian women and girls are falling victim to trafficking in humans, it is highly likely that aboriginal women are the targets.

Regarding research gaps and what needs to occur, we're calling for more research. There's clearly a lack of solid knowledge on the issue in Canada. However, the research must go simply beyond descriptions of the phenomenon to approach the issue from a human rights and socio-economic perspective where the root causes can be brought to light.

The approaches we choose will determine the strategies we use in dealing with this problem and ultimately our rate of success in combating the problem. Current measures in Canada focus on border control and national security; however, the phenomenon of human traffic is much broader in scope, and we need to define it as it is. It's an issue founded in social and economic disparity. It's a human rights issue.

We feel that the gaps in information and the narrow-scoped approach taken by Canada thus far are completely unacceptable. We hope to create some momentum today toward gaining a better understanding of root causes. This approach, although daunting, is necessary if we ever hope to deal with the problem of human trafficking in Canada.

It is also vitally important that we develop and implement a system to monitor the problem nationally. It should be quantified, measured, and monitored. Aboriginal-specific, gender-specific research is needed in this area.

I want to discuss the linkages between human trafficking and aboriginal women. At this point, I think it's important that we identify the indicators that Canadian aboriginal women and girls, in particular, are easy targets for criminals and organizations dealing in trafficking of human beings.

● (1140)

Of the over 500 missing and murdered aboriginal women in Canada, how many have become victims of this international phenomenon? Many of our sisters have simply vanished off the face of the earth, their families, their parents desperately holding onto hope that they'll return or be found.

It has become apparent as more aboriginal women go missing, and a huge majority of the cases are not being investigated, that this type of trafficking must be looked at as a possible source for information. We cannot rule out human trafficking as a trend affecting our women, some of whom, as you know, are in situations of extreme vulnerability.

We need to acknowledge the linkages here. Research indicates that trafficking victims are the poorest, most disadvantaged groups in society. Aboriginal women fit that description, as 40% of our women live in poverty in Canada. More than half over the age of 15 are unemployed. More than half of single-parent households live in core housing need.

Aboriginal women are at higher risk for alcohol and substance abuse, and life expectancy is five to six years less than it is for non-aboriginal women.

Amnesty International noted that Canada has often failed to provide an adequate standard of protection to aboriginal women. This is evidenced through the following statistics.

Aboriginal women are three times as likely to experience violence. Female youth are eight times as likely to commit suicide. Aboriginal women make up almost 30% of the female inmate population in Canada. The number of aboriginal women in federal institutions is increasing at a rate that far exceeds that of aboriginal men.

There are an alarmingly high number of aboriginal women experiencing sexualized, racialized violence in Canada. Aboriginal women have the highest mobility rates. Almost 60% of our women have changed their place of residence in the past five years.

Aboriginal women have experienced a legacy of legislated discrimination that impacts every aspect of our lives and our children's lives.

There has been a fair amount of activity from British Columbia, indicating that this area of the country is commonly used by traffickers to transport their victims. The linkage here is the increasing numbers of missing aboriginal women from British Columbia. The numbers are high and continue to rise, as you know.

In the downtown east side, 70 women are missing. We estimate that one-third of those women are aboriginal.

As you might know, Highway 16 is where locals estimate that the number of missing women is over 30—and all but one are aboriginal.



Given that there's a growing pool of evidence indicating that aboriginal women face the largest socio-economic challenges in Canada, we can speculate as to how strong the linkages are to human trafficking. And given the gaps in information on Canada as a source country, we are left to wonder.

Clearly we cannot deny the linkages between discrimination, poverty, violence, addictions, and incarceration. Aboriginal women are forced into desperate situations in order to provide for their families, in order to survive.

I will now provide our recommendations. As discussed, the measures taken thus far do not constitute genuine solutions, nor do they focus on the structural causes of human trafficking. Too often as a society we choose to deal with the symptoms rather than uncover and address the underlying factors, the root causes.

We would like to see a long-term commitment by the federal government to support work on evidence-based research specific to aboriginal women. We need to gain a better understanding of the extent of the human trafficking issue to be able to determine whether it is an element that requires specific attention, as it relates to the high number of missing aboriginal women in Canada.

We would like to see a national strategy on human trafficking. Collaborative approaches to the issue are needed beyond the interdepartmental working group on human trafficking.

We would like to be involved in the development and implementation of a national strategy.

Finally, we are calling for an end to poverty. The Assembly of First Nations currently has a national campaign to end poverty. Although anecdotal, poverty is clearly a root cause to aboriginal women being forced into high-risk situations. The AFN is raising this as an issue. Canada needs to acknowledge and address some of these root issues.

That's it. I'd like to thank you for hearing me today, and I sincerely hope we can work together on these issues.

• (1145)

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

Ms. Jean and Ms. Matte, if you would like to go forward....

[Translation]

**Ms. Rhéa Jean (Doctorand in Philosophy, University of Sherbrooke, Concertation des luttes contre l'exploitation sexuelle):** Good morning. My name is Rhéa Jean. I am a Ph.D. student in Philosophy at Sherbrooke University. My thesis is on ethical issues relating to prostitution. I am not an expert in human trafficking, but Dian and I both worked on research into the sex trafficking of women in Quebec. I will speak mostly about prostitution generally, and link it to human trafficking. Diane will speak more about the latter.

My position, called the abolitionist position, is held by all members of the CLES, the Concertation des luttes contre l'exploitation sexuelle. The organization, which was founded in May 2005, is a coalition of women's groups and academics. It strives to make people aware of the problem of sexual exploitation, including prostitution and trafficking in women for sexual purposes.

Like the members of the CLES, I consider that trafficking in women for prostitution is directly related to the fact that our society trivializes prostitution. In my view, a client who pays for the services of a trafficked woman is essentially doing the same thing as another who pays for the services of a local woman. The same mechanism is involved and both are equally reprehensible. Why? Because by paying for sexual services, people forget that the others they are dealing with have their own subjectivity, their own lives, their emotions, etc. By paying, they believe that they can demand sex, and that it is part of a contract. They don't realize that prostitution affects the lives of these women, men, young people or children.

One of the great advances of feminism was to make people aware that one could not demand sex under any circumstances. Let us take as example the act that governs sexual harassment. It made people aware of the fact that sex ought not to be part of work. I ask you the following question: In considering prostitution as a job, as some people and some groups do, are we not destroying the progress we have made and rendering legitimate the idea that sex can be part of work, a job?

Feminism made another advance possible, and that was the criminalization of spousal rape. The act made society aware of the fact that sexuality could not be demanded, even in a spousal context. In my view, criminalizing the purchase of sexual services—and I wish to specify that I am not talking about the sale of such services—is similar in principle to the two advances made by feminism. These were to make people aware of the fact that sexuality is too important, intimate and personal to be able to demand it, buy it, turn it into a job or make it part of a contract.

I believe that some serious thinking is needed, not only about trafficking in women, but also about prostitution. I believe that we need to evaluate prostitution in terms of ethics, examine what it presupposes in terms of power relationships between individuals, economic disparities and inequality between the sexes. Prostitution needs to be challenged in order to develop sexual ethics as well as work ethics. Can sex be part of work without the workers becoming alienated from it? Can work be part of sex without the sexuality of individuals being alienated? My answer to both of these questions is no.

Sweden has refused to consider prostitution a job. Indeed, for many citizens of that socially advanced country, opposition to prostitution constituted a normal step along the way in the battle against sexual exploitation. By doing so, Sweden succeeded in considerably reducing the amount of trafficking in women. I believe that Canada should follow Sweden's example and combat sexual exploitation rather than attempt to manage it.

I now give the floor to Diane Matte.

• (1150)

**Ms. Diane Matte (Ex-Coordinator, International Secretariat, Concertation des luttes contre l'exploitation sexuelle):** I am going to concentrate on two points, the work of the research group on sexual trafficking in Quebec and the proposals made by the CLES concerning human trafficking and prostitution in Canada.

I want to point out at the outset that it was in part an initiative of the World March of Women, a network of which I was until very recently the coordinator, to establish the CLES. It is a world network for action that operates in 68 countries and that combats women's poverty and violence against women. In the current context of neo-liberal globalization, which increases inequalities, in particular between men and women, we have been especially concerned for a number of years now about growing militarization, which forces more and more people, particularly women, to move within their own country or to another country. We feel that the commodification of women's bodies has become one of the major issues at the dawn of this millennium.

That is why we worked to establish the CLES and to help set up a research group on sex trafficking in Quebec. People often ask whether there is sex trafficking, what form it takes, etc. The research group's report will soon be available, but I can tell you right now about a number of typical cases we were able to document, which demonstrate the complexity of the problem if we are to intervene.

The first example is that of a woman I will call Maria. A native of Ethiopia, she wanted to leave her country because she was in a violent relationship. She met the friend of a friend who said he could get her into Canada and find her a job. She agreed to go with him, even though she did not have the money to pay him. He told at the outset that it was not serious, and that once they were there, she would have a good job and would be able to repay him from time to time. She went along with him and was able to get through customs with him.

As soon as she was in Canada, he took her to a motel where two accomplices were waiting for them. For a week, she was beaten and raped. She was told that her work in Canada would be prostitution. After five days of this kind of treatment, she had an opportunity to run away and to meet someone in the street who told her how to get to a help centre for immigrants. She was helped to set in motion the process to obtain refugee status. However, the traffickers succeeded in tracking her down and getting in touch with her, even at the immigrant centre. She therefore went into hiding for her own safety. As we speak, she is somewhere in Canada. We hope that she is healthy and safe, but we have not had any information about her.

The second example is that of a woman from Jamaica who was able to obtain a visa, probably as a tourist, to come to Canada. She remained here after her visa expiry date, thereby becoming an illegal immigrant. On a street in Montreal, she met a man, whom we will call Robert. They became friends. She then fell in love with him. A few weeks or a few months after their relationship began, he took her to a bar where there were exotic dancers and told her that she was an illegal immigrant and that she would have to do what the girls there were doing, namely dance for him. She remained under the control of this pimp for six years, who toured her across Canada. She too decided to act. She reported the pimp to the police. Following her initial contacts with the police, she decided she did not want to take the matter further and she too vanished somewhere in Canada.

The third case is that of a woman from Russia who came here under the family reunification program. Her father—at least we assume that he was her father—was here in Canada. As soon as she arrived in Canada, she was offered work in a massage parlour. She is

currently working there 7 days a week, 17 hours a day, for the sole purpose of bringing her mother over to Canada.

● (1155)

● (1200)

[English]

**The Chair:** Madame Matte, could you wrap up, please?

[Translation]

**Ms. Diane Matte:** Yes.

These examples give you an idea of the complexity of the problem. They also show that you cannot dissociate trafficking from prostitution. The CLES is particularly emphatic about the fact that one cannot—and this concerns the Canadian government above all—pass an act that on the one hand condemns sexual trafficking and supplies the tools needed to combat it, and on the other, remains vague and encourages people to bury their heads in the sand with respect to the prostitution industry. It is a known fact that trafficking supplies this industry. The Criminal Code of Canada is rather deficient from this standpoint.

In connection with this, I could leave you our brief. The CLES has in fact begun to identify the essentials of what could constitute a Canadian framework law. It will discuss the issue of sexual exploitation and provide for measures in the four following areas: the importance of education and awareness for women and young women, particularly those from Canada, but also those from other countries; protection and other options for women working as prostitutes who are under the control of networks of traffickers; the criminalization of pimps—pimping is unfortunately very much tolerated in Canada at the moment—and last but not least, the criminalization of customers. Trafficking and the prostitution industry exist because men want to buy the bodies of women and young girls.

Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you all very much. To any of you, if you have any recommendations you want to give to the clerk, we will ensure all members of the committee get a copy of them or any additional comments that unfortunately we weren't able to give you enough time to pass on to us. But I expect with our question and answer format, we'll have opportunities. We'll start the seven-minute round. Seven minutes is for both the questioner and the responder, so please keep the answers as brief as humanly possible in a difficult situation.

Ms. Minna.

**Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

First of all, I want to thank all of you for your presentations. The different groups open a slightly different window every day, but there are some recurring themes. I'm going to mention them, but I may not question them, because I accept them, from what all of you and others have said about the need for shelter with specific support and protection.

The immigration situation, in terms of the 120 days...that's not long enough. It should be reviewed, so women don't fear being deported.

Concerning the criminalization of the user, as I've said for years... people are finally beginning to listen. I've been talking about it for a long time, because I've always felt it should have been the other way round, and I agree with that.

I want to ask some specific questions beyond that. To Ms. Crawford, you were talking about the modelling world, which is expanding, and you made some recommendations. If you had one recommendation, what would that be, in terms of regulating the business and tightening it up?

**Mrs. Liz Crawford:** Tightening it up would suggest that there is something in place already. There is nothing in place, so step one would be educating people, and the second step would be—

**Hon. Maria Minna:** Regulate the industry, is what you're saying.

**Mrs. Liz Crawford:** Yes. They need to be licensed. They need to meet standards to represent minors, period.

**Hon. Maria Minna:** I think that makes a great deal of sense.

I want to go to Ms. Soltys and to the native women's representative, Ms. Wolski.

One of the things we were going to discuss on this committee was the economic security of women in Canada. We're talking about Canadian women's economic security—native women and all women in Canada.

It seems to me, from what both of you have said, that economic security is the root cause. In Ms. Soltys' case, you said some women are abducted—that's criminal. But there's also an underpinning issue with respect to the economic issue. Ms. Wolski, you were mentioning...and I've always felt that is the situation, so I have two questions.

If you were to make two recommendations that would assist in the economic area as well as the police structure...because native women may not even go to the police. They are afraid of being incarcerated, as they are, in larger numbers, being incarcerated. Those who have disappeared have not been investigated. So there's a racial issue, and that's piled onto the economic one.

I'd like to get a clear handle on some recommendations from you. We know that the root cause is economic. I'd like to hear some suggestions on how we might approach that in a more aggressive way. I have some ideas, but I'd like to hear some of yours.

Then, of course, the other is the legal system, the policing system, and how we might change and structure that to ensure there's investigation...at least safety. And of course, shelter, I imagine, is the other...but just the way to break that cycle.

• (1205)

**Ms. Erin Wolski:** Those are very good questions.

I'll start with the police piece first. I think to a large degree what's happening is there's a lack of awareness and knowledge about the aboriginal situation in Canada to begin with. All recruits coming out of the Regina training centre.... I know for a fact there's very limited sensitivity training in terms of aboriginal people—historical

perspectives—in order to increase their awareness and understanding of the people they're typically dealing with. There needs to be more focus on the recruits, and then an extension of that would be refresher courses for the guys who are out in the field.

I think education and awareness is a huge piece, as far as the RCMP goes, to better the relationship between aboriginal people and the RCMP. That relationship goes back 130 years or so. I think there are a lot of barriers that need to be dealt with.

In terms of the economic issue, as I said in my presentation, the Assembly of First Nations is currently challenging the federal government to end poverty. I haven't had a chance to look in detail at their plan, but I think there needs to be a national strategy to end poverty that focuses specifically on aboriginal people in Canada. That would be several-tiered, I'm sure—everything from economic opportunities, to education opportunities, to issues in communities, and looking at the reasons why women in particular are leaving their home territories in search of a better life in urban centres and ending up in similar situations in an urban setting, where they're not able to access housing, they're not able to feed their children and keep a roof over their heads; they're ending up in situations where they're forced into living high-risk lifestyles.

I think the poverty piece is fundamental.

**The Chair:** Ms. Mourani.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ):** Thank you for your testimony. I would like to ask Ms. Wolski a question.

You spoke about trafficking in Aboriginal women, something that is on the rise. Perhaps you could give me some clarification about a matter I have been wondering about for a long time.

Do you think that there is an organized Aboriginal criminal group, whether for drug trafficking, prostitution or trafficking in young people, that is holding a community hostage? If so, does this type of organized crime, as with other forms of crime, moreover, sometimes manage to foil police initiatives?

Last year, well before the Gabriel affair, the Government of Quebec organized an operation to take out a number of organized criminal groups. However, it fell flat.

Do you think that this trafficking in women is linked to organized Aboriginal crime, rooted in a community?

•(1210)

[English]

**Ms. Erin Wolski:** Actually, there's no indication that this is occurring. There is a lot of this activity in British Columbia, and we know there are organizations there that are targeting children in first nations communities, 13 and 14 years old. But there are huge research gaps. So unfortunately, I'm not able to answer that question very intelligently. We can make certain assumptions of what might be happening in our communities, but until we actually focus specifically on the issue, it's anyone's guess.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** That's more difficult.

Part of my question was to find out if in your opinion, there was Aboriginal organized crime.

[English]

**Ms. Erin Wolski:** I don't think I can even answer that question.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** Okay.

I have a question for Ms. Crawford.

You said that standards for modelling agencies needed to be regulated. Do you think that the ban on hiring minors should be imposed? Do you have some specific standards to suggest?

[English]

**Mrs. Liz Crawford:** That's a bit of a loaded question. In the industry worldwide, internationally, the average age is 14 to 17 years old. So for us to set a standard that says we can't recruit or scout minors would decimate our industry internationally. I don't know whether that's a reality for us, if we want to remain a competitor internationally. I think all the groups that work with children should be subject to the same standards, whether it be background checks, registrations, or other things.

I'm not a lawyer. I don't know much about registering a business. But I think most companies that deal with children have to have some things checked out. There are background checks. There are all kinds of things applied to the individuals that work with children. For me, that's very important.

Would I like the age of models to be higher than 14? Absolutely. Is that reflective of what's going on in our industry in the world? No. So it's a tough question.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** Yes, Madam Chair.

[English]

**The Chair:** You have two minutes.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** I understand that hiring models between the ages of 14 to 17 is an international standard, and that if Canada were to decide to hire models of 18 years and over, it would make Canada less competitive.

Discussion is needed, and all countries should ratify a protocol to establish a minimum age of 18 for models. If I understood you correctly, you would be in agreement about not using minors.

[English]

**Mrs. Liz Crawford:** I would agree, and I would like to do some research and get back to you.

I know that in Italy a few years ago you needed to be 16 before you could work in Milan. I don't know if that is still presently the case. There was a period of time when that was an issue because of some of the things that were happening in Milan. Some of the girls were 13, 14, and 15 years old, so they did put an age limit in. That is the only country that I'm aware of that has taken that initiative, but that was a direct reaction to some of the things that were happening there.

I would absolutely love to see that age raised, because I don't think that at 15 and 16 you really are equipped to deal with the things that come in travelling and living in foreign countries on your own, never mind modelling.

•(1215)

[Translation]

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** I would like to ask a final question.

[English]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, but your time is up.

Ms. Smith.

**Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to thank all the presenters today for their very insightful presentations and the effort they put into coming here today.

My first question would be directed to you, Ms. Crawford. Right now in the House of Commons we have a bill that raises the age of consent in Canada. Sex can occur between a 14-year-old and an adult legally, under the law. We tried before to raise the age of consent. We want to do it again.

Could you comment in terms of whether having a higher age of consent for sexual activity would help in Canada? When you say there are older men and younger girls, minors, involved, would that be helpful? That's my first question.

My second question would be directed to Irena Soltys. Could she comment on the men's part here? The men I know would never buy sex. I would be really surprised. What do we need to do to get more men involved in Canada to help this initiative out? Men and women have daughters, so it's an issue for all of us; it's not just a women's issue.

Having said that, maybe you two could take turns, and then I have two other questions for our other guests.

**Mrs. Liz Crawford:** Yes, I think raising the age of consent would definitely be helpful. It would be helpful because there could be no confusion when an agent or scout or whoever is in a position of power over a young girl and things get ugly. I definitely think there is no 14-year-old who really wants to find herself in that situation. I have yet to meet one.

So, yes, raising the age of consent would be a start. It would eliminate even questioning whether that 14-year-old on that set that day was really willing and wanting to be there.

**Mrs. Joy Smith:** Thank you.

**Ms. Irena Soltys:** In answer to how men can be involved in the issue, it's an uncomfortable issue for men, because it's predominantly men who create the demand. It's therefore an ethical issue that men have to look at.

Any amount of education that could be directed that way would be helpful. A lot of it has to do with biases towards women, and specifically biases towards trafficked women. I don't want to single out the police force, but I believe it's mostly composed of men. They need to look at trafficked women not as hookers or streetwalkers; they need to acknowledge the fact that these women have been enslaved and shouldn't be confused with criminals. This can only happen through education anywhere that we can accomplish it.

I challenge many of you to go up to the average police officer, if he's writing you a parking or a speeding ticket, and ask him what he knows about trafficking. My experience has been that it's very little.

Again, it's an ethical and religious issue, and I do agree with Ms. Matte's mention of the Swedish model, which does criminalize the user. Of course, we have john school as part of Streetlight Support Services. We're not sure how effective that is, but at least it places some onus on the user for rehabilitating himself.

**Mrs. Joy Smith:** I have three minutes left, so maybe I can cover you all, with a little luck.

Ms. Wolski, I would like to ask you a question, because I was very interested in something you said. My son is an RCMP officer who is married to an Ojibwa girl, so we're very aware of the culture and everything. It's an amazing aspect.

In terms of education, could you comment in terms of the culture that needs to be understood by, I would say, police and government officials, in terms of how we can stop the human trafficking? I guess it's more on the side of the victim, so that they understand they can have confidence in the person who's talking to them, because on many occasions young aboriginal girls do not fully trust people who do not understand their culture.

Could you comment on that?

• (1220)

**Ms. Erin Wolski:** I think it goes back to the issues with colonialism and the legislated discrimination that's happened in Canada for the past 200 years with respect to residential schools and outlawing traditional ceremonies and trying to quash the languages.

It's so encompassing. There's the sixties scoop. There's legislation that exists today—the Human Rights Act, for example, Bill C-31, the Indian Act. The discrimination is legislated. What happens as a

result of that is a sense of helplessness. The net effect of what's happened over generations sometimes is a lack of ability to cope.

**Mrs. Joy Smith:** So would you say that aspect has to be addressed?

**Ms. Erin Wolski:** The whole historical aspect needs to be understood. People are in situations often not of their own choice.

**Mrs. Joy Smith:** Thank you.

Do I have one more minute?

**The Chair:** The time is about up, Ms. Smith. Thank you.

Ms. Minna has a point of order.

**Hon. Maria Minna:** Madam Chair, I have a point of order for just a quick minute. I'll be very quick, I promise. I just have to correct.

It's not that raising the age of consent is not important, but it is not accurate to say that it's legal for 14-year-olds to have sex with adults. It's absolutely not legal. With a trainer or a camp leader, it's just not. Read the legislation, please, Bill C-2, that came here recently.

I'm sorry, but I really cannot allow for misinformation to stand on the record. It is not legal; read the bill and you'll see exactly what it says.

I just wanted to make that clear, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you for your point of order.

Ms. Mathysen.

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

I have so many questions. I want to begin with Diane Matte.

You said at the beginning of your presentation that neo-liberal globalization and increased militarism had increased the victimization of women and increased trafficking. I wonder if you could expand on that and explain precisely what you meant by it.

[Translation]

**Ms. Diane Matte:** I think it was somebody from the Native Women's Association of Canada who spoke about factors that make women vulnerable. It is obvious that in many countries around the world, neo-liberal globalization has caused impoverishment, particularly among women. This of course is one of the reasons why more and more of them have to leave their country.

For example, it is interesting to see that in Africa, migration has changed completely. Before, it was mainly young men who left their country to find a better life elsewhere. Now it is mainly women who are leaving. To improve their own circumstances and, very often, those of their family, they are regularly forced to use their body. Their own survival and the survival of their family depends on it. In many instances, there is a risk that they will come into contact with trafficking networks.

With respect to militarization, we saw how in Afghanistan, the bombing and the war led to an immense amount of poverty. What was left for people to do to earn money? Families sold their young daughters in Saudi Arabia, where people had enough money to buy the bodies of little girls. The same thing is happening in Iraq at the moment: a great many women, simply to survive, end up in prostitution networks that operate all around the world. I think that the problem exists in Iraq itself.

Equality between men and women also needs to be discussed. Women want to be models at the age of 13 or 14 not because it is in their genes, but because that is what society offers them as an opportunity. It does not necessarily have anything to do with personal liberation. Women's bodies and beauty are prized as a tool for power or as a way of being loved. You need only think of the little girl I spoke to you about, who fell in love with a pimp.

In Quebec, networks of pimps and individuals who traffic in young women focus heavily on youth centres. These people attract young girls by holding out the idea of an easy life, telling that they will be beautiful and that they will receive gifts. At the same time, they ask them to sleep with their friends. That is very often how these things begin. The girls agree to do so because they like the person who approached them. In some cases, they are not even aware that they are being used for the purpose of prostitution.

• (1225)

[English]

**The Chair:** You have two minutes left, Ms. Mathyssen.

**Mrs. Irene Mathyssen:** Ms. Wolski, the Departments of Justice and Foreign Affairs have co-chaired the Interdepartmental Working Group on Trafficking in Persons, and I wondered whether NWAC has been consulted by the working group or been asked to participate in other federal government activities relating to the trafficking of aboriginal women.

**Ms. Erin Wolski:** In fact, no, there's been no consultation with our organization; however, a call has been made to the committee that we'd like to become involved and we'd like to participate at the national level. I believe there are 17 departments that are involved with that committee.

We've made the request; however, we were denied. They said we could come in to give a presentation, but their policy is not to bring in organizations other than federal departments.

**Mrs. Irene Mathyssen:** That's too bad. I would assume you have a great deal of expertise to share.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** You have one minute left.

**Mrs. Irene Mathyssen:** Very quickly, Ms. Soltys, you mentioned the training for health care providers to recognize victims, and I didn't quite catch it all. Could you explain what the problem is, in terms of medical professionals not being properly informed?

**Ms. Irena Soltys:** It's not only medical professionals who are not being properly informed. It's legal professionals, judges, police officers, etc. We have to do a major awareness-raising campaign.

As you heard me read, trafficking victims are subject to physical abuse. AIDS has become rampant because women who are

trafficked aren't given a choice of whether they can use a condom or not. Men will pay more for a trafficked woman if they're allowed not to use a condom. After the women have AIDS, they're discarded. Women can become impregnated, so there's a medical issue related to unwanted children. There are other medical issues, as in a case I heard of recently, where a woman was impregnated 15 times and the embryos were sold on the black market in eastern Europe to a cosmetics industry. There's a myriad of medical issues that a health care professional would not recognize.

It is our obligation to report abuse of women and abuse of children. At the bare minimum, medical professionals should be made aware that a woman could be trafficked. We now have a card where they can phone the immigration division of the RCMP and have their questions answered. The two health care professionals I work with have lectured on the issue. They've written papers to the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*. We do have the personnel in this country to begin this education.

We did make contact with the interdepartmental working group on trafficking, and I'm sorry to say, it was, "Don't call us, we'll call you."

• (1230)

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

Ms. Stronach. This is now five minutes.

**Hon. Belinda Stronach (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you all for being here today.

I think I can speak for my colleagues in saying that we all found your presentations extremely useful. This is such a devastating subject matter. We have many questions and we need to focus on what the solutions are. You do such great advocacy work, and I want to make sure you're able to continue doing that great advocacy work, because there's still a way we must go.

Because you do that advocacy work, do you have any concerns regarding the government's policy within the Status of Women to eliminate the capacity to do that advocacy work? I'd like to understand if that will impact the work you're doing. Do you receive any federal moneys for your organization now?

**Ms. Erin Wolski:** That's an excellent question.

It's quite a concern, actually, that the Status of Women was cut by 48% of their core budget. The trickle-down effect is disturbing. I think it's important that that be put out there.

With regard to other legislation or issues that have been tabled by Parliament, in the example of the elimination of the court challenges program, that directly affects our advocacy work as well. We have no mechanism at this point to challenge any court decisions that come down.

I did read recently in the media with regard to advocacy that women's groups will be disallowed from using federal funds to advocate. This is definitely going to directly affect our ability to bring these issues to tables such as this. It's very disturbing and threatening. We're well aware that this is happening. We're trying our best to advocate and take a collaborative approach with other women's organizations in Canada—from the legal perspective as well as others—to say that this is not right.

**Hon. Belinda Stronach:** Thank you.

My next question may seem like a simple one, but I think it's one that certainly my colleagues, and some on the committee, are struggling to answer, because we want to make sure we address the right priorities and get this report written on a very timely basis.

Could you help us define what human trafficking is? It seems like a very basic question, but it's one the committee is wrestling with.

**The Chair:** Maybe Ms. Matte, being a university professor....

[Translation]

**Ms. Diane Matte:** There are different definitions of sex trafficking. The definition given in the Palermo Protocol, more specifically with respect to taking a person from one location to another or from one country to another by using stratagems such as coercion or deceit, which victimizes people.

As part of its work, the sex trafficking research group has become aware that even this definition, when it comes to applying it, has quite a few limitations. Indeed, how can one determine whether there has been deceit, for example? It is not obvious. We know that in cases of international trafficking, at least, the women involved wanted more than anything else to leave their country and found themselves in a situation in which they were illegal immigrants. This obviously does not encourage them to inform on their traffickers, because that would advertise the fact that they themselves are here illegally.

It is very complex. In any definition of sex trafficking, the concept of exploitation needs to play a much bigger role.

•(1235)

[English]

**The Chair:** Merci.

Very quickly, Ms. Soltys.

**Ms. Irena Soltys:** We need to clarify smuggling and trafficking in this context. People can be smuggled into the country illegally and then they can be trafficked within this country. They can be brought in illegally as well, so we need to be aware of those two differences.

But I refer to this RCMP card, because it breaks it down into a very easy definition, how to determine if a person is being trafficked. Are they doing the work being paid for? Are they being forced or pressured to work? Do they have their papers or travel documents? Are they or their loved ones being threatened in any way, and are they free to pick up and leave at any time? This captures the essence of a trafficked person.

**The Chair:** The analysts would very much appreciate that additional help.

Mr. Fast, welcome to our committee this morning.

**Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC):** Thank you. It's certainly a privilege to be here and to listen to this discussion. I want to thank all of you for coming. By way of clarification, since we've had some comments regarding the age of consent and the current law, if a 50-year-old has sexual relations with a 14-year-old and that 50-year-old is charged criminally, typically, legal counsel for the perpetrator will use consent as a defence. If that defence is made—and often it is because the child is on the stand—defence counsel grills the child. Eventually there is an admission that there was consent, and the perpetrator goes scot-free. The age of protection legislation will remove the defence of consent. So in that sense, it would make it illegal.

My first question is to Ms. Soltys. Addressing the issue of trafficking again, not only within Canada but in Ukraine, I'm curious, are you aware of the degree, if any, to which Russian organized crime or perhaps eastern bloc organized crime is involved in the trafficking of children, both in Canada and in eastern Europe?

**Ms. Irena Soltys:** It's a big issue, because Russian organized crime and other crime rings, the Yakuza, the triads, etc., are all heavily involved in human trafficking. The Hells Angels are the major operators in Canada, and I could be risking my life by saying this.

My knowledge of the issue in Ukraine and Russia stems from our contact with the International Organization for Migration office for eastern Europe. Mr. Frederick Larson is our contact person there. I don't have statistics in front of me. But, for example, I'll take their Kiev office. Their rehabilitation centre treats over 1,000 women a year. These are only the cases that have been reported, and this is one centre in one city, so you can imagine how widespread the problem is. It's estimated that currently over 40,000 women from Ukraine are trafficked. Imagine. That's the population of a small city, potentially.

The problem is very widespread, as it would be from any country that is economically struggling, going through a changeover into a democracy. A lot of Romanian women are trafficked into this country. The RCMP would probably corroborate those statistics. I know of cases of Ukrainian women as well.

**Mr. Ed Fast:** I admire your courage.

I have a question perhaps for Ms. Jean or Ms. Matte.

In your presentation, you would refer to the fact that you are abolitionists. I assume what you're referring to is abolishing this distinction between trafficking and prostitution. Is that correct?

[Translation]

**Ms. Diane Matte:** In fact, what is involved is banning the institution of prostitution.

It goes without saying that this means not making a distinction between trafficking for the purpose of prostitution and prostitution itself. The term "abolitionist" is used in that sense. We do not believe that prostitution has always existed, that it is a trade like any other and that there is nothing you can do about it. We do not accept fate, any more than we accept fate as a reason for the existence of violence against women or fate as an explanation for the inequality between men and women.

Since I have the floor, I will speak about the issue of consent. When one talks about the definition of the expression "sex trafficking", it is very important to note that consent must not be a factor in determining whether a person is a victim or not. This is a very important issue.

No matter what the age of the victim, men always use the fact that women consented to sex in order to protect themselves from the charges against them. It is clear that the question of consent must not be included in our definition. Whether or not there was consent ought not to have an influence on determining whether a woman was a victim of trafficking or not. Otherwise, we would be requiring women to prove that they are victims. Traffickers, like rapists and men who want to abuse their power, will always claim that the woman was consenting. It's the oldest trick in the book.

● (1240)

[English]

**The Chair:** Sorry, time is up.

Mr. Ménard or Ms. Mourani.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I am happy that you raised the question of consent. I do not believe that there is a relationship between consent and human trafficking or prostitution generally.

I would like clarification. Some women say—I do not know whether they are in the minority or the majority—that they go into prostitution as a personal choice. Some groups, like the Stella group, fiercely demand the right to prostitution.

What do you think of that? Is prostitution really a right? Is it really an option?

On the other hand, people say that women do it to survive. There has been a great deal of discussion about this. It has been said that it is a matter of poverty, among other things. Are we not indirectly getting the message that it's a job like any other?

A person who crosses the border to work in a field on a farm—because the pay is higher in Canada than somewhere else—does so to survive. It's been said that when there is incredible poverty in a given country, these women cross the border, are lured and are victims of trafficking, which is very different from what they thought at the outset.

Is this line of argument contributing to this stream of thought—which Stella advocates—to the effect that it is an option, and that because they are poor, they chose to come here to engage in prostitution?

**Ms. Diane Matte:** I would make two distinctions. On the one hand, the right to engage in prostitution does not exist in any international human rights convention or charter. I think that what groups like Stella are demanding, and it is legitimate for them to do so, is the right to dignity and recognition as a separate person who has rights. From this stems the idea of supporting the decriminalization of women who engage in prostitution, as the Concertation des luttes contre l'exploitation sexuelle has been doing.

The problem is not that women engage in prostitution. The problem is that our society, which is based on patriarchal precepts, that is to say inequalities between men and women, present the institution of prostitution as something ordinary or as a trade like any other—particularly over the past 10, 15 or 20 years—whereas we know full well that this is far from being the case. I am certain that the women at Stella are aware of the extent to which women who currently engage in prostitution are more likely than anyone else to be raped, beaten, or victimized in one way or another. They think that the solution would be to legalize prostitution, because this would make these women nice little independent workers, and that this would liberate them.

Our perception is different. We feel that the institution of prostitution concerns not only the women who engage in it, because it is a barrier to equality between men and women. That being the case, prostitution needs to be considered differently. The question is not whether women who engage in prostitution individually feel good, but whether our society wants to develop or tolerate the existence of prostitution.

It is also a matter of survival. I don't know what other term to use. In any event, it is the reality of women here or elsewhere, unfortunately, because of inequalities between men and women. Very often, one way to be able to eat is indeed to prostitute oneself. At that point, I believe we are speaking of survival. It has nothing to do with whether or not it is a job like any other. It is rather a reality. I do not believe that our society should accept that the only possibility or the only option to escape from poverty or to be able to eat requires that part of the population must prostitute itself.

● (1245)

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** If I have understood what you are telling me correctly, a choice has been made.

**Ms. Diane Matte:** Which means that it's a non-choice.

**Mrs. Maria Mourani:** You need to choose between working in a factory and going—

**Ms. Diane Matte:** You have to choose between dying and having something to eat.

This is the case in some parts of Africa in particular. I was recently reading that in South Africa, women prostitute themselves for a meal. You can call that a job if you like, but the reality is that if they are to eat, the only thing on offer is to give a man a blow-job. She doesn't know whether the man in question is going to kill her just for the fun of it, or beat her, but she hopes to be able to eat her next meal.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Mourani.

I have to tell you that we still have some committee business. We really need much more time, and I don't know how we're going to do that.



I ask all of you, if you want to give us some additional comments, you could give them to the clerk, and the clerk will ensure that they're circulated to all of the committee. We would really appreciate it. I think you've heard the tenor of our discussion and debate today, and anything you can do to give us additional assistance, we would appreciate. The analysts may end up contacting you as we move forward to try to get an interim report in before Christmas.

Ms. Smith.

**Mrs. Joy Smith:** Madam Chair, could I make a suggestion and just throw it out to the committee? We have such credible witnesses here today. I was wondering if we could do the motion at the next meeting and have the next 12 minutes. Could we continue to question our guests?

**The Chair:** The committee agrees to giving one more person an opportunity for questions? All right.

Who do we have next on the list then?

Okay. Did you want to finish answering that question, since everybody wanted to comment? That would be the best use of our time.

Ms. Soltys.

**Ms. Irena Soltys:** I'll just mention three things that Ms. Mourani brought up.

The first is about prostitution as a career. Let's get real. I have two children, and a lot of you probably have children. Do you want to walk into your high school for career night and have prostitution listed as a career choice? In my opinion, that's not even a choice.

Secondly, there is the poverty issue. Ms. Matte mentioned the women who enter into it willingly, literally to survive. That is one issue.

Then there is the aspect of those who are coming across the border. Maybe they have an inkling of what they'll be doing; maybe they knowingly come here because they know they'll be doing prostitution, but once they get here, it's the conditions they are working in: they may come here under the impression that they will be free to come and go as they please, when in fact they're enslaved, their documents are taken, they're servicing x number of clients per night, seven days a week, whether they're menstruating or not, whether they're sick or not. That's another aspect of the whole issue we need to look at.

The other thing that really bothers me is the legalization issue. You can look at reports on countries where prostitution has been legalized—for example, Holland. The brothels get this stamp of approval, like those restaurant certificates we have here, saying yes, this place is okay. But the law enforcers in Holland themselves have written reports saying, we can't keep up with it; we don't know whether it has stemmed the influx of trafficked women or not.

It's our belief that legalization actually opens the floodgates for trafficking, because we don't have the capacity to control it or follow up on it.

Thanks.

• (1250)

**The Chair:** Did someone else want to comment further?

Ms. Jean.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Rhéa Jean:** I simply want to add a word about the issue of choice. In fact, the various options need to be considered when one makes a choice.

All you need to do is read the newspapers. The number of advertisements for escort agencies, exotic dancers and this whole environment is often disproportionate compared to the other worthy and normal jobs. What then are the choices available to a young woman who, for example, does not have much education? There are not many. A young woman who has no education has few employment opportunities. This aspect needs to be examined and we need to stop saying that it's her choice and that she is really doing it because she wants to.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Stanton had a quick question he wanted to get in. That will be the last.

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

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. If the committee wants to follow exact process, it would be Ms. Mathysen and then Mr. Stanton.

Ms. Mathysen, did you have a question?

**Mrs. Irene Mathysen:** Yes, thank you.

I'll start with Ms. Crawford, but this is certainly something I'd appreciate hearing about from everyone.

We've been conducting this study on human trafficking for many weeks, and we've heard from a variety of witnesses. One of the recurring themes seems to be the commodification and objectification of women and young girls. Witnesses have actually suggested that we need to make it socially unacceptable to objectify women and girls, to treat them as sexual objects.

Could you comment on the sense that the modelling industry does indeed objectify and sexualize women, portraying them as objects to be bought and consumed?

**Mrs. Liz Crawford:** I would never disagree with that; however, I would disagree that it's the modelling agents and the modelling industry. It's supply and demand. It's the people buying the magazines. It's the consumers who have bought into this image. Modelling agents don't have that much power. They don't control fashion editorials; they don't control what you see in commercials or in advertising or on the runway. That's not them.

You're looking at advertising, you're looking at designers, you're looking at fashion magazines. They are the ones who are objectifying women. I wouldn't say it's modelling agencies. It's the fashion industry, so it goes beyond the modelling industry.

**Mrs. Irene Mathysen:** So it's media and—

**Mrs. Liz Crawford:** Some media, and designers, and yes, everybody who works in the fashion industry. The modelling agencies and the modelling industry provide a product, that being, obviously, models.

**Mrs. Irene Mathysen:** Okay.

**Ms. Irena Soltys:** I can answer very quickly. There are so many cultures involved in the trafficking scenario. All these women come from really totally different climates, when it comes to objectification of women, from covering our faces to.... There are various aspects of it. It's difficult to make a blanket statement, but it definitely does exist.

I can say that in Ukraine, a country that's struggling with democracy, where they're just starting to realize all the comforts of the material world, it's a strong influence. We did gender studies with the kids. We asked them to make a collage of the ideal woman and a collage of the ideal man. The collage of the ideal woman had perfume, a vacuum cleaner, a family, a dog, and a track suit. The man had the car, the job, the power, and so on. We realized this is a big issue. I know it exists to different extents in all of our cultures.

[Translation]

**Ms. Diane Matte:** As I mentioned at the beginning of my presentation, I feel that the issue of the commodification of women's bodies is probably one of the most important issues for women's groups everywhere in the world.

I also believe that it is related to a debate that was never successfully resolved in the 1980s, which is to say pornography, the

use of women's bodies, our sexuality, a sexuality that is specific to women, etc.

At the moment, what we see is mainly the imposition of a male model of sexuality, a model in which women are there to serve men in general. In such circumstances, the search for beauty and the perfect body has become all important, at least in the Western countries and in the countries of the South, where more and more women are getting into debt.

In Brazil, plastic surgery is the main cause of indebtedness among women. Women go into debt in order to live up to the ideal model of big-breasted women. In some countries of the South, it is being as white as possible, and hence bleaching the skin is very fashionable.

Look at all the diets people are on and the value placed on a bodies that meet the standards of male desire. In a neo-liberal society, industry and the marketplace are considered all powerful. We need to question what lies behind it, to question industry. At the moment, traffickers are benefiting from the increased commodification of women's bodies.

● (1255)

[English]

**The Chair:** To our witnesses, thank you for your time, your energy, and for caring about some very important issues. You've given us a huge amount of information and assistance.

The meeting is adjourned.

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